

CSR, Sustainability, Ethics & Governance

Series Editors: Samuel O. Idowu · René Schmidpeter

Antonio Maria Baggio
Maria-Gabriella Baldarelli
Samuel O. Idowu *Editors*

Populism and Accountability

Interdisciplinary Researches on
Active Citizenship

 Springer

CSR, Sustainability, Ethics & Governance

Series Editors

Samuel O. Idowu, London Metropolitan University, London, UK

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Editors

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Citizenship

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Preface

This work aims to contribute to the scientific debate about active citizenship. Citizenship is connected to the various dynamics of “populism.” The term populism lends itself to different interpretations, and the authors of chapters in the book have tried to consider it from different points of view. The result is an analysis that addresses the different aspects of the issue.

This book is the result of a joint project between the Center for Research in Politics and Human Rights, University Institute of Sophia (IUS), and Department of Management, University of Bologna, that is entitled: “Research itineraries on active citizenship and populism: Accountability and interdisciplinary approaches” (2020–2022).

Furthermore, the debate that emerges from the book also has the aim of raising internal and external awareness around the topics covered by the research and a new culture for social and economic action through in-depth analysis of the topics: active citizenship, change in systems and organizations, sustainability, and the civil economy, which is ongoing on populism, from an interdisciplinary point of view.

It considers the application of organizational impact of models in relation to the main theories in the various disciplines involved.

In 2021, the debate among the authors of different disciplines had been activated with two workshops, which were organized to realize a synergistic discussion during the drafting of the chapters.

Each chapter of the book has been subjected to double anonymous referee process evaluation.

The work is structured in four thematic areas. The first part establishes the framework of the different populist phenomena, addresses the definitions of populism and the correlation between political and economic accountability in the consolidation of contemporary democracies.

The second thematic area uses the perspective of accounting to analyze in greater depth the role of accountability to provide useful tools for managing the phenomenon of populism.

The third area, on the other hand, deals with issues from a predominantly political point of view in a dialogue between ideas and narratives concerning populism, introducing categories, such as that of fraternity.

Finally, the fourth area deals with the challenging and delicate issue of leadership and the way of possible social management of the phenomenon of populism.

Firenze, Italy
Rimini, Italy
London, UK
September 2022

Antonio M. Baggio
Maria-Gabriella Baldarelli
Samuel O. Idowu

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Finally, however, the responsibility for any errors and omissions in the book remains ours.

Contents

| | | |
|--|--|------------|
| 1 | Populism and Accountability: Interdisciplinary Researches – An Introduction | 1 |
| | Samuel O. Idowu | |
| Part I Populism and Accountability: Introductory Studies | | |
| 2 | Populism and Its Definitions: Interpretations and Perspectives of a Multifaceted Political Model | 9 |
| | Antonio Maria Baggio | |
| 3 | Accountability and Stakeholder Engagement: Politics and Accounting in Dialogue to Improve Democracy | 55 |
| | Maria-Gabriella Baldarelli | |
| Part II Accountability Versus Populism: Intersections between Politics and Business Economics | | |
| 4 | Business Democratic Value at Stake: A Business Ethics Perspective on Embedded Social and Political Responsibility | 75 |
| | Rosa Fioravante and Mara Del Baldo | |
| 5 | Property, Responsibility, and the Community: Toward a New Concept of Property | 93 |
| | Sergio Barbaro | |
| 6 | Citizens’ Participation in Deliberation Process and Multidimensional Accountability: A Possible Virtuous Relationship | 115 |
| | Giampietro Parolin | |

| | | |
|--|---|------------|
| 7 | Accounting Systems of Postcommunist Balkan States: Towards Accounting Harmonization?..... | 141 |
| | Stefania Vignini | |
| 8 | The Role of Local Authorities in Opposing Populism Through Social Accountability | 167 |
| | Eleonora Cardillo | |
| Part III The Real and the Illusory People. Ideas and Narratives of Populism | | |
| 9 | In Search of the Relationship Between Democracy and Populism from a Multidimensional Perspective. Some Paths: Accountability, Deliberation and Co-governance | 191 |
| | Daniela Ropelato | |
| 10 | Sense of Belonging and Disillusionment: A Phenomenological Reading of Community Dynamics. | 209 |
| | Valentina Gaudiano | |
| 11 | Accountability and Populism: An Anthropological Perspective. | 235 |
| | Feliciano Tosetto | |
| Part IV Leaders and Masses in Populist Phenomena | | |
| 12 | Populism and Political Leadership | 257 |
| | Paolo Giusta | |
| 13 | The Psychological Roots of Populism | 281 |
| | Antonella Deponte | |
| 14 | The Populist Leader: A Profile That Emerged from the Investigation Perspective of Phenomenological Psychopathology..... | 295 |
| | Fabio Frisone | |
| | Index..... | 319 |

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pp. 59–72; Baggio (2011) Toussaint Louverture et l'existence politique du Peuple Noir, in Baggio, A.M. & Augustin, R. (eds.) *Toussaint Louverture, Lettres à la France (1794-1798). Idées pour la libération du Peuple Noir d'Haïti*. Paris: Nouvelle Cité, pp. 11–141.

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Chapter 1

Populism and Accountability: Interdisciplinary Researches – An Introduction



Samuel O. Idowu

Many global citizens of yesteryears and even in today's twenty-first century existed in political environments where the wishes and concerns of the ordinary citizens were generally ignored by a few established elite groups. Those in government who should be accountable to all were less accountable to the masses. With this in mind, societies were run mainly in the interest of a very few minority. *Populism* is therefore a political approach which strives to correct this wrong approach to politics and how organisations are run and directed. *Populism* is an attempt to appeal to ordinary citizens who believe that their concerns are disregarded by those who could have helped to address these concerns, because they are in a position to do so and bring about an egalitarian system of government and consequently an egalitarian society. *Accountability* on the other hand is one of the requirements and qualities of a good system of governance in today's business and civil society. It is an obligation to accept responsibility for one's action either as a public or private sector leader or servant. The absence or lack of accountability erodes confidence in what those at the helm of activities are doing, which makes a mockery of all things done in societal name and interest.

Populism and *accountability* are the two key areas of the scope of this current book. It was deemed necessary therefore to explain the two keywords in the above paragraph in order to set the scene for the 13 chapters of the book in its introductory chapter. My two Italian colleagues research in the area, and their research centres in their two universities – Bologna and Sophia between 2020 and 2022 investigated the areas with some of their colleagues in their two respective research centres and a few more Italian universities; their findings have culminated in the 13 chapters that make up this our book.

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The book is divided into four parts. Part I which is on *Populism and Accountability: Introductory Studies* is composed of two chapters. Part II on *Accountability versus Populism: Intersections between Politics and Business Economics* is subdivided into five chapters. Part III on *The Real and the Illusory People: Ideas and Narratives of Populism* is in three chapters, and finally Part IV on *Leaders and Masses in Populist Phenomena* houses three great chapters like the part before it. The remainder of this introductory piece to the book will look at the findings of each of the 13 chapters which are contained in the book.

The second chapter of the book by Professor Antonio M Baggio of Sophia University Institute of Loppiano, Florence, Italy, explores some of the many definitions of populism, where he recounts the coming together of a community of researchers at a conference in London in 1967 with the main goal of ‘Defining Populism’. The text follows the evolution of the central themes to the present day and explores, in particular, the tools produced by populism studies that would help to understand two contemporary challenges: first, the emergence of new forms of populism fragmented into antagonistic groups during the SarsCoV2 Pandemic, but linked to broader authoritarian visions, and second, the new reflection on the principle of nationality and international solidarity that arose after the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. Both are challenges to the principles, intelligence and strength of democracies.

This text focuses on two aspects in particular: first, the logic with which to construct definitions, so as to avoid errors of setting (unclear and ill-defined choice of subject to be studied), elaboration (conceptual stretching) and evaluation (researcher bias), and second, the understanding of the different identities with which the ‘people’ presents itself and acts historically: populace, mob, civil society, revolutionary people; they cannot be confused within the same ‘populism’. It is a must-read chapter.

The third chapter of the book entitled *Accountability and Stakeholder Engagement: Politics and Accounting in Dialogue to Improve Democracy* is written by Professor Maria Gabriella Baldarelli of the University of Bologna, Italy. In the chapter, Baldarelli considers the potentials for authentic social and environmental accountability through organised crowd-sourced participation accessible to all citizens with a stake in a sustainable future, which according to Bebbington et al. is under-explored. This chapter has the objective of reflecting upon the contribution of accountability through two disciplines, the first of which is politics and the second accounting, to promote emancipatory change and democracy. It is a must-read chapter.

Rosa Fioravante and Mara Del Baldo two scholars of repute from the University of Urbino, Italy, explore in the fourth chapter the issue of business ethics perspective on embedded social and political responsibility. In the chapter, Fioravante and Del Baldo shed light on the role of business ethics and the social responsibility of business in fuelling or combatting populism, as well as in supporting or undermining the quality of democracy. In this vein, the chapter addresses the crisis of representative Western liberal democracy by considering populism the political epiphenomenon of economic inequality and neoliberal cultural individualism.

Fioravante and Del Baldo argue that, by proposing a multidisciplinary approach – bridging political theory, international economic policy and business studies – one is able to discuss the classic idea of embeddedness of business in society in order to outline the main issues connected with the crisis of ‘embedded liberalism’ and its political expression, supporting the idea that, while traditional political intermediate bodies and institutions have lost power, business has gained a new social role in representing a mediating institution, they argue. The chapter notes that by focusing on political CSR, it makes it possible to highlight its limits when facing the issue of the quality of democracy that remains largely unexplored as a relevant factor to be considered when looking at motives for adopting social responsibility practices. A certainly interesting read for anyone interested in the area.

The fifth chapter by Sergio Barbaro from Sophia University Institute is entitled *Property, Responsibility and the Community. Toward a New Concept of Property*. The chapter verifies if the legal institute of property could be combined with the concept of responsibility and accountability. Barbaro uses the chapter to verify whether property could become an instrument to accomplish the needs of the community and to perform the common good. It argues whether the traditional model of private property is based on the exclusive power granted to a subject on a good and on the absolute freedom to dispose of it and to use it in their own interest. The chapter exposes the nineteenth-century codes on the absoluteness of this paradigm which he argues has undergone a temperament through the introduction of public and private limits to the exercise of dominion over an asset, with the aim to guarantee a social function of the property. However, the need to give space to solidarity and cooperation requires to overcome the logic of inclusion – exclusion, as Barbaro argues.

In the sixth chapter, Giampietro Parolin also of Sophia University Institute provides an exploratory study of citizenship participation and multidimensional accountability. In the chapter, he argues the importance of information in citizenship participation and deliberation for an effective people participating. Parolin notes that accountability in many cases offers information without asking if it is useful and meaningful for users. Without a connection to deliberation, accountability is far from offering a contribution to citizen’s participation. This chapter explores how deliberation and public accountability could be connected in the perspective of enhancing citizens’ participation.

In the seventh chapter, Stefania Vignini of the University of Bologna takes the research to the Balkans with a study on the harmonization of accounting systems in the post-communist era in the Balkan states. The chapter investigates accounting change or non-change in Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo – the countries which are generally accepted as constituting ‘the Balkan States’.

These nine countries were previously communist states before 1989. Not all of them are part of the European Union, and practically all the countries have experienced very heavy moments of revolution. In the Balkans their specific brand of language-based nationalism and the role of religion as a crucial cultural dimension have hindered the development of civil societies. The research study was intending

to make a comparative historical investigation on accounting systems and standards of the post-communist Balkan countries, in order to add to our understanding of how the evolution of these systems is connected to changes in the socioeconomic context and the cultural tradition these states. It is an interesting chapter indeed.

In the eighth chapter, Eleonora Cardillo explores the role of local authorities in opposing populism through social accountability. Cardillo in the chapter notes that populism is configured, today even more, as an ideology which is based on distorting ways of communication channels. The chapter argues that there is a need to alter the concept of representation and the function of intermediation between politicians and the community.

Accountability mechanisms can find obstacles when political representatives are indifferent to social reporting duties and when the local community is not involved and therefore limits its formal right of participation and control, Cardillo argues. These issues should stimulate change and reform processes aimed at significantly strengthening social communication and the value of local democracy. Cardillo conducted an interpretative survey of some local authorities with the aim of assessing how administrators perceive the role of social communication tools and accountability processes to combat populist pressures.

Chapter nine on the relationship between democracy and populism by Daniela Ropelato of Sophia University Institute uses the approach of political science to focus on the qualitative features of democratic systems, in order to review the relationship between populism and contemporary democracy. Ropelato asks the question as to whether it is possible to interpret populism as an expression and vector of transformation of the representative model of democracy. If this is possible, he wanted to know the consequences. Relying on some international reports that monitor and evaluate the quality of democratic systems so as to introduce a possible connection between the populist phenomenon and the decline of some established indicators of the democratic framework in recent years. The chapter raises a number of fundamental questions that populism poses to contemporary democracies, and in particular to representation, leadership and citizenship, and how these can contribute to understanding some of the main criticalities of current democratic structures, in terms of accountability, deliberation and co-governance. Ropelato in her chapter argues that even within the framework of an urgent updating of the often exhausted democratic forms, the way forward seems to be that of strengthening social ties. There are no formal solutions and abstract procedures that can replace the power of social cohesion that political action must prioritise, Ropelato concludes.

In the tenth chapter of the book, Valentina Gaudio an Associate Professor at Sophia University Institute devotes the chapter to the sense of belonging and disillusionment, based on phenomenological reading of community dynamics. In the chapter, Gaudio talks about the cultural framework, in Europe and beyond, where there is a more generalized sense of uncertainty and disillusionment towards common living. The extremely individualistic culture of 'do-it-yourself' and 'everything-is-possible' has certainly contributed to this by investing the individual with decision-making powers linked mostly to the emotion of the moment, in private as well as public life – indeed, cancelling the boundaries between public and private,

as the chapter notes. The role of emotions in private daily choices as well as in community and national interest choices has therefore become central, going, however, to the detriment of responsible action and a culture of the common good, Gaudiano argues.

The eleventh chapter of the book authored by Feliciano Tosetto another scholar from Sophia University Institute concentrates the piece on accountability and populism. In the chapter, Tosetto argues that populism is used as a culturally defined idiom for political action and debate that postulates, as a fundamental value, the primacy of people over political control. The chapter also explores accountability in terms of how it is interpreted not as a mere governance tool but as a form of relationship based on control and how it can become a comparative category. This approach makes it possible to think of accountability as a process that integrates political and ethical dimensions, Tosetto argues. Tosetto notes that accountability raised in Anglo-Saxon contexts over the years seems to cross the boundaries of its accounting genealogy to become part of global history and will therefore be read as a particular accountability among various forms of the phenomenon.

In the twelfth chapter, Paolo Giusta focuses on the issue of *Populism and Political Leadership*. In the chapter, Giusta addresses both populist leaders and political leadership as an interactive process. In terms of populist leaders, he first explores some features common to most of them. Giusta notes that they tend to exert a personalistic authority, seek government power, and their relationship with followers is direct, unmediated and uninstitutionalised. He then goes on in the chapter to deal with political leadership, which he defines, in liberal democracies, as a series of processes of mutual influence – involving mainly citizens and elected officials – aimed at pursuing the common good. He went on to consider populism, in terms of Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, as both friend and foe to democracy; he describes how it interacts with these processes, in both positive and negative ways. He argues, positive, since, for instance, populism can mobilise excluded sectors of society and improve the responsiveness of the political system as well as democratic accountability. And negative, since the populist logic of identity is at odds with the democratic idea of representation, populist parties may well be responsive to the short-term demands of public opinion but feel unconstrained by responsibility, and populists tend to reject the rule of law and the constitutional checks and balances, Giusta notes.

In the thirteenth chapter of the book, Antonella Deponte a renowned psychologist looks at the psychological roots of populism. In her chapter, she sets out by citing Lewandowsky who notes that populism is not an inevitable natural disaster but the result of political choices made by identifiable individuals who ultimately can be held accountable for these choices. Populism according to Deponte does not generate from itself; populism is cultivated. To cultivate it, she argues, it is necessary to prepare the ground, spread the seeds of diversity and suspicion and sink the roots in the deepest needs of the human being: identity, recognition, safety and belongingness.

Populism is built by relying on universal psychic dynamics well known in the social sciences, Deponte argues. Specifically, Deponte notes it responds to specific

universal needs and performs functions that are important to people. Hence, counteracting it is not possible without considering its underlying factors. Deponte also notes that alternatives to populism are more likely to succeed if they address more effectively the needs of people and communities. This renowned psychologist provides a great contribution to the book.

The fourteenth chapter of the book by Fabio Frisone a Clinical Psychologist from the University of Messina and the University of Catania delves into the area of populist leader. In the chapter Frisone argues that numerous studies in political psychology have tried to provide a clear demarcation between the profile of leaders belonging to traditional parties and those belonging to populist parties. However, Frisone argues that the question linked to recognizing the phenomenologically relevant characteristics of the populist leader still appears unsolved. It was on this premise that he sets out study what is going on and how things could be resolved in the area. The results of his study suggests that it is possible to bring out a profile of the populist leader. In this regard, Frisone notes that the populist leader seems to live in a 'manic' temporal dimension, in which there is no space for slow maturation because everything seems to have been lived quickly, hoping a soon reaching new enlightenment. The space is lived so that the distance between the world of politics and that of the ordinary citizen is reduced, Frisone argues.

The above summarises the 14 chapters of this unique piece in the 2 areas of the book. It is hoped that all these great authors that researched the different areas of the two key areas have successfully increased our understanding what we know and where we were before the emergence of the book.

Part I
Populism and Accountability: Introductory
Studies

Chapter 2

Populism and Its Definitions: Interpretations and Perspectives of a Multifaceted Political Model



Antonio Maria Baggio

1 Multiplicity of Populisms and Their Definitions

The first attempt to clarify, by an international and qualified representation of scholars, what populism is, took place from 19–21 May 1967 at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences,¹ in the Conference entitled ‘To Define Populism’.

1.1 *From the London Conference to the New Populisms*

Within a century, populism had appeared through a movement of anti-Tzarist intellectuals in imperial Russia, in the years following the defeat in the Crimean War (1856) and Tsar Alexander II’s initiation of the emancipation process of serfdom. The Russian situation was a long way from that of the United States after the Civil War, but here too we find an agricultural sector undermined by the monetary policy implemented with continuity by the federal governments from 1868 onwards; the claim movement supported by debt-ridden farmers was also qualified as ‘populist’

¹The event was organised by the journal *Government and Opposition* in collaboration with the Humanitarian Trust. The Verbatim Report of the Conference is preserved in the School Library. Only the report of the debate of the last session of the Conference, devoted specifically to the issue of defining populism, was published by the journal that had promoted the Conference (*Government and Opposition*, 1968). The following year, the main reports were published – the first five dedicated to the analysis of cases (North America, Latin America, Russia, Eastern Europe, Africa) and the other five to in-depth theoretical analysis (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969).

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and went so far as to create, in 1892, the ‘People’s Party’ which was short-lived. Change century and continent, and we find movements defined as populist in Latin America in the first half of the twentieth century and, starting in the 1940s, the great phenomenon of Peronism in Argentina. There is a populist component within fascism, Nazism and Stalinism, in the processes of decolonisation in Africa, in some youth movements of the 1960s: recent phenomena for those who evaluated them in 1967.

As seen even then, ‘populism’ can take an autonomous, organised and visible form as a party, movement, ideology and mentality. It can also present itself as an internal component of political forces in which the official and explicit, or prevailing, orientation is not populism, but the right or the left, reformism, republicanism, nationalism or other. It may be institutional populism, that is, a component of an ideology imposed by the apparatus of authoritarian or totalitarian states, or states that are introducing transformations aimed at changing the balance of power and/or weakening the democratic order, or attempting to make it more inclusive. Even more generically, a political regime can be referred to as populist if, in its founding texts, it refers to the people as a political subject.

The London Conference takes into consideration this time span, this multiplicity of phenomena and theoretical possibilities. The debate is intense and opens up multiple research perspectives, not least because the participants belong to different disciplines and their languages capture different aspects of reality. The debate is not monopolised by a single discipline but open to political science, anthropology, social and economic sciences, psychology, political philosophy and the history of concepts and cultures. In essence, many of the questions we still face today in the study of populisms are set out, albeit in a profoundly changed world.

It is worth entering into this debate, to make our own the tools it provides and the perspectives it opens up. We will then try to follow – in the essentials – its progress through the generations of scholars and the variety of schools, because there is not only a history of populism that, until the first two decades of the 2000s, has produced unprecedented political phenomena; there is also a history of the study of populism that has experienced a real theoretical enrichment.² Knowing the main lines of this history allows us to better evaluate new theoretical proposals as well.

In fact, publications on populism have grown with considerable acceleration since the 1990s, in parallel with the emergence in Europe of movements and parties that defined themselves or perceived themselves as populist. Populism, in different forms, was not a new phenomenon in Latin America, but over the last two decades, three countries have experienced a radical left populism in power (De La Torre, 2019: 199–203; Weyland, 2013: 19–20) which radically changed the previous political framework: Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador.

²In this sense I find Manuel Anselmi’s book, *Populism. An Introduction*, useful. It aims to take stock, synthetically, of the knowledge acquired so far through studies and debates on populism, introducing us to the thought of some of the authors – from Edward Shils to Yves Mény and Yves Surel – who have proposed, over the past decades, original reflections on populism. In the second part, he addresses some of the issues posed by more recent populism, from the perspective of political sociology (Anselmi, 2018).

The situation regarding populism has also changed a lot in Europe. In 2000, the negotiations to form a government alliance between the ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) of Christian Democrat tradition and the FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party), considered a populist party, was the subject of a condemnatory resolution by the European Parliament. This considered the racist and xenophobic positions and expressions of appreciation for Nazism expressed by its leader at the time, Jörg Haider, to be contrary to European values. The resolution did not even hint at populism, but wanted to prevent the admission of FPÖ into the government from legitimising the extreme right in Europe (European Parliament resolution 3 February, 2000). At that time, in institutional political circles – and, to some extent, also in some academic circles, as we shall see – populism was directly associated with the radical and pro-Nazi right. Twenty years later, at least 27 parties considered or self-described as populist, including left-wing parties, have had or still have experience of government, in 19 European countries.

Other events that have increased interest in populism in the last decade were the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union (2020), the election of Donald Trump (2017–2021) to the presidency of the United States and the consolidation of 'institutional' forms of populism in some Eastern European countries, such as Serbia, Poland and Hungary – a trend confirmed, in the latter country, by the general elections of 2022. In the specific case of Poland and Hungary, it is appropriate to use the expression proposed by Mattia Zulianello, 'positive integrated populist parties' (Zulianello, 2020: 341), to refer to populist parties that integrate themselves into the system and, once in government, introduce laws that change the political regime by adapting it to their own vision. Within the European Union, we find the cases, in particular, of two parties leading their respective governments: the Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Alliance) in Hungary and the PiS (Law and Justice) in Poland. The European Union found that both countries violated certain principles of the democratic framework established by the Union's founding treaties, in some respects: the limitations imposed on freedom of expression (Hungary) and on the freedom of the judiciary in the Polish case. The Union's proceedings against the two countries obtained a Court of Justice ruling on 16 February 2022 (Court of Justice, 2022).³

Within the current dynamic and interesting framework of populism studies, we must also note certain limitations. The first lies in the fact that the interdisciplinary methodology widely applied in the London Conference has not been adequately developed over the next 50 years. It is to be hoped, for the future, that research conducted in interaction between different disciplines will multiply.

This interdisciplinarity has certainly had an influence in multiplying the number of possible definitions of populism. However, the plurality of perspectives should not be interpreted reductively as a state of confusion, but as an initial manifestation of a complex reality. Let us then consider some of the definitions presented then, which seem indicative of a nascent typology.

³Hungary and Poland had brought an action against the EU regulation that makes the disbursement of EU money to Member States conditional on their compliance with the principles of the rule of law. The Court of Justice of the European Union dismissed the appeal on 16 February 2022.

1.2 *Populism as a Progressive Ideology of Transition*

The first type of definition sees populism as a *transitional ideology towards autonomous development*, particularly in countries that have experienced or are undergoing processes of de-colonisation. Peter Worsley, a social anthropologist, places populist ideologies in the context of the ‘undeveloped’ countries that he studied in his book *The Third World* (Worsley, 1965) – an expression that was, at the time, a neologism. Populism is a typical ‘development ideology [...] of transition from “rural idiocy” to modernised society [...] It was more often potential than realised’ (To Define Populism, 1968, 156–157).⁴ The class clash, in his view, does not play the central role in the Third World that it does in developed countries: the main clash is, rather, between society as a whole and the outside world of the former colonisers. The party-state is the engine of development. In some cases, populism has the task of developing a vision that brings together the party, traditional village life and the new autonomous activities associated with development processes.

Beyond the historical context of decolonisation, within which populism is placed, we encounter here *a vision of populism as a progressive ideology and movement*, a vision shared by some, but contrasted by others who oppose it by attributing to *populism a reactionary character*, of opposition to modernisation perceived as a threat. Here begins a debate that has never been concluded, in which each of the interpretations is supported by different cases of populism.

1.3 *Populism as an Ideology Functional to Other Ideologies*

Another definition in the context of *populism as a transitional ideology* is presented by Andrzej Walicki, social and political philosopher.

For Walicki, populism is *a form of peasantist oriented socialism*, through which a Westernised intelligentsia wants to achieve two main goals: a modernisation of ‘backward countries’ as an alternative to capitalist-type development and to rescue idealised pre-capitalist human relations (To Define Populism, 1968, 172).

Walicki connects these forms of de-colonisation populism with nineteenth-century Russian populism: he emphasises the leading role of an alienated elite that wants to return to its cultural roots. This is why it constructs a populist ideology that attempts the composition of contents peculiar to the national tradition with those more general of socialism – herein lies the new element. This type of populism, according to Walicki, can also easily combine its ideas with forms of nationalism and xenophobia.

⁴ Arpad von Lazar rightly comments, in his review of *The Third World*, that Worsley is more familiar with the countries of Asia and Africa than with Latin America; Lazar, A. (1966). *The Journal of Politics*. Vol. 28, No. 2, 445–447. Review of (Worsley, 1965). In fact, Worsley during the Second World War was engaged in India with the British Army.

This idea was put forward in the debate by Ghîta Ionescu (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, 4). Walicki, agreeing with him, places it in a more comprehensive interpretative context. In this sense, the *concept of populism is introduced as a functional ideology of other ideologies, i.e. destined to become a component, an 'adjective', albeit an important one, of more structured ideologies.*

1.4 Populism Generated by a Social Situation

The definition given by Alain Touraine, sociologist of economics and politics, in his second speech reported in the report, defines populism as 'a movement or an ideology defending some traditional values and at the same time directly oriented towards problems of economic and social change. It was both backward and forward looking' (To Define Populism, 1968, 157).

The social situation to which Touraine links populism can be described through *three characteristics*. *The first* is the presence of 'a social category which was half-way engaged in a process of economic change, a category which was defined not by economic circumstances or as an interest group, but was in a process of collective social mobility' (To Define Populism, 1968, 158). This consideration opens up a field of research that will be much explored later – the fact that more social categories are involved in the process of change means that they can no longer recognise themselves on the basis of an ideological classification strictly linked to a role in the production process (such as 'class') or a social function. *The idea of the people, which imposes itself as a unifying subject beyond class differences*, seems to better express the need for belonging and identity reaffirmation of social groups placed in the uncertainty of change. Another avenue of research concerns the fact that *social mobility can quickly turn into political mobility*, causing a significant number of citizens to abandon traditional party affiliations (right, left) and open up to new political possibilities and electoral choices. This phenomenon is found in different eras and countries and has often accompanied the formation of populist parties both in the first half of the twentieth century and in more recent cases (Betz, 1994; Betz & Immerfall, 1998; Surel, 2003).

The second characteristic of the social situation conducive to populism is indicated by Touraine in the emergence of an economic power that appears 'alien' to society, as if in the hands of 'foreigners'. The most obvious example, of course, is the colonial situation, 'but an analogous situation could exist in a relatively traditional dual society where the power of the oligarchy could appear to be a foreign power for the rest of the society' (To Define Populism, 1968, 157–158). Such a situation was to be created in the countries of Eastern Europe after the fall of the socialist regimes, with a very rapid transition from a planned economy that was static, but capable of guaranteeing a minimum of security for the population, to a capitalist economy for which these peoples were not prepared (Heinisch, Massetti, & Mazzoleni, 2020) The perception of power as hostile materialised with the financial crisis that exploded in 2007. *Another important theme of analysis opens up here:*

that of the foreignness of economic power towards the whole of society, which, assuming the configuration of 'the people', presents itself as a whole in relation to a foreign body. In this way, Touraine observes a strong discrepancy can be created between political organisation (in which, I interpret, a popular will can be expressed) and economic power. This consideration by Touraine is part of a history, from the second half of the twentieth century to the present, that has produced a wide range of conflicts between governments and the economy, in which we find both cases of the dominance of economic powers over fragile states and, conversely, governments with strong populist elements that have rendered the economies of their countries fragile or even structurally damaged (Dornbusch & Edwards, 1991; Weyland, 2001, 2013).

The third characteristic indicated by Touraine is the *ambiguous position that can be taken by important components of the middle class*. It can ally itself with the popular classes against the oligarchy, and, at the same time, it can try to maintain a general balance between the classes. This theme has been addressed by numerous comparative studies on populism: exemplary, also methodologically, is Gino Germani's study on fascism and Peronism.

1.5 *Extension and Intention of Definitions*

Donald MacRae was one of the Conference speakers, on the topic of *Populism as Ideology* (MacRae, 1969, 153–165). In the course of the debate, he presented a 14-point definition of populism, in contrast to the authors we have dealt with so far, who had contented themselves with only 4 or 5 points (To Define Populism, 1968, 172–173).

The reason for this wealth of elements in the definition lies in the fact that MacRae links the populist phenomenon to two precise historical situations: 'When we talk of populism we think in the first place of imperial Russia and the late-nineteenth-century United States [...] populism is typically exemplified in modern Russia and America' (To Define Populism, 1968, 172). However different the two populisms are (from each other and from many others), it is from them that MacRae derives the defining elements of populism as such. This process of generalisation, which also concerns other definitions presented during the conference, highlights a central issue in the defining processes of the empirical sciences: *the level of abstraction of definitions, linked to the relationship between connotation and denotation in definitions*.

The closer we bring the lens to a phenomenon, and thus the narrower the scope of the definition, the more observable elements that characterise the phenomenon we bring into the definition of it. Conversely, if we want to include in the same definition a large number of phenomena such as the many populisms of which we have knowledge, then their common characteristics are reduced: the definition includes many more phenomena, but can say less about each of them, as Irving Copi taught several generations of students: 'The *extensional meaning* (also called the *denotative meaning*) of a general term is the collection of the objects that constitutes the

extension (or *denotation*) of the term [...] The set of attributes shared by all and only those objects to which a general term refers is called the **intension** (or *connotation*) of that term' (Copi, Cohen, & McMahon, 2011, 87).

1.6 Six Questions About Populism

It is logical then that Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, in presenting the book *Populism. Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, which contains the papers presented at the Conference, do not refer to a shared definition, but to six recurring themes during the London proceedings, which indicate as many fields for future and necessary research: 'There are perhaps six principal questions on which to base an assessment of whether populism is a unitary concept, regardless of the variety of its incarnations, or whether it is simply a word wrongly used in completely heterogeneous contexts' (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, 3).⁵

The questions are as follows: first, are populisms ideologies or movements?

Second, perhaps 'populism is a sort of recurring mentality appearing in different historical and geographic contexts as the result of a special social situation'. This second path of research is very interesting; Ionescu and Gellner give one of the possible interpretations, assuming that it is the social situation that creates the mentality. But 'mentalities' are not created overnight; they have deep cultural roots: we could say that this mentality is not produced, but activated by a crisis, and we need to explain what it is and why it is a hidden, but permanent presence.

Ionescu and Gellner go on to indicate as a third issue the fear of conspiracy and the mania of persecution towards an enemy indicated from time to time in different subjects, but whose presence is always necessary to orientate the antagonistic sentiment. In fourth place comes 'negativism' whereby populism is always anti-something. Fifth, populism worships the people, always understood as miserable and related to the rural world. Finally, the 'recurring mentality' – as we read in Walicki's exposition – normally disappears to be absorbed within 'strong' ideologies.

1.7 Let's Give Cinderella a Shoe

Berlin was the chairman of the final session 'Towards a Definition' of the Conference, dedicated to the presentation and comparison of different possible definitions of populism. Berlin gave an important synthesis speech, most of which took up elements we have already mentioned and others to which we will return.⁶ At the

⁵The six questions were anticipated by Ionescu during the final debate of the London Conference (To Define Populism, 1968, 168–169).

⁶Berlin did not publish any text. However, the 'Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library' makes available the verbatim of his speech (Berlin, 1969), which claims to be more accurate in some places than the one published by *Government and Opposition* (To Define Populism, 1968, 173–178).

beginning of the session, taking note of the plurality of positions, Berlin expounded the ‘Cinderella complex’, according to which every definition that seeks to construct the perfect model of a phenomenon – and therefore also that of populism – is comparable to Cinderella’s shoe: perfect in itself, it finds no foot that corresponds exactly to it in reality. ‘I mean the following: that there exists a shoe – the word “populism” – for which somewhere there must exist a foot. There are all kinds of feet which it nearly fits, but we must not be trapped by these nearly-fitting feet. The prince is always wandering about with the shoe; and somewhere, we feel sure, there awaits it a limb called pure populism. This is the nucleus of populism, its essence’ (Berlin, 1969, 6). This idea of a perfect (and unchanging) model of populism is Platonic, not useful to us, according to Berlin. The meanings of words are not immovable like Platonic ideas (which are not given through experience in the sensible world, but are the result of rational hypothesis or contemplation) but change, especially if they have to do with historical or sociological subjects: we must not take this direction. ‘At the same time, we must not be tempted in the other direction, which some have taken, to suppose that the word “populism” is simply a homonym [...] Yet I also have a feeling that whenever a word is much used, even if it is an exceedingly confusing or over-rich word, like “romanticism”, “idealism”, “populism”, “democracy” and so on, something real is intended, something, not quite nothing. There is a sense in which one should look for the common core’ (Berlin, 1969, 7).

‘Populism is something real’. The ‘Cinderella complex’ is therefore not an insuperable fate. It is very likely that, while we linger on explaining that populism is indefinable, Cinderella has already left with the Prince, and in her own shoes.

2 People or Populace?

Certain elements recur frequently in definitions of populism. The meanings attributed to them, however, are different. Consequently, the judgement of populism changes, but often, because we are focused on the differences between definitions, we do not notice that the nature of the ‘people’ to which populism refers also changes. We explore this dynamic with the help of four US authors – Edward Shils, Richard Hofstadter, Michael Kazin and Tom Nichols – who introduced new tools for understanding the debate between the 1950s and today.

2.1 *At the Origins of Populism: The Catalysing Role of Resentment*

The first is Edward Shils, sociologist. In his work *The Torment of Secrecy* (Shils, 1956), he examines resentment against the ruling class and the political and economic order it imposes on society as a whole. He considers it fundamental in the

formation of US populism, which began in the Middle West and South in the years following the Civil War.

We found this element in some of the definitions presented at the London Conference, which implement an initial generalisation of resentment, applying it also outside the US experience. Subsequently, in a large number of authors, it is considered as an essential component of populism as such. Its role is also recognised in the analysis of more recent populisms, active in the first two decades of the 2000s.

However, the focus on the concrete phenomenon that characterised Shils' analysis is often lost. The protagonist subject in his description is not 'the people', but the 'populace', a pejorative term compared to 'people': it indicates the baseness of customs, the mass, the uniformity or lack of individuality. The use of two different terms is effective because he intends to emphasise that populism is an expression of the people, not the populace. This dignity of the people leads to the reversal of the meaning – from a moral point of view – of the relationship of inequality: 'Populism is tinged by the belief that the people are not just the equal of their rulers; they are actually better than their rulers and better than the classes – the urban middle classes – associated with the ruling powers' (Shils, 1956, 101). But the presence of the 'populace' element cannot be ignored. There is thus a tension within populism between people and populace, which can make one or the other of the two elements prevail.

Resentment is accompanied by contempt for the political class and a willingness to directly implement the popular will. This entails the refusal to give any form of autonomy to parliamentarians: 'Populism inclines towards a conception of the legislative branch which may be designated as "identity" in contrast with "representation"'. Legislators are expected to be "identical" with the popular will rather than "representatives" who will interpret it' (Shils, 1956, 102). Regardless of the judgement on the feasibility of this direct action, we have a clear description of a second element characterising populism: the rejection of political representation. However, another aspect of this rejection must not be overlooked: the possibility of maturation, of a transition from populace to people, through participation in a political experience that fosters the emancipation of members of the people, orienting them towards an active exercise of citizenship, rather than towards riots and inconclusive protests.

This does not mean, according to Shils, that the populist movement refuses to have leaders, capable, from the earliest years, of organising a 'Farmer Alliance' and achieving significant electoral results. The populism of the following generations would evolve to the point of acquiring a certain idea of representation, managing to bring great politicians into parliament, capable of achieving a mediation between populist demands and the exercise of a parliamentary mandate, as in the case of Robert M. La Follette, senator from 1906 to 1925, a great accuser of President Wilson and political corruption. This introduces another issue of current relevance, given the large presence of populist parties in parliaments: is it possible to think of a representation compatible with the best demands of populism?

2.2 *Ideology or Mentality?*

This work by Shils also opens up another field of reflection that reaches to the present day: he develops the idea of populism as ‘mentality’ and never refers to it as ‘ideology’. For Shils, ideology, to which he devotes the entirety of Chap. 12 of *Torment of Secrecy*, is a political extremism that can take various forms; thus populism, like other political movements, may fall into ideology, but is not ideology per se. What Shils is concerned with is the defence of pluralism, which he contrasts directly not with populism, but with extremism and the apocalyptic mentality:

The apocalyptic mentality sees every issue as a conflict between diametrically opposed alternatives, and it sees the carriers of these alternatives as opposed to each other completely, fundamentally and continuously. The pluralistic mentality, believing the alternatives fall within a narrower range, believes also that the proponents of the alternatives also have more in common with each other than do apocalyptic politicians. (Shils, 1956, 226)

The ‘apocalyptic mentality’ that often enters into the definitions of populism (Hofstadter, 1969, 22; MacRae, 1969, 157, 158, 163; Worsley, 1969, 222) is intended to indicate precisely the absence of political planning, of the capacity to concretise the ideal vision within a historical progression. The populist mentality does not coincide with the apocalyptic mentality and, therefore, may be capable of historical sense and planning: but in what way can we do it? In fact, it is also different from the pluralist mentality that is characterised precisely by the ‘way’ of doing things that inspires the processuality of liberal democracy.

The ‘mentality hypothesis’ has resurfaced in recent publications, with good arguments. Marco Tarchi writes that ‘the essence of populism is identifiable in a specific forma mentis, dependent on a vision of the social order at the basis of which lies a belief in the innate virtues of the people, whose primacy as a source of legitimisation of political action and government is openly claimed’ (Tarchi, 2015 – 1st 2003, 52).

2.3 *Conspiracy Against the People and Anti-intellectualism: A Model from the Nineteenth Century to Sars-CoV-2*

Another element frequently present in both past definitions of populism and in many analyses of contemporary populisms is the belief in the existence of a conspiracy against the people and a consequent persecution mania that fuels both resentment and a mentality of generalised suspicion. Let us take as a reference author on these aspects Richard Hofstadter, who over the years, since 1963, has deepened the study of this mentality, which he considers a real ‘paranoid style in American politics’. The sense of persecution is central to it and gives rise to grandiose conspiracy theories. This argument will be taken up later, as we have seen, by Ghîta Ionescu, who will speak of a ‘political persecution mania’. Hofstadter, on the other hand, takes care to distinguish more clearly between the ‘clinical paranoiac’,

who feels the conspiracy directed specifically against himself, and the ‘paranoid spokesman in politics’, who ‘finds the hostile and conspiratorial world [...] directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others [...] His sense that his political passions are unselfish and patriotic, in fact, goes far to intensify his feeling of righteousness and his moral indignation’ (Hofstadter, 2000, 504).⁷ Hofstadter offers numerous examples of this mentality, some typical of US history, others found everywhere, as we shall see.

He also links the sense of persecution to an anti-intellectualistic attitude, which goes back to the original dream of US populism, in which the ‘common man’ possessed many different skills, indispensable in the ‘initial’ situation he experienced. He was convinced that he could manage, without specialised training, both everyday life and government. That is why today’s ‘common man’ finds it so hard to accept the change in the situation, which has already taken place, and which puts him on the sidelines: ‘Today he knows that he cannot even make his breakfast without using devices, more or less mysterious to him, which expertise has put at his disposal’ (Hofstadter, 1963, 34). Intellectuals act as experts or ideologues and e ‘in both capacities they evoke profound, and, in a measure, legitimate, fears and resentments’ Hofstadter, 1963, 35).⁸

The two elements, persecution and anti-intellectualism, have continued to reinforce each other and evolve, presenting themselves in an acute form in times of crisis. In the first two decades of the 2000s, we could observe them in relation to the financial (and, consequently, economic) crisis that exploded in 2007. We experienced a subsequent acute phase with the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The mentality associated with the persecution/anti-intellectualism pair has spread both socially and politically.

First, on the social level, the anti-intellectualist tendency manifested itself through forms of explicit contestation to the decisions taken by governments to deal with the SARS-CoV 2 pandemic, especially in countries that had made the vaccine mandatory. Studies carried out shortly before the pandemic, such as that of Tom Nichols (Nichols, 2017), are very useful because they had already identified the specific anti-intellectualist mindset on which the No-Vax behaviour became socially and politically antagonistic. Nichols had updated Hofstadter’s analysis of anti-intellectualism, freeing it from the assumption of the ‘common man’. It is no longer a matter of misinformation or ignorance, but of *aggressively wrong*: ‘People don’t just believe dumb things; they actively resist further learning rather than let go of those beliefs’ (Nichols, 2017, X–XI).

I report some brief testimonies of doctors from three Italian hospitals, collected in August 2021, just as an example (the number of such testimonies is enormous) of an ideological obstinacy that goes as far as death. In the Polyclinic of Modena,

⁷The origin of *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, as the author explains, is a Herbert Spencer Lecture given at Oxford in November 1963. An early version of the text was published by *Harper’s Magazine* in November 1964. The text cited (Hofstadter, 2000) is the definitive one.

⁸Mauro Dorato (2019), in his research on anti-intellectualism, studies the principle of competence and links it to the functioning of democracy; Matteo Motta’s (Motta, 2018) study is also relevant.

where nine out of ten intensive care patients are not vaccinated, the anaesthetist explains that the patients in his ward are divided into two groups: ‘undecided who wait until the last minute to get vaccinated and arrive here very frightened, and 30% deniers who think it is a conspiracy to sell drugs. These we find in the hospital when they can no longer breathe’. A doctor at the Polyclinic Sant’Orsola in Bologna explains that patients are opposed to therapy or intubation and their relatives also have the presumption of knowing things, as they point out to the doctors the therapies they would like their loved ones to receive. A doctor in the reanimation ward of Parma Hospital said ‘And then there are those who as a last resort, before being intubated, tell you: “if you vaccinate me I will denounce you”’ (Baldi and Giubilei, 2021, 9).⁹

Conspiracy theories, resentment and presumption of knowledge with anti-intellectual aggression are what we find in the experience of the pandemic between 2020 and 2022 the elements pointed out by Hofstadter and Nichols. A paradoxical situation has arisen: just as it was becoming evident to all that everyone’s health – and public health – depended on the ability of science and technology to prove their specific and elitist knowledge through the invention of vaccines, the conspiratorial and anti-intellectualist mentality has produced alternative explanations, imaginary but articulate, endowed with a certain internal coherence, capable of acting as ‘theories’ for improvised movements of contestation against the system. This production of structured ideological constructions can only be explained by the presence, prior to the pandemic, of the anti-intellectualistic mentality we are studying, on which the pandemic acted as a triggering event or, in many cases, as an opportunity to be seized by subjects already radicalised in antagonism, to implement ‘anti-system’ behaviour.

Second, on the political level, there is agreement among observers in explaining the multiplication of populist political movements and parties across Europe by linking it to the financial crisis (2007). Yves Mény emphasises three traditional components in the new populisms. The first is the change of adversary: it is no longer the other party, but the set of parties perceived as a caste, an elite that has lost its *raison d’être*: ‘In the very name of the democratic principle (and not against it), the people, the source and foundation of all power, are put back in the center of the stage’ (Mény, 2019, 219). A vertical conception of politics (people versus elites) replaces the horizontal one that saw the struggle between parties based on ideological and programmatic differences. The second, which Mény exemplifies with the French case of the ‘Gilets jaunes’ (yellow jackets), is an aggressive resentment: ‘The rage converges and unites on the ground, depoliticized protesters, supporters of Marine Le Pen or Jean-Luc Mélenchon, employees and pensioners, craftsmen and shopkeepers. All united against the ‘power’ to overthrow it but without any ambition to take it’ (Mény, 2019, 222). The third is mistrust in parties and the

⁹It is still too early for general and broadly comparative studies on antagonistic reactions during a pandemic. There are, however, good studies on limited cases, such as *Anti-intellectualism and the mass public’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic* (Merkley & Loewen, 2021); vedi inoltre: Allcott et al., 2020; Allington et al., 2020; Bridgman et al., 2020.

perception of their incompetence in understanding real problems and solving them: this explains why French parties have competed in converging towards the center to win over ‘moderate voters’, while voters have gone the other way, moving towards radicalised movements and parties.

2.4 *Populace Always Comes Back*

Therefore, we can say, on the basis of the continuity of historical facts, that populism is not a transitory phenomenon linked to a particular epoch, but a constant presence in the US reality and in the realities of all democratic countries or countries in democratic transition (whether the liberal democratic regime is under construction or deconstruction, populism can in fact act in both directions). Shils focuses on the risk aspects for democracy, since populism has a tendency to disregard institutions and the rule of law, in particular the separation of institutional powers: ‘The populist mentality, when it has full sway, denies the claims to autonomy of the legislative which it views as its mouthpiece, of the executive which it views as its instrument and of the judiciary which it views as the resistant custodian of a law which sets itself above the will of the people’ (Shils, 1956, 161). This aspect of the populist mentality can have very serious consequences for democratic systems: there is no room for political accountability.¹⁰

Shils had experienced first-hand the authoritarian forcing of Joseph McCarthy, who was only censured by the Senate in December 1954. It should be noted that McCarthy had unfairly attacked the very Senator La Follette, whom Shils referred to as the noble representative of US populism. McCarthy’s action, according to Shils, rested on a populism that no longer had anything to do with the people: the ‘populace’, the other pole to that of conscious citizenship, had imposed itself, a possibility that populism can produce whenever non-respect for democratic institutions and their rules prevails. The diversity of subjects (people or populace) changes the nature of the phenomenon.

Shils took us from the 1860s of the ‘Farmer Alliance’, to the 1920s–1940s of La Follette, to the Cold War. Following his reasoning and using his vocabulary, we could bridge a further span of time and arrive, as an example of radical anti-establishment populism and a mentality characterised by constant suspicion of conspiracies and plots, at the 6 January 2021 assault on Capitol Hill, the seat of Congress, by an organised mob of followers of Donald Trump, defeated in the presidential election: what were the assailants, *people* or *populace*?

¹⁰On this topic, see Mark E. Warren’s essay on *Accountability and Democracy* (2016, 39–54), in particular the ‘Part III Accountable Governance’ of *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability* (Bovens et al., 2016, 195–304).

2.5 Populism as ‘Constitutional’ Language

‘Who speaks for the people *now*?’ Michael Kazin wondered this in the 2017 *Preface* to his book *The Populist Persuasion* (Kazin, 2017, 1st 1995). The presidential election had recently concluded and Kazin observed that both the president-elect, Donald Trump, and his opponent Bernard Sanders, had run their campaigns using a traditional populist theme, namely attacking elites and the establishment in the name of ‘hard-working’ Americans. The two contestants represented two different traditions within populism that Kazin does not want to define as ‘right-wing’ and ‘left-wing’ populism, because these two expressions do not seem adequate for him to grasp the difference between the two languages. Sanders belongs to a liberal populism, which – according to Kazin – makes no distinction between citizens, directed exclusively upward, against the ‘corporate elites’ incapable of governing. Trump’s definition of ‘people’, on the other hand, is ethnically narrow, privileging Americans of European origin and allied to a ‘racial nationalism’. Beyond this, the populist roots of Trump and Sanders do not emerge with the strong characteristics they had in their predecessors, who addressed their parties by each aiming at a clear and robust identity, and not, predominantly, at antagonism towards the opponent:

Neither Democrats nor Republicans have been able to formulate such an appeal today, and that failing is both a cause and an effect of the public’s distaste for both major parties. It may be impossible to come up with a credible definition of ‘the people’ that can mobilize the dizzying plurality of class, gender, and ethnic identities which co-exist, often unhappily, in America today. But ambitious populists will probably not stop trying to concoct one. (Kazin, 2017, *Preface*)

On this basis, we can say that each of the two candidates presented an identity obtained by contrast and not by the development of their own content; they asked for votes against their opponent rather than for their own party. The political relationship between majority and opposition from the outset seemed, consequently, destined to become a risky radical antagonism, as in fact happened. From this point of view, the assault on the Congressional seat in January 2021 appears less unexpected, as it is the result of a populism that is more aggressive because it is more confused and culturally poor: we are in the risky situation of having a majority of populists, but not a clear idea of people. The question ‘people or populace?’ has been answered. This poverty of political language is dramatic:

Whether orated, written, drawn, broadcast, or televised, this language [of populism] is used by those who claim to speak for the vast majority of Americans who work hard and love their country. That is the most basic and telling definition of populism: a language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter. (Kazin, 2017, 1)

For this, ‘American populism binds even as it divides’. Political actors fight each other, but “ver a shared set of ideals”, and this has allowed the United States to avoid subordination to revolutionary ideologies such as fascism, Nazism, Leninism, Maoism and Iranian-style Islam. Populism itself, for Kazin’s cultural current, is not an ideology. According to Kazin, an ideology is loaded with partisan content,

whereas populism – that of the people, not the populace – is directly connected to *shared ideals*.

Populism cannot be associated with being Unionists or Socialists, Democrats or Republicans: ‘Populism, more an impulse than an ideology, is too elastic and promiscuous to be a basis for such an allegiance’ (Kazin, 2017, 3). We can say, in short, that according to this perspective *populism is a constitutional language, hence the political language par excellence* that, in a given historical moment, is embodied by a movement that takes on the task of recalling the ruling classes to the founding values, to the Spirit of ‘76, in an attempt to ‘straighten out’ the country’s path – a populism that is unable to express itself, consequently, that is unable to recover, in its own way, the language of the original foundation, denounces the weakening of shared ideals, the fragility of the political community.

The forms of populism that emerge not only in the United States with the assault on the seat of Congress but also in other countries with a democratic regime, and that express themselves by burning tyres, smashing shop windows, devastating religious sites and assaulting immigrants and ethnic minorities, is an indicator of the prevalence of populace, that is, of the disintegration of social and cultural identities – particularly those of the impoverished middle class – in the dust of the angry mob. This impotent populism, incapable of authentic political vision, must now be content with anti-institutional disorder, with rioting. Today, what Jacques Ellul wrote, in an entirely different context, 50 years ago in *From Revolution to Revolts*, is appropriate again: it is no longer the time for revolutions; ‘revolt is still possible but it no longer leads to any revolution. Because it, the revolution, is precisely excluded – and if what is still called by that name seems derisory compared to what it was meant to be, reformists and revolutionaries now find themselves back to back, equal in their ineffectiveness. Technological growth has exceeded these conflicts [...] This society can no longer be truly challenged. Only its appearances’ (Ellul, 2011 – 1st 1972, 497–498).

2.6 *How Can We Read Populism? A Model of Historiographical Warfare*

Conspiracy, resentment and anti-intellectualism – we have noted their presence in various phenomena defined as populist by their protagonists or indicated as such by various observers. They are elements of an oppositional nature, i.e. they are not, per se, bearers of the project contents that should characterise politics, but express themselves simply as antagonistic impulses, even though they may be accompanied, as we have seen, by an ideological apparatus. The role of these elements (or parts of them) in a good part of past and present populist phenomena is not in doubt. We must instead doubt two other things:

first, that they be always present in popular subjects who initiate public action: could not the elements characterising such action be others?

And *second*, that, if present, they always play the role of main catalysts.

We attempt to answer these questions in two ways: (1) through the analysis of a historiographical dispute concerning American populism in the nineteenth century and (2) through the acquisition of some new theoretical perspectives.

Richard Hofstadter, in the Introduction to his 1955 *The Age of Reform*, defines populism as follows:

By "Populism" I do not mean only the People's (or Populist) Party of the 1890s; for I consider the Populist Party to be merely a heightened expression, at a particular moment of time, of a kind of popular impulse that is endemic in American political culture. Long before the rebellion of the 1890s one can observe a larger trend of thought, stemming from the time of Andrew Jackson, and crystallizing after the Civil War in the Greenback, Granger, and anti-monopoly movements, that expressed the discontents of a great many farmers and businessmen with the economic changes of the late nineteenth century. The Populist spirit captured the Democratic Party in 1896, and continued to play an important part in the politics of the Progressive era. While its special association with agrarian reforms has now become attenuated, I believe that Populist thinking has survived in our own time, partly as an undercurrent of provincial resentments, popular and "democratic" rebelliousness and suspiciousness, and nativism. (Hofstadter, 1955, 4–5)

Populism is characterised by what we might call the 'antagonist triptych' (conspiracy, resentment, anti-intellectualism); but in addition to these three descriptors – to which Hofstadter will also give attention in later works, as we have already seen – the greatest space is devoted to nativism, which must be understood, in this case, as the idea of protecting the 'myth' of the original culture of the rustic, honest and religious American pioneers, not only from the influence of waves of foreign migration but in particular from the transformations that industrial technology was introducing.

Hofstadter's book received immediate and wide acclaim and won the Pulitzer Prize for History the following year.¹¹ Hofstadter's assessment of populism became, within a few years, the 'canonical' interpretation for a considerable part of historians and educated public opinion.

But a historiographical line was also soon formed that opposed populism seen only as backward-looking. Norman Pollack contrasts the critics of populism with the research of what he calls 'earlier writers', who 'never challenged the fact of hard times' (Pollack, 1962, 3–6). Pollack refers to Solon Julius Buck and his history of the 'Granger Movement' (Buck, 1913), to Herman Clarence Nixon and the other 11 authors of *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Twelve Southerners, 1930), to Hallie Farmer, Raymon C. Miller and Alex M. Arnett.¹² To

¹¹ He went on to win it again in 1964, for *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*, which I have already mentioned.

¹² Pollack merely names them, as he does with Norman C. Nixon. They are a varied but solid current of thought. I refer to some of their works, most of which study precise situations and historical moments, with extensive use of journalistic sources and administrative records: Miller, 1925; Farmer, 1924, 1926.

these he adds only one historian of the next generation, Chester McArthur Destler (1946).

More recent authors, he explains, have constructed a *retrogressive framework* that denies the factual content of earlier historical works. The basic criticism he makes of the opposing historians is their ignorance of sources, most of which are easily accessible.¹³ Pollack's work was not solid enough and criticism was not lacking (Saloutos, 1964; Shapiro, 1968). We might call Pollack's book a 'militant text', but this does not mean that the archive sources he used are not true; on the contrary, they provide important information.¹⁴

The one who gives more solidity to a different account of US populism is Lawrence Goodwyn. And it is not just a question of populism: just as Hofstadter included populism in a general view of US history, so, with a different look, does Goodwyn. This 'historiographical battle' is interesting because it highlights the elements that we have seen come into play in the debates on populism within each country: the identity of a people and the meaning of its history are always questioned.

These circumstances have created for the student of the agrarian revolt a number of conceptual hazards, securely grounded in the traditions of our history and culture. Primary among them is a generalized presumption about "politics" that proceeds from a deep and largely unconscious complacency about American democracy. This attitude essentially embraces three elements. At bottom is a romantic view about the achievements of the American past. The national experience is seen as both purposeful and generally progressive. The "system", though not without flaws, works. Lingering flaws will ultimately be diminished. Unarguably, this presumption is the conceptual centrepiece of that vast body of writing known as the literature of American history. However true or untrue this presumption may be, it incontestably prevails. Indeed, it is a central presumption of American culture. (Goodwyn, 1978, 128).

Goodwyn's greatest contribution to the history of the populist movement, in my opinion, lies in the reconstruction of its emancipatory and solidaristic factors. It was not easy to create a new democratic mass movement out of existing patterns in the United States of the 1880s and 1890s. Most citizens voted according to established party loyalties created at the time of the Civil War or determined by religious affiliation. The populism of the 1870s–1890s developed because it started from the social, from the real needs of farmers who created, through cooperation, an alternative network both to sell their products and to buy. In this way, the farmers tried to escape cash payment systems controlled by the big merchants and industry owners, which forced them to increase their indebtedness more and more. In this way, farmers also free themselves from an atavistic sense of subordination and gain an awareness of their rights. Through simple but intense experiences, a democratic culture begins to form: 'When a farm family's wagon crested a hill en route to a Fourth of July "Alliance Day" encampment and the occupants looked back to see thousands

¹³Pollack, at the end of his book, devotes a few pages (145–149) to the indication of archival sources, some of which he found had never been consulted.

¹⁴His is the editor of *The Populist Mind*, one of the most conspicuous and useful collections of sources on populism (Pollack, 1967). From the previous year is George Brown Tindall's *A Populist Reader* (Tindall, 1966).

of other families trailed out behind them in wagon trains, the thought that “the Alliance is the people and the people are together” took on transforming possibilities’ (Goodwyn, 1978, 63–64).

In Goodwyn’s reconstruction *we do not find nostalgia for an original rural community at all, but the economic and political project of a community to be built in the present and the future*. On the results of this attempt, which was nevertheless impressive, there can be different interpretations. Let us read Goodwyn’s balanced assessment:

The young organizer learned in 1884–1885 that cooperative buying and selling was easier to plan at country meetings than to carry out. Town merchants opposed cooperative schemes, as did manufacturers and cotton buyers. Indeed, the entire commercial world was hostile to the concept. Cooperation was not the American way; competition was. But if the new movement did not invariably achieve immediate economic gains, the cooperative idea spurred organizing work. The 1885 state meeting of the Alliance was the largest gathering of farmers ever held in Texas to that time. The order adopted a program calling on all members “to act together as a unit in the sale of their product” and to that end moved to have each county alliance set apart a special day for selling. Thus, Alliancemen began what they called “bulking”. These mass cotton sales were widely advertised and cotton buyers contacted in advance, for the Alliance sought a representative turnout of agents who might themselves engage in a modicum of competition. (Goodwyn, 1978, 59–60)

The co-operative movement certainly did not change the structures of the then existing system. But neither can it be reduced to the ‘retrogressive framework’ constructed by Hofstadter and denounced by Pollack: some elements of the framework can be found in reality, but this interpretative scheme cannot explain the development of co-operation, the growth of the National Farmers Alliance which arose, on a local level, in 1877 and in a few years came to involve the entire Midwest and to support the People’s Party, which constituted an important attempt at a ‘third party’ in the history of the United States: ‘Since the National Farmers Alliance and the People’s Party were sequential expressions of the same popular movement and the same democratic culture, the gradual evolution of the cooperative crusade that generated both was the central component of the agrarian revolt. This understanding came largely from primary sources’ (Goodwyn, 1978, 363). The use of sources is the determining element and, on this level, the clash with Hofstadter is direct: ‘He [Hofstadter] managed to frame his interpretation of the intellectual content of Populism without recourse to a single reference to the planks of the Omaha Platform of the People’s Party or to any of the economic, political, or cultural experiences that led to the creation of those goals. Indeed, there is no indication in his text that he was aware of these experiences’ (Goodwyn, 1978, 364).

In fact, here it is a question of taking the facts into consideration or omitting them; then, of course, one can evaluate the different interpretations. Reading the national press shows the movement’s strong impact on public opinion. But in *my* opinion, the reading of the local press and of the ‘rural weeklies’ is even more interesting because it lets us enter the ‘small worlds’, the daily lives of farmers and workers, in some respects very different between the two groups; yet we find there some common elements linked to populism, such as the concern for community life, the care for education and the attempts to create a culture corresponding to the

emancipation process. On all this, the historians evoked by Pollack can help us. In them we find a concern for family life, for the ‘minimal’ aspects of material life, that historiography and literature will only discover a few decades later. And important contributions also came from historian of Goodwyn generation (for instance, Nugent, 1963; Clanton, 1969; Knapp, 1969; Clinch, 1970; Clanton, 2004).

3 Why Is It So Difficult to Define?

The ‘historiographical war’ is rich in lessons. The most recent historical research shows that it is not possible to define American populism in the nineteenth century solely on the basis of its antagonistic elements, which are ‘empty’, i.e. they can only be explained through the contents of another concept, that of the subject to which populism is ‘against’. The well-documented research on the vital factors of populism, on the other hand, emphasises cooperation, the concretised solidaristic element, which is ‘full’, i.e. it has a content that depends on the relationship established between the members of the cooperating collective subject, without any need to be defined ‘by contrast’ (which is a form of subordination).

3.1 *Retrogressive and Praegrassive Frameworks: Populism as Complexity*

In the case we have observed, the definitions based exclusively on *antagonistic elements* intercept certain behaviours that are actually present in populism, *reactive* behaviours that are caused by the adversary and therefore remain *subordinate* to his action. But only *protagonist elements*, *active* behaviours that depend on the free decision of the subject can explain its nature, the source of its strength and its project. Such *active* behaviours are not subordinate, but *superordinate* to the action of the adversary, i.e. *first*, they develop a project consistent with the nature of the acting subject and not merely imposed by circumstances, and *second*, they seize the opportunity of crisis to build a strategic human and political vision, which stands on a higher plane than a mere reaction to the adversary’s action.

We note that relevant *protagonist* elements actually present in a phenomenon of macroscopic populism such as the one we have described, have been excluded or not adequately assessed to the point of not being included in its definition. And this was not the error of a single piece of research, but the ‘vision’ of an entire historiographic current. So perhaps it is not an episodic error, but one that is produced continuously and thus manifests the action of an ideological prejudice and/or what in ethics is called an ‘erroneous conscience’ (i.e. one that produces the error physiologically). Ideological prejudice produces a *Denkform*, a dynamic model of the movement of thought, adaptable to certain fields of knowledge.

It is a preforming of the path of reasoning, such that the intelligence is not free to explore the possibilities of reality and the thought that wants to know it, but is bound to reproduce a ‘necessitated’ logical sequence: this creates not a single error, but an *erroneous logic*, which ‘produces error physiologically’. It is consequently legitimate to ask whether this bias is also at work in the study of other populist phenomena contemporary to us. In fact, the ‘historiographical war’ has taught us that entire currents of thought can be created that develop theories on the basis of ideological prejudice or, as Giovanni Sartori will shortly explain, on the basis of a logic that is fragile, but can be widely reproduced, out of laziness, for lack of original ideas or when academic relations of subordination between scholars dominate.

The presence of *protagonist* elements does not eliminate the fact that *antagonistic* ones are also present: it is not a question, therefore, of ‘beatifying’ populism, but of recognising, in addition to its destructive components, also its constructive components – when there are any – because the only way to overcome the problems that populisms can create is to satisfy the ‘constitutional needs’ of which they can be bearers. The social sciences, empirical by nature, must create descriptors of reality not only for the ‘retrogressive framework’ – transforming it from an ideological bias to a research hypothesis – but also descriptors for a ‘praegrressive framework’ capable of detecting protagonist elements (see Table 2.1).

A definition of ‘populism’ that uses only antagonistic elements describes, in reality, the ‘populace’, not the ‘people’ and prefigures populism as an exclusively negative phenomenon, to be considered as a dangerous antithesis for democracy. Such ‘prefiguration’ leads one to find, in reality, only what one wants to find, namely negative ‘descriptors’, the only ones considered. We must try to avoid these reductionisms that lead to definitions that are not such and that easily fall into nominalistic arbitrariness (Chibbaro, Rondoni, & Vulpiani, 2014, 99–120). It takes an effort of open-mindedness and, also, the ability to accept uncertainty, for example, to accept, at the outset, the probabilistic hypothesis that populace and people can both be present within a populist phenomenon (as, in fact, often happens), assuming different roles as situations and contexts change. If it is established, for example, that within a populist movement there are components that are open to democratic rules,

Table 2.1 Recognition and Intuitive Evaluation of Retrogressive and Praegrressive Items of a Populist Phenomenon

| | Retrogressive framework antagonist definition | Rating | | | | | Praegrressive framework protagonist definition |
|-------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|--|
| Behaviours | Reactive behaviours | – | – | ? | + | + | Active behaviours |
| | Subordinated to the opponent’s action | | | | | | Superordinate to the opponent’s action |
| Descriptors | Resentment | | | | | | Solidarity |
| | Conspiracy/suspicion | | | | | | Cooperation/trust |
| | Anti-intellectualism | | | | | | Cultural formation |
| | Anti-politics | | | | | | New political representation |
| | Exclusion | | | | | | Inclusion |
| | Closed society | | | | | | Open society |

of which they demand a more credible application, then collaboration with liberal democratic parties is possible. If, on the other hand, these components are neither seen nor considered, there will be a push toward the radicalisation of populism. A free, non-ideological intelligence can accept that what is called populism is a complex reality, hence a whole comprising sub-systems or a sub-system interacting with other sub-systems and that, because of this, it cannot be explained by a single universal law nor by a single definition.

Political science will never be *physical science*. I can assure you that I never accompanied Immanuel Kant on his walks through Königsberg – although my students seem to think otherwise – when he wondered whether metaphysics could become a science. But I do know that the fascination with number made him make heroic but clumsy attempts (as he did in 1763: *An Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy*, a text in which Kant, in order to measure phenomena, had to renounce all human meanings that could not be expressed through numbers). Let's not put ourselves in the same situation. On the difficulty of defining, we will return later, with the help of Giovanni Sartori, meanwhile, not to take definitions from strangers.

Table 2.1 summarises what was written in Sect. 3.1. It is an attempt to visually differentiate the 'Behaviours' and 'Descriptors' that can be attributed to the two opposing conceptual frameworks that characterise the two historiographical orientations described in '2.6 How Can We Read Populism? A Model of Historiographical Warfare'. The third column, 'Rating', is a tool for a possible exercise: one scores each 'Behaviour' or 'Descriptor' by placing a '+' or a '-' in each of the five corresponding boxes: at the end, the count of '+' and '-' will indicate adherence to one or the other of the frameworks and the possibility of modifying or supplementing them. If this exercise is done individually and before conducting proper research, the 'Rating' simply serves to highlight the opinion each person already holds on populism. Everyone will resort to intuitive theories, which are, very often, wrong. It is interesting either to construct roleplays based on the different opinions or to repeat the exercise after discussion or after some study of populism.

3.2 Searching for the Concrete

1956 is an important year for our discourse, because in addition to *The Torment of Secrecy* by Edward Shils, Robert Dahl's *A Preface to Democratic Theory* is published. With two different languages, both take a position within the ideological conflict that, at the height of the Cold War, pitted antagonistic political and economic systems against each other. Both works, through the study of populism, question democracy. The same attention to the concrete that leads Shils to distinguish between people and populace guides Dahl in the comparison between 'Madisonian democracy' and 'populist democracy'.

At the beginning of his reflection, Dahl takes care to remove the reader from any certainty: 'One of the difficulties one must face at the outset is that there is no

democratic theory – there are only democratic theories’ (Dahl, 1956, 1). This consideration is followed by a list of six different types (among the many he considers possible) of theories that can be used for democracy. This is why Dahl limits the focus of his research to the *Preface* of a (future) ‘Democratic theory’ for which political science is not yet ready: ‘But democratic theory itself is full of compromises – compromises of clashing and antagonistic principles. What is a virtue in social life, however, is not necessarily a virtue in social theory [...] What I am going to call the “Madisonian” theory of democracy is an effort to bring off a compromise between the power of majorities and the power of minorities, between the political equality of all adult citizens on the one side, and the desire to limit their sovereignty on the other. As a political system the compromise, except for one important interlude, has proved to be durable. What is more, Americans seem to like it. As a political theory, however, the compromise delicately papers over a number of cracks without quite concealing them’ (Dahl, 1956, 4). As for the populist theory of democracy, the principles it deals with (political equality, popular sovereignty, majority rule) are present throughout the history of democratic theories. Dahl begins his analysis of the populist theory of democracy with a series of quotations on democracy taken from Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Jefferson, Lincoln and Tocqueville, which he recognises to be at odds – as regards the *modus operandi* of democracy – with the *Madisonian* perspective.

How does Dahl compare the two theories? Let us take a specific point in his reasoning as a useful example for our way. He tries to explicate the contents of the principle of the ‘absolute sovereignty of the majority’ in order to understand in what ways it can be applied. Let us take the fourth definition, whose assumption is ‘Proposition 1: The only rule compatible with decision-making in a populistic democracy is the majority principle’. This is followed by ‘Definition 4: The Rule’: ‘The principle of majority rule prescribes that in choosing among alternatives, the alternative preferred by the greater number is selected. That is, given two or more alternatives: t , y , etc., in order for x to be government policy it is a necessary and sufficient condition that the number who prefer x to any alternative is greater than the number who prefer any single alternative to x ’ (Dahl, 1956, 37–38). The application of this rule must take into account the time between the manifestation of the will of the people and its execution: ‘How long a delay is compatible with the Rule? The theory of populistic democracy provides no answer; it is a static system, not one constructed on a time sequence’ (Dahl, 1956, 57).

Dahl’s reasoning is not specious. The ‘time’ factor is essential. It involves the intersection between the theoretical proposal, the rules established for the political process, the mobilisation of institutional decision-makers (government, parliament, etc.) and the evolution of public opinion, which may change in the course of the process. All this only applies within a representative democracy, in which the time required by the various steps is a substantial part of the political choice they produce. Rapid decision-making can only occur in political systems in which the decision-making process is simplified, because it is the prerogative of a small ruling group (dictatorial oligarchy, one-party system, military regime).

One of the empirical problems that the populist theory of democracy does not answer concerns the actual possibility of majority rule. On this point, Dahl refers to Gaetano Mosca's position 'whose objection can be paraphrased as follows: Every society develops a ruling class. Widespread popular control (certainly rule by a majority) is impossible'. And he concludes 'the majority never rules, and consequently it can never tyrannize; only minorities rule, and consequently tyranny is always carried on by minorities' (Dahl, 1956, 54–55). Dahl does not say, here, whether he agrees with Mosca, but the important thing is that, in any case, the populist theory of democracy does not give an answer.

The difference between the Madisonian theory of democracy (with all its uncertainties and frailties) and the populist theory of democracy, however, is very clear: the former has proven to find an application, to somehow manage to function, while the latter does not: 'the theory of populistic democracy is not an empirical system. It consists only of logical relations among ethical postulates. It tells us nothing about the real world. From it we can predict no behavior whatsoever' (Dahl, 1956, 51). The conclusion is 'it is clear that one must go outside the theory of populistic democracy to empirical political science' (Dahl, 1956, 52). But it is a political science that fails to produce an acceptable theory of democracy. Moreover, the inability of the theory of populist democracy to grasp reality does not eliminate the actual importance of the concepts it uses: they continue to have meaning in the real world (Dahl, 1956, 60). The problem, therefore, remains open.

This was taken up the following year by Giovanni Sartori in *Democrazia e definizioni* (Sartori, 1957), which was published in English 5 years later with a title rather far from the original: *Democratic Theory* (Sartori, 1962). In contrast to the *Traité de science politique* in which Georges Burdeau expounds the concept of 'governing democracy', Sartori criticises the idea of 'populistic democracy' by distinguishing it from the ideal of the will of the people: 'Yet I fail to see how mass democracy can be understood as a genuine incarnation of the will-of-the-people ideal of democracy, and I find it even harder to believe – as Burdeau asserts – that some countries, notably the so-called popular democracies, have actually achieved the stage of a governing democracy' (Sartori, 1962, 86). At the date of the Italian edition of the book, the invasion of Hungary by the United Socialist Soviet Republic, which had taken place the year before, was still at the centre of the political debate, especially that of the European communist left, a part of which was beginning to question the ideal and political link with the USSR.

For Sartori, demagogy should not be confused with *paideia*, since 'Demagogy only shifts popular sovereignty from the locus where it maintains a capacity for judgment and reasonableness to situations where it loses it [...] By this path, then, we arrive only at democracy by acclaim, that is, at a massification of popular sovereignty which reduces the actual will of the people to a sham' (Sartori, 1962, 87). For Sartori, the popular will needs places, such as political representation, where decisions can be reached through rational and in-depth debate. As we can see, the processual factor returns, the dimension of time and mediation to guarantee effective democracy, which rescues the 'masses' from manipulation by leaders: *paideia*, in democracy, is the reciprocal circular education that should take place through the

decision-making process, and this is what makes it possible to move from the condition of ‘masses’ to that of citizenship.

A significant proportion of scholars who have written on populism since the London Conference of 1967 refer to the work of Giovanni Sartori. Quotations are frequent, but they are generally limited to briefly mentioning the question of the relationship ‘between the extension (denotation) and intention (connotation) of a term’ (Sartori, 1970, 1041), which we have already mentioned in citing the work of Irving Copi (Copi et al., 2011, 87), who was also a point of reference for Sartori in matters of logic. One understands that this particular point is important because it directly touches on the construction of definitions of populism and remains a hard nut to crack. But this aspect is embedded by Sartori in a much broader discourse on political science and only within this framework can its significance be fully understood.

3.3 *A Logic for Political Science*

In *Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics*, Sartori referred to a ‘golden’ definition that Charles Wright Mills had given, a few years earlier, of the conscious thinker: ‘a man at work and aware of the assumptions and implications of whatever he is about. To be mastered by “method” or “theory” is simply to be kept from working’ (Wright Mills, 1959, 27) (Sartori, 1970, 1033)). The political science of his time, Sartori commented, was mostly in the hands of two unsound extremes: on the one hand, a majority of unconscious thinkers and on the other, a minority of over-conscious thinkers, who tried to develop political science by taking their models and methods from the physical sciences, understood as ‘paradigmatic’: a ‘Kantian’ situation recurs.

Both types of thinkers use increasingly sophisticated technical research tools, and this shared refuge confuses the real difference between them and, above all, confuses science with technique, due to a generalised fragility in thinking logically:

Most of the literature introduced by the title “Methods” (in the social, behavioral or political sciences) actually deals with survey techniques and social statistics, and has little if anything to share with the crucial concern of “methodology”, which is a concern with the logical structure and procedure of scientific enquiry. In a very crucial sense there is no methodology without *logos*, without thinking about thinking. And if a firm distinction is drawn – as it should be – between methodology and technique, the latter is no substitute for the former. One may be a wonderful researcher and manipulator of data, and yet remain an unconscious thinker. The view presented in this article is, then, that the profession as a whole is grievously impaired by methodological unawareness. The more we advance technically, the more we leave a vast, uncharted territory behind our backs. And my underlying complaint is that political scientists eminently lack (with exceptions) a training in logic – indeed in elementary logic. (Sartori, 1970, 1033)

Within this general framework, according to Sartori, what has happened is that we have taken the easy way out by expanding both the meaning and scope of concepts, producing increasingly vague and amorphous conceptualisations. Conceptual

stretching has become habitual: ‘A major drawback of the comparative expansion of the discipline is, then, that it has been conducive to indefiniteness, to undelimited and largely undefined conceptualizations. We do need, ultimately, “universal” categories-concepts which are applicable to any time and place. But nothing is gained if our universals turn out to be ‘no difference’ categories leading to pseudo-equivalences’ (Sartori, 1970, 1035). The problem is that conceptual stretching evades the question: what is it possible to compare? Ancient political theorists, Sartori points out referring to Aristotle, did not fall into this error precisely because they asked themselves. And the answer was not entrusted to a single genius thinker, but to a well-defined methodology:

As indicated by the terminology, their comparisons applied to things belonging to “the same genus”. That is to say, the background of comparability was established by the *per genus et differentiam* mode of analysis, i.e. by a taxonomical treatment. In this context, comparable means something which belongs to the same genus, species or sub-species – in short to the same class. Hence the class provides the “similarity element” of comparability, while the “differences” enter as the species of a genus, or the sub-species of a species – and so forth, depending on how fine the analysis needs to be. However, and here is the rub, the taxonomical requisites of comparability are currently neglected, if not disowned. (Sartori, 1970, 1036)

The comparison described by Sartori is nothing other than the Aristotelian definition by genus and species. The question ‘what is man?’ is answered: ‘he is an animal (genus) that is rational (species)’. Aristotle arrives at taxonomy after having constructed logic in the books of *Organon*. It certainly has a technical aspect, but it is the result of a prolonged theoretical elaboration by the philosophical school, which goes back two generations before Aristotle. It begins with Socrates, for whom philosophical dialogue, developed in a rigorously rational manner and has a direct political significance; in fact, he debates in public spaces, in the street and in the *agora*, because he believes he has a duty to the city, where he develops critical thinking that will cost him the death sentence. Plato, after the death of Socrates, set up the Academy, the philosophical school in which he collected the Socratic teachings and developed them. Aristotle, at Plato’s school, receives and deepens the entire methodological heritage of the philosophical tradition and formalises this method in the *Organon*.

Sartori’s reference to taxonomy shows that he grasps the importance of the definitional procedure in order to place definitions in the right relationship, among themselves and with respect to reality. Philosophical logic allows Aristotle to construct different degrees of abstraction (and thus progressive generalisation) from reality, always distinguishing them. This method allows for comparison, which Aristotle achieves not only in animal taxonomy but, what interests us here, in the comparison between political regimes and in that between the different disciplines that study reality: political science, for Aristotle (*politikê epistêmê*) is the most ‘architectural’ of the practical sciences and has for its object the good of the city (*polis*).

Reality always presents itself, in the first place, as single things, and, as such, cannot be defined. I cannot define Albert Einstein in his uniqueness, but only by

determining his belonging to groups of ‘similar’ that I express through abstractions of different levels, from the most general: ‘Albert is an animal’ to be progressively more specific ones: he is rational, he is a male, he is German, he is a scientist, etc. Each abstraction assimilates Albert by separating him from his individuality and putting him together with others who have the same characteristic. It is still Albert, but each definition/abstraction produces two effects: firstly, it creates a discontinuity between the single existing reality, which contains in itself, *synthetically* and in the concrete of existence, all that I can say about it and the various abstractions that I *analytically* derive from it and that describe it, assimilating it to other similar realities: it is necessary to be aware of this loss of individuality and that knowledge *by abstraction* is knowledge *by separation* from the real subject. *Secondly*, each definition/abstraction introduces both a membership and a non-membership, i.e. it delimits the subjects whose concept corresponds to the definition: it delimits, that is, the members of the group. The defining process ‘isolates’ different elements of a real subject that can be composed of each other in different ways; it depends on the question asked, i.e. on the definition we want to obtain, e.g. ‘Is Albert German?’ and ‘Does Albert know mathematics?’. Answers can be given to these questions, which we can consider partial definitions, but of what level? ‘Albert is German’ tells the truth about Albert, but he shares it with several million Germans. And I certainly cannot say that, as a consequence, all Germans are male or that only males are scientists. It is important to place each definition at its proper level of abstraction, which is assigned to it by the relationship between extension and intention it contains.

I wrote that conceptual knowledge is knowledge by abstraction, which proceeds by separation from the real subject. Greek culture, which provides us with the language that allows us to deal with this subject, was, as we have seen, aware of this detachment. But it was equally aware that everything starts from the encounter with reality. In the ancient Greek language, the verb ‘to know’, *eidènai*, is derived from the same root as the verb *ideîn*, ‘to see’ and is related to the thing that is seen: *tò êidos, hē idèa*. Knowledge has its origin and foundation in ‘seeing’, in a direct contact with the real subject. It is a cognitive realism, that is, based on knowledge that comes from an encounter: knowledge is linked to the vision or memory of a vision that has taken place. ‘In the ancient philosophical conception,’ writes Stefano Maso in his *Dictionary of Philosophical Greek*, from which I derive the analysis of verbs, ‘the perspective is always “realistic”: what “is known” is something concrete that the knowing subject has the possibility of attaining. Just as happened in “vision”: what “is seen” is something really existing that the subject has the possibility of grasping when he has prepared himself properly. And what “is seen” is, in itself, what “appears” to the one who is looking; it is the “phenomenon” [...] (*tò phainòme-non*)’ (Maso, 2010, 183).

Each abstraction, each concept we produce about a given object, brings us closer to it, because, from concept to concept, we give an increasingly precise description of it: but all the conceptual abstractions we can add will increase the approximation, without ever letting us touch the uniqueness of the object we experience in the ‘vision’. We must be aware of the imperfection of conceptual knowledge, accept the

limitation of our definitions and stop, time after time, at the one where the balance between what it says about the object and the number of objects to which it applies, which makes it effective.

How far can we move away from the real subject without losing contact with it, i.e. without forgetting the synthetic ‘vision-knowledge’ we had in the encounter with it? Sartori, concluding his analysis of ‘conceptual stretching’, emphasises one important thing: ‘While there are many reasons for our neglect to attack the problem frontally, a major reason is that we have been swayed by the suggestion that our difficulties can be overcome by switching from “what is” questions to “how much” questions’ (Sartori, 1970, 1036). The ‘what is’ is the encounter with reality: ‘the issue must be joined from its very beginning, that is, on the grounds of concept formation’ (Sartori, 1970, 1040).

3.4 *Populism, Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism*

One of the fields in which definitions of populism should be particularly accurate concerns the relationship (proximity, assimilation, difference?) between certain populist phenomena and authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. We could therefore use this terrain to assess the logical awareness – which we have treated with the help of Giovanni Sartori – with which some studies, representative of different interpretative currents, have approached this issue. However, since this is a highly contentious issue in contemporary political debate, I will remain within examples from the 1900s in order to have the necessary detachment.

One of the reference authors is Hans-Georg Betz. In *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (1994), Betz criticises Lipset’s interpretation of fascism as an expression of the extremism that the German middle class reached, in Lipset’s opinion, in the years of the Weimar Republic (Betz, 1994, 23–24; Lipset, 1981, 489). Leaning on Thomas Childers and Jürgen Falter, Betz rather believes that the Nazis arose from a long-term dissatisfaction that had accumulated in German society, even beyond the confines of the middle class. Betz elaborates on what Childers had called ‘congenital dissatisfaction’ (Childers, 1983, 264)¹⁵ in the belief that the two scholars’ analyses of Nazism contribute substantially to the understanding of the right-wing movements of the 1980s and 1990s: ‘During the past decade politics in Western Europe has increasingly come to be dominated by a climate of resentment and alienation. A majority of citizen in most Western democracies no longer trust political institutions that they consider to be largely self-centered and self-serving, unresponsive to the ideas and wishes of the average persons, and incapable of adopting viable solutions for society’s most pressing problems’ (Betz, 1994, 37). Incapacity to react on the one hand and resentment and alienation on the other trace the framework within which populism develops, feeding on two other elements,

¹⁵ See also Falter (1986, 1990).

which Childers and Falter had noted in their explanations of Nazism, but which Betz also seems to apply to the right-wing parties of his time: the abandonment by many voters of their loyalty to the traditional centre-right parties, in response to an effective strategy of attraction (catch-all party) towards the many ‘politically homeless’ voters. For Betz, ‘the Nazis’ precisely because of their ability to go beyond the traditional cleavage-based parties, ‘represented a fundamentally new and thoroughly modern type of party’ (Betz, 1994, 26).

Betz points out that ‘the interpretation of the rise and success of radical right-wing populist parties proposed in these books closely follows this model’ (Betz, 1994, 26). The problem is that this model does not clearly distinguish the concepts of right-wing parties, populist parties and Nazism, conveying the idea of a natural transition, so to speak, from the political right to Nazism. This way of reasoning then transmits into everyday political debate, after having been eased by the cautionary precautions of academic phraseology, the intuitive conviction that a right-wing voter will, sooner or later, become radicalised, if the situation creates the opportunity. The definitional confusion denounced by Sartori seems to find an example here.

Betz also recovers, in part, the approach of Lipset, who saw modernisation as the structural explanation for the emergence of right-wing movements and parties: ‘The central argument guiding the analysis is that the political changes reflected in the emergence of the radical populist Right are largely a consequence of profound transformation of the socioeconomic and sociocultural structure of advanced Western European democracies. In the literature this transformation is usually characterised as a shift from the industrial to the post-industrial capitalism’ (Betz, 1994, 26–27). With this consideration, however, the time span of application of the same model is considerably broadened, covering both the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society and the subsequent post-industrial historical phase.¹⁶ It is clear that these transformations also influence populism, but not only populism, nor as the sole cause.

Peter Worsley, in his paper on *The Concept of Populism* at the 1967 London Conference – unlike the articulated definition he would later expound during the debate – had proposed a minimal definition of populism, inspired by Shils, based on only two elements: the supremacy of the will of the people and the direct relationship between the people and the government, understood as ‘popular participation in genera’ (Worsley, 1969, 244, 246). One may disagree with him, but Worsley attempts to use a definition that not only identifies the elements of populism, but does so in such a way – as logic correctly requires – as to exclude all other phenomena, and applies it consistently in a situation of social transformation similar to that envisaged by Betz’s ‘model’ (from agrarian to industrial society in the United States in the 1800s) when he writes: ‘These organized populist movements, as we have seen, have taken both left-wing and right-wing forms (more commonly, left)’

¹⁶This approach is reiterated both in Betz’s *Introduction* and in Stefan Immerfall’s *Conclusion*, in a later-collected text (Betz & Immerfall, 1998).

(Worsley, 1969, 241). Turning to the same 1900s phenomena considered by Betz, Worsley draws a very different picture from his definition:

Ideological radicalism of the Right, with its mass roots in the *menu peuple*, as we have seen, is no new phenomenon. Over the centuries, it has taken such forms as the traditional alliance between king, church, and city mob. The twentieth century has similarly converted large segments of the lower orders into the organized mass base of totalitarian parties and has not hesitated to use appeals to popular sentiment – as well as force, blandishment, patronage, etc. – to recruit them. But these movements were anything but “populist” overall: not for nothing are labels like “authoritarian”, “fascist”, or “totalitarian” used normally to describe them. Populism is only an element, not the dominant feature of this kind of movement. (Worsley, 1969, 243)

Betz closely links populism to the radical right without adequate explanation. This excludes left- and centre-right forms of populism and sets up the slide towards Nazism. It is worth noting that the social groups indicated by Betz as predominant ‘among the radical Right’s constituency – blue-collar workers, artisans, and entrepreneurs running small and medium-sized businesses’ (Betz, 1994, 189) largely correspond to both the composition of American populism in the 1800s and that of the Sans-culottes in the French Revolution 1789–1794 (Baggio, 2022, 11–12). Without a clear (albeit imperfect, as we have seen) definition of populism, all these phenomena with similar social characteristics would remain indistinct.

We find a completely different approach in Gino Germani in his *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism*: ‘The theory of mobilisation and the hypotheses on the role of social classes do not exhaust the analysis of the genesis of authoritarian movements and regimes in the modern world’ (Germani, 2021, 3). This assessment is the consequence of an analysis of the generalisation processes used by researchers in the study of authoritarian regimes. The theoretical frameworks used at the beginning of the studies – e.g. on Italian fascism – were applied to well-defined socio-cultural areas. Subsequently, interpretations reached a wider range of generality:

With the spreading of totalitarian movements and regimes in the world, especially after the advent of Nazism and the emergence of the Stalinist form of the Soviet regime, the discussion was considerably enlarged: there appeared hypotheses based on the role of the middle classes, mass society, psychosocial changes induced in all industrial societies, and other theorizations of a much wider range of application. Above all, the theme of modernization appears in various ways [...] Finally, in this widening of the explicative schemes, the historical specificity of fascism or of modern authoritarianism may become completely lost. (Germani, 2021, 3–4)

Germani’s work is expressed through a more rigorous methodology: ‘The theoretical analysis developed here is placed at a specific level of generality, both in terms of sociocultural contexts and of historical epoch’ (Germani, 1978, 3). Germani uses the notion of ‘type’, for which the different levels of generality and the different evolutionary phases of the phenomena are specified. From a temporal point of view, he distinguishes between modern society (of which he gives a definition) and the preceding epoch, moving on to gradually more precise collocations of the phenomena considered. He also constructs a useful scheme to clarify the different levels of generalisation and, in particular, that in which his study is situated: ‘The theories on

authoritarianism which emphasize the role of social classes are placed in the medium range, here identified with the process of national development of the countries used as an illustration' (Germani, 2021, 4–5).

3.5 *The Populism as 'Thin Ideology'*

Cas Mudde's methodological approach in his 2019 study of the same topic, in *The Far Right Today*, is based on a theoretical framework far removed from Germani's, but is equally accurate. I quote from this popular text because the author makes the structure of the argument more clearly visible. Mudde's object of study is the post-war far right in the twenty-first century, during which 'radical right parties have become mainstreamed and increasingly normalised' (Mudde, 2019, 4): the symbolic event of this process is the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States.

Cas Mudde, in the *Introduction*, presents a sequence of definitions starting from the broadest one, which concerns, on the basis of Norberto Bobbio's thought, the distinction between right and left; then he descends into the defining levels within the right. The right that is hostile to liberal democracy, which can be defined as 'anti-system', is called the 'far right'; it is divided into the 'extreme right', of a revolutionary character, which rejects democracy as such, and the 'radical right', of a reformist character, which accepts 'the essence of democracy', but rejects 'minority rights, rule of law, and separation of powers' (Mudde, 2019, 7), which are descriptors of democracy. The extreme right is not populist, while the radical right, 'predominantly', is. Mudde comes to this last conclusion after giving a definition of populism – based on the proposal he developed together with Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser – as 'thin ideology'.

The definition of populism in *The Far Right Today* coincides – except for the use of synonyms in secondary words – with others, given in earlier texts (Mudde, 2004, 544, 562; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017): 'I define populism as a (thin) ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people and the corrupt elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde, 2019, 8). What does this definition contain? In search of the answer, I choose a text by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, which I find very rich in the citation of certain authors such as Sartori, Goertz and Taggart, and in the observations around the definition itself (which repeats, quoting it, the 2004 text):

How to develop a concept of populism that overcomes normative and regional biases? In our opinion, the most promising way is to follow Giovanni Sartori's approach (Sartori, 1970), which is characterized by the promotion of minimal definitions. These include only the core – necessary and sufficient – attributes of a concept. The advantage of minimal definitions is that, because they are based on a reduced number of attributes (little intension), they can be applied to analyse a great range of cases (high extension) [...] in the real world populism hardly ever exists by itself. It has a "chameleonic" character: populism can be

left-wing or right-wing, organized in top-down or bottom-up fashion, rely on strong leaders or be even leaderless. At the same time, by identifying two opposites of populism, we propose a conceptual approach that is helpful for drawing the boundaries of the phenomenon in question. (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013a, 149–150)

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser connect to Michael Freeden's reflection on the concept of 'thin ideology'. Freeden devotes a short chapter to it in *Ideology. A Very Short Introduction*: 'A thin ideology is an ideology that, like mainstream ideologies, has an identifiable morphology but, unlike mainstream ideologies, a restricted morphology. It separates itself from broader ideological contexts by deliberately removing or replacing many concepts that we would expect an ideology to include. It does not embrace the full range of issues that macro-ideologies do, and is limited in its ambitions and scope' (Freeden, 2003, 98).

In his earlier and major work, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Freeden, 1996), Michael Freeden had made a more articulate reflection on thin theory, a concept that he, in turn, acquired from John Rawls. Rawls introduced the hypothesis of thin theory as a 'theory of the good' and in the context of 'the choice of principles in the original position' (Rawls, 1999 – 1st 1971, 349). The subsequent debate on Rawls' theory, among many other things, questioned both thin theory per se and the possibility of moving from 'thin' to 'full theory'. We cannot go into that debate here. In my opinion, Michael Freeden has taken Rawls' original idea out of its context and problematic, in order to construct a completely different conceptual framework, which allows for the composition of effective concept maps, with a distribution (or hierarchization) of concepts according to their definitional relevance. This aspect of usefulness makes the 'thin ideology' appear as a simple solution to a complex problem and is easily adopted. In reality, Michael Freeden's attempt – like that of Destutt de Tracy – is much broader and more articulate. I refer not only to his major work but also to his article *Ideology and Political Theory* (Freeden, 2006) in which he also gives an account of the reception of his work.

The path of Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser is interesting. In Mudde (2007, 13), the 'thin ideology' is only hinted at, in the context of a broad exploration aimed at outlining a 'conceptual framework' for the study of populist radical right parties in Europe. The text Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013b) highlights the 'positive' definition, similar to those already mentioned, and the 'negative' definition, which emphasises (as is logically required) what the definition excludes, i.e. what populism is not. The text of *Populism. An Ideational Approach* (Mudde, 2017) is appreciated for the space devoted to emphasising the role of taxonomy, which we then find clearly exemplified in the text, cited above, from 2019. These are logical insights – within a specific field – that Giovanni Sartori had, on a theoretical level, foreseen as physiological for a scientific methodology (Sartori, 1970, 1975, 1984). Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser acquired them bit by bit, until the theory was complete. Was it therefore really necessary to resort to 'thin ideology', since we already had at our disposal the logic appropriate to the social sciences, which guides us, also through Sartori, towards 'minimal definitions'? Perhaps it was sufficient – and I think it still is – for the development of the investigation of populism, to simply follow the 'logic of the thing': once the three 'core concepts' had been identified, it was logical to

construct a typology of a dynamic type through the combination of subordinate concepts or those linked to the particular historical forms of populisms.

The inclusion of the definition of populism in the context of Freedman's theory of ideology, in fact, on the one hand provides an already organised conceptual framework (the 'thin ideology') but on the other hand brings with it the problematic issue of the debate on ideology, with its complex history and boundless literature. As for me, taking into account the historical course of the concept of ideology in the various currents of thought, I have always distinguished between 'ideology' in the negative sense – i.e. as erroneous thinking, a definition of which I have briefly given here, in 3.1, that is prevalent within philosophical and political philosophy studies (and which I too have used most frequently: Baggio, 1990, 1993; 1994), and that of ideology as 'political culture' without any prior evaluation. This distinction makes it possible to develop, on the one hand, research on the origin of ideas and their dynamics, which involves genealogy, logic, anthropology, symbolism, linguistics, etc. and, lastly, neuroscience; on the other hand, it makes it possible to safeguard the tradition of critical thought that begins with Socrates and develops throughout the course of the West, through the critique of idols carried out by Augustine of Hippo, Francis Bacon and Giambattista Vico and which continues to the present day.

I can assure you – although my students seem to think otherwise – that I was not in prison with Destutt de Tracy when on 27 July 1794, 2 days before being tried by the Revolutionary Court, Robespierre fell, and Destutt, having miraculously escaped the guillotine, decided to start thinking about how the hell certain ideas came into his head, since he still had it stuck in him. It was he, however, with his *Elements of Ideology* (1801–1815), who opened up in modern terms, over two centuries ago, the question of ideology, which has continued to be enriched and rethought to this day; it is unlikely to be closed any time soon and populism will certainly not make things easier for us.

3.6 *Canovan and Wittgenstein: From 'Essentialist' Definitions to the Typology of Populisms*

There are other ways to arrive at satisfactory definitions of populism, such as the one proposed by Margaret Canovan back in 1981. She questions whether the term 'populism' is more confusing than useful. In order to get away from the 'conflicting statements' produced by the attempt to grasp its 'essence', she believes that one way forward is to establish a 'range of populisms' linked together by the 'family resemblances' proposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*. After history and logic, it is the philosophy of language that crosses over into political science.

Wittgenstein, to introduce the concept, gives the example of 'games', of which there are very different types: board games, card games, Olympic games, etc. But one should not think that there must necessarily be something common between all

of them: ‘For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that’ (Wittgenstein, 1958, 31^e). The result of the game research suggests that there are similarities common to some types and not to others: ‘And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail [...] I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. — And I shall say: “games” form a family’ (Wittgenstein, 1958, 32^e).

On this basis, Canovan explains why the construction of a single definition does not seem useful to her: ‘The range and variety of movements lumped together under the general heading of populism make it clear that what we need is not a single essentialist definition, but rather a typology of populisms – one, moreover, which is capable of accommodating a wide range of different phenomena seen from different analytical viewpoints’ (Canovan, 1981, 12–13). She begins by distinguishing populisms into two ‘families’: ‘agrarian populism, which is a kind of rural radicalism’ and ‘political populism’ that ‘seem to focus upon political problems of democracy’ (Canovan, 1981, 8). Imperfect as it is, this division implements a first approximation to reality. Canovan abandons the idea of constructing a universal and ‘essentialist’ definition of populism, in favour of a typology.

I note that, in reality, even this procedure presupposes the determination of one, or more, distinctive features of populism; otherwise it would not even be possible to recognise and distinguish the two ‘families’. Canovan’s typological approach cannot be seen as a substitute for previous – and subsequent – attempts at definition (she herself will do further research on populism in other respects), but it does constitute an important eye-opener.¹⁷

The typological procedure requires careful conceptual work, as Irving Copi explains: ‘In fact, description itself is based on, or embodies, hypotheses. Hypotheses are as critical to the various systems of classification in biology as they are to interpretation in history, and as they are to all knowledge in the social sciences’ (Copi et al., 2011, 529). However, description requires maintaining a binding contact with reality in its various aspects; the descriptive process leading to classification, if applied correctly, must always specify the level of abstraction: ‘classification and description are, at bottom, the same process [...] Scientific classification involves not merely a single division of objects into groups, but further subdivision of each group into subgroups and subclasses, and so on’ (Copi et al., 2011, 530).

¹⁷Canovan distinguishes, within Agrarian Populism, three types of populism: (1) peasant radicalism as in the US People’s Party; (2) peasant movements in the Eastern European Green Rising; and (3) intellectual agrarian socialism (*narodniki*). Within political populism, Canovan places (4) populist dictatorship (e.g. Peronism); (5) populist democracy (direct participation, e.g. referendums); (6) reactionary populism (George Wallace); and (7) politicians’ populism (attempt to build coalitions with an appeal to the unity of the people) (Canovan, 1981, 13).

Moreover, once we have taken note of the complexity of phenomena, the different viewpoints from which we can study them, if expressive of reality, are not mutually exclusive, Copi also emphasises, confirming Canovan's methodology which, as we have seen, sought to relate 'different analytical viewpoints' through typology: 'The theoretical object of classification is less obvious. Alternative schemes of classification are neither true nor false. Objects may be described in different ways, from different points of view. The system of classification adopted will depend on the purpose or interest of the classifier' (Copi et al., 2011, 531). Of course, in this way our knowledge of populism will no longer be as monolithic as a stone we can keep in our pocket to throw at someone, but if the goal is to know and not to prevail in the dispute, this could be considered an advantage.

4 From the Mob to the People: The Role of Civil Society

The analysis carried out so far has highlighted two relevant phenomena within democratic societies:

Firstly, a consistent difficulty in recognising 'shared ideals', i.e. those 'founding truths' that have enabled each political society to constitute itself as such.

Secondly, a widespread social and cultural fragmentation into groups that self-define themselves through complete ideologies, creating worlds apart, self-referential, often antagonistic.

We have also seen that it is necessary to distinguish the 'populace' from the 'people' and that only the latter is the guardian of 'shared ideals'. We must therefore try to answer two questions: *the first*: what are 'shared ideals'? and *the second*: who are 'the people' really?

4.1 Share Ideals and Factual Truths

Regarding the first question, Tom Nichols went very far in his analysis, drawing from it political consequences that were as realistic as they were devastating: 'To reject the advice of experts is to assert autonomy, a way for Americans to insulate their increasingly fragile egos from ever being told they're wrong about anything. It is a new *Declaration of Independence*: no longer do we hold *these* truths to be self-evident, we hold *all* truths to be self-evident, even the ones that aren't true. All things are knowable and every opinion on any subject is as good as any other' (Nichols, 2017, X).

We are experiencing this phenomenon in all democratic regimes worldwide. It is referred to as an inherent fragility of democracy, which would determine the structural weakness of the West. These arguments are mainly developed by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes as a propaganda weapon, especially after the outbreak of

the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It is true that this is a degenerative phenomenon that has many causes, but it is made visible and multipliable by the structure of democratic pluralism. Similar phenomena exist in unfree countries, but in the absence of the freedom guaranteed by pluralism, they have less chance of being noticed.

However, the problem exists. We can say that a considerable proportion of citizens, within democratic countries, do not believe, or no longer believe, in their own ‘Spirit of 76’, that is, in the contents of the founding political event; they are unable to share principles and ideals that previous generations held to be true, as if the ‘we’ of ‘we hold these truths’, did not refer to the ‘one people’ subject of the first line of the *Declaration*, or of other texts that contain the ‘visions’ that other peoples have of themselves. Hannah Arendt is right in arguing that, unlike the *Declaration of Independence*, those truths are not self-evident, although Jefferson thought so (Arendt, 2006 – 1st 1968, 242). I agree with Arendt’s assertion, but respectfully disagree with her underlying reasoning (Baggio, 2013, 56–59) and think that the explanation may be different.

‘These truths’ does not only mean ‘values’ or ‘common principles’, but refers to a shared history, to a journey that led ‘one people’ to the decision to found a new political institution in which their identity is expressed and recognised by mankind (‘a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires...’). A consensus was created in the course of the history of that people, a consensus not ‘by convention’, i.e. not based on a stipulation (stipulative definition) that could be wrong, nor even on an untouchable block of ‘objective truths’ (dogmatic definition), but ‘by discovery’ and ‘by construction’ of a shared reality that manifests itself to all as true. For the French of the *Maquis* or for the Italians of the resistance – to give examples – who were experiencing not only a war against an external enemy but also an internal war, those truths that, if shared, constitute the root of common belonging, were not at all evident. Those truths had to be reconquered, above all by re-experiencing them, by re-creating an underlying unity capable of ensuring that different – but not mutually destructive – visions of life and politics could coexist. Hannah Arendt calls them ‘factual truths’: ‘Factual truth [...] is always related to other people: it concerns events and circumstances in which many are involved; it is established by witnesses and depends upon testimony; it exists only to the extent that it is spoken about, even if it occurs in the domain of privacy. It is political by nature’ (Arendt, 2006 – 1st 1968, 233–234).

Factual truths are lived and discovered by people in civil society,¹⁸ in the people, not by the state that is based on them. They have to be guarded, interpreted and re-interpreted and continuously updated:

And if we now think of factual truths [...] we at once become aware of how much more vulnerable they are than all the kinds of rational taken together [...] The chances of factual truth surviving the onslaught of power are very slim indeed; it is always in danger of being maneuvered out of the world not only for a time but, potentially, forever. Facts and events

¹⁸I refer, for studies on civil society, to *The Idea of Civil Society*, by Adam Seligman (1992) and two fundamental collections of essays: (Keane, 1988; Cohen & Arato, 1992).

are infinitely more fragile things than axioms, discoveries, theories [...] produced by the human mind. (Arendt, 2006 – 1st 1968, 227)

In the case of the United States, the people is the subject that, at the time of the declaration, already exists and wants to give life to a state that does not yet exist. The state will always have to refer to what comes before, to what it owes its construction, in order to have any notion of its values. But they are, at the same time, immersed in the dynamics of the different interpretations that the people, a unitary and plural reality, experience in the course of history: in this sense, populism can be understood as language, in the meaning of ‘constitutional language’ that we have derived from Michael Kazin’s reading, but it is an ‘evolutionary constitutional language’. John Kennedy, on 16 April 1959, when the climate created by McCarthy and which Shils has described to us was still in the air, posed this very question, which could be posed again today:

The basic question confronting us today is whether these fundamentals still hold true, whether we really believe in this idea of a republic, whether today the American people would ratify the Constitution and adopt the Bill of Rights—or whether the dangers of external attack and internal subversion, promoted by a foe more sinister and more powerful than any our Founding Fathers knew, have so altered our world and our beliefs as to make these fundamental truths no longer applicable. The Constitution, of course, is still in force—but it is a solemn contract made in the name of “We the People”—and it is an agreement that should be renewed by each generation. (Kennedy, 1963, 162)

It is clear that this is not only the situation in the United States: in many states, the subjectivity of the people has a constitutional basis, from which political actors can draw inspiration. Hannah Arendt is aware that factual truths can be easily manipulated, as everyday politics demonstrates. Germany, for example, she writes in the *Truth and Politics*, invaded Belgium in 1914: this is a fact. The opposite statement is absurd but can have political significance as an attempt to change the situation by using lies as a form of action. The *Truth and Politics* was first published in *The New Yorker*, 25 February 1967, following – as the author explains – the controversy aroused by the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt, 1963)¹⁹: at stake in the trial against Otto Adolf Heichmann were precisely the factual truths about the Holocaust, which not even many of the victims had been able to communicate. Yet Arendt seems to describe, in some respects, our current situation:

The same is true when the liar, lacking the power to make his falsehood stick, does not insist on the gospel truth of his statement but pretends that this is his “opinion”, to which he claims his constitutional right. This is frequently done by subversive groups, and in a politically immature public the resulting confusion can be considerable. The blurring of the dividing line between factual truth and opinion belongs among the many forms that lying can assume, all of which are forms of action. (Arendt, 2006, 245)

Can the liar be prevented from acting politically in this way? To some extent yes, but only in those rare cases where it can be shown that he is breaking some law, and

¹⁹Hannah Arendt had followed the trial and published five articles for *The New Yorker* in February and March 1963, later collected in a book.

even in those cases, the liar has already acted. What is certain is that the best forces of democracy should be devoted to educating: that *paideia* overcome *demagogy*. In democracy, freedom can become a weakness, if people allow it, but it is meant to always be an asset.

4.2 Who Is the People?

The second question is who really is ‘the people’?

Hannah Arendt does not use ‘populace’ but, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, clearly distinguishes between ‘people’ and what she calls ‘mob’, a term that describes the ‘populace’ in its aggressive aspect, as a crowd that is either willing to engage in violence or is engaging in it. Arendt describes as a ‘fundamental error of regarding the mob as identical with rather than as a caricature of the people. The mob is primarily a group in which the residue of all classes are represented. This makes it so easy to mistake the mob for the people, which also comprises all strata of society’ (Arendt, 1958 – 1st 1951, 107).

The people is characterised by an open pluralism, and it is possible to distinguish it from the ‘mob’: the latter, in fact, always tends to subordinate itself to some ‘strong man’, to the ‘great leader’. The people, on the contrary, ‘in all great revolutions fight for true representation’ (Arendt, 1958 – 1st 1951, 107).

Margaret Canovan knew deeply Arendt’s thought²⁰ which provided her with many stimuli. The English scholar made a significant contribution to populism studies by progressively shifting the focus of investigation towards the analysis of the ‘people’ and the – culturally plural – history of its concept. The direction of the research is well represented by the titles of the first and last work: from *Populism* (1981) to *People* (2005). Already in *People, Politicians* and *Populism*, she analyses three meanings of ‘people’ that are in common use in modern English²¹:

1. The People as Nation. We often use “people” to refer to a whole political community or nation, as in “the Polish people”, “the people of New Zealand”. The usual implication is that all those native to a particular country are included, and that together they form a community with a common life.
2. The People as Underdogs. In a more restricted sense, the term can be contrasted with some kind of elite or upper class to refer not to the whole community, but to the less privileged majority of its members, as in the expression, “a man of the people”.

²⁰I will leave aside the numerous articles and simply point to the two volumes: *The political thought of Hannah Arendt* (Canovan, 1974) e *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought* (Canovan, 1992).

²¹Canovan presenterà tre diverse varianti interpretative di ‘people’ in *Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy* (Canovan, 1999).

3. People as Everyman. Besides using the word with an article – “the people” or “people” – we talk about “people” in general, as in “there were a lot of people at the meeting”. That is, “people” can mean individual human beings. (Canovan, 1984, 314–315).

Canovan describes the people ‘as Nation’ in reference to the native population creating a community. The creation of a community, however, is not only a feature of the people as Nation, which, Canovan writes, does indeed have affinities especially with conservatism. People as underdogs’ does as well: ‘Nevertheless, there can be no question of the term being monopolized by the Right, for in the second of the senses already listed it is a vital rallying cry for the Left [...] Although this left-wing people [as Underdogs] includes less population of any given country than its right-wing counterpart, this is compensated for by its links of solidarity with the (lower-class) peoples of other countries [...] Right and Left alike conceive of the people in collective terms as a community of one sort or another, even though they disagree about the boundaries of that community’ (Canovan, 1984, 315–316). Consequently, one cannot agree with Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser when they argue that the concept of ‘Nation’, when based on ‘Nativism’, is essentially xenophobic and characterises the contemporary populist right parties in Europe (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015 – 1st 2013, 502); if anything, the way those parties interpret nativism (as an ideological form) is xenophobic, but neither the concept of ‘native’ nor that of ‘nation’ is. The discourse could be extended, for example, to ‘American Native Peoples’, for whom ‘native’ status is a source of personal and collective rights. It is clear that Canovan’s aim is not to justify anti-democratic parties, but to preserve the constructive and democratic potential of the idea of people and nation.

In reflecting on the concept of nationhood, we must bear in mind the events that had changed the reality of Eastern Europe during the 1980s and up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. These were events in which the role of the national identity of individual countries had been decisive in a transformative, progressive sense. It certainly did not manifest itself for the first time, as it had characterised the search for ‘paths to socialism’ in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, which differed from the Soviet model and were both repressed with military force. The national element may be the basis on which a people builds a legal order and internal solidarity; and this process is in the history of many peoples. The idea of ‘nation’ does not necessarily lead to xenophobic nationalism, but it can be the first step on building a solidarity-based vision of humanity. The ‘League of Nations’ (1920), the ‘United Nations’ (1945), mean just that. The idea of nation can be interpreted not only in an exclusionary sense, but in an inclusionary sense too. This is what characterises, for example, the national idea of the United States. If we read Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address (19 November 1863) – just to give an example and endeavouring to ignore the immense library that exists on the subject – we see that the President’s thought is like a thread between the beginning, which indicates the origins: ‘our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation’ and the final statement, which indicates the purpose: ‘the great task remaining before us [...] that this nation, under God, shall

have a new birth of freedom' (Lincoln, 1953, 23). The mistakes and difficulties that the 'American Experiment' has gone through in history do not eliminate the vision that a nation has of itself: the unity between the original nation, inherited by those who were born into it, and the nation, which must continually experience a new birth with those who have come and will come to it.

Without history, a theory cannot be developed. It is often necessary to create and experiencing solidarity among 'natives' – originally based on blood ties – in order to come to understand solidarity in an increasingly inclusive manner. It is not a matter of generosity or 'good feelings', but a political process. Aristotle explained the progressive enlargement of the human community from the family, to the tribe, to the *polis* – and, with the latter, the birth of politics – by the need to respond to the ends of community members. If the city, in Aristotle's time, was *téleios*, that is, it was the community that enabled all the purposes of human beings of that time to be realised, what is the *téleios* community of today, if not humanity itself? To cite just one example with which we are all familiar, there are populations in demographic decline, others in surplus to the resources they possess: many of these imbalances are only resolved in a trans-continental dimension.

4.3 *Civil Society and Founding People*

The notion of solidarity should not only be understood intuitively. Hannah Arendt, for instance, in *On Revolution*, makes an interesting political elaboration of it, taking the republicanism of ancient Rome as a historical reference: 'For solidarity, because it partakes of reason, and hence of generality, is able to comprehend a multitude conceptually, not only the multitude of a class or a nation or a people, but eventually all mankind. But this solidarity, though it may be aroused by suffering, is not guided by it, and it comprehends the strong and the rich no less than the weak and the poor [...] solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action, compassion is one of the passions and pity is a sentiment' (Arendt, 1990 – 1st 1963, 88–89).

The idea of solidarity, throughout history, has gone far beyond the ancient republicanism that held together, but at the same time separated, two hereditary social categories. Throughout the 1800s, a debate developed involving the relational principles used in the founding events of political societies, starting with the English revolution of the 1600s, to focus on that of the English colonies in North America and, immediately afterwards, on the French and Haitian revolutions: the latter achieved the first effective universalisation of rights between Whites and Blacks in history, on the basis of the French 'Triptych' – liberty, equality and fraternity – which introduced a dynamic between the founding principles of the political community that was as problematic as it was unexplored (Baggio, 2011). Between 1800 and 1900, several major cultural currents of solidarism stand out, which profoundly affect society, the economy and politics. They produced facts and, consequently, a

vast bibliography.²² In most political studies on populism, however, it is not possible to find, among the ‘descriptors’ or ‘items’ of the analyses, concepts that have profoundly affected political realities and theories and that are also central to the popular and populist political experience, such as solidarity, friendship, brotherhood and trust. There is something about the latter: Rodrigo Mardones reports on it in *Fraternity in Politics. New Scholarship and Publications from Latin America* (Mardones, 2012).

We find this intrinsic connection between ‘society’ and ‘people’ in a historical period much closer to us, that, which we have already mentioned, of 1980s Europe. And here we also find Margaret Canovan: ‘Of all recent cases of “people power”, the strongest claim to authenticity as a grass roots movement of the People belongs to the Polish “Solidarity” (*Solidarność*) movement that emerged unexpectedly in 1980’ (Canovan, 2005, 136). ‘Solidarity’ movement, Canovan emphasises, had the support of the entire population, and it gives an explanation that takes up the different meanings contained in the word ‘people’, which she had expounded over 20 years earlier, interpreted in the light of the Arendtian vision of solidarity uniting the people: ‘It could do so because it represented the people three times over, not just as sovereign source of legitimacy but as underdogs and as nation – a conjunction of meanings of “people” and sources of myth that greatly reinforced one another. Starting as a workers’ trade union, it drew deeply on the rich mythology of Polish nationalism, itself fused with religious devotion [...] To many observers this was a genuine manifestation of the People in action’ (Canovan, 2005, 136). And, further, ‘It is therefore fair to say that some of the myths contain a kernel of truth about politics: where individual people do form “a people” and acts as “the people”, political power can come into being – perhaps momentarily, but sometimes in a solid, lasting fashion, as the *populus Romanus* showed long ago, and the American People more recently’ (Canovan, 2005, 137). Canovan immediately adds that these are exceptional events and that when the people come to exercise power directly, destructive actions are frequent, but she uses Arendt’s terminology to describe them: ‘mob violence’ (Canovan, 2005, 137).

The organised and politically conscious entry of the people into the political scene, from which they were excluded, had a particular effect – which, at least from the outside, was very difficult to foresee – on the ruling elites, at least in the states where the regime changes of 1989–1990 took place peacefully. That is to say there was the recognition, at least in the cases of the Democratic Republic of Germany and Czechoslovakia, of the formation of an alternative power, of a sort of ‘transfer of power’ from the political establishment to civil society. The citizens declared that they did not recognise themselves in the politics of the regime and imposed themselves on the political representatives as the real political body.

On this, I can also add a personal testimony. On 11 December 1989, at a demonstration in Prague in which a large part of the population – not only the young

²²I will simply point to a few works, containing an extensive bibliography: Baggio, 2013; Scholz, 2008; Brunkhorst, 2005; Chevallier et al., 1992.

political activists who had participated in the demonstrations from late September to November but entire families with young children and grandparents – had poured into Wenceslas Square and the surrounding area; Vaclav Havel was presented as a candidate to become the new President of the Republic. Everyone applauded as if it was a done deal, as if it was the natural course of things. I was astonished at such confidence and asked Jirí, one of the friends with whom I was attending the event: ‘How can you be sure that the parliament will elect precisely Havel, its enemy?’ He gave me ‘the’ answer: ‘They are used to obeying, and now we give the orders’ (Baggio, 1990, 11–18). It is this transition that makes civil society, ‘the People’, take on a founding role.

The changes that were less violent and proved to be more profound and lasting were prepared by action from below, which did not take the form of sudden flashes of public action, but was built patiently, first of all by weaving personal bonds of trust, into which new people were gradually drawn, until cohesive groups capable of exerting a significant social influence were created, as happened in East Germany (Bransch, 1990). Opposition movements presented themselves, both in the GDR and in Czechoslovakia, as ‘forums of civil society’. Civil society (understood not in the sense of Hegel’s ‘bürgerliche gesellschaft’, as a mere locus of private interests, but rather in the political sense of Cicero’s *civilis societas* or that of Thomas Aquinas’s *totius multitudinis*) on those occasions did not merely de-constructively act: it presented a value vision, a political project, an alternative leadership that grew out of its own bosom. In these popular movements, resentment was certainly present, but the vision, the political strategy and the strength to implement it, the solidarity that overcame social and cultural differences came from other factors, belonging to reality, strangely absent from the most fashionable definitions of populism.

An important aspect, which Canovan captures – referring directly to Arendt – is the distinction between authority and power, the distinction between the two different roles they assume in the critical moment: ‘Sometimes, it seems, we are confronted with “the people” as a political reality, generating both the collective power that can threaten a regime, and the collective authority that can bestow legitimacy on a new one and keep that power in being (Arendt, 1963)’ (Canovan, 2005, 137).

I think a key element in giving an adequate (and politically viable) interpretation of these converging visions of Arendt, and Canovan is to understand the link and distinction between civil society and the people. ‘Civil society’ means plurality of associations, of cultures, of political orientations, of legitimate interests, of lifestyles, of personal choices. The experiences examined explain that when this type of society acts in a unified manner and ‘becomes the people’, it is in order to perform a founding act, which may be long and complex, but its purpose is to give life to a new community.

The moment it comes into being, however, the people as a unitary reality withdraws, does not govern, does not exercise power. For government and all that it entails – making laws, making decisions, living ordinary political life – it is necessary to return to the pluralism of civil society. The founding function is transformed into a function of control so that laws and decisions correspond to the values and

principles that originated the political community and that must continue to be its reasons and ‘shared ideals’ or, if you like, the ‘factual truths’: the ‘will of the people’, after having created a new power, continues to scrutinise its legitimacy, also (but not only) by institutionalising this function in a body (e.g. a judiciary) separate from the executive power: that is, it continues to subsist as authority, not power. Could this be a possible conceptual framework in which to contain Madison’s and the People’s democracy in a dynamic equilibrium? It is important that this is not just a conjecture; it is important to have lived through historical experiences in which the people acted as one but were able to maintain their pluralism as a civil society. The key issue is the growth of the political awareness of civil society.

When it went well, it went like this. It could happen again. Let us prepare to describe it better and, if possible, help it happen.

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Chapter 3

Accountability and Stakeholder Engagement: Politics and Accounting in Dialogue to Improve Democracy



Maria-Gabriella Baldarelli 

1 Introduction

In accountability definitions there are a lot of meanings that are composed by technicalities and qualitative narratives, with social and relational implications in governance processes.

It is acknowledged that there is a responsible and transparent method of reporting in which, through rather strict rules, it is necessary that, in the face of expenses, revenues must be indicated in an organic fashion. In fact, ever since the Assyrians and Babylonians, traders have described their ways to keep the accounts ‘in good order’ (Pacioli, 1987).

The excessive approach about technicalities had been criticized (Munro & Mouritsen, 1996; Boland & Schultze, 1996), because it creates an excessive focus on figures instead of relations (Kamuf, 2007).

At the same time, narrative contents of accountability became more and more long and complex. Stakeholders instead of being informed get lost reading to the hundreds of pages concerning the financial statements and other types of ‘not financial information’ that can be derived from different models and that take different names with partially different contents, such as environmental, social, social responsibility, mission, sustainable and integrated.

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In this panacea of information variously expressed through graphs, numbers, tables and reports, the reader in a certain sense loses, or rather loses, the sense of the 'whole' that is the company, without often being able to draw an overall but only partial vision. The partial vision derives from narratives that communicate only the positive information of the firm impact of stakeholders and environment and several times bypassing the negative aspects.

This process is called 'greenwashing', that is, a brushstroke of paint and everything becomes beautiful, hiding, however, what is negative towards the community the company is implementing: conditions of employees, environmental pollution, etc.

The concept of giving an appropriate account then leads to the objective not only of highlighting the positive aspects – education and solidarity programs, measures to reduce the negative impact on the environment, etc. – but also of wanting with this information to 'manipulate' stakeholders to convince them of the good work of the company even if it clearly creates damage to health or addiction because the product cannot be changed.

Moreover, more equilibrium amongst technicalities and narratives in accountability is required (Editorial -SI Accountability and Accounterability, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 23 (2012) 177–182).

This is because 'the importance and power of accountability in the development and discharge of democracy' (Gray et al., 1997 p. 327) is the key question that is involving populism and conflicts amongst stakeholders and Institutions.

In politics, as analysed in the previous chapter, the phenomenon of populism (understood as having a pejorative meaning with respect to people or community) is considered from a political and party perspective (Borowiak, 2011).

The research question is 'What are the main aspects in common and the different ones in the accountability considered in policy and in accounting discipline?'

This work offers some reflections in theory to the necessity to rethink the paradigm, according to which organisations are considered and which accountability models could be useful to give a more complete view of the results and of the impact on them.

This current research design considers the literature review using an interdisciplinary approach, both political and accounting. This perspective tries to involve these two disciplines in a 'dialogue' throughout accountability. The aim of the work is to clarify the concept of accountability that is defined in different, and sometimes misleading, ways.

2 Accountability: Conceptual Network Considering the Politics Approach

In this section, we tackle the theme of accountability from the viewpoint of politics (Baggio, 2013). The concept of accountability comes out of an auspice, underlined by some writers, amongst whom is Ascani (2014), of broadening consensus to a *modus operandi* of politicians, which may go beyond the usual term in office but which investigates a wider vision as well as a longer-term one. This long-term ‘strategic vision’ requires a knowledge greater than that required for those actions which are limited to a short term and related to the term in office. Accountability might provide important backing to make government activities more transparent and responsible.

Besides, Ascani (2014) underlines the need for accountability which shows itself at both world and European level. At world level, particularly in those continents, which to a greater extent suffer from poverty and corruption, some scholars underline the importance of responsibility by government bodies of various states in promoting greater participation of various social groups. However, a great difficulty can be found in making the political-decisional process a participatory one, indeed – ‘Democratic accountability should ensure that choices about creating public value are based on broader consensus by local residents. But this is far from the case in many African countries’ (Hogan & Idowu, 2021, p. 815).

Such difficulties of participation have been described and challenged by various scholars in politics, and ‘fraternity’ was proposed as a principle fundamental to start off possible solutions to those problematic issues outlined above (Baggio, 2013). In this context, we have not got the space to treat such a factor, though we will try to consider this as a factor to keep in mind in accountability as well.

Yet another scholar (Borowiak, 2011) highlights accountability as challenge for shining a light on responsibility and control in international bodies.

At a European level, however, political representation is dissolved within its complex functioning mechanisms. Even if a voluntary process of legitimisation, which reverberates within a representative democracy, however exists in this context.

All this in that, following the thinking of Rousseau (1755), the State is of human construction and therefore it might also take not-exactly democratic ‘turns’ like those dictatorial ones. Accountability refocuses our attention on responsibility and control, thus making those ‘turns’ we referred to all the harder. This in that, according to Schedler (1999), the importance of recognising one’s own limitations by way of accountability permits us to underline responsibility and the need for comparison and debate. Such comparison and debate are necessary to increase the awareness of one’s own limitations and one’s own actions. Moreover, by way of the relational dimension of comparison and debate, individual limitations are shared, and the results go beyond those previously foreseen individually.

Accountability becomes the control mechanism for excess of power and brings our attention back to representative democracy (Ascani, 2014). This in that in order

to make democracy possible in reality, forms of representation must be applied and upon representation accountability is grafted. Indeed, the following is most interesting: ‘...La lotta per la propria potenza, e la responsabilità personale per la propria causa che da questa deriva, è l’elemento vitale del politico come dell’imprenditore’ (...*The struggle for one’s own power, and the personal responsibility for one’s own cause which comes from it, represents the vital element of the politician as much as of the entrepreneur.*) (Weber, 1982, p. 38–39). This aspect will later be taken up again with regard treatment of accountability from the company perspective.

Even the proposal and the spreading of New Public Management which, ever since the eighties, tries to include criteria of economic efficiency borrowed from private companies, do not substitute accountability. Rather, according to some authors (Larbi, 1999), this line of thought has demonstrated a certain crisis. Ascani (2014) underlines that in this way, even increasing efficiency, that which has been lost, is precisely accountability in the meaning of demand, legitimisation and control.

This in that trusting the provision of certain services to private companies has matted the role of politics (Borowiak, 2011).

The contribution of accountability is based on the development of a constructive reasoning, so that on the part of political bodies it is not enough to ‘show off’ a motivation that is purely charismatic, but it is necessary to transmit information in a transparent way to empower the masses or to make people informed of the results of the work of these bodies.

Accountability in political discipline pertains to a ‘necessary’ process for those who hold a public political role, such as: president, mayor, member of parliament, etc. Public political roles are the result of elective mechanisms, that lead these subjects to manage resources and assets on behalf of the people who elect them. So, ‘Those who hold a public political role, in fact, must not be considered accountable only for what pertains to the single mandate that is entrusted to them from time to time, but also...for long-term consequences of their final results of perspectives project and work’ (Ascani, 2014, p. 14).

Ascani (2014) offers a broad examination of the history of the term and concepts of accountability, in particular referring to its political meaning, to avoid the drifting of misleading meanings.

The perspective of political accountability analysis develops from international concepts (Borowiak, 2011; Dubnick, 1996) to a greater focus referring to the EU (Schmidt, 2004).

The following definition of accountability in politics may be considered: ‘By accountability, ..., we mean mechanisms of demand, argumentation/justification and control...’ (Ascani, 2014, p. 40).

Other definitions of accountability may also be pondered, amongst which is, ‘A è accountable verso B quando A è obbligato ad informare B circa le proprie azioni (passate e future) e le proprie decisioni, a giustificarle/spiegarle e a subire punizioni/sanzioni nel caso di un’eventuale cattiva gestione’ (*A is accountable to B when A is forced to inform B regarding its own actions (past and future ones) as well as its own decisions, to justify/explain them and to be subject to punishment/sanctions in*

the case of eventual bad management) (Mulgan, 2000, p. 555). Moreover, we may consider also how ‘quei meccanismi che regolano la relazione tra governanti e governati, rappresentanti e rappresentati, che vincolano i primi a rendere i secondi edotti delle azioni intraprese per loro conto (nel loro interesse) e consentono ai secondi di giudicare e, eventualmente, intraprendere azioni contro i primi, sulla base delle informazioni e delle giustificazioni ricevute’ (*those mechanisms which regulate the relationship between rulers and ruled, representatives and represented, that commit the former to make the latter aware of the actions undertaken on their behalf (in their interest) and allow the latter to judge and, eventually, take actions against the former, on the basis of information and explanations received*) (Dubnick, 2008, p. 11; Ascani, 2014, p. 25).

Accountability in politics is fundamental in constructing trust between those who govern and those governed.

Accountability, according to other authors, amongst whom is Schedler (1999), represents ‘la capacità di assicurare che i pubblici ufficiali e i governanti rispondano delle loro azioni e ne diano giustificazione’ (*the capacity of ensuring that public officials and rulers answer for their actions and justify them*) (Schedler, 1999, p. 14; Ascani, 2014, p. 26). Its fundamental basis may be found in responsibility and responsabilisation. In such a way, a concept of ‘control’ is also included within accountability – necessary control in order to justify and verify the conduct of those players with political power.

Indeed, in this sense ‘Così, l’accountability non mira affatto a riconsegnare integralmente al popolo il potere che da esso viene trasferito ai suoi rappresentanti, ma vuole, piuttosto, costruire un ponte tra i governanti e i governati, istituendo un dialogo costante e dando vita ad una reale condivisione’ (*Thus, accountability does not minimally aim at integrally devolving, to the people again, the power that from them is transferred to their representatives, it wishes, rather, to construct a bridge between rulers and ruled, establishing a continual dialogue and giving life to real sharing*) (Ascani, 2014, p. 35).

Accountability is important for the functioning of democracy yet is to be harmonised with all other aspects of the political and democratic process.

The concept of accountability in politics specifically refers to the relationship between rulers (representative institutions) and ruled (citizens). Passing on those aspects relating to horizontal accountability (between peers) and vertical accountability (with hierarchical differences amongst the various interested parties) (Ascani, 2014, p. 42), we rest on that electoral one and on the various stages in which it develops. The first stage concerns the investigation of the candidates who may be elected. They listen to the citizens, understand their needs and would bear and carry them on should they be elected. The second stage begins following the election and regards the discharging of their electoral mandate. This means the concrete implementation of all that was promised during the voting stage. Whenever decisions on issues are different from those that came up during the pre-electoral listening phase, a new consultation is required, one which has such themes as its focus. The third stage regards providing for argumentation and justification, i.e. ‘being accountable’ for that which they were able to consider throughout the electoral mandate, or that

which, instead, they were not able to consider. In this latter stage, accountability plays the role of mediator and of making the citizens knowledgeable of the various passages during the time in office and verifying the consensus obtained. In bureaucratic accountability, on the other hand, reference is made to the possibility, for politicians, of verifying the behaviours of the officials within the public administration, including those aspects of ethics and professional deontology that are involved in the activities carried on by them (Jackson, 2009).

Institutional accountability, however, rests on the division of powers into legislative, executive and judicial powers (Montesquieu, 2011 (orig. ed. in 1748)) which holds to the aim of verifying the balance between them.

In politics, the tools used in accountability include those organs provided for by the constitution, the courts of justice, organisations that act as stimulation element of the consensus of citizens, etc.

Moreover, the presence of ‘being accountable’ in politics has a meaning which concerns the presence of a perpetual interaction and dialogue amongst those that should allow being questioned on their conduct and on their way of operating and the citizens who should have an active role of information requests to their representatives in the government (Ascani chap. 1). The conceptualisation and realisation of an accountability that can guarantee democracy is one of the most important challenges to the current state of the art in a globalised world (Borowiak, 2011).

Finally, another element should be inserted, about the dimensions of dialogue in politics. Amongst them, ‘fraternity’ is suggesting one way to improve it, as is better explained in the next sections. That, because, during times, liberty and equality, coming from French Revolution, had been implemented, but fraternity must be considered in politics and in accountability: ‘The fact that fraternity is the universal human condition and that it refers necessarily to liberty and equality does not mean at all that these are historically acquired, or that the fraternal condition is always a harmonious and peaceable one’ (Baggio, 2013 p. 48).

Once having presented accountability from the viewpoint of political sciences, in the following section, the discussion considering the accounting viewpoint is proposed.

3 Accountability: Conceptual Network Considering an Accounting Approach

In this section, we wish to analyse the meaning of accountability in the discipline of accounting.

The analysis considers the following dimensions, the first of which concerns some general definitions of accountability. The second dimension particularly considers recent thoughts and research which have involved the public administration, even in exceptional times, like that of the current COVID-19 pandemic. To these two dimensions, we need to include a third which considers the relationship between

ethics and accountability (Rusconi, 2019). This third dimension will be introduced by way of the thoughts of Shearer (2002).

As regards the first dimension, we choose to define accountability by categorizing it within social accounting.¹ The fact remains that the social and non-neutral function of accounting is recognized also by scholars, who mainly refer to financial accounting (Hines, 1989; Hopwood, 1987).

The choice of using social accounting has been carried out, in that hermeneutic and emancipatory characteristics are to be found in it. As regards the aspects relative to the hermeneutic process, we may consider ‘hermeneutic dialectic process’ (Laughlin & Broadbent, 1996) which seeks out a means that might lead us towards reflexive mutual understanding between the organisation and its stakeholders’ (Gray et al., 1997, p. 329). The emancipatory characteristic, instead, consists in the possibility of intervening, via the information coming from reporting, on the distribution of powers within society and, therefore, it may contribute to the improvement of democracy. This aspect, according to Gray et al. (1997) is covered particularly by accountability, as can be read: ‘This emancipatory moment lies beyond the accountability itself and, rather, underpins the project and provides its motivation. The project seeks to enhance the democratic virtues of transparency and accountability’ (Gray et al., 1997, p. 329). The quotation opens up to the ethics dimension which we will examine as the third part of the section.

Within social accounting the concept of accountability was developed by Gray et al. (1997): ‘Accountability...is concerned with the relationships between groups, individuals, organizations and the *rights* to information that such relationships entail. Simply stated, accountability is the duty to provide an account of the actions for which one is held responsible (For more detail see, e.g. Gray *et al.* 1986, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1996b). The nature of the relationships – and the attendant rights to information – are contextually determined by the society in which the relationship occurs’ (Gray et al., 1997, p. 334).

Following social accounting theory, accountability contributes to ‘emancipatory’ change of the society (Gray, 1989; Hines, 1989; Brown et al., 2015; Bebbington et al., 2017, 2021).

Accountability, according to the discipline of accounting, is defined as being in tight relation to the informative system for the internal and external financial reporting of the company as well as to the tools that allow its development (Marchi, 1993).

In this sense, other definitions may be considered, amongst which is that proposed by Matacena (2002), who writes thus, ‘L’accountability esprime la responsabilità informativa dell’azienda medesima e si sostanzia in quel sistema di comunicazioni, interne ed. esterne, che nella trasparenza e nel controllo d’esito trovano la loro piena conformazione...’ (*Accountability expresses the informative*

¹Please read: ‘Social accounting is used here as a generic term for convenience to cover all forms of accounts which go beyond the economic and for all the different labels under which it appears – social responsibility accounting, social audits, corporate social reporting, employee and employment reporting, stakeholder dialogue reporting as well as environmental accounting and reporting.’ (Gray, 1999, pp. 2 and 3)

responsibility of the company itself and is embodied in that communication system, both internal and external, which in transparency and control of outcome finds its full structure) (Matacena, 2002: 146).

The author underlines responsibility in measuring but also in transparency and control. In his writings, Matacena (2010, 2017) affirms the importance of connecting accountability to the mission and governance of the company while considering such combinations throughout the various typologies of companies. This combination of mission, governance and accountability as a unitary body is linked to company policies (Bertini, 2013, fourth edition).

Not far from the preceding author's position, Rusconi affirms: '...si può intendere l'accountability come il dovere e la responsabilità di spiegare, giustificare, a chi ne ha diritto, che cosa si sta facendo per rispettare gli impegni presi con gli interlocutori, sia sul piano economico-reddituale...sia da altri punti di vista' (*accountability may be understood as the duty and the responsibility of explaining, justifying, to whom ever is entitled to it, what is being done to respect commitments undertaken with stakeholders, both at economics and income level and from other viewpoints*) (Rusconi, 2002, p. 229). Rusconi (2002) considers accountability linking it to both definitions mentioned previously.

Moreover, he divides the concept of direct accountability from that of indirect accountability. Direct accountability makes reference to the tools of measurement such as financial, social, environmental, sustainability, integrated, etc. statements. Instead, for indirect accountability, he mainly considers social and environmental certificates the company manages to obtain (Balluchi & Furlotti, 2019).

In these definitions the importance is underlined of considering one typology of accounting that is not necessarily 'financial' in nature but which is able to measure, within the company informative system, all aspects of the relationship between company and environment and, therefore, also those concerning society and environment. In support of this, it is necessary to underline social (Idowu (ed.) 2021), ethical and environmental responsibility, within the various stages of predisposition of company outcomes (Baldarelli, 2005).

Another important definition mainly underlines the activities of control under which the subjects, who are part of the social system, have to undergo: 'When individuals are involved in these social systems they are accountable for their actions due to the existence of a shared system of expectations...Accountability refers to the perception of defending or justifying one's conduct to an audience that has reward or sanction authority, and where rewards or sanctions are perceived to be contingent upon audience evaluation of such conduct' (Beu & Buckley, 2001; p. 61).

Briefly, accountability is the process of measurement, qualitative and quantitative, of social, ethical and environmental responsibility of the company. Such measurement is directed towards carrying out informative transparency as regards all stakeholders and towards improving company reputation.

After having analysed the concept of accountability, then some specific concepts of accountability, more relative to government and public administration entities, are considered.

Mutiganda and Jarvinen (2021) underline the growing interest by accountants in the area of political accountability (Fowler & Cordery, 2015; Hyndman et al., 2008; Nyland & Pettersen, 2015; Sinclair, 1995) and particularly in those aspects concerning the restriction policies on public sector accountabilities (Bracci et al., 2015). The authors analyse a case using strong structuration theory (Stones, 2005), applying it in the process of defining accountability in situations of austerity policies. The case analysed regards Finland and, in particular, Viking City, from 2007 to 2015. The matter of analysis consists in the repercussions which came to light within the procedure of tendering the services for the management of the elderly. Such a procedure, over time, has seen change in both the behaviour of politicians and administrators on the basis of modifications to external structures and to the needs of maintaining consensus by the citizens. After having described the outcomes of the analysis of the case, also considering different legislatures, the authors may conclude that, ‘In our case, the two competitive tendering processes illustrate that a high level of trust between agents is needed if changes in accountability are to occur (Coad and Glyptis 2014)’ (Mutiganda & Jarvinen, 2021, p. 99). The relationship between external and internal structures in the management of services, in this case services to the elderly, requires the construction of reciprocal trust, and on it the change of decision makers, both at public level and in the external structure (winner of the tender), intervenes over time. The authors start from four basic areas: external structure, internal structure, active agency and outcomes. However, the fundamental role of the interaction between structures and agents in all four areas under consideration exists. Therefore, it is not just a question of external pressures but also of how the leadership styles are able to manage the relationships. It is on these aspects that accountability is introduced which, over time and on the basis of the aspects defined, tends towards modifying itself: ‘we emphasise in our conclusion that political accountability is needed to make account use ethical (again, because not all the companies that won a contract with Viking City have started performing it, it remains too early to assume that political accountability will continue to manifest as positively as it currently does)’ (Mutiganda & Jarvinen, 2021 p. 99).

Some authors (Andreas et al., 2021) analysed accountability styles of the Italian government in the initial stages of the pandemic – in exceptional times. Indeed, the authors underline that, notwithstanding the evolution of the studies on accountability, there is still room to be able to contribute further to the debate, especially in exceptional circumstances: ‘existing literature has shown how governments have mobilized political capital to alter the role of accountability in times of crisis (Demirag et al., 2020). This paper builds on this research by critically analysing the mechanisms through which the Italian government sought to combine public governance and public accountability issues as a means of urging shared responsibility. The notion of styles plays an important role in enhancing our understanding of how shared responsibility is promoted during various phases of the COVID-19 pandemic’ (Andreas et al., 2021: 448). In particular, the paper pauses on accountability styles by way of an analysis both of the documentation provided by the Italian government from January 1 to August 7, 2020, and the press conferences which, in that period, were held by the Italian Prime Minister. The authors identify five phases:

January 1–31; February 1–21; February 22–March 7; March 8–April 18 and April 19–August 7. In each of these phases, various styles of accountability are pinpointed, which are, respectively, rebuttal, dismissal, reactive, proactive and coercive (Andreas et al., 2021, p. 455). Without going deep down to the particular meaning of each one, a passage from accountability mainly centred on government towards an accountability more co-participated, especially by citizens, can progressively be noted: ‘the accountability styles were focused on the government’s responsibility, while in the last two phases, accountability focused on citizens’ responsibility ... by creating a stronger sense of “shared responsibility” ...’ (Andreas et al., 2021, p. 462).

To better understand the meaning of ‘shared responsibility’, the analysis of the third dimension is introduced, and we avail of another interesting approach proposed by Shearer (2002). The author considers the development of a theory of accountability broader than that based upon classic economic theory. Indeed, the ethics aspect, and the relationship between it and accountability, seems to be rather underconsidered, as can be read: ‘Efforts to assign economic accountability in this way, however, often inadequately theorize necessary ethical presuppositions regarding the moral status of economic collectivities, including the scope of moral community to which the entity is accountable...the subject has received relatively little attention, and remains underdeveloped relative to the social accounting literature to which it is requisite’ (Shearer, 2002, p. 542). To better understand how accountability can contribute to ‘emancipatory change’ and democracy, Shearer (2002) suggests accounting for itself and accounting for the o(O)ther. Companies become members of a moral community through the virtues/merits of the accounts that these companies present to it. Therefore, accountability has a strong relevance to the relationships, since without a relationship there is no accountability and the ethical aspect is part of the relationship (Shearer, 2002).

Therefore, the ethical substratum defines broader horizons of accounting/accountability reunifying the identities that relate with each other: ‘At the same time Schweiker (1993:241) argues that the fiduciary relationship of trust that exists between the accountant and the entity...creates a doubleness of identity sufficiently analogous to that experienced by the individual to create a “fragile unity of an agent and community in time”’ (p. 244, in Shearer, 2002, p. 546).

Differing interests interact in this way, and ‘...the account serves to create a “unity-in-diversity” that constitutes the temporal identity of the collective entity’ (Shearer, 2002, p. 547). As quoted previously, Schweiker (1993) underlines the importance of this relationality that exists within accountability.

From this it is clear that reporting is an activity that is expressed through one’s identity in relation to the other, and this has ethical implications through the relationality within accounting.

Other scholars consider accountability as an elusive concept for which it inserts the discourse of inter-subjectivity (Sinclair, 1995).

Arrington and Francis (1993) underline accounting as a response to the demonstration of reasonableness of the company’s work and necessarily recall the presence of ‘others’.

The aspects just outlined and highlight the difficulties in putting together interests that are often in contrast to each other. To this end, it is interesting to recall those that concern the definitions of accountability and the role played by the subjects with whom the company interacts. For this reason, another framework regarding the discipline of accounting may be considered: one that comes out of stakeholder perspectives within a pluralistic democracy (Brown et al., 2015). The work of Brown et al. (2015) and of the Special Issue (AAAJ, 2015, vol 29, Issue 5: “Accounting in pluralistic societies”) originates from the consideration that society is made up of various subjects who are often at loggerheads with each other and considering all the needs for guaranteeing the democratic process means being able to elaborate involvement processes that foresee a fundamental and creative role for accounting. Indeed, the authors affirm: ‘Often, incorporating the perspectives of diverse groups (e.g. their values, assumptions, knowledges and approaches to social change) requires different processes and accountability regimes, and new types of information transmitted through alternative media. However, the accounting, accountability and policy implications are generally not well articulated or understood’ (Brown et al., 2015, p. 627). Indeed, the contents of the Special Issue allow for reflecting upon the various aspects that regard engagement of the various stakeholders and also upon ways through which to guarantee greater justice and active participation, in order to promote a process that is democratic to a larger degree (Special Issue: Accounting in pluralistic societies, Guest Editors: Judy Brown, Jesse Dillard and Trevor Hopper, Accounting, Auditing, and Accountability Journal: Volume 28, Issue 5 (2015)).

The synthesis which may come out of the various academic papers is: “Democratic accounting practices, like democratic practices more generally, can take various forms and engage many different actors over many different contexts. Those contesting dominant accounting logic need to specify alternatives based on viewpoints such as stakeholder-accountability or critical perspectives” (Brown et al., 2015, p. 640; Dillard & Brown, 2015; Gray et al. 2014a, b). Besides these aspects, at the basis of such considerations, the authors suggest the importance of the ethos and reciprocal respect in generating profound and sincere relations.

What has been affirmed brings the interest back to the third dimension which has been examined and involves the relationship between ethics and accountability. This in that, some research works demonstrated how the choice of ethics is important also for being more and more competitive² (Baldarelli, 2005).

Such an aspect was analysed by Rusconi (2019). The idea of the author is that of establishing a dialogue between two different worlds, which have developed separately, and which are represented, on the one hand, by the corporate systemic theory and the theories of the stakeholders and, on the other, by the ethical vision of the company understood as a system. The author considers, therefore, ethics fundamental to the management of the company.

² Indeed, please read: ‘A better understanding of why individuals behave as they do when presented with ethical dilemmas will allow organizations to be pro-active in create an ethical environment, which is critical to success’ (Beu & Buckley, 2001, p. 69.)

Rusconi (2019) defines the principles of the proposed model of stakeholder management theory (SMT). Especially, stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010; Rusconi, 2019) firstly considers the company to be a system of stakeholders, a ‘stellar’ system of stakeholders (Baldarelli et al., 2005). Secondly, it considers each stakeholder positioned in its own map of specific stakeholders who make identify its borderlines difficult and its management difficult. Thirdly, the stakeholders try to seek a balance that includes the minimum acknowledgement of their needs (MMA: minimum mutual acknowledgement). Fourthly, each stakeholder, besides the MMA which creates a condition of minimum, nevertheless has the aim of having his own needs satisfied.

These aspects bring the EFST (ethical firm system theory) to help SMT in the sense that SMT presupposes a tight connection between ethics and success in business.

And the theory goes from an approach of corporate responsibility towards stakeholders to responsible stakeholders who, if they want to increase benefits, must somehow make it known to the company passing from competition amongst them, to cooperation and corporatism.

Finally, each company can be considered as a system of its own in which the stakeholders have the same dignity and different characteristics.

In this sense Tantalo and Priem (2014) also speak of synergy between stakeholders even if only the key ones, which in some way can help manage the trade-offs between competitive interests (Rusconi, 2019). Moreover, the author underlines the responsibility of the company towards the stakeholders and the accountability of the stakeholders towards the company and other stakeholders. The process moves towards empowerment of stakeholders that involves greater attention of the same towards each other and also brings company decisions to take their needs into account (Goodstein & Wicks, 2007; Rusconi, 2019).

After the analysis of accountability using accounting perspective, in the next section, the relationships amongst the two approaches, politics and accounting, are presented.

4 Accountability in Politics and in Accounting: Some Notes Concerning Relationships and Differences

In order to answer the research question, ‘What are the main aspects in common and the different ones in the accountability considered in policy and in accounting discipline?’, in this section the main differences are outlined, which are in the previous two concepts, in order to achieve the possible relationships established in accountability, in politics and accounting.

Firstly, the matter under examination in accounting makes reference to companies. So, accountability has the company as its object, which is defined as a system of elements oriented towards the reaching of a vector of economic and social

objectives and is compared with broader systems, amongst which are market, ecological political and social environment (Amaduzzi, 1965, 1966; Galassi, 1969; Matacena, 2017). So, the object of accountability is not represented only by the Public Administration but also by the private “companies” both for profit ones and not-for-profit ones (Amaduzzi, 1965, 1966).

The second and fundamental difference is that in accounting, attention is directed towards methods of government and control based on tools measuring outcomes in quantitative and qualitative terms: financial and non-financial statements (Balluchi & Furlotti, 2019) paying attention to relational and decision-making processes activated by them. In this discipline, the ‘technique’ of measuring corporate outcomes has been and is developed together with the theory which is implied by it (Baldarelli et al., 2017).

Obviously, from the measurement and communication processes, all the reasonings relative to the mechanisms which are talked about in politics set off. Shortly, in accounting without measurement and communication, it is not possible to proceed to processes of government and control. The quantitative/qualitative outcomes of measurement relate to and can modify the process of government and control, in that on the basis of the degree of their achievement, the company shall have to intervene to change the strategies and policies adopted.

Attention is so centred on the measuring that often in the writings of accounting attention seems placed exclusively on mere ‘tecnica contabile’ (*accounting technique*) (Marchi, 1993) losing sight of its relational value (Catturi, 1989). This is one of the factors, according to the writer of this paper, that has made interpreting and reading accounting outcomes very difficult for those who are not expert and professionally prepared for the purpose. Such aspects have weighed, and still do, upon understanding the importance of reading the outcomes in any activity, including public administration! Responsibilisation of individuals passes by way of measuring the outcomes, even quantitative ones, of their actions, without which evaluation of activities and actions undertaken cannot be carried out. This, according to the writer of this paper, is the main aspect which distinguishes accountability in politics from accountability in business.

In politics, the attention is predominantly addressed towards processes of legitimisation and control, that is, mechanisms that generate the consensus. Such mechanisms may forecast the measurement of project outcomes, yet the dialectic does not originate from them, how much they are part of a pre-existing process without necessarily changing it. Therefore, not necessarily are they based upon tools of quantitative/qualitative measurement, but upon the dynamics of dialogue/relationship between rulers and ruled (citizens). In this process, aspects of measurement which are considered instrumental to the dynamics of the relationship and not so much to that of the government of the activities are moved to the background (Table 3.1).

Within this dynamic interaction of the analysis of the two disciplines, we can make out a relational margin, which starts from the measurement tools to broaden into concentric circles to relational dynamics that originate from them.

Therefore, attention must focus on the importance in being accountable having at the base accounting, tools of measurement, on the one hand, and on the other, in

Table 3.1 Initial summary of specificities in the two doctrines

| Accountability in politics | Accountability in accounting |
|--|--|
| 1. Subject of analysis is the public administration | 1. Subject of analysis is the company |
| 2. Prevalent attention is granted to the processes of legitimisation and control, that is, mechanisms that generate the consensus, therefore, not necessarily based upon tools for quantitative/qualitative measurement, rather upon the dynamics of dialogue/relationship between rulers and ruled (citizens) | 2. Attention is focussed upon government/control methods based upon tools for the measurement of outcomes in quantitative and qualitative terms: financial as well as non-financial statements, paying attention to relational and decision-making processes activated by them |
| 3. Measurement occurs by way of tools and dynamics which are developed throughout the relationship | 3. By way of quantitative and qualitative outcomes, the process of dialogue is rebooted/develops within the company and between it and its stakeholders |

avoiding the excessively jargon-ridden, or excessively verbose, ‘deviations’ which may lead to considering ‘just the tools’, losing sight of the process why they were launched.

In this scenario, the stakeholders play a fundamental role and so does their responsabilisation in ‘asking’ that such an aspect is valued as well in order to make the mechanisms of dialogue between delegated (politicians) and delegators (citizens) easier.

5 Conclusion

In this work, the meaning of accountability has been analysed while considering two disciplines, politics and accounting.

To provide an answer to the research question, in both the need for basing accountability on the construction of relationships which can build trust and democracy came to the fore. We have met in literature, a re-definition of the role of accountability towards a new way of dealing with stakeholders, in order to reconcile conflicts and to act as an essential mediator to ensure transparency and the re-dial of dialogue amongst opposing social partners.

The literature presents possible orientations that can lead to a partial solution of the current state of the art in which accountability oscillates between scarcity of information and transparency and excessive information and redundancy. The contribution of Shearer (2002) and other authors (Andreas et al., 2021; Rusconi, 2018, 2019) tries to bring attention to the aspects of responsibility and relationality of accountability, which, in this way, is oriented towards the function of contributing to democracy and emancipation. The accountability role of quantitative ‘mediation’ is very important to give populism lesser negative attributes, because it helps stakeholders and social partners to clarify the reasons of eventual conflicts amongst them (Bebbington et al. 2021).

It is in this context that the aspects inherent to fraternity, which we previously mentioned, are relative to a deeper study of relationships and betterment of their 'nature'. Such a principle, to which literature (Baggio, 2013) has brought back attention in that it was partially 'forgotten' compared to those of freedom and equality, as well advocated by the French Revolution.

Within corporate literature too, primordial aspects emerge which disclose that way of action suggested by Baggio (2013) which takes the name of fraternity, and this may say something to resolve 'how' to connect the various aspects of accountability and how to link them with the mission and governance (?). But this is for later research works.

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Part II
Accountability Versus Populism:
Intersections between Politics and Business
Economics

Chapter 4

Business Democratic Value at Stake: A Business Ethics Perspective on Embedded Social and Political Responsibility



Rosa Fioravante and Mara Del Baldo

1 Introduction

The present work addresses the crisis of representative Western liberal democracy by considering populism the political epiphenomenon of economic inequality and neoliberal cultural individualism. As current social and political discontents with democratic processes are due also to lack of social concerns by economic actors, we argue that normative foundations of business ethics extend the idea of social responsibility and care for the common good to concern for the quality of democracy as well and are key to promote sustainable business practices and active participation of business actors to fighting populism, individualism and disintermediation. Indeed, economic roots of populism have been widely discussed by the literature belonging to disciplines such as economic and political sociology, macroeconomics and international economic policy, while from the perspective of business and managerial studies, they remain mostly overlooked. This is due to a more general lack of interest registered so far in analyzing the possible roles and effects of concerns for democracy and democratic values as one of the variables connected to business actors' behavior and as an intangible value that can promote social responsibility of business.

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The present work aims to shed light on the role of business ethics and the social responsibility of business in fueling or combatting populism, as well as in supporting or undermining the quality of democracy. The paper addresses the issue by proposing a multidisciplinary approach. Section 1 introduces a short discussion of the concept of “populism” as linked to specific economic causes, mainly macroeconomic variables such as consequences of economic crisis and irresponsible corporations’ behavior. The classic idea of embeddedness of business in society is discussed in order to outline the main issues connected to the crisis of “embedded liberalism” and its political expression, as well as to support the idea that, while traditional political intermediate bodies and institutions have lost power, business has gained a new social role in representing a mediating institution. In Sect. 2 a critical assessment of the literature on corporate social responsibility (CSR) will be presented, focusing on political CSR to highlight its limits when facing the issue of the quality of democracy. The latter remains largely unexplored as a relevant factor to be considered when looking at motives for adopting social responsibility practices. In Sect. 3 possible paths of research, moving from business ethics theoretical possibilities in understanding the link between business behavior and political values, are proposed. Ultimately the paper argues for democracy to be considered among the intangible values informing business responsible behavior from both a normative and positive point of view. In this vein, we highlight how little research has been conducted so far by focusing specifically on the influence of political ideologies on business actors’ behavior and on the influence that democratic belief can exert on ethical business choices. Ultimately, the paper aims to consider how business’s responsibility toward social cohesion and economic embeddedness, as well as business power to fight economic causes of populism, need to be further explored and problematized. A multidisciplinary approach, bridging political theory, international economic policy and business studies, is pursued.

2 Democracy at Stake

2.1 *The Populist Malaise*

Although populism has been defined as the political zeitgeist of our epoch (Mudde, 2004), its characterization is still widely debated by significantly different perspectives (such as Laclau, 2005; de la Torre, 2019; Mueller, 2017). Nonetheless, all different definitions and approaches that can be considered insist on populism as a form of politics (whether concerning political communication, political representation, or the configuration of political actors), addressing an “us versus them.” Depending on the phenomenon analyzed and the framework adopted, the “us versus them” can take the form of “top versus bottom,” “the many versus the few,” “the common citizenship versus the politicians.” As Bauman argues (1998a, b), the weakening of traditional links of Western twenty-first century’s society, such as

political parties and trade unions, the development of digital technology, and the process of globalization (declined as hyperglobalization, see Rodrik, 2011) have led to atomization of society and, thus, to a loss of traditional political identities resulting in the seeking for new ones in nationalist and religious values. Within this context, populism plays a crucial role in providing a framework (the “us versus them”) which builds an artificial concept of one “people” in opposition to others. Many scholars have also underlined how inequalities (in particular, economic and social inequality) fuel populism (see among others Kriesi & Pappas, 2015; Crouch, 2020a, b; Piketty, 2019; Hay & Smith, 2005) as a reaction to impoverishment of the middle class, representation discontent, and depoliticization processes, thus resulting, more in general, in the undermining of the foundations of modern representative democracy.

As Norberto Bobbio used to warn, it is not possible for political democracy to persist without expanding and taking the forms of social democracy as well, i.e., pursuing the democratization of all contexts of associate life (Bobbio, 1995). On the contrary, in the past four decades, democracy has not extended its reach in social contexts but has also undergone an interruption at political levels, with the end of what had been labelled as an unavoidable succession of waves of democratization (Huntington, 1991), eventually leading to the adoption of democracy by the whole globe (Fukuyama, 1989). This setback is not a cause of concern only in countries that do not have an established democratic form of government yet, but for countries that have developed throughout the second half of the twentieth century a mature form of liberal democracy as well. Indeed, the latter system has undergone deep political crises connected to the consequences of financial globalization (Rodrik, 2011), the decrease power of decision power of public institutions (Crouch, 2004), and the structural change in political parties and intermediate bodies (Mair, 2013). In some countries the quality of democracy has been severely challenged by sovereign debts’ crisis consequences (Morlino & Raniolo, 2019), and social movements have sprung to protest against austerity measures and medium-term consequences of the financial crash of 2008 (della Porta et al., 2017). The very prophet of the “End of History” thesis (Fukuyama, 1989), conveyed as the idea of the end of political clashes and ideological battles, insofar liberal democracy and free market capitalism would soon be adopted by the whole globe as the best political and economic systems possible, has re-thought his own prophecy, when arguing that financial globalization had “eroded the middle-class base on which liberal democracy rests” (Fukuyama, 2012). Indeed, as Fukuyama has later stressed, modern Western democracy needs three pillars as a political order to be sustained: the nation-state, the middle-class society, and democratic accountability (Fukuyama, 2014).

Rising inequalities and the decline of the standards of life of the Western middle class (Lakner & Milanovic, 2016) have been eroding at least two of the three pillars (Rodrik, 2018). Far from growing together as predicted by Milton Friedman (Friedman, 1962), economic freedom and political freedom have become entangled in a trade-off between economic freedom and social security (Rodrik, 2011; Sen, 1992). It is within this scenario that political populism and economic populism have

been an answer to the spreading of this trade-off among the middle class of the Western countries, resulting in heterogeneous consequences, all of which share lack of accountability of ruling classes (both economic and political) and economic inequalities, leading to political polarization (Rodrik, 2018; Piketty, 2019; Abdelal, 2020).

While literature disagrees on the ontological definition of populism, at all levels of analysis (whether it be ideological, as in Freedman (2017); constitutional, as in Urbinati (2019); mediatic, as in Gerbaudo (2018)), little room for discussion is left to deny the phenomenon as, at the very least, an epi-phenomenon of social discontent caused by economic material development (inequality) and economic ideologies informing depoliticization, social individualism, and excessive competition (Hay & Smith, 2005; Bauman, 1998a, b; Rodrik, 2018). Even scholars that provide a positive meaning to the concept of populism recognize economic causes at the core of its spreading (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2018). In this vein, the populist phenomenon can be seen as a political challenge that addresses a traditional vested question of the economic discipline as well as of social sciences in general: what is the role of business among society? And, given its implication (although indirect) in fueling the populist wave, does it have a role in undermining or bettering the quality of contemporary democracy?

2.2 *Embedded and Dis-embedded Liberalism*

As Italo Calvino, great Italian novelist, wrote: “a classic is a book that is never done telling what has to tell.” Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation*, published in 1944, in its original analysis of social causes and consequences of the Great Depression from the point of view of economic anthropology, is a book as such.

As Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz argued, in his Foreword to the 2001 Edition of Polanyi’s work: “only diehards would argue for the self-regulating economy, at one extreme, or for a government run economy, at the other” (Stiglitz, 2001 p.ix). *The Great Transformation* is a robust reflection concerning what happens to a society that goes too far one way or another in the two extremes recalled by Stiglitz, i.e., if the anthropologically based equilibrium between economic interests and societal needs for protection and welfare is destroyed by the attempt of the economic system to become an autonomous sphere, detached from cultural and social environment, as well as from political institutions. In Polanyi’s view, indeed, economics and politics are not interesting as two separate spheres of inquiry, but rather they ought to be considered in their intertwining. Polanyi’s lesson about the rising of totalitarianism during the 1930s of the twentieth century insists on how reactionary politics is fostered by mass unemployment, rising insecurity and atomization, by the economic system becoming similar to an Hobbesian “state of war” determined by free market as the only force of social interaction. Indeed, when unfettered competition, lack of redistribution of wealth and possibilities, individual self-interest becomes the

imperative social norm, the process of dis-embedding of the economy leads to a mass search for political solutions. This “counter-movement” can take highly regressive forms when totalitarian solutions are proposed as the quicker and stronger ones. The dis-embedding of the economy thus results in a failure of democracy and liberal politics, as well as in social turmoil: “Fascism, like socialism, was rooted in a market society that refused to function. [...] the issues transcended the economic sphere and [...] radiated into almost every field of human activity” (Polanyi, 2001 p.248).

The concept of embeddedness has proved to be valuable to understand the 2008 consequences of the economic crisis and the regressive populist wave of protectionism, nationalism, and xenophobia that has reached his peak with the Brexit vote and Trump’s election in 2016 (Rodrik, 2018) – as economic causes of populism (inequality and cultural individualism) are recurrent. Following Polanyi’s suggestion, in order for the economy to not escape social norms and to prevent regressive solutions on political level, scholars have faced the issue of embeddedness by arguing for a strong welfare state and have proposed a sharp critique of the “under-socialized” anthropological model of neoclassical economy (see Granovetter, 1985).

From an opposite point of view, the concept of embeddedness has been deployed also to convey the idea of a renewed equilibrium between economic, social, and political need, by proposing the idea of “embedded liberalism” (Ruggie, 1982). In his view, there is the possibility of a compromise between business private interests and freedom and public welfare solutions, and, as this compromise is threatened by neoliberal push for dis-embedding the economy, the equilibrium can be preserved by leveraging domestic intervention with free market and, above all, by a spreading social and political consensus culturally and politically supporting the compromise itself. More recently, the same author, together with other scholars, has raised the attention on the behavior of business, as a critical issue that could either support the system of embedded liberalism or, by behaving immorally and exploiting the power of transnational corporations, could cause a lack of legitimacy to it (Abdelal & Ruggie, 2009; Ruggie, 2020; Helleiner, 2019). Indeed, as the 2008 economic crisis has shown the power of financial markets to detach from social norms, Abdelal has outlined several issues at the core of the resulting crisis of liberal embeddedness: the globalized system that allows financial markets to be out of control by political decisions, the increasing income inequality between developed and developing worlds, the crisis of intergenerational economic mobility, and the crisis of migration and unemployment have all contributed to a consensus crisis and a legitimacy crisis of the previous order. These political issues – left unattended – generate a fertile humus to thrive and allow populist politicians to pursue political opportunities or “representation gaps” (Abdelal, 2020). In order to understand the possible role of business in being responsible toward democratic development of society, it is relevant to understand what challenges and opportunities are posed by the representation gap that has emerged.

2.3 *Business as Intermediate Body*

As populism is framed as an epiphenomenon signaling society's discontent with the quality of democratic representation, unfulfilled social demands, and loss of popular sovereignty, prominent scholars of different disciplines have been trying to understand where does decisional power lie, if it is no more in nation-state full disposability (Crouch, 2020a, b; Rodrik, 2011). While highlighting the threats posed by the economic crisis to the liberal embeddedness consensus, Ruggie himself has recognized that globalization has entailed "governance gaps...between the scope and impact of economic forces and actors, and the capacity of societies to manage their adverse consequences" (Ruggie, 2008, p.3).

While the tradition of political economy and international economic policy mostly discuss a dichotomy between political power and economic power, in the form of a public versus private contest, by focusing on the size of public intervention in the economy (among others Stiglitz, 2019, and Krugman, 2009), another tradition, such as the civil economy tradition, highlights a third pillar of power, resting on civil society and societal organizations (Bruni & Zamagni, 2015). In line with the latter, Sapelli has referred to a "polyarchy" to which economic, political, and social powers concur. In his view "popular sovereignty is expressed in all forms of the polyarchy" (Sapelli, 1993, p.47–48), and business relations belong both in market and in non-market spheres. The idea of social power as overlapping with economic and state power's spheres is increasingly gaining consensus among business studies: the shareholder value paradigm, as summarized by Friedman (1970), in his idea of a strict separation between social purposes and economic aims, has been overcome by stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1994) and, even more so, by the idea of a progressive blurring between government and business's roles in ensuring social development, dignity of work, and even social justice (Waddock, 2014; Schlag & Melé, 2020; Del Baldo, 2019).

Business ethics has indeed a long tradition of understanding, by different perspectives, the intertwining of profit and non-profit sphere, of economic sustainability with social and environmental responsibility. As Kline (Kline, 2018) recalls, business cannot be identified fully by its organizational status, nor its nature is exhausted by looking only at its activity, as trade cannot give a holistic account for it. Rather, as Kline suggests, business is defined by the actions undertaken to pursue an intent (to make profit), which are never morally neutral. In this light, by refusing the separation thesis, it can be stated that the intertwining between business conduct and political conduct is inherent to the rules that polity emanates; thus decisions pertaining to the sphere of business can be considered fully political, and decisions by the polity on the functioning of business and the market can be considered fully economical – "business becomes a political arena where doing business is doing politics" (Kline, 2018, p.233). Some scholars are even more radical in advocating for "firms as political entities," by addressing them as agents of social change (Ferreras, 2017), in such a way that overcomes both limits to the corporate political activity perspective and the idea that firms are filling a power void left by political institution (Rasche, 2015).

Moreover, the growth of business's influence on political decisions has resulted in two opposite tendencies. On one side, a refashioning of the paradigm of "political capitalism" (Kolko, 1965), through the idea that public policies, have been oriented to comply with political and economic élites' demands instead of lower classes, a claim that has been at the center of social movements and both right-wing and left-wing populist movements protesting the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis (see Holcombe, 2018, p.405; Mirowski, 2013; Crouch, 2012). On the other side, awareness on the political power of business actors has entailed a rethinking of concepts traditionally associated with the political sphere to be deployed in understanding corporate role and use of this power (Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007), as well as promoting the engagement within the business ethics field in order to rethink and reassess the social role of the enterprise and of businessmen and women (Holcombe, 2018; Zamagni, 2004). As other traditional institutions and intermediate bodies loose decisional power and large corporations get richer than nation states, the moral expectations toward how this power is used is surging, together with the attention on theories able to grasp the renewed social role of business.

One of the possible ways to reinterpret this role is to look at the firm as a mediating institution (Donaldson & Dunfee, 2002): according to this perspective, the firm has an economic function that involves the dynamic of "mediation" between a single person and society as a whole (see Fort, 1996, p.150). This understanding of the social role of the firm, even when not explicitly recalled, can be found as a background idea of ethical theories involved with person centered approaches (Melé, 2012; Solomon, 1992) and involved in the discussion of dignity and spirituality within business (Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012; Pirson, 2017). Fort's argument for considering the corporations: "Mediating structures are often thought of in terms of family, church, and voluntary (usually non-profit) organizations" (Fort, 1996, p.151) leads consequently to the idea that the firm itself should recognize its role as embedded institution. Indeed, the fact that work constitutes such a consistent part of people's lives and socialization entails the necessity for corporations to actively recognize this mediating role (Fort, 1996).

The above mentioned tension towards embeddedness can be found also in more recent works concerning the paradigm of humanistic management and entrepreneurship (Pirson, 2019; Spitzbeck, 2011; Garriga & Melé, 2004), as well as in theories addressing the need to re-embed the economy within society to face current challenges of inequality and climate change. For supporters of the perspective of humanistic management, the mediating role of the firm lies in its ability to build a person-oriented institution that connects individual talents and scopes to a higher idea of good society and shared humanistic values (such as spirituality, religion, arts, leisure, etc.). Throughout this paradigm an instrumental understanding of the role of business is conveyed: contrary to the mainstream understanding of business and the economy as the purpose of human development, the idea of business as one of the numerous vectors of human fulfillment and civilization progress, among others concurring to social and environmental well-being is able to grasp its value as mean to something else, rather than as purpose in itself. Thus, it becomes clear that profitability is no sole definition for society's aims nor for business goal themselves (Waddock, 2014).

Consequently, in order to grasp business' potential role in fighting populism, it is essential to understand, from a theoretical point of view, its nature as mediating institution, both within society and culture due to its embeddedness feature, and in its contemporary and increasing role as intermediate body with social and political power.

3 Political CSR Without Democratic Concern

3.1 *A Contested Terrain*

Corporate social responsibility is a contested terrain in which highly divergent perspectives on the role of business within society are at stake, but almost none of them has tackled social responsibility toward democracy so far. Within the field, literature on "political CSR" (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011) has been developed with the aim to discuss the connections between the political implications of business and its possible involvement in active citizenship, but it is not common to address preferences of the entrepreneurs and managers for political regimes nor concerns for the quality of democracy in particular. Nonetheless, given business' political role and its mediating function, it can be argued that such perspective would be in line with business ethics' disciplinary premises and CSR most pressing research questions.

Garriga and Melé clearly depict the main aspects addressed by CSR theories: (1) meeting objectives that produce long-term profits, (2) using business power in a responsible way, (3) integrating social demands, and (4) contributing to a good society by doing what is ethically correct. (see, Garriga & Melé, 2004, p.65). By leaving aside the first group of theories, connected to the idea of the firm as being mainly (when not solely) responsible for-profit creation, it can be argued that the other three groups share the same common normative view that holds the firm responsible not only for its individual behavior rather for its proactive social role in a larger context, among which the state of democracy could be envisioned. Therefore, theories pertaining to the second and third approach of CSR, as identified by Garriga and Melé, provide a clear vision of the intertwining of the political and business spheres but, at the same time, do not articulate business behavior facing different types of governments. Democratic values and concern for the quality of democracy are thus not considered as such, but rather are disseminated through different groups of CSR theories.

Another way to group and categorize different approaches among CSR theories is the analysis of research trends according to the type of analysis provided on three levels: institutional, organizational, and individual (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). According to this categorization, institutional motives are entangled with the political and governance level, as wide discussion is provided on stakeholders' pressure to firms for adopting CSR practices and evidence is provided on how regulations and jurisdictions play a very relevant role in conditioning responsible behavior (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). At the organizational level of analysis, no evidence is

provided of the intertwining with political reasons for adopting CSR strategies, as socially responsible strategies are seen primarily as a driver of competitiveness and thus are undertaken for instrumental reasons.

Nonetheless, while considering the individual level, the influence of the issue of personal commitment to values and beliefs emerges clearly: although literature considered by the authors focuses outstandingly on management-employee relationship, it highlights the relevance of commitment to ethical values, both to shape a visionary leadership and to convey identification, loyalty, and increased affection toward the organization due to its engagement in social causes. While authors themselves point out that individual analysis represents a minor portion of the field, a gap in the literature can be observed when looking at entrepreneurial and managerial commitment to democratic values and how these affect firm organization and behavior. Nonetheless, Aguinis and Glavas' scheme could be deployed in future paths of research able to address the topic. Indeed, moving from their schematization, following their effort in dividing literature into proactive/reactive theories, normative/instrumental theories, and external/internal outcomes, the issue of commitment to democratic value and concern for the quality of democracy could be framed within this same categorization. In particular, democratic issues at stake within business behavior could be addressed as being normative (firms engaging in CSR as coherent practice with intangible values such as care for democratic pluralism and other related values), proactive (firms actively preventing causes of populism by promoting dignity of work, decent wages, and incentives to cooperation rather than individualistic behavior), with both internal and external outcomes (affecting active citizenship of internal stakeholder and promoting it among external ones).

3.2 An Unexplored Territory

Political CSR has often been configured as a field where concepts drawn from political theory are applied to business behavior, in order to place it within the framework of a general shift of power, as already mentioned, from the political to the economic sphere. A successful example of this approach are notions as “corporate constitutionalism” (Davis, 1960) or “corporate citizenship” (Matten & Crane, 2005). Especially concerning the latter, although this concept has been explicitly derived from Western liberal democratic context, its discussion has been developed in relation with changing scopes, roles, and limits of action of nation-state government, looking at how corporations can be filling its deficiency. Indeed, while not addressing it openly in relation to quality and fallacy of democracy, the social, civil, and political rights mentioned by Matten and Crane can all be discussed as connected to the issue. Indeed, by addressing the corporation as the possible locus of “channeling political rights” (p.174), the framework does not, for explicit choice of the authors, include a discussion of the motives for which the corporation decides to exert this role nor the discussion on the political regime in which the corporation acts, insofar Western democratic context seems to be taken for granted.

In a less straightforward manner, Hussain and Moriarty have underlined a similar limit to corporate citizenship by addressing Palazzo and Scherer's theory and pointing out that the latter does not actually solve the democratic deficit since it considers business corporations as "supervising authorities" rather than "functionaries," that is, agents that must be held accountable to the democratic reasoning (see Hussain & Moriarty, 2018, p. 519).

While the frame of corporate citizenship addresses a concern for democratic quality and it links it with certain ways of conducting business, it conveys the idea – similar to the majority of political CSR literature – that democratic concern only arises in business' awareness when needed for instrumental reasons and regulation aims, disregarding democratic values that can or cannot be involved in doing business.

A wider, although clear and exhaustive, definition of political CSR has been proposed by Frynas and Stephens as "activities where CSR has an intended or unintended political impact, or where intended or unintended political impacts on CSR exist" (Frynas & Stephens, 2014, p.485). Although the definition is quite wide, political CSR has been largely anchored in corporate strategy, as Frynas and Stephens show in their assessment of the field by categorizing its relevant literature into three domains. They focus on how firms respond to political environment changes, and identify three levels of analysis: macro, meso, and individual. In their review, similarly to the aforementioned, Aquinis and Glava's, the authors, point out that "political CSR research has failed to draw on existing micro-level theory applications in the general CSR literature and in the general management literature" (see Frynas & Stephens, 2014, p. 498).

Read through the lenses of corporate strategy, political CSR has been developing also as a conceived "source of advantage" as Lawton and other scholars (Lawton et al., 2012) explain; it revolves around the idea of "corporate attempts to shape government policy in ways favorable to the firm." While this approach differs substantially from literature applying political theory notions to business understanding (such as the case of corporate citizenship, constitutionalism, etc.), as it openly conveys the idea that business behavior affects the political environment, it still reflects a rather traditional idea of economic power and state powers being separate although reciprocally influencing. Resources, institutions, and political environment are considered among the firm concerns and fields of action instrumentally to the pursuit of profitability, largely connected to actions aimed at public policy change.

In this light, the relative scarcity of studies adopting the individual and the micro-level perspective, as well as the instrumental point of view, could be among the reasons for the lack of significant discussion on the relation between entrepreneurial and managerial democratic belief and social responsible behavior of the firm. Similar premises are conveyed also by Whelan (2016) in his analysis of how corporations act politically and thus influence international politics and global governance, although the idea that "fundamental goods" (such as democracy, recalled at p.5, are influenced directly or indirectly by the firm's behavior) is integrated.

By dialoguing with Lawton, McGuire, and Rajwani, Whelan suggests that actual research on political CSR has focused on scientific methods taken from hard

science, while neglecting ethical motives and concerns, even though the sphere of reflection on CSR is imbued with normative considerations which, by their very nature, involve moral aspects and frequent evaluations of what should or should not be done. In this vein, what Whelan points out is that whether we look at the firm’s action dynamics with national governments, international agreements, and global governance (as pursued also by NGOs and other civil society actors), the focus of the relevant literature remains mainly on instrumental motives and a mixture of self-regulation attempts or practices aimed at influence favorable regulation. Nonetheless, Whelan’s perspective contributes in pointing out two major limits of political CSR: first, it is suggested that, by often taking the Rawlsian or Habermasian perspectives (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011), literature on political CSR neglects to focus on power roles, conveying rather more contractual or dialogic frameworks; secondly, Whelan points out that, in neglecting this power role, the literature overlooks both negative and positive implications connected to the possible use of this power with regard to the political scenario. More on the second point, Whelan clearly states in Table 4.1 (p. 729) that the State should be “liberal or social democratic (suggested implicitly).” As so far argued, this implicit suggestion is in line with the background understanding of all political CSR literature, including Whelan perspective, which ultimately points to the discussion of (empirical or normative) forms of (national or international) governance of corporations, rather than to the discussion of the possibilities of democratic values as motives of CSR practices or business conduct largely taken, although explicitly mentioning the issue of democracy as one to be considered within the debate.

Whether it promotes an inquiry on how business can be a vector of citizenship (Moon et al., 2005) or an inquiry on ways and strategies through which business power is used to limit government’s sphere (Levy & Egan, 2003), literature on

Table 4.1 Current paths of research tackling democratic concern in business behavior

| Democracy at stake | Direction | Type of enquiry | Partially tackled issues | Paths for moving forward |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------|---|---|
| Political ideologies influencing business behavior | From political to business | Empirical | Implementing CSR practices according to political stances | Understanding how political ideas influence ethical business choices |
| Business power influence on politics | From political to business | Theoretical | Political CSR should foresee a “‘political’ model of corporate governance” | Understanding how concern and care for democracy can take the form of firm governance innovation and other significant change in the business model |
| Business power influence on politics | From business to politics | Theoretical | Pursuing ethical business following a certain idea of democracy and the common good | Understanding what kind of political ideas lead to ethical business choices |

political CSR does not directly question corporations' role in undermining or enhancing the quality of democracy. Therefore, it overlooks the nature of embeddedness of business in society, according to which the way firms are governed and the way business is conducted reciprocally is influenced and has the power to influence the social sphere; nor it does take into consideration the intertwining between ethical choices (the level of values) and corporate choice (especially concerning the level of political belief according to which choices on CSR and business ethics behavior are made).

4 Assessing Democracy as a Business Actor's Concern

Existing limits of current research on political CSR has been only partially filled by research based on two approaches: first, by focusing on how political ideologies affect entrepreneurial and managerial choices in adopting CSR practices, and second, by developing theoretical frameworks able to evaluate business ethics role in using business power to influence the quality of democracy or to pursue a direct political engagement (see Table 4.1).

Within the first perspective, Chin et al. (2013) have proposed a significant enquiry into how political ideologies of CEOs affect CSR practices adoption and how the ideological level entails business support for different political stances. This kind of enquiry could be promoted by sampling not only CEOs but different roles within the firm, at both entrepreneurial and managerial level and by not only considering financial support for PACs (i.e., Political Action Committee used to directly offer financial support to political candidates) but also other forms of political engagement. More on the point, other relevant issues can be analyzed, deepening the same link, between business action and political environmental affection by looking, for example, at trade unions involvement in the firm governance, at how active participation to decisions is envisioned for employees, at how issues of public concern (such as climate change or public health) are dealt with by involving relevant stakeholders outside the firm within the firm decision-making processes. This would partially fill the gap existing in current literature on CSR on the link business behavior and the public democratic sphere.

With regard to the second approach, Djelic and Etchanchu's critique of CSR political literature raises a pivotal issue, similar to Whelan's perspective: in order to assess the role of political views and democratic ideals into CSR discussion, the theoretical framework used needs to highlight the relevance of pointing out how corporate and managerial voluntarism in the context of transnational deliberative and participatory platforms might be able to contributing to the "common good." (see Djelic & Etchanchu, 2017, p.XXX). Indeed, the emphasis on participation is in line with the suggested idea of a possible "stakeholder democracy" platform: according to this view, political CSR should foresee a "'political' model of corporate governance" capable to provide communities, citizenries, and/or civil society, with voting rights similar to those provided by shareholder corporate governance

models (see Whelan, 2012, p. 719). By deepening this idea, important paths of research can be explored by looking at how concern and care for democracy can take the form of firm governance innovation and democratic implementation within its governance models.

Furthermore a third additional approach can be identified looking at works assessing democracy as a value affecting business behavior and a possible source of concern for business actors is not new (Bonar, 1893; Dierkesmeier, 2016), although it is a stream of debate not largely discussed within the current mainstream approach. More in general, understanding the role of intangible values within economic action still requires important intellectual effort. Indeed, as Knight suggested, no motive connected to human action is purely economic (Knight, 1922); thus, in order to grasp the political side of economic action, it is required to replace the economist point of view with a sociable one, such as replacing the homo oeconomicus anthropological paradigm with the aristoteles zoon politikon (Carrier, 2012; Bruni & Zamagni, 2009; Schlag & Melé, 2020). The recent refashioning of the idea that the business actors act according to “other purposes” (Costa & Ramus, 2015; Screpanti & Zamagni, 2005; Roncaglia, 1996), rather than only profit, is gaining consensus but remains to be systematize within business studies through normative and positive approaches (Spitzeck, 2011). The social dimension of business, as well as what has been recalled as a “polyarchy,” would be impossible to grasp without a thorough understanding of values, beliefs, and spiritual/personal influences informing entrepreneurship and management actions (Nigri et al., 2020; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012, 2013).

To overcome a narrower view of CSR, a number of debates within the field of business ethics are spreading, aiming at widening the scopes of the social responsibility paradigm by focusing on the transformative power that rests in shaping and making business. Indeed, to stress the mediating, democratic, embedded features, and roles of the firm requires addressing not only features of entrepreneurship and management – such as innovation and cultural change, as being promoted by the enterprise within its sector, industry, and district – but also as being promoted as strategic behavior integrated within an holistic vision of the well-functioning of democratic society and the value of participation by active citizenship and local communities. Some examples of theories pushing toward the re-embedding of the firm within society, not disregarding the issue of the intertwining between democratic values and business actions, are those perspectives able to reconnect business actors’ behavior and strategies with democratic practices aimed at, enhancing virtues and practices of participation, cooperation, and sharing of intangible resources. Among the latter, the following can be enlisted: the “collaborative entrepreneurship” model (Rocha & Miles, 2009) and humane entrepreneurship perspective (Pirson et Al. 2014; Schlag & Melé, 2020). More in general concerns for the quality of democracy are shown in those active engagement of business actors and business reforms that evolves within the sphere of the economy of care and caring for the planet and future generations, as recalled by the challenge of integral ecology, as presented by *Laudato Si* Encyclical Letter (Pope Francis, 24 May 2015) and promoted throughout a rethinking of the concept of the sustainable enterprise (Del

Baldo, 2014). While Chin et al.'s work and literature belonging to the same sphere of enquiry could fill the gap concerning how the individual level of involvement by business actors develops according to political belief, such recent theories of the firm as mediating institution having profound impacts on the quality of democracy, all pursue some degrees of participation by employees and stakeholders in its governance and the determining of its business model (Kelly, 2002; Edinger-Schons et al., 2019).

The border between political and business action, when it comes to preserving and supporting the quality of democracy, is much more porous than it has been treated in the past perspectives that share the background idea that business is embedded within society by nature and that disregarding this social feature can lead to only a partial understanding of the firm as being based on making profits and trade, but not as a communitarian reality fulfilling its social mission (as recalled by Kline's definition), which are thus to be confronted with the democratic implications entailed. As one of the contemporary grand challenges to be faced is a significant crisis of democracy as undermined by the populist phenomenon, theories apt at introducing ethical and democratic concerns as one of the variables to be tackled to assess business' behavior are all to be listed among the theoretical and normative efforts to preserve the "common good" of a political regime based on freedom, equity, and pluralism.

5 Conclusions

Literature on political engagement of business has confronted the issue of embeddedness of the economy within society and the crisis of the so-called embedded liberalism consensus. Nonetheless, the idea that firms engage in politically oriented CSR strategies is mainly tackled from an instrumental point of view. In conclusion, current limits of CSR approach and, more in depth, political CSR theories, can be assessed on two levels: first, as a missing enquiry into individual and voluntary involvement of business in the issue of the quality of democracy, its protection, and enhancement, and second, in providing the understanding of how political beliefs influence actors and organizations in shaping business models, governance decisions, and, ultimately, in deploying business economic power and interpreting firm's mediating role within society. Although these issues are discussed within research tackling features of political action of the firm and within the discussion on the motives leading to the adoption of CSR strategies, they rarely are confronted by focusing on the topic of democratic concern as such. At both levels, the theoretical assumptions needed to promote such intellectual quests are enrooted in a business ethics perspective able to grasp the firm as being informed with values and cultures, as well as in a number of non-strictly related economic motives, among which it is possible to list concern for democracy as well. Insofar we recognize that business holds a role in responsible and accountable behavior to democratic institutions and active citizenship; it is clear that it holds a role in fighting the populist phenomena

as well. Providing high-quality jobs, lessening inequalities, and encouraging arts, culture, and civic participation are all possible issues to be deepened as factors of normative and empirical relevance to grasp firms' behavior in relation to the quality of democracy and to the fighting of the social tendencies of individualism, disintermediation, and polarization, among which populism and democratic discontent thrive.

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Chapter 5

Property, Responsibility, and the Community: Toward a New Concept of Property



Sergio Barbaro

1 Introduction

In this research we want to examine some of the tendencies emerged in the law, which affirm the birth of a new conception of property in which the owner from having exclusive right on a good becomes the object of precise duties and responsibilities toward the community, people, and the society.

The paper will be organized in four parts. In the first part will be examined the concept of property in his traditional dimension trough the study of its formulation during the codification period (1800–1900) and starting with the prototype of this concept as expressed by the Code Civil des Français in the article 544. This part will also examine the concept of property in the German Civil Code and in the Italian Civil Code.

In the second part, the paper will take in consideration the model of ownership in the Common Law.

The third part of the paper will discuss the evolution of the concept of property/ownership/possession in the different legal systems and the rise of a new model of property based on participation, accountability, and responsibility. The work will also face the debate among the scholars about this new approach underlining the different theories and proposal on this topic. Particular attention will be paid to the phenomena that emerged through the study of some indigenous societies in which the natural resources are regulated through a model of collective or communitarian management. Finally, the paper will try to contribute to the debate examining the new scenario and the discussion on the old and new concepts and regimes of property through the lens of the principles of solidarity, trust, and fraternity.

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2 Approach to the Concept and Legal Regime of Property in Classical Legal Families

2.1 *Property in Civil Law*

There are different conceptions of private property developed in the various legal systems, so much so that it is impossible to trace a single and even prevailing notion (Gambaro, 1997: 515).

In this first part of the work, we intend to start from the examination of the concepts of ownership in the Civil Law and in the Common Law, which constitute the families of systems where the same has been coined and discussed, and then try to broaden the examination to other legal systems.

Some authors have considered that, in a nutshell, two proprietary conceptual models linked to the two main legal traditions can be identified in Europe (Praduroux, 2018: 51).

In the development of the Civil Law, or rather of the legal tradition rooted mainly in Western European countries, the influence of Roman law and written rules is fundamental, starting with those developed within the *Codex Iuris Iustineaneum*. The same cannot be said of Common Law which constitutes a tradition based on a historical evolution substantially impervious to the influence of Roman law and characterized by the primacy and judges and by the idea of the law as an instrument aimed at resolving concrete disputes (Varano & Barsotti, 2016: 36).

The proprietary model developed within the Civil Law is therefore affected by the Romanistic idea of the *dominium*, based on the exclusive relationship between person and tangible asset (Praduroux, 2018: 51).

In Common Law this conception did not have the same influence in the theory of ownership (Praduroux, 2018: 51). As a consequence, in the Civil Law, the ownership concept is deeply linked to the good and to the powers that could be exercised over the good. In Common Law countries, on the other hand, the concept of property is expressed more in a relationship between individuals having as its object or in any case mediated by them (Praduroux, 2018, Lametti 2003b).

Therefore, according to legal doctrine, the difference between the conceptions translates into an opposition between those who conceive the right of private property and other real rights as an immediate power over a good and those who affirm that the right cannot concern other than relationships between human beings and therefore constructs “the position of the holder of a real right starting from the obligations of abstention imposed on any other subject” (Gambaro, 1997: 515).

In the countries of Civil Law, starting from the period of the nineteenth-century codification, the proprietary model has taken on a totalitarian and totalizing connotation. The right of property has in fact become the prototype of every absolute right, an expression of man’s power over things and nature.

The analysis of the textual data offered in the countries of Civil Law by the Codes drawn up in the nineteenth century allows us to grasp the centrality of the concept of private property. It constitutes the fulcrum of the entire French

codification, as recognition and expression, alongside the contract, of the free will of individuals in the exercise of their powers within economic and legal relations (Arnaud, 2005: 230) and, therefore, rises to prerequisite and measure of any other subjective right.

Article 544 of the French Civil Code defines the property as “le droit de jouir et disposer des choses de la manière la plus absolue, pourvu qu’on n’en fasse pas un usage prohibé par les lois ou par les règlements.” The right of property is understood as the right to enjoy and dispose of things in an absolute manner. By “enjoyment” of the good, we mean the right to derive from the thing all the utilities that it is able to provide, using it directly or giving it to others to obtain a consideration (Arnaud, 2005: 230). By “power of disposition,” we mean the right to transfer all or part of the rights in the thing to others. However, the absoluteness of the power of the dominus is tempered, in an obligatory form, by the prohibition imposed by the same Article 544 to make use of the right prohibited by law or by state regulations.

In the vision of private property arising from French legislation, there is no room for solidarity claims. The right of property as expressed by the French codification is configured as a monolith that cannot be scratched by any limit or temperament other than mere formal compliance with the law.

It is therefore not surprising that according to some authors (Rodotà, 2014: 4), it was precisely property that replaced fraternity in the triad of the French Revolution. It is said, in fact, that Napoleon, in his proclamation of 18 Brumaire, presented himself to the French as the defender of “freedom, equality, property.” The proprietary model based on an exclusive logic has therefore supplanted the principle of fraternity which is instead based on an inclusive and universal vision.

The concept of property law as elaborated by the French Civil Code has become the paradigmatic model underlying the structuring of property law in most Western codes and the foundation of the structuring of every other absolute right.

In Italy, the Albertine Statute of 1848 solemnly sanctioned Article 29 the absolute value of property, proclaiming that “All properties without exception are inviolable.” Subsequently, the Italian Civil Code of 1865 and the subsequent of 1942 resumed the same concept of private property as an absolute and practicable right *erga omnes*.

Article 832 of the Italian Civil Code in force states that “the owner has the right to enjoy and dispose of things fully and exclusively.” Particular emphasis is given by the article to the character of “exclusivity” which must be understood as the power of the dominus to prohibit any interference by third parties with regard to the choices in terms of enjoyment and disposal of the property (*Ius excludendi omnes alios*) (Torrente & Schlesinger, 2008: 305).

However, the Italian Civil Code, as well as the French correspondent, states that this right must be exercised “within the limits and in compliance with the obligations established by the legal system.”

The German Civil Code defines the right of ownership (*Eigentum*) in § 903 which states that the owner of a thing (according to § 90 “things in the sense of the law are only corporeal things”) can, as they do not oppose them the law and the rights of third parties, dispose of the thing at will and exclude others from any action

on it (§ 903 BGB, paragraph 1 reads as follows: “Der Eigentümer einer Sache kann, soweit nicht das Gesetz oder Rechte Dritter entgegenstehen, mit der Sache nach Belieben verfahren und andere von jeder Einwirkung ausschließen”).

The same article specifies, however, that right of property finds a limit in the law and in the rights of third parties.

The proprietary model developed in the nineteenth-century codifications, based on an absolutist, and excluding logic, has undergone a temperament especially with the advent of the modern constitutions and with the consecration of collective and public needs that have led to the establishment of limits and modulations to the exercise of law.

A “social function” is beginning to be recognized in the right of property, according to which the thing owned can be a tool, usable in a free form, and not only as a compulsory duty, towards others, to satisfy solidaristic criteria, for the realization of the human person and to allow respect for human dignity (Comporti, 1984: 330).

The word “social,” according to the doctrine, indicates “a particular way of being of the individual towards others” (Rescigno, 1972: 44). The social function constitutes the parameter by which the behavior of the dominus in relation to the community is evaluated (Rescigno, 1972; Florit, 2003: 21). The emergence of this function has occurred over time using different techniques within of the regulations.

In Italy, the protection of social instances in the exercise of property, which reflects the concern to guarantee an equitable distribution of wealth, by establishing limits on the proprietary power to choose the destination or use of the property and to dispose of it, is enshrined in the Article 42 of the Constitutional Charter which expressly prescribes that the law may establish limits on private property in order to allow it to be accessible to all and ensure its social function (Barcellona, 1997: 459). In this sense, the various regimes or statutes of property operate in our legal system (construction, urban planning, agriculture) which impose precise limits and constraints on the exercise of the right to property in order to protect the interests of the community (Rodotà, 1960, 1252 ss; Barcellona, 1997).

The same need for the protection of social instances is guaranteed in France through the theory of the abuse of law which has led to the affirmation that even the owner cannot be considered immune from responding to third parties if he/she causes a prejudice in the exercise of law. The theory of the abuse of law was elaborated by French jurisprudence in the *Coquerel v/Clement-Bayard* case of 1915 which led to the overcoming of the dogma of the immunity of proprietary action for the purposes of civil liability (Gambaro, 1997: 517; Pirovano, 1979: 313).

The case involved the owner of a land, Mr. Coquerel, who had installed scaffolding with spikes on his bottom for the sole purpose of hitting and damaging airships flying from the nearby factory owned by Mr. Clement-Bayard. Mr. Coquerel, who had already been sentenced in the first instance and on appeal for damages against the other party, had also filed an appeal before the French Court of Cassation. However, the French Supreme Court confirmed the sentence with the obligation to compensate the damage in favor of Ms. Clement-Bayard by virtue of the principle

that the use of right turns into abuse when it is exercised for the sole purpose of damaging others.

Through this doctrine it was deemed possible to establish limits on the exercise of the right to property by sanctioning those behaviors which, although an expression of proprietary power, are carried out with the intent of causing damage to third parties and are consequently not deserving of protection by of the legal system and which are defined as emulative acts.

The abuse of the right therefore occurs primarily in all those cases in which the exercise of the right is in contrast with the spirit and purpose for which it was attributed by the legal system (Josserand, 1939: 45). Secondly, the abuse of right occurs not only in the hypothesis of contrast with the social function underlying the subjective right itself but also in all cases in which it is used in an anomalous or abnormal way (Saleilles, 1895: 371), i.e., if the conduct of the owner is contrary to the economic and social purpose of the law (Bonanzinga, 2013).

The overcoming of the dogma of ownership immunity occurs in the German legal system through the dictates of Article 14 of the Fundamental Law of the German Republic which establishes that property must not only be a source of law but also of obligations toward third parties (Gambaro, 1997). Therefore, the German constitutional legislator brings property back into the sphere of responsibility not through reference to the social function but by providing that it too can be a source of obligations (Gambaro, 1997). The content of the concept of ownership is therefore specified through the provision of obligations and duties toward third parties (Gambaro, 1997).

2.2 *Property and Ownership in Common Law*

The concept of property developed in common law countries has not, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, been affected by the Romanistic influence but rather by Norman customary law (Praduroux, 2018: 55) and above all by the feudal legal system that the Normans established in England following the Battle of Hasting in 1066.

Under this regime, the Normans established as regards real estate property (land law) no one could define himself as the owner of an asset as all the land belonged to the sovereign (*Terra regis*) and therefore was to be considered the exclusive property of the Crown (ultimate ownership) (Moccia, 2008).

According to the doctrine, in fact, “the English legal system does not know the idea of abstract property law [...] unless it wishes to consider the eminent dominion of the Crown in this way, but rather in the meaning of the right of sovereignty over the entire land of the kingdom” (Moccia, 2008).

In Common Law systems, in addition to the term property, the term “ownership” is also often encountered. The term “ownership” is defined in the sense of generic ownership of rights on movable or immovable property in an often-non-technical meaning and very far from the Roman monolithic definition of property (Moccia,

2008). Finally, in the Common Law tradition, we find a further concept expressed by the term “possession.” While in the Romanistic systems, property and possession are often opposed and possession does not necessarily determine the existence of a property right, in the Common Law systems, property and possession are often combined, as possession generally assumes the existence of the property on a good (Moccia, 2008).

Another important aspect of the law of property in Common Law is the distinction, always a legacy of Norman influence, between real property and personal property. The object of the first form of property is the land and everything related to the land (*heritagia*), while the personal property concerns movable property (*Catalla*) (Mattei, 2001; Praduroux, 2019). The difference between the two institutes, in addition to the object, consists mainly in the type of action that can be taken to protect the law. For real property it is possible to carry out actions in *rem* aimed at obtaining the return and recovery of the asset. On the other hand, for personal property, there are only actions in *personam* aimed at obtaining compensation for damages (Mattei, 2001).

The entire system of real property is based on the doctrine of estates (from the Latin *status*) which also has its origins in the Norman feudal system (Mattei, 2001; Moccia, 2008). Following the Norman conquest of England, King William the Conqueror had the practical need to reward his followers and at the same time ensure effective military control of the island.

To this end, the Norman king attributed to the Crown the ownership of the entire occupied land but assured his Lords the use of the land. The Lords became tenants in chief; these in turn could grant the use of the land to their subordinates who in turn became tenants. This relationship between Lord and tenant was defined as free tenure (Mattei, 2001). The land remained the property of the king, but the tenants could use it freely in exchange for some consideration in favor of the Crown which could consist in the obligation, at the request of the king, to guarantee knights and soldiers for the Lord’s army (military tenure), to celebrate religious functions for the soul of the Lord (ecclesiastical tenure), or to pay a certain sum of money (*socage*) (Mattei, 2001: 329).

The land is returned to the Crown in the event of the tenant’s death or in the event of a breach of the fiduciary relationship with the sovereign or the Lord.

According to scholars, the main forms of estate were the life estate which ran out on the death of the tenant and the estate in fee simple, which attributed the right to enjoy the fund also to the tenant’s heirs and was extinguished only with the extinction of the family, and finally the estate in fee tail (Male or female) linked only to a specific male or female succession line (Crane, 1961: 282; Mattei, 2001: 329).

The fee simple has been defined as an absolute fiefdom, as it allows the *ad infinitum* enjoyment of a fund to the feudal lord (L. Moccia, 2008: 76). This figure granted, with full possession of the estate, the right to use and abuse it, excluding others from enjoyment (L. Moccia, 2008: 76). It is evident that this juridical institution is the one that most closely resembles the concept of property in force in civil law.

With the Law of Property Act of 1925, Section I, the “estates” were reduced to two “fee simple absolute in possession” and “terms of years absolute.” The first substantially corresponds to the medieval fee simple, and the second provides for the right to possess the property for a specific, limited period of time (Crane, 1961: 285; Moccia, 2008: 97).

Ultimately, the proprietary model developed in Common Law is not based on the proprietary paradigm developed in Civil Law but on a less absolutist view of property.

The institution that comes closest to the continental proprietary model is represented by the fee simple absolute which takes the form of the absolute right to enjoy and dispose of a property, excluding others from such enjoyment.

The right of the owner of the land to exclude others from the enjoyment of an asset is one of the faculties that Common Law jurists have considered as a fundamental expression of power over immovable things (Merrill, 1998; Anderson, 2006; Smith, 2012; Valguarnera, 2018;)

On this point, see the words of Blackstone (1765–1769):

There is nothing which so generally strikes the imagination, and engages the affections of mankind, as the right of property; or that sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe.[...] In the beginning of the world, we are informed by holy writ, the all-bountiful Creator gave to man “dominion over all the earth, and over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth”. This is the only true and solid foundation of man’s dominion over external things, whatever airy metaphysical notions may have been started by fanciful writers upon this subject. The earth, therefore, and all things therein, are the general property of all mankind, exclusive of other beings, from the immediate gift of the Creator.

The US Supreme Court has stated, in one of the most recent property arrests, that “the right to exclude others is one of the most essential sticks in the bundle of rights that are commonly characterized as property.”

The same orientation has been repeated several times by the jurisprudence of the US Supreme Court. In one of the most recent rulings, the Supreme Court itself reaffirmed the same principles, underlining how the right to exclude others constitutes one of the essential elements of the modern conception of property rights:

The “right to exclude others” is “one of the most essential sticks in the bundle of rights that are commonly characterized as property.” *Kaiser Aetna v. United States*, 444 U.S. 164, 176 (1979). It has long been understood as the most fundamental element of property rights. [...] And this Court has emphasized that the “hallmark of a protected property interest is the right to exclude others.” *College Sav. Bank v. Fla. Prepaid Postsecondary Educ. Expense Bd.*, 527 U.S. 666, 673 (1999). Today, the right to exclude remains “an essential element of modern property rights.” *Rawlings v. Kentucky*, 448 U.S. 98, 112 (1980) (Blackmun, J., concurring) (quotations omitted) (citing *Kaiser Aetna*, 444 U.S. at 179–180). Without it, “all other elements would be of little value.” *Dickman v. Comm’r*, 465 U.S. 330, 336 (1984). In fact, “it is difficult to conceive of any property as private if the right to exclude is rejected.” Richard A. Epstein, *Takings, Exclusivity and Speech: The*

Legacy of *PruneYard v. Robins*, 64 U. Chi. L. Rev. 21, 22 (1997). Though state law generally determines which “sticks” a property owner will have in his ‘bundle,’ see e.g., *United States v. Craft*, 535 U.S. 274 (2002), “there are limits on a state’s ability to alter traditional understandings of property through legislation.” Pet. App. E-16 (Ikuta, J., dissenting from denial of rehearing en banc). Indeed, the right to exclude is “so universally held to be a fundamental element of the property right,” that it “falls within this category of interests that the Government cannot take without compensation.” *Kaiser*, 444 U.S. at 179–80.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the US doctrine expressly states as “the right to exclude others is more than just” one of the most essential “constituents of property—it is the *sine qua non*” (Merrill, 1998: 730; Merrill, 1985).

Despite these orientations, however, the absolutist paradigm widespread in the Civil Law has never completely taken root in the Common Law, where, on the contrary, there are several scholars who affirm the need for the property to be conformed to collective and community needs (without claims of exhaustiveness, see Lametti, 2003c; Lametti, 2003b; Alexander & Peñalver, 2012; Alexander et al., 2009; by di Robilant, 2011).

3 The Debate on the Concept of Property in Civil Law and Common Law

In this paragraph we intend to examine some of the doctrinal and jurisprudential tendencies that have been developed in recent years in the field of property. Clearly, we intend to examine only some of the orientations, those that, in the opinion of the writer, are most significant on the subject, in order to give an idea of the ongoing debate.

In the context of continental Europe, the doctrine has long highlighted how the proprietary model based on powers and limits to the exercise of these powers is now outdated and that the needs of cooperation and solidarity, of health and environmental protection, require the need to dwell more on obligations and responsibilities. Only by paying more attention to these aspects could the exclusion effect characteristic of the proprietary model be overcome. In this sense, according to this orientation, the reference to the social function of property cannot be investigated solely as a mere dimension of the conformation of the content of the law: it also requires renewed attention to the responsibilities toward third parties connected with the exercise of proprietary rights (Rodotà, 1997: 453).

One of the most interesting theories developed in recent years starts from the idea that some goods that are instrumental to human development must be subtracted from both the public and private domain and must, instead, be managed jointly.

The traditional Western regime of allocation and ownership of assets is based on the binary distinction between private and public (Resta, 2018: 216).

Private goods are the object of exclusive enjoyment by individuals, while public goods are owned by the state or by its expressions (Resta, 2018: 221). Beyond these two categories, a third is identified consisting of common goods, that is, those things that do not belong to the individual but rather are the object of use by an entire community.

The debate on the commons has made a comeback especially as a response to the failure of public policies and the inability of governments to manage resources effectively. The need to truly pursue the common good and to generate trust in the community pushes toward alternative solutions to the public/private dichotomy (Harvey, 2011; Marella, 2012; P. Dardot & Laval, 2014). The need to ensure greater participation and responsibility of the community in the management of assets has led many scholars to hope that some assets are neither subject to privatization nor entrusted to public management but administered by the community that benefits from them (Marella, 2012; Dardot & Laval, 2014).

The concept of common goods and the theorization of the statute of the same entail various problems and criticalities that will be examined in the next paragraph.

The starting point in the discussion in Common Law systems is given by the doctrine of ownership as bundle of rights or bundle of sticks. In contrast to the dogmatic vision developed by Blackstone, some jurists, at the beginning of the last century, developed a new concept of property in accordance with the new economic and social needs. According to this doctrine, “property does not consist of things, but rather fundamental legal relations between people” and is composed of a bundle of rights, powers, privileges, and immunities (Hohfeld, 1913: 30; Singer, 1982: 975).

The owner has the right to exclude others from the property, the privilege of building, cultivating the land, and walking in it, and third parties have the duty to refrain from violating these rights and privileges.

On the other hand, the owner must use the goods in such a way as not to harm others. The counterpart of these proprietary prerogatives is therefore represented by their opposites: “no rights, duties, disabilities and liabilities.”

According to this doctrine, “Ownership is a complex set of legal relations in which individuals are interdependent” – “Because ownership is relational, no person can enjoy complete freedom to use, possess, enjoy, or transfer” their assets (Johnson, 2007: 251).

The corollary of this theorization is that property has a malleable and dynamic structure that can be conformed by the legislator and jurisprudence for regulatory, equity, and wealth redistribution needs (Di Robliant, 2013: 886).

However, many scholars have criticized the conception of property as a bundle of rights as still too focused on proprietary prerogatives rather than on the duties and obligations of the owner (di Robliant, 2013: 874).

4 Toward a New Concept of Property

This paragraph takes into consideration some of the concepts that have developed about property and assets that have contributed to the debate on a concept of property capable of integrating values such as sharing, cooperation, responsibility, and solidarity. In the first part, we will focus on the deepening of the debate on common goods; in the second part, we will consider some of the theories developed in the Common Law on a progressive and supportive conception of property. In the last part, the concept of collective and community property will be explored as a particular reference to the theme of indigenous property.

4.1 *Common Goods*

The main problem of theorizing common goods consists in identifying their status or establishing which goods fall into the category of commons and how they should be regulated (Marella, 2012: 11).

Part of the doctrine describes common goods as functional goods for the exercise of fundamental rights, such as the right to life and a healthy environment and the development of the human person and which must be disconnected from the dominical (individualistic) and authoritarian (welfare state) paradigm (Mattei, 2011: VII; Rodotà, 2012: 311).

Other authors define common goods as all those realities in which the satisfaction of the subject's interest occurs according to relational dynamics (knowledge, culture, health, environment) rather than in a direct relationship of enjoyment with an identified entity (Iuliani, 2012: 617).

Particularly worth mentioning is a recent definition which seeks to trace the contours of this category:

the commons indicate a system of relationships that are established between people in the management of their "good being" together. They are "common" because they create bonds of solidarity. They presuppose a collective responsibility of the communities of reference. Their shared use: cum-munus. Before being "things," common goods are a system of relationships based on sharing, cooperation, reciprocity. The commons are a way of being of society that embraces the principles of social (equity and justice) and environmental sustainability (regeneration of life) (Cacciari, 2019).

What transpires from the various definitions of common goods is precisely the relational character of the same, in which the satisfaction of interest and of the right cannot be separated from cooperation, collaboration, and ultimately reciprocity understood as recognition of the other as bearer of the same needs and rights.

A second problem is that of identifying which ones are concretely common goods. The Nobel Prize Ostrom, in her "Governing the Commons," mainly focused her attention on natural resources (forests, waterways, oceans, pastures, etc.) (Ostrom, 1990).

Civil Law jurists tend to expand the catalog of common goods to include other intangible goods such as knowledge, culture, indigenous traditions, and genetic information (Iuliani, 2012; Marella, 2017). Furthermore, according to part of the doctrine, not only public spaces such as streets, squares, public gardens, and buildings but the entire city as an instrumental place for human development par excellence would also fall into this category (Marella, 2017: 68). Finally, always according to this orientation, infrastructures and public services aimed at the common good such as schools, universities, and health services should be included in this catalog as common goods (Marella, 2017: 68).

The last, but not least aspect, is how to guarantee a juridical status to common goods. On this question, the jurists have deeply questioned themselves given the variety of assets that fall into this category and the absence of specific rules on the subject.

Some authors trace its legal characteristics by affirming how the commons must give life to a new model of environmental regulation that goes beyond the concept of ownership and sovereignty and that is based on the unavailability of the same and on cooperation in the management of these resources.

In contrast to the liberal concept of property, which was entirely constructed on the concept of availability, the commons gave a new positive value to unavailability, favorable to commons practices and cooperation and to environmental preservation. These commons outlined an alternative model to environmental regulation, apart from the model which rests on public authorities and forms of restrictions of private rights and in which environmental law is taken to have originated. This commons model presented itself as beyond property and sovereignty (Ingold, 2018: 456).

According to the prevailing orientation, the common goods give life to a social system characterized by three elements. The first is a common resource pool. The second element is a community that accesses and takes care of resources, which is the connection between the common good and the community.

The last element is the collective action of creating, restoring, managing, and governing a resource, which is defined by the literature as “communing” (Marella, 2017: 66; Turner, 2018: 41).

The fundamental issue remains to guarantee the recognition and consequent legal protection of these social systems which must necessarily pass through the countries of Civil Law by Parliament.

In Italy an attempt was made with the Rodotà Commission for the revision of the Italian Civil Code, established in 2007, in order to include common goods in the codicistic notion of goods (Rodotà, 2012). However, this proposal did not have the desired results, and the Italian Civil Code to date has not yet been amended in this sense.

On the other hand, the scenario existing in Common Law deserves a different discourse, where in various countries the jurisprudence of the courts, through the recognition of forms of collective usufruct or customary ownership developed by indigenous communities, has given legal protection to forms of community management of natural resources. This phenomenon will be discussed more in the next paragraphs.

4.2 *Progressive Property Theories*

The so-called progressive property theorists (di Robliant, 2013: 873) or collective social theorists (Alexander, 2011: 1017) have tried in the Common Law to go beyond this conception of property based on mere efficiency in the management of assets by elaborating new concepts that place at the center of the debate the social and moral responsibility of the owner.

In this work we cannot take into consideration all the scholars who have ventured into the theorization of a new vision of the property due to evident lack of space. So, it will limit itself to a few.

The first author to be mentioned is Hanoch Dagan. Dagan, in his book *Property: Values and Institutions* (Dagan, 2011), rejects not only the monistic and despotic vision of property developed by Blackstone but also the conception of property as a bundle of rights. According to the author, property must be at the service not only of efficiency but of various liberal values such as private autonomy, utility but also work, human dignity, community, and distributive justice.

Another concept that deserves mention was developed by J. W. Singer, who states that property law cannot be considered only a mechanism for the coordination, management, and control of scarce resources but constitutes a “quasi-constitutional framework for social life” (Singer, 2014: 1334–1335). According to the author, in fact, the regulation of property deeply affects social relations and must be aimed at promoting the values underlying democracy:

Property law does more than manage the complexity of human interactions to ensure low-cost coordination among people with regard to control of things. Property law establishes a baseline for social relations compatible with democracy, both as a political system and a form of social life. Property law not only simplifies and promotes human interaction, but it also entails substantive choices about the type and scope of property rights that a free and democratic society can recognize without violating its deepest values (Singer, 2014: 1303–1304).

Ultimately, according to Singer, property regulation cannot be based solely on efficient choices and cost-benefit analysis but must also consider primary needs such as the protection of the weakest, substantial equality, human dignity, and the deepest values of a democratic society.

In the debate on ownership, an important role is also played by the conceptualization of property law developed by the Canadian D. Lametti. For Lametti, property must serve not only individual values such as autonomy, dignity, and personal but also collective and community development (Lametti, 2010: 4). This orientation starts from the Aristotelian and Thomistic vision of property to elaborate a valid conception for our days too. Aristotle, in book II of *Politics*, theorizes one conception of private property which must be at the service of the virtues. According to the great Greek philosopher, property must be private in possession but common in use.

This definition finds its explanation in the Aristotelian vision of a private property that is at the service of the community and the development of each member of the same (Lametti, 2010: 35). Thomas Aquinas starts from the Aristotelian vision of

private property by developing it through the Christian thinking. The duty of charity toward other human beings and the command “love your neighbor as yourself” must push the individual to use the resources of which is in possession for the salvation of others and for the development of humanity (D’Aquino, *Summa Theological*, IIa – IIae, Q.66, art.2.). It follows that private property must be used also in the interest of others who are in a difficult situation (Lametti, 2010). Starting from the philosophical assumptions highlighted, Lametti develops an innovative conception of private property. The author states that the owner must manage the assets covered by the right such as if they were resources entrusted to him, in harmony with the environment and sharing some of them with other community members. Lametti refers to the concept of “stewardship” that entails the need for the owner to act as steward, taking care of the assets that are not entrusted to us only in their own interest but also in the interest of the community and future generations (Lametti, 2003a: 67; Barbaro & Paglione, 2013).

Such orientation considers private property as a relationship between subjects that has as its object and is mediated by resources that have social and community relevance (Lametti, 2003b). The concept of stewardship was also developed by other Common Law authors. The British scholars Lucy and Mitchell had already theorized with an article in the *Cambridge Law Journal* the need to give space to this model of control over assets (Lucy & Mitchell, 1996: 566–600). According to the authors, private property has failed as an instrument for controlling scarce resources, and only the concept of stewardship based on the management of assets in the interest of high subjects and future generations is able to effectively guarantee the control and management of natural resources and sustainable development. According to other authors, the juridical regulation of private property, concerning natural resources, must legally include this duty of custody (Karp, 1993; Worrell & Appleby, 2000).

We want to conclude this paragraph by mentioning a last study on property elaborated by two US jurists (Alexander, 2009; Alexander et al. 2009; Peñalver, 2009; Alexander & Peñalver, 2012) in which the proposal to revisit the concept of property finds its theoretical foundations once again in the Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy mentioned above.

The analysis of the two jurists starts from the observation that both Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas base their theory of property on the consideration that men are social animals and that the human condition is characterized by dependence on other human beings. No matter how much the autonomy of everyone is valued, man cannot prosper without others (Alexander & Peñalver, 2012: 87). Property has a relational nature, and due to this character, it cannot but contain obligations and duties toward others. In particular, the obligation not to cause harm to others. According to the authors, however, the need to support human development means that owners have more substantial obligations than the sole duty not to harm others. Each owner is responsible to the communities in which the essential skills for their own personal fulfillment are developed. Communities can expect owners to contribute with its own resources and sharing assets to support these social matrices. According to the authors, in some communities, the bonds of affection and

reciprocity will be sufficient for individuals to contribute to this purpose. In others, some state intervention will be necessary for these obligations to be fulfilled (Alexander & Peñalver, 2012: 94–95).

4.3 *Collective Property and Indigenous Ownership*

In this paragraph we want to examine some of the concepts and theories that have developed about property/collective ownership. The theme of collective ownership has found great prominence following the debate that has arisen among scholars mainly since the publication of Hardin's famous 1968 text, "The tragedy of common goods" (Hardin, 1968). According to the US biologist, the tragedy of the common goods consists in the dissipation of natural resources if they are left to collective management, since the individualistic logic leads to the use of the resource freely accessible to all in a selfish way up to the inevitable destruction of the same. On the other hand, according to the author's thesis, the privatization of scarce resources would prevent indiscriminate exploitation and would more effectively protect natural resources.

The same efficiency preference for private property is affirmed by other scholars such as the economist Harold Demsetz (Demsetz, 1967; Demsetz, 2002). Various voices have opposed this vision. First, the Italian jurist Paolo Grossi who in a work published in 1977 highlights the presence in Italy of effective forms of shared ownership widespread in the countryside (Grossi, 1977). This dispute includes the work of the Nobel Prize in economics Elinor Ostrom who in her 1990 text *Governing the Commons* hypothesizes the existence of a third way between the state and the market, between private and public, represented precisely by the common properties (Ostrom, 1990). According to this thesis, the shared model of ownership does not inevitably lead to the disastrous consequences highlighted by Hardin but is effectively used in different parts of the world. Therefore, the governance of commons can be resolved through such forms of common management. The author analyzes several practical cases of community management of resources and highlights the conditions for such phenomena to remain stable and effective over time. The most important requirement is the presence of a community that supports the government and management of natural resources. Within these community institutions that constitute the substratum of the governance of the commons, a democratic system of sharing and exchange of information, based on trust and cooperation, must exist. Such communities, despite being subjected to a minimum of control by external authorities, must in any case be left free to govern themselves through their own systems for resolving disputes and for the imposition of sanctions in the case of violation of the governance rules of common goods (Ostrom, 1990: 90).

The revival in communities of forms of community management of assets such as vegetable gardens and civic gardens, land trusts, and common pastures and forms of community management of parks has recently pushed many scholars to question the legal regime applicable to these forms of collective ownership. In particular,

Anna di Robilant has tried in recent years to hypothesize a regulation applicable to such phenomena. According to the author, the problem of theorizing the legal status of collective properties is fundamentally based on the compromise between different types of freedom (trade-off between different kinds of freedoms) and between values of the community and private autonomy. According to the author, the success of this community management of resources can only pass through a greater space for values such as equity, justice, solidarity, and fraternity that depend on a limitation of one's individual autonomy in reason for a shared project and the will to pursue the common good. More concretely Robilant, citing Sandel (Sandel, 2009) and in contrast to the liberal vision of Dagan-Heller (Dagan & Heller, 2001), affirms that for every common resource it is necessary to think of a specific regime that is elaborated on the basis of the type of values and virtues that that good supports or to which it is instrumental (di Robilant, 2011: 1372). The discourse on collective properties is deeply intrinsic with the debate on legal recognition of the forms of customary ownership and customary tenure developed in different indigenous cultures (Espinosa et al., 2016: 154–170; Gilbert, 2013: 115–136; Okoth Ogendo, 2002: 107–117; Slattery, 1979).

The right of indigenous peoples to their ancestral land is recognized by the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous people of the United Nations of 2007 which expressly states in Article 26 that “Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired” and that “the States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resource.”

In various indigenous cultures, the management of land and natural resources has always been entrusted to community and not to individuals, according to principles and rules of customary law (Dawson et al., 2021: 19; Okoth Ogendo, 1989: 6). Many of these forms of community governance of natural assets have been laid at the foundation of Ostrom's empirical investigation or are being studied by the scholars dealing with common goods (Dawson et al., 2021: 19; Okoth Ogendo, 2002: 107). In some legal systems, these forms of management, in the past deeply criticized or simply canceled because they were considered primitive, have been recognized legal.

In this last part of the work, we want to mention the phenomenon and examine briefly some cases of legal recognition of such models of allocation and management of common goods by indigenous peoples. *Calder vs Attorney - General of British Columbia* is the first case in which comes into acknowledged the existence of an Aboriginal title or Aboriginal ownership. The case is named after indigenous Nisga community leader Frank Calder, who initiated the case in 1973 by asking Canadian justice for a legal title to lands that had been occupied by his people in British Columbia for generations. The Canadian Supreme Court rejected this request, believing that this right had existed in the past but was to be considered extinct with the new laws that British Columbia had had to comply with when joining the Canadian Confederation. The case, however, gave impetus to the subsequent recognition in Canada of the rights of indigenous communities and their power to govern themselves.

In Africa the debate on forms of community management of natural resources is very lively. The African continent is sadly in the limelight due to phenomena of land grabbing, the appropriation of resources by multinationals and growing poverty. Local indigenous communities have always played a fundamental role in the management of natural resources. Many of these phenomena of community management of assets have been the basis of the subsistence of indigenous communities for generations and often constitute tools for effective and equitable management of assets within the group. However, several of these realities have been sacrificed to the altar of capitalism or swept away by Western colonialism. On the other hand, some scholars invoke its recognition and legal protection.

In Kenya, for example, there is one of the most significant legislative interventions that has expressly granted legal value to forms of community owned properties (Cotula, 2007; Cotula & Mathieu, 2008; Lesniewska et al., 2013; Wily, 2018a: 68; Wily, 2019: 15–17).

The Community Land Act of 2016 provides that each community can apply for recognition of its collective title on the land and legally manage the property through a state registration mechanism (Articles 10 and 11) (Wily, 2018b: 12). In particular, the legislation in question provides that communities can be granted property rights on ancestral lands and on lands traditionally occupied by communities of hunters – gatherers and shepherds (Article 12).

The Act provides for the possibility of communities to give themselves their own rules to regulate the management and administration of land owned on the basis of existing customs. The regulatory text also provides that the assembly of each community, made up of all adult members, must elect a Community Land Management Committee. The function of the Committee is to regulate the life of the community, promote cooperation between all members, and coordinate relations with the public authorities (Article 15). Finally, a registered community can adopt alternative forms of dispute resolution, including traditional tools (Article 39).

Ultimately, the text of the law grants full legal recognition to forms of collective and communal ownership on land whether they are registered or not subject to registration, allowing the communities that own the property rights to govern themselves also on the basis of their own customs and traditional rules when these are not in conflict with the law.

5 Conclusions: The Elements of a New Proprietary Vision: Community, Trust, and Fraternity

From the foregoing examination, a new vision of properties emerges that the various orientations examined declare as characterized by a greater value dimension and by specific duties and responsibilities toward others and the community.

In the different theories presented, the community constitutes the substratum and the point of reference in the management of resources. There are several definitions

of community. It is certainly not possible in this work to give an account of all the studies on the subject. There are, however, two prevailing conceptions in relation to the management of common goods, according to the doctrine. The first vision of the community is defined as “ethno-identitarian,” according to which the ideological and value homogeneity, the sharing of the same history and needs, and the interaction between the members of the group lead to an equitable and efficient management of common resources (Di Robliant, 2012: 272). On the other hand, according to a different view, which is defined as “civic republican,” common property regimes can create communities where none previously existed and produce shared ethos and values (by Robliant, 2012: 272).

In this last part of the work, we want to focus on some of the assumptions that, in the opinion of the writer, allow a community to be able to conduct a truly equitable management of common goods.

The first is the trust between the members of the community, a real glue on which the realization of a valid and lasting management of common and collective goods depends. The goal of an equitable and just distribution of scarce resources can only be achieved through cooperation and iterations with and in harmony with other members of the community (Iuliani, 2012: 617). According to this interpretation, trust is the element that determines the success of the management of common goods.

The same considerations were made by the Nobel laureate Ostrom in an essay (Ostrom, 2009) in which the author states that trust and reciprocity are the fundamental requirements for an effective resolution of common dilemmas. So Ostrom stated the following:

As long as many scholars continue to presume that all humans are self-interested maximizers in all contexts, the importance of building trust and reciprocity among users of a commons is not viewed as important. What has been viewed as important for many scholars is devising optimal external rules to impose on resource users so that they will stop overharvesting from a commons. Sufficient research now supports an assumption that humans may endogenously adopt norms of trustworthiness and reciprocity in contexts where there is a higher probability that they share a common future, their actions are known or reported to others, and cooperative actions do lead to increased payoffs. This assumption makes a big difference in how one understands the microrelationship among those relying on a commons. (Ostrom, 2009: 227–228).

The authoritative author reproaches the scholars who have dealt with these issues by asking to overturn the paradigms on the subject that see men as simply interested in satisfying their own interests, placing, on the other hand, at the center of the management models of common resources the construction of trust and reciprocity.

However, in order to build a community capable of supporting the management of resources, trust and reciprocity are not enough, but a further step is necessary consisting in the full recognition of the other member of the group as bearer of the same needs and interests.

A. Di Robilant, one of the most important supporters of a progressive idea of property, states that the new concepts of property and common ownership must be informed by the principles of solidarity and fraternity (di Robilant, 2011: 1364).

Fraternity constitutes a different concept from solidarity, and according to this orientation (Baggio, 2012: 5), it contains a relationship between two different subjects, each of whom is at the start equal to the other in dignity and value but who can express a different and independent choice with respect to the other. Fraternity, therefore, is configured as a relational paradigm that involves openness to otherness, to the recognition of the other as, at the same time, different but equal to oneself. In this way, fraternity is configured as an inclusive model that leads to the overcoming of the “vision of the other as ‘antagonist’ or ‘competitor,’ ‘obstacle’ or ‘limit’ to one’s individual freedom” (Cosseddu, 2012: 171).

According to authoritative doctrine, the third way between market and state and the rediscovery of common goods must be based on the recovery of the dimension of the interpersonal relationship by drawing on the fraternity that allows people who affirm themselves as equals to express their identity in an authentic relationship with each other (Lipari, 2018: 643–644).

So on this point, the Prof. Emeritus of Private Law Nicolò Lipari stated the following:

That is, we must break our old mental patterns, according to which the market produces wealth, and the State redistributes it through the tools of the welfare state, because, if the productive moment is characterized by the sign of injustice and ignores any social dimension, this can never be recovered downstream and the community will inexorably doomed to decline. It is therefore a question of recovering the dimension of the interpersonal relationship, expanding the territory of the common goods and offering them to everyone the opportunity to tap into it. Which, *mutatis verbis*, is the only way to recover the current value of that third word of the revolutionary triad, fraternity, which we increasingly tend to relegate to a vague moralistic dimension, contenting ourselves with ever more conditioned freedom and ever more formal equality. It is a question of discovering once and for all, in the civil dimension, that the law must rediscover the relationship, defeating indifference. Justice cannot be a simple recognition of a form but must be filled with the substance of an intrinsically egalitarian relationship, valid not only in the result, but in the suitable ways to achieve it. With this specific: that fraternity is not simply resolved in solidarity. Solidarity is an organizational form of society which tends to mitigate inequalities; fraternity, on the other hand, allows people who assert themselves by definition as equals to express their (necessarily different) identity in an authentic relationship with each other.

Ultimately, a vision of ownership must be rooted in the recognition of the other. Only the full awareness of others, their needs, and rights can lead to a truly fair and sustainable asset management regime. The proprietary models highlighted, therefore, function only in those communities or groups whose foundation is constituted by trust, reciprocity, and fraternity (Proudhon, 1998: 33; Moccia, 2008: 21; Giglioni, 2018: 3; Pizzolato, 2016: 1; Iaione, 2015: 51–55).

We want to conclude this work with some final considerations that involve the very nature and function of law. Law seems to have taken a “dark” path in recent years, reducing itself to mere procedural truth and mere precept (Lipari, 2019: 1283–1304).

Law appears today more and more often as a set of formal rules completely orphaned of a substratum of values, so much so that some scholars speak of a “death of values” in our legal systems (Salvi, 2018: 865; Minda, 1995: 224 ss.). Even principles, enunciated and consecrated by the Constitutional Charters, such as human dignity, rights, solidarity, and equality seem to take on a static, formal dimension, devoid of planning (Castronovo, 2015). The traditional legal concept of property, the expression of an individualistic and egocentric vision of the individual, is a significant example of this drift. Therefore, a serious rethinking of law in general and of private law in particular is necessary which places values at the center and which leads to the discovery of its relational dimension understood as care and attention to the other which remedies the legal formalism and the indifference. In this direction, a fundamental role can be played by the new generations of jurists who have the task and duty to restore law to its true nature, which cannot ignore relationality and interpersonal relationships and the awareness that every rule presupposes a value.

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Chapter 6

Citizens' Participation in Deliberation Process and Multidimensional Accountability: A Possible Virtuous Relationship



Giampietro Parolin

1 Introduction

Deliberation and public accountability, despite a common ground they insist, are two streams of research and practice that rarely connect to each other. From the perspective of citizen participation, we could ask two basic questions: does deliberation make sense without accountability? Is accountability useful and meaningful without deliberation (i.e., people using information to discuss and make decisions)?

As Sen (2003) underlines, at the heart of democracy, there is discussion among citizens and public reasoning. However, discussion is fruitful only if it is based on reliable information about public choices. Poor information lead to poor discussion and decision-making. Moreover, poor information offers space for citizens' manipulation by politicians. Kotler (2016) considers reduced information and participation and low citizens' involvement as the main weakness of actual democracies.

So deliberation needs information for people participating (Arnstein, 1969). On the other hand, accountability in many cases offers information without asking if it is useful and meaningful for somebody. Without a connection to deliberation, accountability is far from offering a contribution to citizen's participation.

This chapter explores how deliberation and public accountability could be connected in the perspective of enhancing citizens' participation. Information is seen as the key concept that can bridge deliberation and public accountability, making the latter meaningful (Bovens et al., 2014).

In this contribution, we argue that a virtuous relationship can be established between democratic participation – in the form of deliberation – and public accountability, seen as a verifiable source of information. This relationship can mutually

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increase the quality of both components, leading to better political agenda setting, decision-making, and evaluation of outcomes for the citizens.

The effects of connection are from one side that deliberation can increase the quality of accountability defining issues under discussion, people involved, and information needed.

From the other side, accountability can furnish reliable and verifiable information in the right level of detail requested by decision-makers, offering an objective anchorage to reasons, creating an impartiality ground for participants.

Our approach is based mainly on literary review and conceptual network on deliberation and public accountability, using information as a bridging concept.

In the first part, we explore the foundations of deliberation in political philosophy, political sciences, and economics. In reviewing we try to highlight potential impacts and connections with accountability.

The interdisciplinary analysis makes possible to compare normative approach of deliberation proposed by political philosophy with a behavioral one used by political sciences and economics (Landa & Meirowitz, 2009).

From an economic point of view, a particular focus is dedicated to the role of information and how heterogeneous preferences predict different behaviors in sharing information and preference change. We also examine how the quality of information impact on discussion (Doraszelski et al., 2003). In fact economics distinguish a cheap talk (Farrell & Rabin, 1996), an informal conversation where information is not verifiable, from discussion with verifiable information. This distinction, we argue, is relevant when we try to connect deliberation to accountability.

In the second part, we analyze the concepts of accountability in connection with deliberation. In particular we explore the perspective of accountability as a deliberative process (Bovens et al., 2014). Following this line of reasoning, we try to understand how, and at which conditions, accountability can encourage and increase citizens' participation. In particular we examine the relationship between the level of participation and accountability needs (Damgaard and Lewis in Bovens et al., 2014).

Finally we discuss about accountability design. In order to make it effective, we propose a multidimensional approach, highlighting seven dimensions of accountability. Having a baseline framework might help designers to capture the complexity of phenomena, shedding light to many dimensions that impact citizens' life and choosing relevant and meaningful information for their deliberations.

The contribution is divided in the following sections: Sect. 1 describes literature review about the process of deliberation and its foundation in political philosophy. Sect. 2 offers a glance on the challenges of deliberation in cultural pluralism. Sect. 3 presents a conceptual network derived from political science, involving decision-making models, types of deliberation, and preferences analysis. Sect. 4 contains a literary review of deliberation from an economic point of view, exploring the role of information in discussion and preference modification. Sect. 5 is about connecting public accountability and deliberation through a literature review on accountability as a deliberative process. Sect. 6 proposes a multidimensional accountability approach to integrate fragmented information. Sect. 7 is about discussion and conclusion.

2 The Process of Deliberation: Literature Review

According to Elster (1998) deliberation "(...) includes decision making by means of arguments offered by and to participants who are committed to values of rationality and impartiality." Przeworsky (in Elster, 1998) defines deliberation as an outcome: "the endogenous change of preferences resulting from communication."

Elster (1998) distinguishes arguing, bargaining, and voting to clarify the distinction among contracting, deliberation, and the aggregative mechanism of voting.

Deliberation deals with sharing arguments and reasons to support a certain choice, defining alternative options. It is a process that consent to participants to modify their preferences without incentives except for reaching a decision based on values of rationality and impartiality.

The question is if deliberation can be impartial in reality or if it is just an ideal condition: this is crucial for the economic analysis of public choices using game theory approach (Landa & Meirowitz, 2009) compared with normative approach of deliberation proposed by political philosophy.

Manin (quoted by Fearon, in Elster, 1998) considers deliberation as a process of social exchange of reasons and arguments by participants who need to be legitimate to support a certain choice. This idea of deliberation furnishes reasons both to winners and losers in a following process of voting.

But deliberation is not only a particular sort of discussion but also an "(...) interior process by which an individual weighs reasons for and against courses of action" (Fearon, in Elster, 1998). If this individual deliberation is considered sufficient for some people, a public discussion might be useless. A confirmation comes from economic models on deliberation: they show that some individuals are very resistant to discussion keeping stable their prior preferences (Doraszelski et al., 2003).

On the other side, Bohman (1996) defines a public deliberation as a cooperative activity: "a dialogical process of exchanging reasons for the purpose of resolving problematic situations that cannot be settled without interpersonal coordination and cooperation."

Deliberation refers to a broad spectrum of phenomena, and there is not a unique definition (Landa & Meirowitz, 2009). An investigation on its foundations can shed light on key features.

Deliberation is based upon Kantian-inspired theoretical foundations such as reasons, inclusion, and justice or legitimacy (Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008). John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas are certainly the modern main contributors to foundations of deliberation. Both of them argue that deliberation can help to reach fair and legitimate aims and the process is led, not just inside the subjects, but through the interaction among subjects. Rawls underlines deliberation as a form of rationality instead, whereas Habermas sees it as a form of social process. From this point of view, they offer a complementary view.

In the framework of Rawls' (1971) theory of justice, deliberation is part of project that goes beyond collective choices: the hearth of his work is a search of

principles of justice that a rational subject would choose in ideal conditions to design form and functioning of institutions, rights and duties, distribution of costs, and benefits of social cooperation.

Trying to go beyond utilitarian approach, Rawls puts subjects in the condition of considering a general desire for justice that could combine and somehow limit other objectives. It is clear to author that society, "(...) considered as cooperative venture for mutual advantage (...) is typically marked by a conflict as well as an identity of interests" (Rawls, 1971; 73–74). In these conditions, it is necessary to establish the terms of association that Rawls defines as "original agreement." In this agreement there are "(...) principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association" (Rawls, 1971; 10–11).

Rawls asks which conceptions of justice subjects would choose if they did not know their beliefs and interest beyond their own actual condition. To put decision-makers in a condition of making fair choices – to be in a deliberative rationality – Rawls uses the expedient of "veil of ignorance": this way subjects are detached from prior and present experiences, conditioning their decision-making, and place in a "original position" where they can freely choose a conception of justice. Behind the "veil of ignorance," parties "(...) do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations" (Rawls, 1971; 118).

In this framework Rawls builds a deliberative rationality: "In everyday life the exchange of opinion with others checks our partiality and widens our perspective; we are made to see things from their standpoint and the limits of our vision are brought home to us" (Rawls, 1971; 315). Discussion is the key process to combine information and enlarge arguments in order to be able to choose "(...) with full awareness of the relevant facts and after a careful consideration of the consequences" (Rawls, 1971; 359).

From the perspective of Rawls' deliberation, accountability could be a neutral/common informational ground to furnish an objective representation of reality for participants.

According to Habermas deliberation is an argumentative practice inclusive both thematically and socially, an "endless conversation" using a rational discourse among all those affected and equal consideration of all interests at play (Habermas, 2001; 29–33).

Central to Habermas vision of deliberation is the distinction between knowledge and rationality, even though there is an interconnection between the two terms. Knowledge is defined as opinions represented in the form of enunciations, having a propositional structure. Instead rationality is about how subjects, capable of language and action, use knowledge.

Knowledge and rationality are also connected to accountability. You can offer accountability as a form of knowledge, but the use will depend upon the rationality of subjects.

Argumentation is the core process in Habermas' view of deliberation. Participant discuss and share validity claims supporting their position or criticizing others' with

the “forceless force of better argument.” The final aim of Habermas communicative action is to reach an agreement.

Pragmatic presuppositions must be met for a practice to count as deliberation: openness and full inclusion of affected parties in a span of time longer enough to let positions being displayed.

Offering participant relevant information for deliberation, through accountability mechanisms, is certainly a form of inclusion.

This process of enlarging argumentation should take into account all the relevant information and possible objections.

In order to deepen the analysis, Habermas, on Aristotelian basis, defines the aspects of argumentation (Table 6.1).

The aspects of argumentation indicate as many fundamental topics of discussion process, where rhetoric moves on a ground of persuasion and dialectic compares defined arguments, while logic gives space to further insights and the possibility of integrating information to produce well-founded arguments. It is obviously a path that shifts the strength of arguments from a highly subjective connotation to an inter-subjective connotation, based on evidence and tending to maximum objectivity.

We can consider persuasion as a form of argumentation without accountability, while dialectic an argumentation with partial accountability and logic an argumentation with shared accountability.

This conceptual framework, in order to understand how the forms of rationality and the forms of argumentation fit into the multiform human action Habermas

Table 6.1 Aspects of argumentation

| Aspect | Definition | Aristotelian discipline of reference | Emerging structures | Objective |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Process | Continuation – set in a reflexive way – with other means of action oriented toward understanding | Rhetoric | Ideal linguistic situation, egalitarian | Convince a universal audience by achieving general consensus |
| Procedure | Form of interaction regulated in a specific way | Dialectic | Ritualized competition for better arguments | Settle a dispute on validity claims with a rationally motivated agreement |
| Produce arguments | Aims to produce plausible, convincing arguments on the basis of their inherent qualities with which validity claims can be met or rejected | Logic | Determination and mutual construction of single topics and their relationships | Establish or satisfy a validity claim with arguments |

Re-elaborated from Habermas (1984; 82–84)

(1984), assuming the distinction between higher and lower functions of language (Popper), elaborates five models of action.

The models of action as conceived by Habermas (1984) consider the subject's world of reference as a set of motivations and behaviors. He then associates each world with a specific dimension of underlying rationality (Table 6.2).

As can be seen from Table 6.2, the models have highly diversified levels of complexity. This implies that even the forms of discussion that we can expect will incorporate this variety, indeed in some way they postpone and hint at the underlying action patterns. This is perhaps one of the typical challenges and dilemmas facing any decision-oriented discussion: Who is standing in front of me? What are the purposes of him? Why does he present these arguments and in this way?

Habermas (1984) offers an interpretative key to be able to "read" the action but also to orient it intentionally in the deliberative processes. What is challenging is certainly the dimension of complexity that can be generated in the multiformity of worlds, actors, rationality, and arguments: this is precisely the place where subjects discuss and can find an agreement (but also a lack of agreement or worse a conflict) in very different forms.

Language is the common element of all action models, and Habermas (1984) shows how it assumes very different connotations in the different action models.

Thus in teleological action, the subject is in a "cognitive-volitional" complex useful for forming opinions on existing states of fact, and for communicating desired intentions and actions (Habermas, 1984; 87). In this action language is functional in shaping the opinion of other subjects for their own interest.

In the strategic model, language itself becomes part of the deliberation strategy. We will see in another part of this contribution how game theory deepen the role of language, in the discussion and in the consequent vote.

Table 6.2 Action models

| Action model | Reference world | Type of actor | Theories | Key concept |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|--|--|
| Teleological action | Objective | Single | Philosophical theory of action | Purpose-oriented decision among action alternatives |
| Strategic action | Objective | Plural | Decision theory Strategic game theory Sociology Social psychology | Purpose-oriented decision among action alternatives which considers the expectation of decisions of at least one other subject |
| Action regulated by rules | Social | Plural | Role theory | Compliance with the rules |
| Dramaturgical action | Subjective | Actor-audience | Sociology | Self-representation |
| Communicative action | Objective Social Subjective | Plural | Language | Interpretation |

Elaborated from Habermas (1984; 85–96)

Action regulated by norms is enriched by the “motivational complex” and by the possible introjection of values (Habermas, 1984; 89), connoting language as a vehicle of consensus and cultural values.

The dramaturgical action can take on features both of actor-audience interaction and of a strategic type, in which the actor treats viewers as a counterpart, using language in a way that is functional to the staging of subjects.

In communicative action, language acts as an instrument of a plural reflection on different worlds to build a common ground in which an agreement can be reached “(...) whereby speakers and hearer, out of the context of their pre-interpreted life-world, refer simultaneously to things in the objective, social and subjective world in order to negotiate common definition of the situation” (Habermas, 1984; 89). In this model reason is understood intersubjectively, not belonging to the subject but emerging in linguistic communication between subjects (Jeziarska, 2019).

For every model of action, we have different reference worlds. Only some are objective. And this highlights how accountability, an objective representation of reality, must be integrated with a social and subjective representation of reality. Therefore even an excellent accountability is not enough for a deliberation from the perspective of Habermas.

The reference hypothesis is the activation, by all participants, of the potential of rationality intrinsic to the objective, social, and subjective worlds to find a cooperative way of understanding each other. The chance of each participant is to accept an enrichment of his own point of view, in order to allow a minimum of convergence on the definitions of the problems on which the joint decision insists.

3 Deliberation and the Challenge of Cultural Pluralism

Inevitably, reflecting on deliberation leads to a confrontation with all the human components, from the cultural to the psychological.

Latin cultures, with the high value attributed to strong opinions on any topic, seem to contain a natural predisposition to authoritarian forms, with the risk of not being inclined to a healthy democratic discussion (Hirschmann quoted by Gambetta in Elster, 1998). Typical statements of these cultures are spanish “claro” (clear) position and italian “uomo forte” (strongman). Cultures in which an analytical knowledge prevails seem to have an advantage in reaching the maximum effectiveness of deliberation compared to those in which holistic knowledge prevails.

However it is complex to integrate subjects of different cultural group because the phenomena of mutual displacement and consequent isolation may arise (Gambetta in Elster, 1998). These aspects have to be taken into account when we consider expected behavior and the structure of incentives in deliberation. Cultural roots modify the sense of justice in deliberation and support the perception of a different value to the discussion before a collective decision (Fearon in Elster, 1998).

On the topic of deliberation in a multicultural context, Bohman (1996) tackles unavoidable issues. Starting from Rousseau’s position, which considers a social

pact feasible on condition that there is a minimum of cultural homogeneity, Bohman (1996; 71–72) asks how it is possible to establish a social pact in nation states that are characterized by growing inequalities, ethnic diversity, and cultural pluralism. His basic research question is if standards of rationality are themselves subjected to different and conflicting interpretations, how can people decide on the basis of irreconcilable values?

In case of very strong moral conflicts the attempts of Rawls (1971) to create a common space through the concepts and practices of “overlapping consensus” and to avoid controversial topics (method of avoidance), risk being totally ineffective. In fact, following Rawls’ policy (Rawls, 1971), there is a real possibility that the common space turns out to be empty, due to the lack of an even minimal consent on an agreement that is reasonable for everyone.

The plurality of public reasons requires to review both Rawls (1971) and Habermas’ (1984) positions. Rawls (1971) tends to avoid conflicts; Habermas (1984) thinks they can be reconciled through impartial dialogue. But accepting the plurality of public reasons consequently means leaving impartiality, in order to give space to partial positions, especially in the moral field. This, according to Bohman (1996; 92), should lead to building an expanded deliberative space that can contain cultural diversity, so that no culturally characterized group can feel overwhelmed by the majority.

Cultural pluralism has relevant impact on accountability: having different values might ask to account referring to those values. In this sense accountability might help to increase mutual understanding as long as it is able to highlight the policy impact on what really matters to different groups. We will deepen this aspect discussing accountability design.

4 Deliberation in Political Science: Conceptual Network

Political science, with respect to political philosophy, uses empirical methodologies to investigate the allocation and dynamics of power and powers within institutions, taking the positivist approach typical of social sciences and using analytical tools.

On deliberation, political science offers interesting suggestions related to the following:

- Decision-making models
- Types of deliberation
- Preferences of analysis

Decision-making models are relevant for problem setting before any decision. They highlight competences of the decision maker, different problem representation, and aims. Bobbio (1996) proposes decision-making models applicable in different contexts, summarized in Table 6.3, with a view to possible additions.

The rational-comprehensive model has led to the development of data-driven decision-making that is a way to make more objective consensus-sensitive

Table 6.3 Decision-making models

| Decision-making models | Competences of the decision maker | Typology of problem representation | Aims | Potential integration to other models |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Rational comprehensive | Problem expert | Unique | Unique and fixed | Yes |
| Cognitive | Process expert | Multiple | Tendentially unique in part variable | Yes in two phases |
| Incremental | Process expert | Multiple | Multiple and variable | Yes in more phases |
| “Garbage can” | Variable experience | None | None intentional | ? |

Elaborated from Bobbio (1996)

decision-making, as we have experienced during pandemic. And in fact in many countries, there are daily reports based on figures.

Perhaps interpretative skills, essential to give quantitative and qualitative meaning to numbers and data, are not sufficiently considered. The issue of accessibility and usability of data and information has a relevant impact on accountability, to make it meaningful, for those who participate in the decision-making process, as a common starting point in terms of knowledge.

The cognitive model recognizes bounded rationality (Simon, 1949) and focuses on the representation of problems. It offers the opportunity to consider each actor/decision-maker as bearer of his own rationality and a specific logic of action. In this case we can consider how accountability is able to help an integrative representation of problems respecting different rationalities.

In the incremental model, the network of interactions that generates the decision-making process plays a key role: in fact, the decision is the result of a nonlinear sequence of negotiations and compromises that make individual preferences compatible, including and building alliances, giving the process an incremental configuration. In this case accountability seems to be on the background of political agreements.

The garbage can model changes paradigm and refers to a random rationality (Cohen et al., 1972). In this model, decisions are the result of an apparently anarchic process, in which the elements – choice opportunities, participants, problems, and solutions – interact with each other in a casual way and where a solution (the basket) can fortuitously attract different types of problems, choice opportunities, and participants (waste).

The assumption of ambiguity of the garbage can model lends itself very well to reading crisis situations. In times of crisis, decision-makers must give up the certainties of ideas and positions, as well as of information, to devise processes of adaptation to reality, discovering threats and opportunities. New demands for accountability might arise, as we have seen during the financial crisis of 2008 and actual pandemic.

Every model highlights a particular perspective, and single decision-makers apply one or integrate different models according to his own rationality. In the experience of political participation, every model must be taken into account because it can express the variety of single positions and make them meaningful.

Regarding types of deliberation, Bobbio (2010) shows how much deliberation is a multi-form phenomenon. He wonders why a process such as deliberation, which aims, through a dialogic exchange of arguments, to bring people's points of view closer, in practice, results in outcomes that conflict with the initial goal.

In particular, starting from the review of the literature on the subject, Bobbio shows that the discussion can generate conformity, polarization of positions, and personal contrast. The scholar questions if these failures and risks are the symptom of deliberation failure per se or if they occur in certain deliberative contexts.

Starting from this research question, Bobbio hypothesizes that the development of deliberation depends on different entry positions of participants, in particular on the nature of judgments they express at the beginning of the deliberative process. The starting position depends on preferences about outcomes, beliefs about the state of the world – which influences preferences about strategies – and cause-and-effect relationships.

Several empirical studies cited by Bobbio (2010) show that the variety of types of participants affects the type of initial position they take in deliberation. Initial position can vary along three dimensions:

- Level of definition of positions
- Level of reflection of participants
- Level of freedom of positions

The interaction between above first two dimensions, which are independent of each other – the level of definition of the positions and the level of reflection of the participants – defines four types of positions, as can be seen from Table 6.4.

In the theoretical view of deliberation, it is assumed that participants are free to express their points of view and possibly modify them during the discussion. This is not always true in practice, because participants may have to respond for their positions to other subjects, if they are a more or less explicit expression of these, for example, an association or a political party (Bobbio, 2010; 4).

Therefore, introducing a dimension relating to the level of freedom of positions is necessary to fully read the dynamics and interactions in deliberation. It is evident, in particular in the “certainty of judgment” position, that this can express an external constraint.

Table 6.4 Types of position in deliberation

| | | Position | |
|------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Well defined | Vague |
| Reflection | Reflexive | Certainty of judgment | Suspension of judgment |
| | Nonreflexive | Prejudice | Uncertainty of judgment |

Elaborated by Bobbio (2010; 4)

The good news is that in any type of deliberation, the presence of some participant who expresses a “suspension of judgment,” is sufficient in itself to improve the quality of deliberation (Bobbio, 2010; 16). On the other side, Bobbio warns about the position of power of some subjects with regard to those who do not have the same position. Institutional design for a good deliberation should consider this asymmetry.

One of the central topics in the discussion and deliberation processes is linked to the preferences of decision-makers. In fact, a discussion makes sense and supports a deliberative process if there is the possibility, for individual participants, to change their preferences.

It is important to distinguish between primitive preferences, defined in relation to the outcomes of the choice, and induced preferences, linked instead to actions (Curini, 2004). The discussion process, in the case of different types of preferences, assumes equally different characteristics.

In the case of primitive preferences, public discussion can mitigate self-interest using what Elster (1998) calls the “civilizing force of hypocrisy”: due to Habermasian norms, in deliberation subjects may change their preferences because they argue in terms of public interest. This is a very ideal position.

More realistic is the discussion about induced preferences, very common in public debate, focused on the consequences of choosing some actions rather than others. In this case a relevant role is played by information. If participants are open to change their preferences with new information, the credibility of sources becomes relevant.

Here comes a relevant role for accountability that can have an impact depending on the level of openness of participants in decision-making. It seems that those who are in a vague position can benefit more. Those who have prejudice or certainty of judgment might simply reject information disconfirming their positions. We'll see further in this contribution how new information might impact on subjects with different preferences.

Engaging in information acquisition, strategic use of information, and the interactions with vote systems are common grounds between political science and economics. They both use empirical research using a game theoretical approach.

5 Deliberation in Economics

The interest of economics on deliberation is recent and mainly concentrated on preference modification – considering the value and amount of information used – and preference aggregation mechanism.

For economics deliberation is made up of four elements:

- All the individuals considered and involved
- Set of relevant options
- Individual preferences on outcomes with respect to the different options
- Preference aggregation mechanism

Four streams of economic research deal with deliberation: social choice, public choice, managerial economics, and behavioral economics.

For the aim of this contribution, we focus on public choice and managerial economics. These streams of research offers models, based on game theory, that deal with preference modification through information acquisition and sharing.

From public choice we also learn that participation through deliberation is a costly process: in fact, it requires the investment of time and resources, commitment, and effort in communication and linguistic elaboration useful for comprehension.

Most of the economic literature reviewed to explore the topic of discussion value is based on game theory. In this discipline, the game constitutes a stylized model describing situations of strategic interaction, whose result obtained by each player depends on his own strategic choice and on the choices of the other players.

The key elements of a game are first of all the players, who must be at least two, then the set of possible strategies that can be used by each player, the rules of the game (simultaneous, sequential, one-shot or repeated), the payoff for each corresponding player, the combination of the choices made by all players, and finally the information available to the players at the time of the choice (complete or incomplete). The information can cover various elements including the preferences and strategies of other players.

The deliberation process, according to the general approach of game theory, consists of a set of restrictions on the environment in which participants interact: these are normative institutional arrangements in which participants have the opportunity to discuss before voting, not restrictions on behavior.

The game theory approach generally follows a three-stage process.

In the first stage, a game is defined so that three elements are captured:

- The relevant choices available to players, which in the specific case of deliberation are a set of messages that can be exchanged and a set of choices after discussion
- The knowledge of the players with respect to the choices, with respect to each and with respect to the deliberative interaction
- The perceived attractiveness about the consequences of the choices, having the possibility for the players to have all the relevant information

The second stage specifies a solution concept that includes a set of assumptions about participants' expected behavior.

Given the two previous stages, the third stage, using precise techniques of analysis, goes to generate of the predictions on the type of behavior that can be manifested given the choices previewed in the model, verifying the possibility or less than to catch up the equilibrium defined in the concept of solution.

The fundamental question that game theory seeks to answer is how strategies relate to private information and participant preferences (Landa & Meirowitz, 2009, 429–430).

In more specific terms, game theory asks, if there is uncertainty on the part of other players about the information held by some participant, how reasonable it is

to expect that the information will be shared openly and fully by each participant and that this same information will be considered credible by other members.

From a game theoretical approach, there are many models that predict outcomes about sharing information during deliberation, in the forms of conversation, discussion, and debate. In this section we sum up some predictions relevant for the connection between deliberation and accountability.

The most common form of sharing information is the informal conversation, whose corresponding model of analysis in game theory is the cheap talk.

In information exchange situations, cheap talk can lead to full sharing of private information if there is no incentive to lie. If the incentive to lie is too strong, cheap talk becomes completely insignificant, whereas if the incentive is limited, cheap talk can be significant in equilibrium (Farrell & Rabin, 1996). Alignment of preferences and values makes cheap talk effective (Austen-Smith & Feddersen, 2009).

In the case of debate and voting with an exogenous agenda (not determined by the participants in the decision), debate with unverifiable information has the greatest effect with the condition of a convergence of interests on the induced preferences: in this case, in fact, the incentive to share the information is not counterbalanced by strategic considerations on the diversity of preferences with respect to the ideal points, nor on the consequences of the choice.

In debate and voting with an endogenous agenda (determined by the participants in the decision), the positive effect of debate is maximized with close interests because it also makes information available for agenda setting (Austen-Smith, 1990).

The effect of information sharing, then, can be different according to the different preferences of the participants in the discussion:

- The subjects who are strongly interested in a certain position (the extremists) care neither about their own information nor about the information they can acquire from the debate and always vote for the same option.
- The totally disinterested subjects who, because of their disinterest, consider the choice to be made only on the basis of their own opinion.
- The only subjects who have something to gain from the debate are those who have an interest but are also open to verifying that their position is substantiated by facts and believe that theirs must be an informed vote that best represents the state of the world.

This last position is the one that most closely resembles the deliberative ideals proposed by political philosophers, and in particular by Habermas, as seen above.

With the same quality of information between senders and receivers, communication has the effect of a double check between the information possessed and the message received. Increased information quality greatly reduces extremism and increases truthful disclosure by participants (Doraszelski et al., 2003).

This point is rather relevant for accountability. Offering a common ground in discussion, it can enhance communication among participants in deliberation and, though its quality, reduce extremism.

An interesting prediction about persuasion is furnished by the model of Caillaud e Tirole (Caillaud & Tirole, 2007). They analyze the role of “key members,” calling

them the “dragging members,” as “information pivots” who have enough credibility in the group to be able to influence the vote of other members, particularly a qualified majority. “Too much support is not useful support,” they conclude: in other words, overconfident members derive no utility from being able to have costly additional information. However, moderate members can change their initial position if there is “good news,” i.e., if other members support a position after acquiring new information: this is the mechanism of “cascading persuasion.”

After this brief and stringent review of the theoretical models, it is natural to ask what are the results of empirical verification, carried out through experiments.

An extensive review of experiments testing decisions made under “prisoner’s dilemma” conditions is carried out by Sally (1995), who aims to assess the role of messages or conversations in influencing people’s decisions. The analysis moves between the theoretical framework, which draws a rational selfish agent for whom conversation with others should be without effect (cheap talk), and the experimental results, which show instead that discussion has a strongly positive effect on the willingness to cooperate by subjects: discussion before each round increases cooperation by 40%, compared to the same game without discussion.

Westwood (2014) shows that persuasive, explanation-rich messages in a pairwise debate shift opinions regardless of differences in the knowledge of individual instances. He therefore shows that persuasion can have a greater effect than the acquisition of new information.

McCubbins and Rodriguez (2006) ask whether and under what conditions individuals deliberate and what social welfare outcomes result. Building on the cognitive science literature, the two authors consider the fact that talking, listening, and learning are costly alternative behaviors to other activities that can be performed.

Put in economic terms, the communicative process that occurs in deliberation can be realized given the incentive structure and the costs of deliberating and is subject to a condition of scarcity, normally overlooked by deliberation theorists. Of course, in this structure of incentives, the role of institutions that create the conditions for people to discuss and decide should be considered.

With the premises just mentioned, McCubbins and Rodriguez (2006) designed an experiment to test the ideal theoretical conditions predicted by deliberation theorists – such as common interest, equality, information acquisition, change of opinion, etc. – by setting up corresponding experimental conditions.

The experiment confirmed the hypotheses initially formulated by the researchers: social well-being increases considerably between the basic treatment (without communication) and the one with no expensive communication, so much so that each participant earns on average almost four times more, while the same social well-being tends to decrease as sending or receiving information becomes expensive.

The writer was also recently able to carry out a deliberative experiment with a sample of undergraduate students from two universities (Cagliari and Sophia). These students were asked to deliberate in small groups on divisive issues (civil unions, *ius soli*, GMOs). Beginning with the framework proposed by Schkade et al.

(2007), we tested how much certain factors weigh on the deliberative process in terms of both consensus and the shift in participants' opinions:

- The availability of information of varying quality
- The opportunity for discussion
- Cultural and ethical diversity

Following what is predicted by the theoretical models of economic science, the agreement should take place after the preferences are aligned as a result of the discussion. On the same line of reasoning, the absence of discussion with a pure vote should leave preferences unchanged.

The results of the experiment belie these predictions: on the one hand, the discussion itself turns out to be capable of activating cooperation, and thus generating agreement, without a significant shift in opinions (preferences); on the other hand, the simple observation of voting in one's deliberative group generates a shift in opinions a posteriori.

It is clear that game theoretical models capture only some dimensions of deliberation. Deliberation is a rich and complex phenomenon where competition and cooperation coexist. From experiments we have evidence of Habermasian deliberative rationality that consent to subjects "operate together and find an agreement." And information has a key role in this process.

6 Public Accountability and Deliberative Process

Whatever defined, information has very different impact on subjects. From political philosophy and political science, we have learnt that it depends on forms and aspects of argumentation, action models, decision-making models, and positions in deliberation. From economics we have seen that subjects have heterogeneous preferences, and, in some conditions, they do not ever use additional information making accountability useless.

But the good news is that single participants can make a difference in the public discussion, even though they are a minority. The presence of some participant who expresses a "suspension of judgment" is sufficient in itself to improve the quality of deliberation (Bobbio, 2010; 16) and some "key members," as "information pivots" can influence the vote of other members as seen in the model of Caillaud e Tirole (2007).

Having seen the richness and complexity of deliberation, a question arises on how accountability can contribute to enhance deliberation, in order to put decision-makers, i.e., citizens, at the best conditions.

Accountability has different meanings because every discipline has its own definition of accountability, and not all definitions are fully compatible (Bovens et al., 2014). From an accounting point of view, accountability is actually conceived as a standardized form of verifiable information. Is it sufficient to match with

deliberation needs? Probably information furnished by bookkeeping is just a part of accountability because if the counterpart is not able to use it – because of lack access or technical language constraints – it becomes useless.

From a deliberative point of view, we should look to relational and communicative core of accountability. Social and psychological literature on accountability shows the role played by expectations, where everyone is implicitly or explicitly involved in social life. From this point of view, accountability is about the “exchange of reasons for conduct” aiming to “verbally bridge the gap between action and expectation” (Messer, 2009). “Exchange of reason” echoes Habermasian foundation of deliberation and encourages a virtuous connection between accountability and deliberation. This connection is vital as long as it is recognized that accountability is central to democracy.

Accountability is a precondition for democracy to work. It provides to citizens and representatives the necessary information for the evaluation of government’s action.

So deliberatively speaking we should also consider what types of accountability foster precision in judgment and enhance critical reflection, “how timing, reputation and political leanings affect accountability processes and their outcomes” (Bovens et al., 2014).

At the same time, we must be aware of the potential interest divergence between power holders and citizens affected. That’s why it is essential to identify needs and demands related to accountability. The latter point open the question on how institutional arrangements enable citizens affected by decisions to require an account (Warren in Bovens et al., 2014).

This is a crucial point because most of modern democracies let the electoral moments be the main mechanism of evaluation of government’s action. It is a mechanism of choice without reasons for changing the political orientation. It is the mechanism of exit, like a purchasing process. Instead, a voice mechanism furnishes the reason for performance concerns (Hirschman, 1970). In a voice mechanism, accountability can play a vital role between elections, enriching political agenda of all competitors.

Deliberative arenas show how citizens are able to gather and manage information for the topics to be discussed. From the participatory budget in Porto Alegre in 1989, passing through the proposal of a Deliberation Day (Ackerman e Fishkin 2004), many deliberative practices have been implemented around the world.

Deliberative practices have very different levels of citizen participation, depending on how much power they have in decision-making processes. Frameworking the level of participation helps to focus on accountability needs and issues.

According to Damgaard and Lewis (in Bovens et al., 2014), using Arnstein’s ladder of participation, there are five levels of citizen participation in accountability (Table 6.5).

Accountability practices, from social and environmental reporting to customer satisfaction survey, passing through participatory budget, reach different levels of citizen participation. Rarely they reach a citizen power, except for participatory budget (Rainero & Brescia, 2018).

Table 6.5 Ladder of participation

| Level of participation and description of accountability activities by citizens | | <i>Forward looking activities</i> | Arnstein's ladder of participation | |
|---|---|--|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Joint ownership | Express full judgment and make general proposals | <i>Agenda setting and policy making</i> | Citizen control | Citizen power |
| Collaboration | Express full judgment make bounded proposals | <i>Impact the agenda through services delivered</i> | Delegate power | |
| Advice | Express partial judgment make limited proposals | <i>Impact the setting or change the standard monitored</i> | Partnership | |
| Involvement | Monitor the process using specific questions Discuss the issues using general questions | | Placation Consultation | Tokenism |
| "Education" | Receive information through one-way communication Subjects of persuasion Subjects of misinformation | | Informing Therapy Manipulation | Nonparticipation |

Re-elaborated from Damgaard and Lewis (2014)

The Italian experience of town hall social reporting shows that after an initial enthusiasm (2004–2007) there is a slowdown in the process of adoption (Giacomini, 2013). Most of experiences are in the format of one-way communication, and rarely citizens' dialogue is established after the release of reports. Being voluntary practices, some town hall have evaluated the real benefits of them and abandon a costly practice.

Participation is a costly practice for both powerholder and citizens, so institutional design should be applied to have an accountability easily available for citizens. Most of social reporting is very technical and at risk of informational overload. It is more concerned on standard compliance than to citizens' comprehensibility and usability. Without a mediated use by media, this kind of information is not able even to reach citizens.

In fact "(...) only the adequate understanding of received information allows those who come into possession to contextualize them correctly, to report them, at least potentially, to actual dynamics of participation and then give a responsible reading, not influenced in a prejudicial manner by the culture of suspicion and distrust" (Rainero & Brescia, 2018).

There is an issue of not only understanding but also selecting information that really matters to citizens.

In general, performance literature shows that citizens are notably absent when it comes to choosing permanent key performance measures. Sometimes, as in the case of school boards, new measurement asked by parents may become a new standard of indicators monitored (Damgaard and Lewis in Bovens et al., 2014).

Pandemic accountability on healthcare has shown that very few figures can have a big impact in the public debate, pushing politicians around the world to reshape healthcare policies. Probably the question about accountability for citizens' participation should deal with impacts of policies on their lives. But it is also important the way impacts are measured and communicated.

An interesting attempt in achieving citizens' involvement and encouraging them to participate in collective decision-making is popular reporting. This tool is a "(...) citizen-centered 'simplified' report that provides mainly financial information related to governmental entity in a comprehensive and concise manner that can be easily understood by users lacking expertise in accounting and financial issues" (Manes-Rossi et al., 2019).

At the base of popular reporting, there is the idea of a technical nature of financial reports that results too complicated for common people. Some scholars have defined some qualitative characteristic of a popular reporting: "the information should be timely, easy understandable, credible and objective; the report should be linked to official financial statements for those interested in examining more detailed financial information. Moreover, the report should favor citizens' participation in the political life of government and encourage citizens to provide feedback useful for both managers and politicians as a basis for future decisions" (Manes-Rossi et al., 2019).

When citizens have been asked about information characteristics, their answer is that it should be timely, relevant, and contextualized (Manes-Rossi et al., 2019).

Popular reporting could be integrated and combined with other tools used for citizens' participation such as participatory budgeting, opinion surveys, physical and digital forums, referenda, etc. It should be developed in tune with cultural and sociological characteristics of citizens (Manes-Rossi et al., 2019). Therefore these requirements should be taken into consideration when designing accountability.

From a participatory point of view, accountability co-design could be a key turn to enhance both quantity and quality of citizens' participation. There is a growing interest about co-design around the world, both academic- and practice-based (Evans & Terrey, 2016). It is recognized that it can promote a mutual understanding in order to established shared representations of problems and concerns, a basic stage for prototyping, evaluating, and scaling interventions.

Accountability co-design is compatible with different degrees of participation. It doesn't imply a co-production process but surely elevates citizens' engagement, at least, to an advice level. It gives the opportunity of "(...) participation in informative encounters and reflective engagements." Moreover it opens space for mutual learning (Light & Seravalli, 2019).

Pandemic has shed light on processes of care. In this perspective, when accountability is shared, it becomes itself a form of caring, where trust can increase between citizens and institutions, and a democratic principle is enacted (Light & Seravalli, 2019).

7 Adopting a System Approach and Meaningful Accountability

In the above review on deliberation, we have seen that subjects display a full range of rationalities. According to Viber (in Bovens et al., 2014), this variety of cognitive characteristic, including biases such as emotion-based decision-making and self-deception should be taken into consideration when dealing with accountability.

Moreover, in multicultural societies, the presence of multiple identities and conflicting norms calls for an accountability that is able to regain the big picture (Viber in Bovens et al., 2014).

The abovementioned needs have to match with a meaningful accountability. This point calls for a "(...) shift in focus from demands for more (or less) accountability to questions about what type of accountability are relevant and the conditions and context in which they are effective" (Bovens and Shillemans in Bovens et al., 2014).

In order to be more meaningful, it is recognized that accountability processes should be organized in deliberative ways, accepting to focus only on salient issues, that could vary each year, instead of a broad set of recurrent items and general issues (Bovens and Shillemans in Bovens et al., 2014).

When it comes to go practical, it is not easy to accomplish all the needs that we have underlined. So we propose that a multidimensional approach should be undertaken. Having clear dimensions of accountability could help deliberative processes to match subjects' needs, eventually using a co-design approach.

Since the work of Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi (2009), the idea to go beyond the measurement of GDP has increased a multidimensional approach to accountability.

Starting from an experienced methodology (Golin and Parolin in Jan Jonker and Marco de Witte Golin & Parolin, 2006), we propose to consider seven dimensions of accountability, in order to have a framework for designing, and possibly co-designing, effective accountability processes and reporting. Citizenship is connected to many dimensions, that's why a multidimensional approach is able to capture and shed light to aspects not considered in financial reporting. Moreover the different dimensions can be harmonized, suggesting policies to fill the gaps where needed.

Seven dimensions can be easily connected to a rainbow, a unique and rich phenomenon.

- Economic resources
- Stakeholders and relations
- Cultural and constitutional values

- Health, social, and environmental quality
- Infrastructures and artistic dimension
- Education, knowledge, and innovation
- Communication

Every dimension is connected to others, and potential specific issues can be developed if needed.

7.1 Economic Resources

Resources are necessary for any activity put into place for citizens. Financial resources are relevant and there is abundant accountability about them. In the case of public accountability, financial resources are linked with the fiscal pact between public authorities and citizens. That's why this is a basic information to have in public discussion.

Less frequent is a consideration of other resources such as human and physical resources. Sometimes citizens and communities take care of public goods through volunteering: this strong form of participation should be reported in order to reinforce it and enlarge the experience to other citizens.

Potential issues are inequalities and social justice, fiscal policies, participatory budget, citizens' volunteering, creation of jobs, implementation of the subsidiarity principle: tools and frequency, level of debt (impact on future generation), and stakeholders and relations.

Despite the fact that accountability is to be kept open and transparent, stakeholders' identification is a key activity to establish an effective dialogue and engagement. Once a group of citizens is identified, to go beyond a simple informative functions, a contact should be searched in order to jointly select relevant key measurements.

It might be the case that groups of citizens ask for a focused accountability. This bottom-up opportunity is often in the form of compliant. Certainly a shared culture of dialogue could encourage a mutual understanding passing through accountability.

Potential issues are the following:

- Multistakeholder accountability
- Inclusion of excluded and fragile people
- Gender accountability
- Intergenerational accountability

7.2 Cultural and Constitutional Values

There is a pact between citizens and rulers: the constitution. So accountability should show how constitutional principle are fulfilled thorough policies over time. Constitution is a common ground for all citizens; hence there is a space for a shared accountability across political agenda proposed by different parties.

Another item of this dimension is that of cultural values. In any country there are specific shared by a group of people. Addressing those cultures, from their priorities, is a way to make accountability more inclusive.

Potential issues are the following:

- Periodical reporting on constitutional principles fulfillment
- Reporting on minority groups (i.e., ethnic/linguistic groups)
- Cultural heritage

7.3 Health, Social, and Environmental Quality

As we have experienced during pandemic, health is a basic need to be monitored in connection with environment protection. This dimension impacts many subjects, from government to nonprofit organizations and communities.

This dimension examines what contribute to people's well-being, showing how social and environmental quality impact on life.

Potential issues are as follows:

- Healthcare figures
- Quality of social relations
- Quality of services
- Supportive network for families, lonely, elder, and disabled people
- Work-life conciliation
- Environmental protection and climate change
- Recycling policies
- Food and nutrition
- Sports facilities
- Parks

7.4 Infrastructures and Artistic Dimension

Physical and digital infrastructures design the space where we live and impact deeply in the quality of life. But the aesthetic dimension is broader than functional structures and embraces artistic dimension that enriches our lives.

How the physical and digital space is designed shape our relationships, creating opportunities or threats for mutual connections and understanding.

The phenomenon of smart cities show that citizens' participation increases when facilitating conditions are created (Cortes-Cediel et al., 2019).

Potential issues are as follows:

- Housing policies
- Infrastructure delivery for basic needs (mobility, education, etc.)
- Physical and digital infrastructures for citizens' participation
- Museums and artistic production

7.5 *Education, Knowledge, and Innovation*

The dimension deals with human capital, whereas knowledge and innovation processes are strictly linked to investments in education. In this case it is particularly relevant to measure the effects of public investment in knowledge and innovation.

Potential issues are as follows:

- Human capital reporting
- Innovation reporting
- Public library (books, opening time, etc.)
- Local traditions

7.6 *Communication*

This dimension should deal on channels, formats, and languages chosen to meet different group of citizens. Effectiveness in communication is due to the obvious possibility of speaking the same language and being in harmony with the addressee's aims and values. This demands a similar shared experience to create the "we" feeling. This might require adapting the language to that of the stakeholders involved, i.e., there is a need for an appropriate tuning in language to meet different audience, from scientific communities to citizens.

A result is seen in active feedback and general participation.

Potential issues are as follows:

- Popular reporting
- Engagement policies
- Tools and channels of communication

Adopting a multidimensional accountability consents to explore many dimensions, sometimes hidden and taken for granted, that impact citizens' life, enlarging a dialogue that can enrich and focus political agenda on real needs. Going through concrete dimensions makes this dialogue operational and measurable, showing how different stakeholder contribute.

8 Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the relationship between deliberation and public accountability in the perspective of enhancing citizens' participation, using information as a connecting concept.

From deliberation side, we have seen how information has very different impact on subjects, and therefore how accountability can contribute.

From political philosophy literature review, we have learnt that it depends on forms of rationality, form and aspect of argumentation, and action models (Habermas, 1984). Table 6.6 summarizes the main results of the literature review.

From a political science conceptual network, we have learnt that it depends on decision-making models and positions in deliberation (Bobbio, 2010). Table 6.7 summarizes the main results and implications of conceptual network.

From economics we have seen that subjects have heterogeneous preferences and, in some conditions, do not ever use additional information making accountability useless, being captured by their personal position (Doraszelski et al., 2003). But the good news is that single participants can make a difference in the public discussion even though they are a minority (Caillaud & Tirole, 2007). Table 6.8 summarizes results and implications.

Hence accountability has weak or strong connection to deliberation depending from above dimensions. In some cases we might have argumentation without

Table 6.6 Potential connections between deliberation in political philosophy and accountability

| Deliberation in political philosophy | Accountability contribution |
|---|--|
| Define forms of rationality Use of knowledge depend upon rationality of subjects | Offers a form of knowledge |
| Request inclusion | Offers information to all participants |
| Define forms of argumentation | |
| Persuasion Dialectic Logic | No need for accountability Partial use of accountability Shared accountability |
| Define action model | |
| Models with objective information Models with social and subjective information | Able to match informational needs Offers a base information for discussion |
| Consider cultural pluralism | To be designed to account to different values and what impact to different cultural groups |

Table 6.7 Potential connections between deliberation in political science and accountability

| Deliberation in political science | Accountability contribution |
|--|--|
| Define decision-making models Accessibility and usability of data and information Integrative representation of problems respecting different rationalities Facing crises | Offers standardized information |
| Define the positions and the level of reflection of the participants Certainty of judgment Uncertainty of judgment Suspension of judgment Prejudice | Offers information accepted or rejected depending the openness of participants Useless for some positions |

Table 6.8 Potential connections between deliberation in economics and accountability

| Deliberation in economics | Accountability contribution |
|---|--|
| Define type of information shared in deliberation Non-verifiable information (cheap talk) Verifiable information | Offers verifiable information |
| Define preferences of participants Strongly interested in a certain position (the extremists) Disinterested Interested but open to new information | Offers information accepted or rejected depending the preferences of participants. Only interest but open gain benefit. |
| Define key members as “information pivots” who have enough credibility in the group to be able to influence the vote of other members | Offers objective information |

accountability. In other cases an objective representation of reality must be integrated with a social and subjective representation of reality. Therefore even an excellent accountability is not enough for a deliberation, especially from the perspective of Habermas.

From public accountability side, information is related to relational and communicative aspects. A key role is played by expectations, and in this case accountability is about the “exchange of reasons for conduct” aiming to “verbally bridge the gap between action and expectation” (Messer, 2009).

The role of expectations makes us to consider what type of accountability foster precision in judgment and enhance critical reflection (Warren in Bovens et al., 2014). Moreover there is a concern about potential interest divergence between power holder and citizens affected.

The latter point is crucial and strictly connected with the kind of participation citizens experience. We have seen that there is a relevant relationship between the level of participation and accountability. From manipulation to citizen control, there is a range of potential participation and related accountability activities (Damgaard and Lewis in Bovens et al., 2014; Rainero & Brescia, 2018).

The open issue is how to design a public accountability that can encourage participation. A promising attempt comes from the experience of popular reporting. The aim is to have timely, easy understandable, credible, and objective information (Manes-Rossi et al., 2019).

Probably the best option, in order to have a potential full participation, is to engage in accountability co-design (Evans & Terrey, 2016). As in other deliberative processes, citizens and power holders can promote a mutual understanding, sharing representations of problems and concerns (Light & Seravalli, 2019).

To address the challenge of co-design, we propose a multidimensional approach. This is in line with the demand of a system approach to accountability, able to regain the big picture (Viber in Bovens et al., 2014).

From the perspective of participation in deliberative process, the final aim is to have a meaningful accountability (Bovens et al., 2014).

In Table 6.9, we summarize the main results of connecting a meaningful accountability to deliberation.

Table 6.9 Potential connections between meaningful accountability and deliberation

| Meaningful accountability | Deliberation contribution |
|---|--|
| Ask what type of accountability are relevant and the conditions and context in which they are effective | Offers decision-making context where accountability can be useful for participants |
| Focus only on salient issues | Match with specific needs of participants |
| Could vary each year | Offer specific needs of participants |
| Is multidimensional | Match with differences in values and impact |
| Apply co-design | Create a strong connection to deliberation needs |

Deliberation without accountability that is verifiable information has weak reasons. Accountability without deliberation is useless. Connecting the two makes a possible virtuous circle. Accountability can offer grounded reasons for the public debate, but accountability needs to be meaningful to different people and adjusted in terms of content and language (Manes-Rossi et al., 2019).

Future research could explore from one-side deliberation needs, considering also the impact of digital transformation and the role of social networks in shaping public discussion, and from the other side, how accountability impacts on decision-making and is recognized as source of verifiable information.

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Chapter 7

Accounting Systems of Postcommunist Balkan States: Towards Accounting Harmonization?



Stefania Vignini

1 Introduction

Many scientific papers have been dedicated to accounting changes systems in emerging economies, and although some recent studies have been focused on former Soviet Union countries (Alexander, 2013; Alexander and Ghedrovici (2013), on the Republic of Moldova; Alexander and Ghedrovici (2013), on the use of accounting in the USSR; and Alexander and Alon (2017), on the Republic of Belarus), little attention has been given to international accounting research on the Balkan states.

Furthermore there has been very little academic engagement with populist movements in the post-Yugoslav states. However, there has been a rise of populist parties in the area of Balkan states.

This contribution therefore arises from both reasons. It is true that it belongs *de iure* to the world of accounting but does not neglect some elements related to populism literature. The reason for this “contamination” is because we are really convinced that the two apparently distant topics must walk “hand in hand.” It is not possible to know accounting changes systems without a premise of populist movements in the post-Yugoslav countries. These movements in fact influenced the behavior about the choices in the accounting systems.

This chapter is fundamentally designed to provide inputs toward investigation of accounting change, or non-change, within the countries generally accepted as constituting “the Balkan states.”

The aim of the present research is a historical investigation on accounting systems and standards of the postcommunist Balkan countries, in order to prove how

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the evolution of these systems is connected to changes in the socio-economic/political context and in the cultural tradition.

Through this study we show that postcommunist countries have, *de jure*, intensely changed their accounting systems, implementing a fast harmonization process with the ambition to converge into the European accounting system. On the other hand, as Haller (2002) states, accounting harmonization among the EU represents a political task in the process of achieving a unified European economic market.¹

Balkan countries are (in alphabetical order), in accordance with Bideleux and Jeffries (2007), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia. What these countries have in common is that they are postcommunists. Not all of them are part of the European Union, and practically all the countries have experienced very heavy moments of revolution. Without any doubt the various military conflicts that have ravaged the Balkans in the last two centuries have certainly marked the countries. In reality, Churchill's famous quote are very eloquent and need to be remembered: "the Balkan peoples are loaded themselves with more history than they can bear." Furthermore in the Balkans, their specific brand of language-based nationalism and the role of religion as a crucial cultural dimension have hindered the development of civil societies.

The paper is purely deductive (Read, 1914) because the results come from contextual data, clauses, or analysis of what aspects covered in theoretical literature in the chosen empirical context and follows a description logic aimed at highlighting similarities and differences.

This work is divided into the following sections: Sect. 2 describes literature review about populism and accounting system; Sect. 3 presents the accounting systems of Balkan states; and finally Sect. 4 contains discussion and conclusion.

2 Literature

2.1 A Brief Consideration on the Concept of Populism

Before addressing our issue, we just want to add a few elements, without any ambition of completeness, concerning the concept of populism (see Laclau, 2005). In the course of the work, we will then add some interesting references on the populism of the various Balkan countries analyzed.

¹ Haller summarizes accounting differences into four dimensions (Haller, 2002 p.173):

- The scope of regulation which covers foreign or/and domestic companies
- Mandatory or optional use of IAS/IFRS or US GAAP
- The obligation of compliance with national GAAP when financial statements are prepared with IFRS/IAS or US GAAP
- The compliance with IFRS/IAS or US GAAP for consolidated financial statements only or financial statements in general

Populism as a term is traditionally hard to define. One of the first engagements with the term in the academic literature can be found in the works of Ernesto Laclau, who argued that populism is an articulation of popular themes in opposition to the power bloc. His studies are “discursive strategies that contain particular rhetorical techniques and ways of approaching a certain topic” (Jakobson et al., 2012, p.11); “He specifically focused on what he called ‘progressive left-wing’ populism, which would mobilize the oppressed people (i.e. the working class) against the dominant power bloc. He later expanded his understanding of ‘the people’ as a driver for social change” (cit. by Džankić & Keil, 2017, p.404). Urbinati (1998) at page 116 defines populism as “total opposite of liberal and representative democracy.” Populism is like a vent for managing “organic crises” (Gramsci) within a political system when the institutional system can no longer handle the needs of the people (cit. by Jakobson et al., 2012, p.13).

Ernst Haas (1958), one of the most influential neofunctionalist scholars, defined integration as the process: “whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states. The end result of a process of political integration is a new political community superimposed over the pre-existing ones” (cit. by Tema, 2011, p.42).

Then populism is a “form of sharply antagonistic political rhetoric and politics, which extremely simplifies problems and offers seemingly easy, painless, sometimes very concrete but most often vague solutions” (Skolkay, 2000, p.2), a “result of a socio-economic, political, cultural or discursive crisis or crises in a society” (Skolkay, 2000, p.17).

Furthermore some argue, directly or indirectly, that populism is a legacy of the ideology and/or practice of communism² In particular Carpenter (1997) argues that postcommunist countries can be split into two groups, two political “orders.” The first one is “national populism” and the second one is “social democracy.” The first type, national populism, is a result of a specific historical experience. Here we can include, argues Carpenter, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Yugoslavia. In the Balkans³, claims Ágh, national populists are to a great degree part of the elite, or indeed in extreme cases

²For example, Tökes (1991, p. 230) finds three specific features which distinguish communist regimes from right-wing authoritarian regimes; Greskovits (1998, p. 106) has found seven fundamental similar features between communism and populism in economic policies.

³See also: Bailey (1990) “Accounting in the shadow of Stalinism,” *Accounting, Organisations and Society*, 513–25; Briston (1978) “The evolution of accounting in developing countries,” *International Journal of Accounting*, 105–20; Chavance (1992/1994) *The Transformation of Communist Systems*. Oxford: Westview; Abdelal (2001). National purpose in the world economy: Post-Soviet states in comparative perspective. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Blondel (2001), *Cabinets in Post-Communist East-Central Europe and in the Balkans*, in Blondel et al., *Cabinets in Eastern Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited; Whittington (2005). The adoption of International Accounting Standards in the European Union. *European Accounting Review*, 14(1), 127–153.

they form the elite itself (cited by Skolkay, 2000, p.5). In circumstances of political and economic instability, citizens' security becomes a salient issue at the societal level.

2.2 *A Brief Consideration on the Concept of Accounting System*

According to a part of the economic literature (Nobes, 1998)⁴, the concept of accounting system is not necessarily linked to some basic unit logic, but to different detectable/detected administrative practices. In such a perspective, accounting systems are analyzed as a set of practices adopted by different countries (Gray, 1988).

Between the accounting system and the socio-economic-cultural environment in which each is defined, and constantly develops, there are numerous and intense cause-effect relationships (Doupnik & Salter, 1995; Jayasinghe & Thomas, 2009). For understanding the evolution of a particular accounting system rather than another, it is therefore necessary to analyze the context in which it is inserted, following the temporal evolution of some factors deemed relevant. In order to grasp the evolution of one particular accounting system rather than another, it is therefore necessary to analyze its context and the temporal evolution of some key factors.

Many scholars have been committed to understanding the environmental factors which caused the differences in the accounting systems of different countries. Most of them tried to create a classification model highlighting similarities and differences between groups of accounting systems. So in international literature, we can divide approaches to the classification of accounting systems (Nobes & Stadler, 2013), according to the method used, into deductive and inductive approaches.

Deductive approaches (Hatfield, 1966; Seidler, 1967; Nobes, 1998; Nobes, 1999) identify the relevant environmental factors on the basis of personal considerations and at a later stage identify the similar countries and the possible evolutionary paths that have affected the systems accounting.

Inductive methods (Da costa et al., 1978; Frank, 1979, etc.), on the other hand, empirically analyze the accounting practices adopted in the different countries, grouping those countries with similar practices at a later time.

The aim of our analysis is the understanding of the environmental factors which influence the choice to adopt certain accounting practices rather than others. Indeed the most recent⁵ developments in the classification of accounting systems and research of the possible causes of differentiation tend to analyze the environmental factors that cause these differentiations (Baydoun & Willett, 1995; Saudagaran,

⁴See also Nobes (2003). On the myth of "Anglo-Saxon" financial accounting: A comment. *The International Journal of Accounting*, 38(1), 95–104; Nobes (2011). IFRS practices and the persistence of accounting system classification. *Abacus*, 47(3), 267–283.

⁵It is, in fact, with 1988, specifically, with Gray's work that a new line of investigation opens up related to the study of the influence of culture on different accounting systems.

2004). In fact, to study accounting systems, it is necessary to know the political-institutional situation (see Ágh, 1998) of the socio-cultural value system of the basic choices in the policies historically pursued by each country. Many factors affect a country's accounting system. Some of those factors can be considered as politic regime, colonial and other influences, legal system, influence of taxation, the accountancy profession, etc.

The present study belongs to international accounting, taking into consideration the accounting standards currently in force and the context characterized by an increasing importance of the accounting harmonization concept (Hopwood, 1983).

3 Accounting Systems of Balkan States

3.1 Albania⁶

Like the other Eastern European countries, Albania switched to the free and open market economy in the early 1990s. These changes in the economic system, from a centralized economy to a market economy, presented several requirements regarding the creation of a new legal and institutional infrastructure in all the economic fields and in accounting as well. Deep reforms and innovative measures were needed to build this infrastructure. Politic regime “is the most influential factor in the forming and development of Albanian accounting system in 20th century” (Kruja et al., 2008, p.374).

In the process of EU integration (Bogdani & Loughlin, 2004), Albania has been involved in the recent flow of the global accounting⁷ by introducing new National Accounting Standards in 2006 that became effective in 2008. The implementation of the new NAS fully complying with the IAS/IFRS⁸ presents a major change in the accounting environment in Albania.

However, the first results from these NAS implementation in practice⁹ are not those of a 100% success due mainly to “two sets of reasons, one set of a *technical character* – those arising from technical details or difficulties within standards themselves and with application in practice – and the other set of a *bureaucratic character* – which relate to some delays in publishing the NAS, in offering

⁶There are endless examples that demonstrate the EU influence in the sharpening of the levels of populism. In Albania there is much talk of reforms, but lack of any significant progress, and thus more dissatisfaction with politics in general and more politicians rely on populist methods (Tema, 2011, p.62). Decisions are driven from “the need for stability and from the need to eliminate conflicts rather than being a result of inclusive political processes between different actors” (Tema, 2011, p.39).

⁷See among the others Dean (2010).

⁸See Albania IFAC.

⁹See, among the others: Duhaxhiu and Kapllani (2012), The relationship between financial and tax accounting in Albania, *The Romanian Economic Journal*, No 43, pp.45–60.

supportive training session or explaining and guiding materials as well as a weak campaign and publicity about the standards” (Shkurti & Duraj, 2016, p.257).

In 2014, the National Accounting Council of Albania (NACA) performed a major revision of this existing framework of NAS. Even though the NACA tried to avoid differences between the IFRS for SMEs and the Albanian NAS, there were still differences¹⁰. Nonetheless, “it is important to view the manner in which both platforms may be revised in future” (Shkurti & Duraj, 2016).

3.2 *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Since 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) has been working not only on “building state institutions but has also been working on its socio-economic recovery and development” (Basic, 2008, p.3). Prior studies explain the early adoption of the IFRS according to firm-specific benefits (Renders & Gaeremynck, 2007; McGee, 2008; McGee & Pekmez, 2008). In FBiH, international accounting standards (IAS) started to be used on the first of January, 1995.

The Law on Accounting and Auditing of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH No. 42/04 of 2004) requires mandatory application of IFRS and IFRS for SMEs as issued by the IASB and translated into national languages for all legal entities, depending on their size. The Accounting and Auditing Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AACBiH), a non-governmental independent professional body, under the BiH Law No. 42/04 is responsible for the translation and publication of the standards into the national languages¹¹.

Many processes related to modernizing society and the economy take place alongside the post-war recovery¹². The reform process is fueled by the general idea of introducing internationally accepted and recognized standards in the sectors of reporting, auditing and education in this fieldn (Shkurti & Gjony, 2010).

The processes penetrate all fields and all levels, whereas the accounting reform, especially passing of appropriate regulations that provide for introduction and application of IFRS (Basic, 2008).

These and other processes are all “aiming to achieve one sole goal – creation of a modern and developed state that will be a member of the EU and that will have its place in the world” (Basic, 2008, p.3).

¹⁰For example, there are some discrepancies that relate to the presentation of financial information in the financial statements or the treatment of financial instruments and the business combinations.

¹¹ See Bosnia and Herzegovina IFAC.

¹²See among the others Stipic I, *Socio.hu, Special issue 2017*, Constructing “the people” Citizen populism against ethnic hegemony in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the light of the 2013–2014 protests; Guzina (2005) How Multiethnic is Democracy in the Balkans: The Case of Bosnia. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii.

However in 2008 Basic worried about the problems with IFRS and in the same way Ergun and Öztürk (2011) investigate the problems with the implementation process of the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) in Bosnia & Herzegovina. The authors indicate that companies do not have enough information about the IFRS, and that “insufficient regulation, educated staff and material and inadequate efforts on the part of policy makers have had a significant negative influence on the implementation process” (Ergun & Öztürk, 2011, p.365).

3.3 Bulgaria

Bulgaria is “formally” a people’s republic since 1946, when he entered the Soviet sphere of influence after the Second World War. In 1990, after the dissolution of the URSS, it became an effectively independent republic with a new Constitution. At the same time, a new process towards democracy and market economy began with a troubled transition to achieve democracy¹³ and the market economy¹⁴. Since 1998, Bulgaria has undertaken substantial changes in the national accounting legislation¹⁵, mainly based on the fundamental principles underlying the IAS. Consequently there has been a process toward the international accounting standards as opposed to the principles contained in European directives. Therefore a new transition process started in Bulgaria, from the Continental European model to the Anglo-Saxon model, entirely based on the application of IAS/IFRS (Spasov, 1999; Sucher et al., 2005; Pojarevska, 2015). This process required a new accounting legislation at a national scale, started in 1991, with the enactment of a “Law on Accounting” and the endorsement of a “National Chart of Accounts.” This law regulated the organization of accounting in a mixed economic system, due to the still dominant number of state-owned enterprises. It contained not only rules on the content of financial statements, its structure and assets assessment, but also provisions about bookkeeping for private companies¹⁶. After the endorsement of this Law on Accounting, the first steps were made toward some legislation suitable for a market economy model. The attention was directed to the adoption and consequently the adaptation of international accounting standards and predominantly the provisions of some European

¹³See among the others Malinov (2007). Reflections on Bulgarian populism (Размисли за българския популизъм). *Critique and Humanism Journal*, 23, 71–84; Medarov (2015), *The transformations of liberal anti-populism in post-1989 Bulgaria Populism*, Working Papers No. 2, Thessaloniki; Miscoiu (2014). Balkan populisms. *Journal Souteastern Europe*, 38(1), 1–24; Krasteva (2016) *The Post-Communist Rise of National Populism: Bulgarian Paradoxes*. In: Lazaridis G., Campani G., Benveniste A. (eds) *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55679-0_7

¹⁴Report on the observance of standards and Codes (ROSC), October 2007, p. 1 “Since 1990, Bulgaria had a successful transition toward political democracy and moving to a market economy, while fighting inflation and unemployment.”

¹⁵See also Boyanov (2012, 2014), Basheva & Boyanov (2015).

¹⁶It must be emphasized that this feature is still present in the current version of the law.

directives. For this reason the accounting standards contained in the Law on Accounting are similar to those contained in the Fourth Directive, taking of course into account the particular Bulgarian tradition and its accounting cultural context.

In January 2002, the new Law on Accounting entered in force, while in June of the same year, a new model of National Chart of Accounts was introduced, which was recommended by law, though not mandatory.

However, a fundamental step in Bulgarian history was definitely its entry into the European Union on January 1, 2007. This resulted in the transposition of EU directives also in accounting and the mandatory adoption of IAS/IFRS provided for by EU Regulations. From January 1, 2007, up to this moment, in the Law of Accounting, substantial changes and amendments are made that affected the organization and methods of accounting¹⁷.

The Accountancy Act of 2015 stipulates the accounting standards that are applicable in Bulgaria and prescribes application of IFRS as endorsed in the European Union (EU) and published in the EU Official Journal.

As of January 1, 2017, all public interest entities¹⁸ are required to apply the IFRS as adopted by the EU. All other entities are required to apply the National Accounting Standards set by the Ministry of Finance. Entities that were applying IFRS before and that are not public interest entities in 2017 may choose to start applying the National Accounting Standards. IFRS for SME has not been adopted, and there are no immediate plans to adopt the standard for application in Bulgaria¹⁹.

3.4 Croatia²⁰

Croatia is a republic founded in 1991, after the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia. The conflicts and the separation from Yugoslavia slowed down the transition process and the accounting reforms (Džajić & Monšnja-Škare, 1997, p.486).

In the early 1990s, an important event took place in the Croatian economy: the transition process from a planned economy based on social property toward a market economy, focused on free market laws and private property in the means of production. This process was characterized by numerous company restructurings and privatizations thanks to the creation of the Croatian privatization fund (Betti, 1997; Kesner, 1997).

¹⁷See also Environmental Accounting: conceptual Framework, in Baldarelli et al. (2017), *Environmental Accounting and Reporting, Theory and practice*, Springer.

¹⁸Public interest entities, regardless of their size, are (i) issuers of securities on a regulated market in an EU Member State; (ii) credit institutions; (iii) insurance companies; (iv) pension companies and funds managed by them; (v) state and national railways; and (vi) companies providing water and sewage services as a major activity.

¹⁹See Bulgaria IFAC.

²⁰Grbeša and Šalaj (2017), Populism in Croatia: The Curious Case of The Bridge, *Annals of the Croatian Political Science Association: political science journal*, Vol.14, No1, pp.7–30.

Despite the changing economic climate and the financial distress which was affecting Croatia in those years, small- and medium-sized enterprises could resist mainly thanks to their flexibility (Mošnja-Škare, 2001; Baldarelli et al., 2007).

Accounting aimed at applying rules and meeting the information requirements provided by a planned economy, with a high degree of state regulation and a strong influence of the legal system²¹.

The reforms transformed a uniform and passive accounting system into a modern one, which was similar to those of developed countries and was more in line with its new role and function.

The Accounting Act (1992) had an investor-oriented approach and was therefore focused on the capital market. The growth of risk capital market was crucial for the development of the whole economy, and it was based on the protection of investors by providing transparency, high-quality, and true and fair information in financial statements.

This was the reason why International Accounting Standards were introduced by law and were made mandatory for all companies, regardless of their sizes. Moreover, medium-sized, large, and listed companies had to publish their financial statements, while small-sized enterprises were exempted from this obligation. Small- and medium-sized enterprises could draft a condensed financial statement, thanks to the influence of European directives. Nevertheless there were no exemptions for the application of IAS: indeed it was not possible to amend those standards or adapt them, because they had to be implemented exactly as they had been translated and published.

Croatia adopted international standards invasively, but the problem²² became immediately apparent. In fact, markedly investor-oriented principles require the presence of companies dependent on capital market financings, whose main financial statement users have to be external subjects. In the Croatian reality, instead, SMEs were predominant²³ and had no particular interest in external investors (Dimitric, 2008). In this situation, some simplifications and amendments were

²¹ See also Gulin et al. (2002), *History Of Accounting Regulation In The Europe And Its Effects On The Accounting Regulation In Croatia*, working Paper, Faculty of Economic Zagreb, p. 19. The authors say: "In Croatia, the accounting regulations are defined by the Accounting Law. In its basic parts (contents of financial statements and assessment principles) it is based on the EU Directives. However, at the same time it stipulates the direct application of IAS for all the entities ('enterprises') regardless whether or not listed on the financial markets. The obligation of direct application of IAS is the realisation of the accounting harmonisation process. However, thereby small companies (not listed) obtain a law of 2448 articles, which is unsustainable and requests a logical rationalisation in future. The potential models of accounting regulations in Croatia should be based on the criterion accepted in the developed countries. That means separate definition of regulations for the entities» not listed from the regulations for the entities listed on the financial markets. The latter should primarily harmonise the accounting regulations through direct application of IAS."

²² See also, among others, Baldarelli et al. (2007), *International Accounting Standards for SMEs: Empirical Evidences for SMEs in a Country in Transition and a Developed Country Facing New Challenges*, Zagreb.

²³ Only in 2009 out of 91,320 companies 436 were classified large (of which 210 listed), 89,438 small (98%) and 1446 medium.

necessary in order to make the legal framework more flexible for most Croatian companies, SMEs indeed.

In 2005, another Accounting Act was issued. From then on, full international accounting standards as of 2004 became mandatory only for public companies, large enterprises, and companies listed on official stock markets. The other entities could choose whether complying with full IAS/IFRS or adopting exclusively IAS (thus excluding IFRS) as of 2000. Unfortunately, also the amendments in the second Accounting Act were not sufficiently appropriate for SMEs.

Afterward the strategy pursued was to require the application of full IAS/IFRS exclusively for large and listed companies, while the others had to comply with Croatian Financial Reporting Standards (CFRS), whose scheduled publication was the end of February 2008.

The opening of markets, the globalization, and the recent (2013) entry into the European Union allowed the development of a process of simplification of procedures and laws (Mamić Sačer et al., 2007). This has left the field to regulations of a lower rank, which were more suitable for sudden changes and for accounting principles issued by professionals. Since July 1, 2013, Croatian companies listed in an EU/EEA securities market follow IFRSs.²⁴ In particular enterprises rated on the stock exchange and medium and large enterprises must construct their financial reports according to international accounting management standards and EU guidelines. However, small enterprises and craftsmanships must conform with Croatian Financial Reporting Standards²⁵.

3.5 Kosovo

Kosovo, during the period of the war and occupation²⁶ for dozen years, begins its transition from a starting point which was very difficult. The 1990s was characterized in Kosovo with very poor economic policies, weak financial institutions, and very high unemployment rate where it is estimated that over half of the population were unemployed; besides that also among them the poverty was more evident.

The transition of the reconstruction phase after the war was very fast due to the enormous financial assistance and international expertise, as well as diaspora

²⁴The European Commission (EC) periodically issues a document which summarises the use of options of the IAS Regulation by European Union Member States.

²⁵See Croatia IFAC.

²⁶Among the most interesting papers on the subject, we recommend Smajljaj (2020), Populism in a never ending and multiple system transformation in Kosovo: the case of *Vetevendosje*, *Journal of Contemporary central and Eastern Europe*, vol.28, pp199–223; Yabanci (2016), Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics in Kosovo: A Case Study of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje, *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, No 2, pp.17–43. In particular the author says: “Few studies have systematically examined the rising political and social unrest in the Balkans. This paper investigates the local dynamics and consequences of widespread anti-establishment discontent in Kosovo through the analytical framework of populism” (p.17).

remittances coming from around the world²⁷. This has had a positive impact on economic and social development, as well as comprehensive economic sustainability of the state of a newborn that was under development. Like many countries of Eastern Europe that suffered some year after the transition of social-economic, political liberal and democratic systems, transition in Kosovo has not been completed, but is ongoing.

Immediately after the war of 1999, the business environment takes another direction due to the lack of public institutions in terms of market regulation and organization of the accounting system. This has been a time of art for many new entrepreneurs where Kosovo had the opportunity to benefit from this period since businesses were not obliged to pay any taxes on their business activities. The interim government formed at the time were alongside and supported mainly by international donations that come mainly from the EU countries and the USA.

The focus of International Community was interested on the political aspects: preservation of security and stability; the structure of the system of accounting, compilation and submission statements and financial reports and control were organized by the earlier Yugoslavia.

Year 2001 marks an extraordinary reach in the field of accounting system in Kosovo after the approval of UNMIK Regulation 2001/30. With this law, it was formed the Kosovo Board for Financial Reporting Standards (KBFRS) that determines the standards in relation to an accounting of business obligations and audits that are required to be exposed including internal stakeholders and external. Accordingly, regulatory structures was created for accounting and auditing (UNMIK, 2001; Vokshia & Rrustem, 2019).

On the other hand, all the small and medium enterprises are obliged to prepare the financial statements on the basis of the tax rules in effect²⁸.

The Law No. 06/L-032 on Accounting, Financial Reporting, and Auditing requires all business organizations registered as limited liability companies or shareholder companies in Kosovo, depending on their size²⁹ to apply either IFRSs or IFRS for small- and medium-sized entities (SMEs) as translated into Albanian and approved by the Kosovo Council for Financial Reporting (KCFR).

²⁷ See Allu et al. (2016), Business Environment and Accounting System in Kosovo: Comparison of Different Periods, *European Journal of Economics and Business Studies*, Vol.6, n.1, pp.36–40.

²⁸ It is worth mentioning that in 2006, Kosovo became part of the free trade agreement CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement) by joining Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Moldova. Furthermore, Kosovo has managed to have access to the EU market based on the project of autonomous union preferences and preferential treatment won for some products to be exported to the USA (MT1, 2011). This has led to the liberalized economics gradually but rapidly so that Kosovo be in the same trend and stage of development with other countries in the region.

²⁹ Large companies that meet two of the three size criteria must use full IFRSs; medium and small companies may use either full IFRS or IFRS for SMEs. Micro-sized entities below the specified size criteria must follow simplified standards issued by the KCFR that are based on IAS as they existed in 2001. Under the Law, all companies may elect to directly apply IASB-issued standards (see Kosovo IFAC).

3.6 Macedonia³⁰

In the process of reformation in the sphere of accounting and financial reporting, Macedonia decided to implement the IASC's IAS in 1998 and to use the same in practice.

Macedonia respects the IFRS rules and regulations in matters of accounting³¹ and business operations in optimal conditions, and according to the Company Law of the Republic of Macedonia, commercial entities, large and medium commercial companies, firms in the banking sector, branches, and subsidiaries must respect the IFRS standards in matters of accounting³².

According to the Trade Company Law, the financial statements for the required entities must be prepared according to the IFRS. As Whittington (2005, p. 127) points out, "several 'transition' economies of Eastern Europe which did not have established local standards, were either adopting or permitting the use of international standards." That was the case in Macedonia. Adopting the international accounting standards as national standards was thought to be the best tool for building a comparable and transparent financial reporting system that would help investors make informed financial decisions.

However, it was soon realized that the legal setup, especially if it was not perfectly instituted, was not sufficient to serve the goals for which it had originally been put in place (Markovska, 2005, p. 3).

Indeed Macedonia (as well as Slovenia) is making serious attempts in harmonizing their accounting and financial reporting norms on a global level (Markovska, 2005, p.25).

The objective of Macedonia to become part of the European Union imposed the need for aligning the Macedonian legislation with *acquis communautaire* including the accounting and financial reporting legislation³³. In order to undertake such compliance, some adjustments to the current legislative and accounting environment must be done first.

³⁰ See, among the others, Bosilkov (2019), Media populism in Macedonia: Right-wing populist style in the coverage of the "migrant crisis", *Central European Journal of Communication*, (2019), No: 23, pp. 206–223; Petkovski (2016), Authoritarian Populism and Hegemony: Constructing 'the People in Macedonia's illiberal discourse, Ljupcho, *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, No: 2, pp. 44–66.

³¹ See, among the others, Dean, 2010; Hadzi, 2010, 2011.

³² See Macedonia IFAC.

³³ See, among the others, Andonov, 2010.

Harmonization of the national accounting standards with IFRS was also necessary³⁴. Furthermore implementation of IFRS for SMEs increases the accounting quality, but Shukran and Jeton in 2011 wrote “it would be interesting to witness what lies ahead, but always recalling that this is going to be a challengeable process with much difficulty” (Shukran & Jeton, 2011, p.60).

3.7 Montenegro

In the case of Montenegro, the first signs of dismantled security appeared in the late 1980s, with the failure of the project of Yugoslav socio-economic reconstruction. The socialist economy that guaranteed people a sense of stability suffered from rapid decay. This process intensified with the collapse of the common state at the beginning of the 1990s. The wars in the neighboring republics and the hyperinflation in 1993 evoked a societal crisis and increased the people’s dependency on the decisions taken by the political leadership (Džankić & Keil, 2017, p.412)³⁵.

The aim of the paper of Jocović and Milović (2017) is to analyze the quality of the legal solutions contained in the regulation of accounting and auditing in Montenegro. The research into the area has been carried out by taking into account the needs of harmonization of the Montenegrin legal system with that of the EU but also in relation to the necessity of solving the many problems posed by the practice of implementation of the earlier legislation. The authors put forward the conclusion that harmonization process in the area of accounting law should contribute to

³⁴Kozuharov et al. say “A strategy that synchronizes the variables of this research, an adequate qualification of certified accountants, managers with higher level of education and training particularly in medium, small and micro entities, an acceleration of the full implementation of the Regulation on accounting with the establishment of the Institute of certified accountants, as well as institutional monitoring and control of the correct application of international financial reporting standards and the application of the Code of Ethics, and therefore, reducing the timeframe for convergence of international regulations with national regulations and ensuring complete harmonization of financial reporting based on International Financial Reporting Standards in the Republic of Macedonia, will facilitate the sustainable development of Macedonian companies and will indirectly influence on the economic development of the country” (Kozuharov et al., 2015, p.240). See among the others Koleva et al. (2020).

³⁵These sentences are very interesting: “Ever since it became independent in 2006, Montenegro has steadily progressed in its ambition to accede to the European Union. Even so, a new form of populism, dominated by neither a far-right nor a far-left discourse, but controlled by leading political elites in the country’s government has developed in Montenegro. This form of populism is not a mechanism of ensuring the dominance of the Democratic Party of Socialists (Demokratska Partija Socijalista Crne Gore, DPS) in Montenegro per se. Instead it is used as a tool to support and enhance other mechanisms that the party utilizes in order to stay in power and remain the dominant force in the country. Hence, we can observe the growth of a new kind of populism, a state-sponsored populist discourse that is very different from populism as understood in Western Europe. What we find in Montenegro is a government that uses populist language and messages to support a clientelistic state system” (Džankić & Keil, 2017, p. 403).

strengthening the competitiveness of the national economy and improving the legal security of holders of material interests.

The Law on Accounting No. 052 of 2016 requires that all legal entities prepare financial statements in accordance with IAS/IFRS as issued by the IASB and translated and published by the Institute of Certified Accountants of Montenegro.

The latest version of IFRS translated into the Serbian language is the 2009 version and several standards from the 2013 Bluebook, which were translated by the Serbian Association of Accountants and Auditors. IFRS for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was translated in 2013 but is not mandatory for application³⁶.

A final consideration must be added. IFRS standards are not currently translated into Montenegrin. Languages in official use in Montenegro are Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian, and Croatian. Translations of IFRS standards into those languages are available, but the Serbian translation is generally used.

3.8 Romania

Several studies have examined a wide range of issues related to IFRS adoption in Romania (Lapters & Popa, 2009; Albu & Albu, 2012; Albu et al., 2014; Albu & Albu, 2017). Furthermore Romania, as a full member of the EU since 2007, could be expected to be, in transition economy terms, a leader in the process of change and development.

Under communism, Romania's accounting system was rather an adjustment of the Soviet accounting system (Bailey, 1995; Richard, 1995). The redefinition of the accounting system after the fall of communism³⁷ was of French inspiration (Nistor & Filip, 2008; Deaconu & Buiga, 2011; Albu et al., 2011), motivated by "essentially political and cultural (not technical) reasons" (Richard, 1995) and "close cultural and economic ties between Romania and France" (Albu et al., 2011).

In 1991, the Accounting Act 82 was issued and became the backbone of the Romanian accounting regulations. Specific instructions have subsequently been provided by Orders of the Ministry of Public Finance (OMPFs), to bring the former socialist country closer to Western Europe. The first step was made in 1999, toward both the Fourth Directive and IAS.³⁸

³⁶ See Montenegro IFAC.

³⁷ Dragoman (2020) "Save Romania" Union and the Persistent Populism in Romania, Problems of Post-Communism, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1781540>; Dragoman (2016), Does Looking for Political Success Mean Undermining the Parliament? Populism and the Institutional Weakness in Romania, *South-East European Journal of Political Science* 4 (1):63–79; Mungiu (2018), Romania's Italian-Style Anticorruption Populism, *Journal of Democracy* 29 (3):104–16. doi:10.1353/jod.2018.0048.

³⁸ See among the others Dutia (1995).

Between 2005 and 2015, the national regulation was further harmonized with the Fourth and the Seventh Directives. Currently, the accounting of unlisted companies, for both individual and consolidated statements, is regulated by the enactment of the Accounting Directive. Listed companies follow IFRS.

One of the takeaways was that gradual implementation of IFRS was deemed to be the most effective strategy. In Romania's case, they started with only 13 large entities that were required to report under IFRS and slowly moved toward banks and credit institutions³⁹. Now all domestic companies⁴⁰ whose securities trade in a regulated market are required to use IFRS Standards as adopted by the EU in their consolidated financial statements⁴¹.

3.9 Serbia

In Serbia, the beginning of complying accounting regulations, their standardization, and deregulation of the legal regulation in favor of the professional regulation are connected with the mid-1980s⁴², when there were significant investments in the agricultural production in Old Yugoslavia made by the World Bank. During the year of 1986, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) signed an agreement of the preparation, adoption, and disclosure of the Yugoslav Accounting Standards (YAS) with the Federation of Accountants and Financial Workers. After that, the Act on Financial Business Operations was reached as well as the mentioned one – Act on Accounting. They prescribed an obligation of keeping business books and preparing financial reports by competent people and an obligation of complying accounting licenses

³⁹The very interesting study of Albu et al. (2013) investigates the perceptions of stakeholders involved in financial reporting in four emerging economies (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Turkey) regarding the possible implementation of IFRS for SMEs, in terms of costs, benefits, and strategy of adoption. The authors say that there is more support for IFRS for SMEs implementation in these four countries than suggested by the results of the European Commission's 2010 consultation for the European Union. Interviews indicate the most support for the convergence approach. However, users oppose convergence and prefer the adoption of IFRS for SMEs.

⁴⁰There are two tiers of Romanian Accounting Standards applicable to SMEs in Romania under Ministry of Finance Order no 3.055/2009. Both sets of standards differ from the *IFRS for SMEs* Standard. The more comprehensive set of standards applies to SMEs that meet at least two of the following three size tests:

- Total assets: more than €3,650,000
- Net turnover more than €7,300,000
- Number of employees more than 50

⁴¹ See Romania IFAC.

⁴² See among the others Lutovac (2020), Populism and the Defects of Democracy in Serbia, *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, No 15, pp. 192–205; Guzina (2021), Through the twenty-first century looking glass: Liberalism, democracy, and populism in a pre-Yugoslav Serbia. *Nations and Nationalism*, pp.1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12715>

with the accounting standards and accounting principles. The Act on Accounting⁴³ has made the Federation of Accountants and Auditors of Serbia more significant, due to their dedication to the translation and implementation of the accounting standards and other business regulations, education of professional accountants and auditors, etc.

The December 2002 modification of the Act of Accounting, upon proposal for the modification made in the month of July in the same year, conditioned the elimination of the provision on the rule of assessing the positions of the balance sheet and profit and loss account and the acceptance of the IAS for assessing positions of financial reports.

At the beginning of the year of 2010, changes in the Act contributed to the harmonization with the EU provisions in order to enhance the quality of financial reporting. Compared to the previous Act from the year of 2006⁴⁴, the new Act was more precise and accurate in its provisions; there was more control, and it stipulated strict measures to be taken against those who are all but disciplined in financial reporting.

All enterprises from the largest listed companies to the smallest unincorporated proprietorships must comply with IFRS. In fact, it has been said “A consistent application of the IAS/IFRS contributes to the credibility of financial reporting” (Vukelić et al., 2011, p.103).

The feeling is that, as the authors say, “The reaching of a novel Act on Accounting and Auditing would create suitable regulatory conditions for the standardization of financial reporting, which stands for one of the conditions for Serbia’s joining the European Union” (Vukelić et al., 2011, p.103).

The Ministry of Finance adopts IFRS as translated into Serbian and published in the *Official Gazette* for the preparation of the financial statements of large companies and public interest entities as defined in the Law on Accounting. It also adopted IFRS for SMEs for application by small- and medium-sized entities and grants medium-sized entities the option to use IFRS. Micro-entities may choose to use

⁴³In 1992, as a certified professional organization, the Federation published 30 Yugoslav Accounting Standards; in the year of 1993, it reached 2 specific Yugoslav accounting standards: YAS 31: Needed expertise of a person keeping business books and preparing accounting reports and YAS 33: Accounting software which serves to identify accounting licenses and standardization of the accounting software. It can be said that, in the year of 1993, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had a professional regulation complied with the international professional regulation, and 5 years later, YAS 34: Consolidated Accounting Report was reached. The Act on Accounting was modified and amended for several times.

⁴⁴The legal regulation also consists of the Decree of Budget Accounting (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 125/03 and 12/06), Act on Budget System (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 9/02 and 86/06) and Rule Book on Standard Classification Framework and Account Plan (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 20/07 and 63/07), Act on State Audit Institution and all the rule books and schemes which arise from them (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 20/07 and 63/07).

IFRS for SMEs⁴⁵ or the requirements in the National Rulebook for Accounting and Financial Reporting, which the Ministry of Finance is in the process of redrafting⁴⁶.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

In reference to the Balkan countries' transition⁴⁷, economies generally do not have an established accounting and auditing tradition. They often lack a strong professional accounting body, if they even have one at all. Accounting and auditing systems may be inadequate (Thompson, 2016) or nonexistent. Also, one of the largest issues is the shortage of a skilled professional accounting workforce in many nations.

Given that widely distinct countries are included in that category, the structural transformations that take place and the resulting structures have similarities but also distinctive features. CEE transition economies tend to be rooted in a code-law tradition and are associated with concentrated ownership and low regulatory quality (Albu et al., 2014).

We believe there are important contributions that can help us make brief conclusions. The first one is a fundamental paper written by Bailey (1995) that discusses a theoretical construct as a frame of reference for understanding the possibilities for, and the nature of, accounting change in the former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe⁴⁸.

The paper of Bailey (1995) deals with accounting in transition in the transitional economy and claims: "The immediate effect of the attempt to break free from the accounting regime of the era of centrally planned economies has been the spread of accounting disharmonization among the former socialist countries. In some countries accounting reform has been confined to a slimming down of the existing accounting system (e.g. in the USSR). In some countries there has been a false start to accounting reform. In other countries there has been apparently steady progress in accounting reform" (Bailey, 1995, p.619).

Since Bailey wrote his introductory article, the focus on accounting change in the CEE has been the further implementation of international financial reporting standards (IFRS) for local enterprises. The requirement for group listed enterprises to prepare IFRS reports from 2005 "is established in most transitional economies, but

⁴⁵As of 2020, the 2020 version of IFRS and the 2015 version of IFRS for SMEs have been translated into Serbian and are required for application.

⁴⁶See Serbia IFAC.

⁴⁷The term transition economies is typically used to describe countries adopting market reforms and changing from a centrally planned to a market economy (Alon & Hageman, 2013).

⁴⁸See also McGee and Preobragenskaya (2006), *Accounting and financial system reform in Eastern Europe and Asia*. USA, Springer; Petrakos (1996), The regional dimension of transition in Central and East European countries. *Eastern European Economics*, 34(5) September/October: 5–38.

it is still unclear to what extent other enterprises will prepare IFRS financial statements” (Sucher et al., 2005, p.574)⁴⁹.

Indications are that “in most of the transitional economies of Eastern and Central Europe, other non-listed enterprises will not have to prepare financial statements according to IFRS” (Sucher et al., 2005, p.574).

On the other hand, the international accounting literature provides evidence that IFRSs improve accounting quality (Daske & Gebhardt, 2006) and potentially reduce the cost of equity capital (e.g., Barth et al., 2008). However the adoption of IFRSs has raised several questions and concerns.

In 2008, Nobes & Parker argue that “if a number of accountants from different countries, or even one country, are given a set of transactions from which to prepare financial statements, they will not produce identical statements” (p.4), though there are endeavors to reduce them particularly by International Accounting Standards Board (IASB).

Furthermore Alexander and Alon (2017) say “different objectives of IFRS and local reporting contribute to dual institutionality of standards where differing formats target the needs of diverse users. Thus, adoption through layering is unlikely to contribute to convergence between different reporting standards used for different purposes, and parallel reporting is expected to persist.”

Then, in the final part of paper, the authors say “it is important to recognize that the adoption approach utilized will impact the possibility of convergence between national and IFRS reporting. Dual institutionality of accounting standards is perpetuated due to the adoption through layering” (Alexander & Alon, 2017, p.276).

For example, it must be noted that even Macedonia uses full IFRS; in fact it “derives the accounting rules from these standards, however, still there are differences in accounting practices. Translation and understandability was pointed out by our respondents as problems in using IFRS” (Shukran & Jeton, 2011, p.58).

We must highlight that the economic globalization have contributed to the need of creating a unified language for international communication, a unique set of international financial reporting standards “with the sole purpose to strengthen the transparency for investors, and reduce the capital price” (Kozuharov & Georgievska, 2018, p.1597).

For Alexander et al. (2018), “harmonization of different socially constructed realities is more important than harmonization of different socially constructed words” (p.1975). But for the authors, this is also logically impossible.

The fundamental passage with which we agree is precisely that “the only way to achieve harmonization is to change one or more socially constructed realities until they become identically constructed. The underlying conceptual understandings are likely to differ across communities, including communities of different user groups arising from the different perceived purposes of financial reporting in the first place” (p.1975).

⁴⁹In Bulgaria and Croatia it is already required that all enterprises prepare IFRS financial statements (ROSC, 2002a, b).

Balkan countries have recently moved toward a market economy, and many of these countries are currently part of the European Union. The economic systems have a limited number of listed companies, and a huge number of small- and medium-sized enterprises – even micro-enterprises. On the other hand, the accounting rules in force are very different. At the time of their transition to the market economy from the collectivist one, they adopted an accounting system close to the setting of international standards. The choice seems understandable, given that these countries were completely devoid of accounting traditions referable to the free market.

However the accounting scene across the former socialist countries “has become immeasurably more diverse and complex” (Zeghal & Mhedhbi, 2006, p.619). It is possible to affirm that the accounting system in the Balkan countries is moving toward IFRS, to gain access into international markets, but again having the traces of the old system where the state persists to shape the accounting notion.

In addition, we want to affirm that, from a superficial view, the Balkan countries seem to have adopted the international accounting principles. However, it is different to affirm complete harmonization with international standards because we must not neglect the problem of language (Searle, 1995, 2009) and comparability, which “complicates” the correct translation/interpretation of the international standards.

Language influences the way we think(...), and often the choice of an inappropriate label in the translation of accounting terminology is detrimental to international accounting communication and creates problems for users (Evans, 2004). Furthermore Evans (2010) says “language change in accounting, including transmission between languages and cultures, can inform accounting historians about the transfer of technical developments, as well as about socio-economic, political or ideological processes, power relationships, and the importance of terminology in jurisdictional disputes.”

Directly linked to the problem of language is comparability. It is a very difficult notion to understand even within a country, let alone globally. We have not really had much literature that helps us understand what is meant by comparability when we have it, and when we do not. The view originating in the USA is that comparability is achieved by assuring that “like things look alike, and unlike things look different” (Trueblood, 1966, p. 189)⁵⁰.

In our opinion this paper highlighted that, surely, Balkan countries is moving toward IFRS, but again having the traces of the old system where the state persists to shape the accounting notion. This aspect shows that we are very far from harmonization, and finally we cannot forget all the problems of different languages in the Balkan countries with inevitable problems of comparability, translation, and interpretation.

At this point we think that infinite future possibilities open up for specific insights into the individual international standards in each Balkan country object of our work.

⁵⁰But in accounting what are “things”? And how do we perceive and identify “like” and “unlike things”? As stated by Zeff, accounting is “an artefact, not articles of furniture or draperies” (Zeff, 2007, p.290).

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Chapter 8

The Role of Local Authorities in Opposing Populism Through Social Accountability



Eleonora Cardillo

1 Introduction

The concept of populism is considered an attitude and orientation of demagogic exaltation of the people, sharing their positions often in contrast with the actions and behaviors of institutions, governments, and ruling classes. It provokes a contrast between the pure people who are the custodians of just and positive values (Bobbio et al., 2016; Marchettoni, 2017) and the corrupt elites based on the lacking relationship between political representatives and the people's will (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Populism can represent an essentially undemocratic phenomenon as it considers political parties, intermediaries between institutions and the people, as a threat and a source of corruption (Fenucci, 2019). In this sense, it can destabilize the principles of solidarity and democracy by splitting society into two opposing sides, on the one hand, the populists who support the mood of the people and, on the other hand, a ruling class that holds power and is combatted.

Public administrations, like local authorities, are sometimes considered organizations distant from citizens and unable to conduct public action according to certain criteria of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The Mayor of Gdansk, a member of the European Council of the Regions, in a meeting on the theme of populist tendencies, held at the headquarters of the EU Assembly in 2017 attended by mayors and political representatives of different countries, underlined that local authorities have the task and the duty to fight populism and no one can do it better than them, due to their closeness to citizenship through a process of sharing responsibilities between municipal administrators and citizens.

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Starting from the social mission that characterizes the action and the institutional purposes of local authorities, to combat the phenomenon of populism, it is important to focus on the quality and social value of public administrations. This implies the ability to revisit their work and to follow the rules that lead to the improvement of their social communication and accountability system.

The contribution aims to analyze the role played by local authorities through social communication and reporting tools in countering populist currents according to the public accountability approach. In order to evaluate the role of social reporting in limiting populist tendencies an interpretive analysis was carried out. Interviews were conducted with mayors, councilors, aldermen, and service managers of various local authorities investigated to assess the perception of their role in this critical context. This ambit is also studied in consideration of the renewed communication and reporting system resulting from the recent accounting harmonization process of Italian local authorities, which pays attention to the relationship between institution and citizen and to the methods of evaluating public action. In order to limit populism, local administrations need to recapture their relationship with the community by creating social value and a consolidated path of sharing choices and public policies. Improving social responsibility means respecting the human context and the main and secondary stakeholders by promoting a communication system that responds to the collective interest of citizens increasingly protected by appropriate regulations.

2 Populism as a Limit to Public Democratic Processes

The concept of populism is not easy to define and circumscribe precisely. It is believed that this indeterminacy is linked to the fact that the different connotations of populism manifest themselves with respect to the political and social context in which it takes shape (Wirth et al., 2016; Enli & Rosenberg, 2018). The phenomenon of populism in its evolutionary dynamics was characterized by the presence of various elements: the affirmation of a coincidence between populist movements and popular will, an aversion to elite and power groups, and the presence of a group of subjects who share the same values and ideas (Canneddu et al., 2019).

The term populism was born in Russia and developed in America and also in France in the early 1900s. In Italy, it developed after the First World War. Populism, understood as a cultural and political attitude of exaltation of the people, is initially based on the principles of socialism.

The Russian populism, that developed at the beginning of the twentieth century, proposes a general improvement in the living conditions of the most needy classes by realizing a socialist thrust in contrast with the Western industrial society. According to this meaning, Russian populism represents more an appeal to the people to counter this situation than a process of exaltation of the people.

Populism, understood as an action against the financial elites by the middle class, develops in North America, while in Latin America, it manifests itself directly as a

governing force taking on various forms including Peronism which assumes the connotations of a populist, socialist, and patriotic movement. Starting therefore from an agrarian populism (typical of Russian intellectuals) and from a political populism (based more on reactionary movements), from the 1990s onward, the presence of neo-populist parties developed in European countries. In Europe today the concept of populism is considered a pathological element of representative democracy.

According to that general definition, populism can be considered an attitude and an orientation of demagogic exaltation of the people. The positions of the people are shared and exalted, but they often contrast with the actions and behaviors of political institutions, governments, and the ruling classes. In this sense, populism tends to undermine institutional political representation as the people, while characterized by a variety of characteristics, are considered a superior source of legitimacy that can take direct and determined action (Magrin, 2011). Populism therefore generates a distinction and a contrast between pure people, custodians of just and positive values (Bobbio et al., 2016; Marchettoni, 2017), and the corrupt elites who do not allow a balanced and useful relationship between political representatives and popular will (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

In the context of studies on this subject (Kelsen, 1995; Arditì, 2004; Stanley, 2008; Taggart, 2000; Rooduijn, 2013; Pazé, 2017), some typical and identifying elements of the populist approach can be found: the centrality of a homogeneous people that separates itself from corrupt elite groups and disloyal individuals, the absolute principle of popular sovereignty and direct democracy mechanisms (Chiantera Stutte, 2014), the identification of a leadership figure in which the people identify themselves, and the direct and simplified communication profiles between the leader and the people that guarantee an emotional closeness with respect to the situation of dissatisfaction and intolerance of the people.

Starting from these conceptual delimitations, the relationship between democracy and populism remains complex. This relationship is, in fact, generally conceived as conflicting and antithetical (Pazé, 2017). If on the one hand democracy is based on the functioning of representation, on the other hand, populism is configured as an ideology which, today increasingly based on distorting ways of communication channels, instead wants to alter the concept of democratic representation and the regulatory function of intermediation between politicians and community.

The controversial relationship between democracy and populism leads us to affirm that the evaluation of the aspects, contents, and effects of democracy represents an important premise for understanding the relationship between populism, parties, and democracy and, therefore, the basics on which populism is founded (Baldini, 2014).

In this sense, Laclau (2005, 2008) thinks that populism is not a problem of democracy but rather the essence of democracy itself. This approach derives from the consideration that radical democracy cannot exist without the people who are made up of populist policies. Therefore, there is a profound link between political intervention and populism, understood as an ordinary method for building a link among different social demands.

According to other approaches, populism can represent an essentially undemocratic phenomenon and, specifically, an explicit attack on democratic and representative principles, as it considers political parties and intermediaries between institutions and people, as a threat and a source of corruption (Fenucci, 2019). Starting from a request for greater popular participation and the elimination of intermediate organs and structures such as associations, movements, parties, or trade unions, populism creates a process of identification between people and institutional power and a direct relationship between leader and people (Rimoli, 2020). This reshapes the concept of democracy according to which the sovereignty of the people is exercised through forms of representation and institutional intermediation and can destabilize the principles of solidarity and democracy.

Jagers and Walgrave (2007) think that populism is a style of communication of political actors who relate to the people representing their main interlocutor. The figure of the populist politician is characterized by the creation of an accentuated closeness with the people and a simple and informal communication strategy. This figure manifests itself, however, when politics enters a crisis failing to meet the needs and expectations of the community. In this circumstance, the people become almost an indistinct entity that clashes with political and economic structures to show their virtues and positions of anti-political criticism and distrust in the functioning of democratic institutions.

3 The Accountability of Public Organizations Against Populist Pressures

Territorial public administrations have always been committed to making a profitable comparison with the socioeconomic context they govern. However, there is a certain complexity in connecting the needs of citizens with the ability of the public organization to interpret and satisfy requests through careful management of stakeholders in the context of a government in constant transformation (Reinwald & Kræmmergaard, 2012).

In line with the role and aims of the public sector, these organizations, such as local authorities, are sometimes considered distant from citizens and unable to conduct public action according to certain criteria of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, the communication tools do not always appear sufficient and effective to respond to collective needs as they often do not offer a clear view of the action of administrators with respect to the use of resources and the implementation of policies.

The purpose of constant and responsible dialogue with stakeholders is to communicate, in an exhaustive and understandable way, how the public body has implemented and improved the services in quantitative and qualitative terms (Angelopoulos et al., 2010) and to assess the type of impact that external stakeholders have on the performance (Schalk, 2017).

Starting, therefore, from the social mission that characterizes the action and institutional aims of local authorities, in order to counter the phenomenon of populism, it is important to focus on the quality and social value of public administrations. This implies the ability to revisit own work and to follow the rules that lead to the improvement of the communication and social responsibility system, “it is precisely on this field that economic and political institutions can regain people’s trust, witnessing the possibility of a different vision, aiming at the creation of value through those inclusive processes that see their distinctive traits precisely in participation and in the shared assumption of responsibility towards others” (Felice & Angelini, 2017, p. 3).

In this context, the role played by collective policies and public social responsibility in countering populist currents is outlined.

The mayor of Gdansk, a member of the Europe Council of the Regions, in a meeting on the theme of populist tendencies, held at the headquarters of the EU Assembly in 2017, which was attended by mayors and political representatives of various countries, stressed that the local governments have the task and duty to fight populism and no one can do it better than them, due to their proximity to citizenship through a process of sharing responsibilities between municipal administrators and citizens.

These characteristics are connected to the institutional essence of the local authority as an entity aimed at the development of processes of supply and consumption of wealth in order to meet the needs of the administered community, through the use and destination of resources deriving from State and Regions transfers and from taxation, tariffs, and income services and asset management. The will to achieve efficiency in allocative, redistributive, and social terms supports the decisions and operating rules that govern the concrete management dynamics. This ensures that the organization is conducted according to the rules of good performance and impartiality of the administration. The local authority, by its nature, plays a role institutionally linked to the value of sociality, which becomes its primary dimension of observation and an essential reading key for evaluating its activity. In this sense, local organization cannot be considered a phenomenon detached from the economic and social context; it is in fact a complementary part of the other systems with which it relates and creates an exchange relationship (Bruni, 1968; Ball, 2004).

The path thus outlined is configured with a view to increasing public accountability, which is expressed in the duty of the public administration to draw up an account that reports on its actions (Jones, 1992; Mulgan, 2000; Baldarelli et al., 2015).

Accountability can be traced back to the individual sense of responsibility and to issues relating to respect of public interest, as well as to control activity as it also assumes the characteristics of an institutional control mechanism, through the request for information on the role and actions, carried out by the organization. It is also linked to the pursuit of the wishes and needs of citizens through shared and conscious interaction; and from this derives the dialogic nature of accountability

which includes a process of mutual clarification and justification (Day & Klein, 1987; Bovens, 1998). Accountability has also been defined as the management of expectations through the performance of public services, and these expectations can be both external and internal (Dubnick, 1998). In fact, this concept includes the consideration of public expectations on performance, responsiveness, sensitivity, and morality for a wide circle of people and institutions, although such expectations are often interpreted in a subjective way and can become contradictory (Kearns, 1996).

The duty of accountability takes on a double dimension, internal and external (Peters, 1995; Dubnick, 1998; Mulgan, 2000). The calling of the entity to generate an account that reports on its actions by communicating them to the citizens is linked to the concept of external accountability; the responsibility linked to the individual conscience to perform this duty is instead brought back to internal accountability, through a process of “internalization of accountability” (Mulgan, 2000).

The concept of accountability also has a temporal perspective that should not run out in the short term but become part of the conditions and prerequisites for future actions (Weick, 1995), framing itself in a cultural and historical significance rather than in a series of fixed and rigid and universally accepted sets of precepts (Willmott, 1996).

More recent studies have investigated public accountability with respect to the nature and structure of relationships between individuals with responsibilities (Busuic & Lodge, 2016; Overman, 2021) and the way they perceive their duties and the legitimacy of their actions (Hall et al., 2017). The relationship between the responsibility to fulfill obligations and the attention given to reputation linked to the position held in the organization also becomes essential (Doering et al., 2021). Accountability mechanisms can find obstacles when political representatives are indifferent to social reporting duties and when the local community is not inclined to exercise its formal right of participation and control. These issues should stimulate change and reform processes aimed at significantly strengthening local governance and democracy (Kamrul Ahsan et al., 2018).

Populist pressures can counteract the structures of responsibility present in the organization by altering and modifying the practices of responsibility and the reputation of the actors involved (Wood et al., 2022). The populist ideology leads, in fact, to a dichotomous setting of society, on the one hand the pure people and on the other hand the corrupt elite, and in this antagonistic construction, the political exponents should express only the general will of the people (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In this vision, a moralistic policy emerges that considers the groups of power to be inferior and attributes value only to the popular voice (Müller, 2017). According to this logic, populists are not only anti-elitists but also anti-pluralists, opposing the principles of liberal democracy (Bauer & Becker, 2020). Local administrations represent pluralist institutions based on the principles of democracy and accountability; instead populist pressures could lead to a democratic relegation, threatening the pluralist and inclusive essence of public action.

4 The Renewed Role of Social Communication in the Current Accounting System of Italian Local Authorities

The evolution toward the new public management model and the legislative innovations that have taken place in the last decade have profoundly changed the relationship between local authority and citizen, bringing out strong expectations of citizens on the level of services offered by the public sector, in terms of both more efficient use of resources and quality of service, generating a significant increase in the demand for transparency and participation in public management (Bryson et al., 2014).

The local authority has the opportunity to reinterpret the role played and, at the same time, make a reporting system inspired by economic and social criteria where the concept - duty of public administration accountability becomes relevant (Cardillo, 2017).

The renewed communication and reporting system deriving from the recent accounting harmonization process of Italian local authorities (Legislative Decree 118/2011 and subsequent amendments) pays attention to the relationship between institution and citizen and to evaluation methods of public action. To limit populism, local administrations need to regain possession of their relationship with the community by creating social value and a consolidated path of sharing choices and public policies. Improving social responsibility means respecting the human context and the main and secondary stakeholders, promoting a communication system that responds to the collective interest of citizens who are increasingly protected by adequate regulations. The distinction between primary and secondary (internal/external) stakeholders, even if it is not definable in an absolute way, classifies between the subjects who operate within the institution whose contribution is essential for the performance of the activity and the subjects who influence and they are influenced by public action even if they are not directly involved in the performance of the activity (Clarkson, 1995). According to this meaning, all individuals, even potential ones, are stakeholders, including future generations.

Transparency and accountability are the main issues in the public administration reform process, understood as prerequisites for monitoring activity and limiting corruption (Law August 7 2015, no. 12). The introduction of social tools, such as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), favors access to public administration data and documents which on the one hand reduce some publicity obligations for the entity but on the other stimulate participation and the transparent opening to the community (Legislative Decree 25 May 2016 no. 97).

The general factors underlying populism are in fact strengthened when there is territorial fragmentation and the exclusion of the people from the choices regarding economic development, public infrastructures and transport policies, health, education, security, and other relevant areas for the life of the territory (European Economic and Social Committee, 2019).

The development of communication and management models to meet the expectations of citizens on the level of services offered by the public sector and the increase in the level of transparency and accessibility are priority in the process of cultural and regulatory renewal of local authorities.

Social reporting systems improve the democratic process because they activate communication and sharing systems on the activities carried out so as to allow interlocutors to formulate their own opinion on policies or on how to improve them, feeling an integral part of a system. In light of these changes, the public accountability system is increasingly oriented toward an interactive approach, in which the different levels of local institutions communicate more directly with the citizens. For example, in the context of internal control systems, the introduction of the evaluation by citizens on the quality of services provided by the local authority represents a way to interact constructively with the community.

The role of the accounting information system of Italian local authorities in accountability processes plays a fundamental role. Harmonized accounting, consolidated financial statements, and disclosure obligations can be a field of investigation for scholars and public decision-makers to assess the impact on transparency and accountability (Aversano & Manes Rossi, 2015; Bracci, 2017). Transparency and accountability are elements that give stability and coherence to the delegation and representation mechanism between society and institutions. Transparency fulfills its moral responsibility when it makes an organization more responsible and when it is able to provide sufficient information to stakeholders (Rawlins, 2008). Therefore, the involvement of stakeholders is an important part of transparency because it creates appropriate channels to bring citizens closer and make them more involved in social and institutional choices (Cotterrell, 1999; Piotrowski & Van Ryzin, 2007).

With reference to Italian local authorities context, the harmonization accounting standard, concerning the planning activity rules (Annex 4/1 of Legislative Decree 118/2011), requires that the strategic and financial programming documents also indicates the tools through which the local body intends to report on their work during the mandate in a systematic and transparent manner, to inform citizens on the level of implementation of programs and on the achievement of objectives of political and administrative responsibility areas. This provision certainly represents a turning point as previously there was no obligation and therefore the entity could not use any tool aimed at creating social utility for community. Furthermore, the choice of the social communication tool must be indicated in advance to guarantee the recipients a legitimate expectation and a clear knowledge of the social reporting methods used (Castellani & Mazzara, 2018).

5 Perception of Social Communication Tools' Role to Combat Populist Tendencies: Some Empirical Evidence

5.1 *Methodology and Data Collection*

Starting from the legislative provision relating to the obligation for local authorities to define, in the preventive phase, the social communication tool adopted to inform citizens about the use of resources an empirical research has been carried out to understand the influences between social reporting systems and populist approaches. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to political and technical subjects working at three several Sicilian local authorities. The choice of these entities was based on the willingness of the administrators to collaborate for the purposes of research and on the fact that these entities have implemented social reporting procedures to meet the regulatory social disclosure. These entities represent research contexts characterized by high complexity and subject to continuous regulatory changes, which, being in close relationship with citizenship, play a decisive role in improving democratic principles and participation (Borgonovi, 2005; Cardillo & Ruggeri, 2016).

The regulatory changes of the last decade have led local authorities to develop new tools capable of evaluating performance in a clearer and more transparent way to satisfy external and internal interlocutors. Specifically, the interviews were addressed to three mayors, six aldermen, three councilors, and several service managers responsible for various services (Social Affairs, General Secretariat, Culture and Education, Performance Evaluation System, Territory and Environment, Financial service) in order to assess their perception of the social communication tools and the role they attribute to them with respect to improving the political/community relationship. Accounting documents were also viewed which are useful for understanding the role played by social communication (such as social report, performance evaluation plan and relation, single programming document, and executive management plan).

The approach adopted for the analysis is interpretative, aimed at evaluating the perception of administrators and technicians on the orientation and sharing of specific procedures dictated by changes in communication and reporting systems (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Denzin et al., 2006). The interviews conducted from March to June 2021 focused on specific main issues that constitute the topics of interest. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered in order to base the discussion on the themes useful for answering research questions. This choice is consistent with the interpretative approach aimed at understanding how subjects interpret specific dynamics and processes. Before conducting the interviews, the issues under observation, the related objectives, and the methods for measuring the results have been communicated to the subjects. Furthermore, all the interviews were transcribed and subsequently shared with the interviewees in order to verify their contents. Table 8.1 shows the interview topic obtained from the five questions administered to the interviewees, the subjects interviewed, the number of interviews, and the duration.

Table 8.1 Interview details

| Interview topic | Subjects interviewed | Number of interviews | Duration of the interviews |
|------------------------|---|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, and Q5 | Three mayors | 1 | 2 h and 15 min |
| | Six alderman | 1 | 2 h |
| | Three councilors | 2 | 2 h |
| | Six services managers | 6 | 3 h |
| | Three heads of financial service | 2 | 1 h |
| | Three heads of management control/performance cycle | 2 | 1 h |

5.2 Findings

The areas of analysis concerned the nature of the social document, the purposes attributed to it, the possible alternatives chosen to report to the community, the role of social communication in combating populist pressures, and the connection between the level of accountability and the improvement of the relationship between politicians and people. Specifically, the questionnaire contains the following questions that derive from some general themes considered, such as the social reporting systems adopted and their possible connection with populist orientations, the structuring of the accounting system, and the relevance of the local territorial context. For each question, the results of the empirical analysis are reported.

Q1: Which document is indicated as a social communication and reporting tool in the forecasting phase?

With reference to this question, all entities share the goal of social responsibility, which is not only a means of communication and transparency but also an ethical and moral duty. The administration can deal with citizens according to a shared logic of participation empowerment.

Two entities have chosen the social report, as a social communication document with an annual frequency, following a strong link with the single planning document in order to maintain consistency between the strategic choices and the social results achieved. The document provides a report on the activities carried out by the entity, in the reference year, with a description of the actions taken in relation to each area of intervention, highlighting the resources committed and the results achieved. However, qualitative information prevails over quantitative ones, highlighting the main socioeconomic effects on the territory. The social report is the tool through which the administration increases its capacity for monitoring social goals, and its use aims at improving the administration's planning and control skills and at establishing a more lasting dialogue with citizens on the basis of shared communication. The social report is considered the main form of social reporting and openness to the outside, through an exposition of its institutional and managerial responsibility in order to create public value. In this context, "harmonized accounting and communication and reporting obligations constitute for policy makers and also for

scholars an area in which to assess their impact on transparency and accountability” (Head of management control of a local government).

One of the entities investigated adopts, as a social reporting method, the documents required by Legislative Decree 150/2009 relating to performance evaluation, specifically the performance plan and the performance report. The subjects interviewed in this body consider the performance measurement systems as essential tools for improving public services; therefore, if they are developed and implemented in a correct and useful way, they can play a fundamental role in defining and achieving strategic and social objectives, in aligning behaviors and attitudes and in improving organizational performance.

However, it is necessary that the performance evaluation system is part of a more general programming-planning-management-reporting cycle through punctual time phases marked with precision and specific documents for each level of this evaluation system. In fact, the effectiveness of the system also depends on timely planning to guide management in an orderly and punctual manner and not late, as often happens.

Specifically, if, on the one hand, the performance plan identifies the strategic and operational guidelines and objectives and defines, with reference to these objectives, the expected results and the indicators for measuring and evaluating performance, on the other hand, the annual report on performance is the managerial improvement tool. Through reporting, the administration can reprogram objectives and resources taking into account the results obtained in the previous year and progressively improving the functioning of the performance cycle. In this sense, compliance with the deadlines for preparing the document is particularly useful in favoring subsequent planning activities. The report is an accountability tool through which the administration can report to all stakeholders, internal and external, the results obtained in the period considered and any deviations – and the related causes – with respect to the planned objectives. In this perspective, conciseness, clarity, and comprehensibility are privileged in preparing the report, also making extensive use of representations and schemes to improve the usability and the comprehensibility of the information. In fact, “the development of an adequate performance evaluation system will improve the relationship between administration and citizens, creating a dialogue among them, placing the administration in a position to be more efficient and effective in achieving the required results” (Head of performance cycle of a local authority).

There is a shared purpose attributed to social reporting systems which should be built to be usable for citizens, containing qualitative and quantitative information accessible to the various subjects, overcoming the technical accounting information that characterizes traditional accounting documents. The effort that still needs to be made is to create a specific reclassification system, which aligns, according to specific criteria and instrumental logics, the data expressed in the planning documents, with the activities and categories indicated in the social document.

Q2: What purposes are attributed to social communication and reporting tools? Do they create social value?

The growing openness to the outside has stimulated the need to obtain new communication tools that report on the results obtained by local authorities to the various stakeholders, especially with reference to the quality of services and the ways in which resources are used.

The strong idea that supports the choices of the entities analyzed is to bring citizens back to the center of interest of local institutions and to consider them as the bearers of rights and needs. The main objective of social communication therefore consists in making the dialogue open to the expectations of the context, listening to the reasons and proposals of the community with the aim of creating a dialectical and constructive interchange. Starting from these considerations, for political and technical subjects, an important role, as a means of social and transparent communication to citizens, is represented by the social report. It is perceived as a possible agent of change in supporting strategic-managerial and participation processes, through which the administration increases its awareness to respond to the community needs.

In general, the social report, like all the tools used to communicate with citizens, represents a strong two-way communication system with stakeholders, favoring, on the one hand, the transparency of administrative action and, on the other, the participation of citizens to public life. However, it is noted that, starting from a greater request by the community to account for the results achieved, often social reporting tools do not appear to be effective, from a management and communication point of view, because they often are hermetic and/or superficial in representing results produced by the public administration. Specifically, the accounting system should be capable of offering a useful basis for the detection and representation of phenomena following a logical interdependence of processes, the specific managerial phases, and the clear representation of results of performances achieved. In this sense, it is possible to achieve greater alignment between accounting data and social communication and a more valid consistency between the aims of the public institution, expressed and measured through this system, and the needs of the social and economic environment.

With reference to the perception of the purposes and value of social reporting models, it is associated with the political-institutional dimension that characterizes the generation and configuration of the information system useful for these purposes. Starting from consideration that social dimension assumes an essential place in making economic and financial choices; its inclusion in the institutional and formalized adoption and approval of traditional accounting system documents of local authorities is crucial. It therefore becomes relevant to identify the distinct but related purposes of strategic planning and operational and programming activity. The first identifies certain macro-objectives and fulfills, in a broader perspective, the so-called social effectiveness, understood as an activity aimed at satisfying public needs; the second is linked to management results through a verification of the achievement of certain levels of efficiency and productivity, also contributing to the achievement of social performance. Indeed, "the exercise of public power operates in a context of different interests, both public and private, which deserve protection, making negotiations and discussions among various administrations and between

administrations and citizens. Transparency and social accountability come from an administration that adopts organizational models and understandable forms of behavior, in order to allow citizens to easily get into the context of public action” (Mayor of a local government).

The growing tendency to feed public accountability processes, in fact, attributes a substantial role to the information content of the accounting system. The information and data of accounting system are representative, not only from the point of view of a mere allocative and authorization logic but according to a broader managerial approach that reevaluates and reconfigures the system making it suitable, in its complete and logically integrated configuration, for the clarification of social impact implications. In order to identify useful parameters for monitoring and measuring the degree of stakeholder expectations, the local authority chooses and collects data that are valid for the representation and evaluation of organization-social context relations in the complex interactive and communicative dynamics.

Q3: Do you know alternative documents to the one used by the entity to report and which can offer greater or equal social utility?

In terms of social reporting, local authorities have emphasized the role attributed to the mandate reporting. It represents a form of reporting that is based on the assumption that political body exercises its government activity through a trust relationship expressed by citizens through their vote. Public administrators are therefore obliged to satisfy the voters’ right to information regarding their electoral promises. It is highlighted that the document, being connected to the duration of the mandate program, is drawn up at the end of the mandate with the aim of demonstrating, with clarity and transparency, the interventions carried out and the results achieved during the five-year period compared to what was declared in the programming phase.

The administrators interviewed admit the strategic nature of the tool, because it constitutes a basis for guaranteeing institutional and programmatic continuity for the administrations that will take office in subsequent years. However, they believe that, on the one hand, it is necessary to define more specifically the structure and contents of the mandate report, and on the other hand, in order to serve as a social document, it should be produced annually, for example, through an annual mandate report that allows a periodic strategic and social control.

In order to use the mandate report as a social accountability tool, it should contain specific information regarding the different areas of action of the entity with respect to the services offered and the objectives achieved; an assessment of the economic, social, and environmental impact of the entity actions and the projects carried out; a picture of the economic, financial, and equity situation at the beginning and at the end of the mandate (as well as periodically), highlighting the strengths and weaknesses with respect to internal results and the expectations of the territory; an analysis of the degree of satisfaction of the various stakeholders with regard to the services provided; and a description of the policies adopted and the related choices on the use of resources with a clear and transparent language.

The managers interviewed believe that certainly the preparation of the mandate report is prepared by internal subjects that operate in the local authority; the

construction of the social report instead can involve the presence of specific skills that sometimes need to be found outside the organization. For example, stakeholder mapping involves appropriate sampling and complex selection techniques that require statistical knowledge and skills in social research. The head of performance cycle of a local government states that “the satisfaction of the stakeholders involved ensures balanced growth in the medium-long term; therefore, we can understand the importance that such a document can have in supporting strategic decisions and institutional guidelines.”

Among the documents considered in possible social reporting tools, the performance report is highlighted, as a document through which the administration reports results achieved in relation to the objectives programmed and contained in the performance plan of the previous year, highlighting the resources used and any deviations recorded in the final balance with respect to what was planned. This document follows a precise logic of representation, by indicating the areas of intervention, the needs identified and the priorities to be met, the results achieved with the use of appropriate data and indicators, any critical issues, and the actions envisaged for the future. Another important aspect is the classification of specific stakeholders considered relevant for the purposes of the activities carried out. Particular attention is given to the monitoring activity about expected impacts associated with the specific three-year objectives in order to creating public value and improving the level of well-being of users and stakeholders, taking into account the quantity and quality of available resources. The report represents a valid social reporting tool because it offers an overall picture of the results achieved in relation to the organizational and individual objectives of the managers who directly contributed to their realization. Furthermore, the validation of the performance report made by the OIV (Internal Evaluation Body - Article 14, paragraph 4, letter c. of Legislative Decree 150/2009) gives it essential descriptive and communicative characteristics. In fact, a condition for validation is that this report is drawn up in a concise, clear, and immediately understandable form to citizens and other users, guaranteeing its visibility through publication on the institutional website. Managerial control reporting system can also be a tool of social evaluation for the local authority even if the partial implementation of it limits its use for social reporting purposes.

Q4: Could the strengthening of social communication and reporting tools reduce populist pressures and improve the relationship between politics and the community?

Public institution is founded on a system of values and principles that qualify and characterize its work. According to this end, it is necessary to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of its organizational and management structure. That means starting a process of requalification and renewal of its own structures and administrative apparatus to make it suitable and adequate to meet collective needs, limiting populist tendencies.

The consideration of the stakeholder requests implies the attribution of a political-institutional importance to the social reporting process, considering the knowledge and analysis of the overall relational public system, a support available to public management for decisions and to guide the management according to the needs expressed by the community. The administrators believe that the identification of

their stakeholders is essential to create the conditions for the activation of a dialogue and a valid interaction, making citizens involved in the choices and actions and not an opposing pole and in contrast with the public policies.

The selection of the social interests and the ways in which to represent them require the development of an aptitude to interpret the requests of the various stakeholders, anticipating, and where possible avoiding, any conflicting positions. The public administrators, right from their candidacy, have to recognize both current and future stakeholders in order to define a conduct that can be oriented toward compliance with their requests in the medium-long term.

Service managers say that changes in managerial systems and practices can be successful if they are accepted, assimilated, and internalized by the subjects of the organization, acquiring rules and procedures of specific contexts. This can also be extended to the local body stakeholders. In fact, social reactions, like populist ones, also depend on the quality of the means with which the organization relates to stakeholders and shares strategies and policies with them. The relationships with stakeholders should start from a shared vision on the needs to be satisfied and should involve the role that each organizational unit has to achieve for this purpose. Both in the phase of defining the strategic-political choices and in the reporting results phase, it is necessary to find adequate communication and management solutions, such as the participatory budget and the social budget and report, to activate paths and synergies with the territory. The Mayor of a local government said that “through the accounting documents and even more those of social reporting, the institution communicates its identity, realizing the mission and the strategic objectives that guide its action and promoting the transparent dissemination and the correct perception of its value. These documents become tools for providing third parties with information that allows them to evaluate socio-environmental as well as economic results but undoubtedly favor a constructive dialogue with the local community.”

Social documents can help make citizens participate in the dynamics of the entity, but they reflect the usefulness and criticality of the accounting and control systems present in the organization. The analysis of these systems is important in the strategic and managerial enhancement processes. The lack and often the ineffectiveness of the control systems expresses the scarce diffusion of the control and accountability culture. The reduced adoption of control reporting models based on managerial logic limits the achievement of certain results linked to the objectives of various organizational figures and responsible managers.

Certainly, the improvement of transparency and accountability processes feeds two-way communication and fosters a climate of consensus and trust, allowing social control over the work of the local authority and creating a more valid relationship with the community.

Q5: Do local authorities play an important role in fighting populism by increasing their level of accountability?

The social reporting systems for the investigated local authorities constitute a tool that the body adopts to offer its community the possibility of recognizing and evaluating the pursuit of its mission and the vision on which the administrative

activity was built and developed. In this perspective, the concept of accountability translates into the ability to create social value correlated with the human value and instrumental resources, communicating results to society in a transparent way. Political subjects affirm that in order to evaluate the performance of public administrations, the goal of creating social value and its implementation methods are primary and essential prerogatives. Social value is not simply an abstract concept but can be measured by applying social accounting methods. Public institutions are based on a social mission; therefore, the inclusion of social variables is a constitutive element of primary evaluation of the organization (Quarter & Richmond, 2003; Polonsky & Grau, 2008).

The pursuit of accountability requires the existence of a consolidated relationship between administrators and community, an activity of reporting the objectives and related areas of intervention, and a process of evaluation and expression of opinion by the stakeholders. The politicians interviewed stressed that in the public sector, institutional activity should focus on the development of a set of relationship channels established with its internal and external interlocutors, necessary to effectively seek the necessary consent and social legitimacy of actions.

However, various service managers highlighted that the need for social reporting communication encounters various difficulties, such as the complex mapping of stakeholders. The differences and diversities of the administered community in fact express specific and divergent interests of citizens according to their economic and social conditions, difficult to map and select. The public managers also point out that a limit to the sharing process with community can sometimes be given by the interference of political intents related to the achievement of electoral consensus which can contrast with the social and economic development needs.

The interviews show the importance of accountability processes and the generation of organizational skills and competencies to counter the phenomenon of populism. In the public context, in fact, these processes are influenced by the presence of institutional actors who interface with different ways of thinking and, consequently, approaching to managerial innovations and communication methodologies.

The growth of accountability of local authorities strengthens communication and transparency, through social reporting tools that make the effects of corporate management accessible to stakeholders; participation, with the creation of a dialogue with civil society and other institutions on the various activities and interventions; the value dimension, with which the entity acquires its social mission and awareness of the needs of the population and their recognition in the economic and social system; and democratic processes, consolidating the typically democratic mechanisms of representation and delegation, reducing the distance and lack of communication between different spheres of social, political, and economic action and the related institutions that feed populist demonstrations. These elements are important to reduce the phase of disinterest and institutional political detachment that the public administration risks. Furthermore, several administrators believe that political communication should adapt to the new dissemination tools; this implies that public administrations will not be able to use only the usual tools, based on dynamics of comparison and reflexive dialectics, at the basis of the principles of pluralist

democracy, but they will often be induced to use more immediate tools and languages of the current digital society. In this regard, a councilor stated that “it is also important to adapt the communication tools to bring the public community closer, because society is becoming more and more digital and therefore the way of communicating also affects the perception of the content that is communicated.”

6 Conclusions

The social communication and reporting tools, adopted by local authorities, support role and duty of reporting toward citizens. Respect for community right to be informed of the choices made by public organizations, in a clear and accessible way, places the people in the conditions to fully exercise civil citizenship. Thus, public institution constructs an instrument of active participation and direct democracy by hindering populist pressures.

The results of the survey show an awareness of the importance attributed to social reporting systems that should be designed to consolidate the communication of qualitative and quantitative information to citizens. The implementation of social interaction processes should be supported by careful identification of stakeholders in order to analyze the dialectical relationships that follow the change in the institutional culture (Angelopoulos et al., 2010; Schalk, 2017).

The investigated entities attribute importance to the connection between social communication and the performance evaluation system to more consciously realize managerial paths and improve performance levels. In this sense, the performance plan and report can constitute possible valid options on which to base the social reporting system. However, in the more general processes of performance evaluation, such as planning, management, and reporting phases, a necessary temporal realignment and integration between the cycles of performance, budget, and strategic planning should be carried out in order to achieve consistency between the planning contents and the results measurement. It is therefore necessary to verify consistency with respect to the objectives established in the planning stage, the operational ones assigned to the service managers, and the needs expressed by the local community. The recognition of the purposes expressed by the social reporting models is associated with the political-institutional dimension that characterizes the generation and configuration of the accounting information system of local authorities. The social dimension should be included in the institutional and formalized logic of creating and approving traditional accounting documents. Considering that public social communication activates a process that allows different actors to relate to each other and to compare points of view and values in order to contribute to the common goals and interests, this communication can represent a path which limits populist pressures by building a new identity for public administrators and citizens.

The social effectiveness of public action translates into a connection between the aims of the public institution, realized and measured through a logical interdependence between management processes, and the information needs of the

socioeconomic environment. The growing tendency to improve public accountability processes in fact attributes a substantial role to the information content of the accounting system making it suitable for social disclosure (Peters, 1995; Kearns, 1996; Dubnick, 1998; Mulgan, 2000). The value and culture of accountability and transparency should be disseminated at all organizational levels (Doering et al., 2021). It should be noted that public administrators should become aware of the importance of not using contingent and media communication tools devoid of real effectiveness and content; instead, they have to develop communication systems that express useful information and a valid knowledge of public action supported by a qualified planning, control, and evaluation of results.

In fact, populism today is strengthened and is based on a type of

communication on smartphone or tablet, which makes possible a fictitious direct and constant relationship between the leader and his popular audience in a form of direct representation, gives everyone an illusion of presence and power, and finally pushes to choose improvised politicians, of proud mediocrity but well-endowed with visibility on the net, to carry out tasks that would instead require that experience and that specific competence that are today completely ignored if not even derided and denigrated as suspicious (Rimoli, 2020, pp. 12–13).

The central issue is to build an image of credibility and reliability especially in the area of service delivery, basing administrative action on a qualified response to the citizen's needs. Populism should not overturn the intermediary role played by institutions according to democratic principles (Rooduijn, 2013; Pazé, 2017; Kamrul Ahsan et al., 2018; Bauer & Becker, 2020; Wood et al., 2022); positively defending people means transforming the role played by politicians and administrators toward the emancipation, education, and awareness of citizens (Chiantera Stutte, 2014).

The reflections presented suggest some orientations for politicians and public managers, on which the process of reform of public administrations, toward transparency and compulsory social communication to citizens, is based. These paths promote the development of various aspects including (1) the dissemination of information necessary for citizens for a more functional and collaborative relationship with local authority, (2) the use of specific social communication tools that adopt a clear and understandable language, and (3) the implementation of reasoned and noncontingent communication methods with people through strategic and organizational choices that support citizens' participation in public management. These elements could favor the fulfilment of purposes aimed at protecting the social interest and engender in the people greater trust and reliability in public institutions.

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Part III
The Real and the Illusory People. Ideas
and Narratives of Populism

Chapter 9

In Search of the Relationship Between Democracy and Populism from a Multidimensional Perspective. Some Paths: Accountability, Deliberation and Co-governance



Daniela Ropelato

1 Introduction

In the cultural and scientific debate, the disproportionate use of a concept often leads to reflect not only on its flexibility and adaptation to many contexts but also on its possible inconsistency. This is what happens to the concept of populism, which in the contemporary world appears marked by vague terminology and clear ambiguity, especially when it is used in journalistic language.

The conceptual challenge appears formidable: populism is quite a difficult term to deal with. Although in the historical- and political-institutional field the wide diffusion of the phenomenon and its relevance place it among the most studied at an international level, the concept continues to show a polysemic and ambivalent profile. It is not the aim of this brief research to reach a mature definition – others in this volume will deal with it – rather our objective is to describe and understand in depth the relationship between populism and democracy from a specific perspective. The methodology is not that of history and political philosophy, but of political science, which is increasingly interested in investigating the qualitative features of democratic systems in today's world and their various dimensions. Is it possible to interpret populism as an expression and vector of transformation of the representative form of democracy? What are the consequences? What contribution this interpretation can add to the clarification of the concept and to the pathways of change that are visible, albeit to different degrees, in today's democratic systems?

The study adopts an exploratory approach, based on the literature in the field, to investigate the key points of the populist idea and practices in the contemporary

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world: the absolutisation of the will of the people, the conception of the people as an undifferentiated whole and the growing phenomena of political polarisation and disintermediation. In a framework in which the very definition of democracy is highly debated, some recent international research reports on the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of democratic systems will guide us in considering a possible connection between the populist phenomenon and the decline of these indicators in recent years. The main interest that runs through these pages is to verify whether the fundamental questions that populism poses to contemporary democracies, and in particular to representation, leadership and citizenship, can contribute to clarifying some of the main criticalities of current democratic structures, in terms of accountability, deliberation and co-governance.

2 In Search of a Definition

“A specter is haunting the world: populism”. Referring to the famous incipit of Marx and Engels, Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner introduced in Ionescu & Gellner, 1969 their research on populism, which was perhaps the first scientific text dedicated to the phenomenon. The book, which is still one of the most complete and important at the international level, analyses the idea of populism and definitely makes it a large container where a strong rhetorical element, a unifying and organic conception of the people, makes possible to aggregate very different phenomena.

In the years to follow, further research has been added. Alfio Mastropaolo (2005) states that populism “thus becomes ubiquitous and inflated. But inflation is a self-feeding mechanism”.¹ Since the late 1980s, the category takes on an increasingly pronounced media profile. It is broadly assigned to a constellation of movements, parties and regimes “not easily referable – Mastropaolo continues – to any of the traditional political families, democratically not too scrupulous and prone to a noisy rhetoric of the people, at the same time marked by forms of personal leadership” (2005, 70).

The analysis is carried forward by scholars who do not hesitate to speak of the emergence from a phenomenological point of view of a *populist moment* (De Benoist, 2017). Yet when, especially in recent years, the label is used for any opposition movement, coming from the right as well as from the left of the political forces (according to a spatial typology that today is increasingly weaker), we rightly note that the concept of populism resists generalisation. Assuming peculiar nuances in different contexts, it rather calls for a comparative work, the more necessary, the more diversified are the language and contents that characterise its expressions, connected with the political cultures in which it grows (Urbinati, 2019). Nadia Urbinati is among the scholars who disapprove of the choice to classify as populists “from

¹ The author of the chapter is responsible for the translation of the texts that do not come from original works in English.

xenophobic nationalists to critics of neoliberal policies, as if ‘populist’ applied to all those who do not rule themselves and who criticise rulers, regardless of the principles underlying their critique” (Urbinati, 2019, 112). This practice has not worked in favour of a conceptual clarity, since it seems inappropriate to conflate into a single generic set any protest parties or movements that aggressively confront ruling elites, just as it is unlikely to limit the search for populist political actors to countries that are in recession or affected by austerity policies and unemployment.

Another operation that does not appear useful is to oppose a *good* populism with a *bad* one, as sometimes one happens to read. An excerpt from an article by Thomas Piketty (2017) offers to some extent an example:

Populism is merely a somewhat confused but legitimate response to the feeling of abandonment experienced by the working classes in the advanced countries in the face of globalisation and the rise of inequalities. To construct specific answers to these challenges, we have to build on the most internationalist populist elements – therefore on the radical left (...) – whatever their limits; otherwise, the retreat into nationalism and xenophobia will prevail.

Studies have multiplied over the years, to deepen the profiles of populism and its historical trajectory in different geographical regions. Diamanti and Lazar (2018) attributed the expansion of populism in Europe to the flourishing of the “democracy of the public”: a democracy that, according to Bernard Manin (1997), was born from the decline of traditional political cultures and the withdrawal of the ideological mass parties. Again according to Manin, referring to the “democracy of the public” today means considering the influence in politics of strong processes of personalisation and mediatisation, analysing the weight of globalisation, the crisis of nation states, the reduction of the capacity of governments crushed by financial capitalism and technocratic power and the formidable development of communication. Populism has been grafted into this complex historical context, where citizens become “public” and parties tend to personalise themselves, where social participation and organisation on the ground are bypassed by invasive media communication processes.

In Italy, this phenomenon has covered and continues to cover many original paths, and the country, not without reason, has been called as a *populist laboratory* (Zanatta, 2002; Tarchi, 2015) that has expanded to include the entire political system and parties. Among the main aspects, first of all, we emphasise a style of communication and political action that weakens the traditional representative mechanisms. Often the legislative place par excellence, the Parliament, has been roughly described as the place of inconclusiveness and distance between politics and society, marked by frequent conflicts with other instances of government.

Recent studies indicate other perspectives, such as that of Marco Tarchi (2019) who represents populism essentially as a characteristic mentality, an intellectual attitude rather than a set of contents. In his view, this fluid *forma mentis* reveals different degrees of intensity depending on the contexts: at its basis, we can recognise the fundamental idea of the people as an organic reality, to which belong the full legitimacy of power, beyond any representation and mediation. It is not only an operational definition that is lacking: what seems far away is the construction of a real theory of populism, that is, a systematic elaboration of principles and

deductions capable of interpreting it. In the last years, the term populism has followed a similar path to that followed by the concept of democracy in all its complexity. In order to ensure a minimal and shared definition and an unambiguous conceptual structure, that deal with the numerous historical translations of this concept, a continuous exercise of adjectivisation and specification, has been carried out: democracy can be that of the ancients and the moderns, direct and representative, participatory and deliberative, cosmopolitan, illiberal, hybrid, etc. More recently, we speak of hyper-democracy, counter-democracy and post-democracy. Populism seems to retrace a similar path too, so it is not uncommon today for the term to be specified by a multiplication of adjectives and prefixes (Baldini, 2014). Populism can be nationalist, ethnic, regional, economic, academic and pastoral; we can hear of tele-populism and market populism and, as with democracy, populism of the ancients and the moderns.

Along this path, to prevent analysis scenarios from becoming increasingly complex, it is useful to focus on facts and, in order to discern the predominant characteristics of the phenomenon, to look at the concrete consequences of populism that emerge once political actors are in government, consequences that are often different from the promises and indications made before coming to power. We need to keep in mind the following: populism can present itself in different forms before and after the electoral moment and before and after the access to the institutions of government, and this can constitute another element of ambivalence. Starting from this point, studies have distinguished between populism understood as a movement of opinion, oppositional, sometimes far from the same electoral dynamics, and populism as a movement interested in and committed to acquiring power within the state (Meny & Surel, 2002; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012).

3 Some Common Features

Trying to sum up a vast phenomenology, we need to identify some common features of the main instances of the populist thought and practice. It is possible to highlight three central aspects among the most frequently highlighted elements:

- (a) The pivotal role of popular sovereignty and the intolerance for constitutional limits and countervailing powers
- (b) The power of leadership, in which both individual and collective subjects are called to recognise and identify themselves, without mediation
- (c) An undivided vision of the people, as a subject that expresses itself with a single voice in front of the establishment, through the principle of majority

These points undoubtedly concern some of the pillars of democracy, the form of representation, participation and political conflict. Within this frame, populism seeks to manage democratic representation with a direct appeal to the people, driven to a permanent antagonistic confrontation with the establishment. It is the affirmation of an insuperable social rigidity, whereby the people and the establishment

would not be able to meet, since any democracy would be threatened and weakened by an undeniable elitist dimension. The populist critique of this elitist character actually only hides the same outline: the populist idea nonetheless promotes the formation of an elite. Donald Trump's statements, in the inauguration speech of his presidency of the United States in January 2017, are an expression of this:

What truly matters is not which party controls our government, but whether our government is controlled by the people. January 20th, 2017 will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this nation again. The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer. (in Urbinati, 2019, p. 122)

What political subjectivity are we talking about? Although populism claims the ability to operate within the connections of real life, it is easy to see how its protagonists take refuge in a theoretical territory, where the people become an abstract idea. Deepening the meaning of this concept is a matter of other essays in this volume; what we emphasise here is the fact that the condemnation of elites and the disapproval of representative democracy reactivate the myth of a "true" democracy understood as direct, immediate democracy, which rejects any intermediary. The power of the leader claims to embody this myth, through a unifying narrative that mobilises and convinces the public; and indeed, populisms often take the name of the leader. Without such a narrative and without such leadership, the populist idea would remain compressed essentially in the forms of protest and contestation.

Another central point is the relationship between the decline of the party democracy models and the reconfiguration of politics according to more personalised views, which make massive use of media communication and the Internet in consensus building. The demos no longer seeks political representation and rejects the vision that justifies it (Revelli, 2019); rather it demands direct representation, an unfiltered voice and presence. Scholars of the theory of democracy have associated populism with the strategy of "linking an increasingly undifferentiated and depoliticised electorate with a largely neutral and nonpartisan system of governance" (Mair, 2002, p. 84).

This seems to foster an interclass vision of society; ultimately, it simplifies social pluralism into factions, increasing political polarisation and intolerance. It is claimed that the people undergoes an operation of differentiation and division by external forces, while its profile is and remains unitary. However, when we go deeper into this analysis, we will note within the concept of people two different segments in conflict: the "many commoners" and the "powerful few". In a certain way, we can say that populism replaces the horizontal division of the right-left party system with a more extensive dominant division of a vertical type, between those who are "below" and those who are "above". The distancing from the traditional party system is clear, to the point that those among populist political actors who gain power declare that they continue to belong to the people, by remaining outside the structure of the political establishment, immune from its logic, and spending most of their time proving that they have not lost their popular connotations. Populism, drawing on this narrative, is not afraid of electoral competition and does not suspend free and competitive elections: electoral voting remains in most of the

cases a key dimension of populist regimes. An interesting contribution comes from those scholars, who emphasise the risk that emerges from populist political actors:

How are we to make sense of the project of ‘partyless democracy’, given that populism utilizes, even if instrumentally, the means of the party in its struggle against established parties, and given moreover that it does not think of its party as identical to the whole people? (Urbinati, 2019, p. 123)

Finally, from *the majority rule*, understood and unanimously acknowledged as a decision-making value in a time of pluralism, they move to *the majority power*, which becomes a different principle of political relations where pluralism becomes an obstacle to the exercise of political decision-making. What binds the represented people to their representatives is a kind of identification, rather than an electoral mandate. The mandate remains and justifies the demand for responsibility that invests the rulers, but the sense of belonging to the same political body feeds a growing hostility towards difference, dissent and minority positions. Isaiah Berlin (1968, p. 175), pointing to this aspect with a strong sense of foreboding, wrote: “Populism cannot be a consciously minority movement. Whether falsely or truly, it stands for the majority of men, the majority of men who have somehow been damaged”.

4 Populism and Democracy

Very early on, the debate on populism flanked the studies of democratic theory, although the difficulties of interpretation, due to the different historical translations of the phenomenon and disagreement over conceptualisation, have hindered the formation of a platform of shared knowledge. The research agenda remains more relevant than ever (*The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 2017), focusing on the consequences of populist instances on the democratic institutional fabric (both when they find a voice in power and in opposition), in order to understand their causal directions and short- and long-term influences. This investigation is also made possible because in recent years, there has been an increase in the data collected and made available by qualified international organisations committed to study the democratic system in the world and in particular the extension of liberal democracies over the last century. Their goals are monitoring and evaluation of the main analytical dimensions of the institutional systems, in order to support political and social rights and freedoms, acknowledged by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, to promote media freedom, the functioning of electoral systems, the fight against inequality, etc.

At a time when the very idea of democracy does not have an unequivocal definition, the identification of some operationalizable measures can offer a platform of information that allows the construction of some complex indices and the comparison of different arrangements. One might think of democracy, in fact, as a necessarily dichotomous concept: either a state is democratic or it is not, whereas, from another perspective, most of these indicators allow for the expression of different

degrees along an extended continuum. The annual reports published by these international centres can be accessed online in their entirety; in the context of this article, only a few highlights are possible. There are many questions to be explored: can we say that the growth of populism represents a reaction to the perceived decay of democracies and the crisis of traditional political parties? Does the prevailing scenario interpret the relationship between populism and democracy, or rather the relationship between populism and authoritarianism? Is it possible to assert, and on what basis, that populist perspectives are inevitably incompatible with democracy? Or is it more correct to simply observe that populism is challenging democratic governments (Pasquino, 2008)?

In the last 20 years, some authors (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2019) did not hesitate to relate populism to a new season of reform, with potentially positive transformations in terms of egalitarianism and participation. In this case, the growth of populist parties would not in itself be a symptom of crisis but rather a sign of advancement and self-correction. Summing up these observations, can we understand populism as a phenomenon which is functional to the strengthening of some democratic dimensions, which contributes to clarify points of weakness of the current systems and to put these issues on the public agenda?

For an elaboration of these questions, let us first consider the Democracy Index, 2020, drafted by the researchers of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) entitled: “In sickness and in health?” Putting five specific dimensions of variation under the lens – electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, government functioning, participation and political culture – the report states that the overall quality of democratic systems around the world has declined somewhat by 2020.

Almost 70% of countries covered by The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index recorded a decline in their overall score, as country after country locked down to protect lives from a novel coronavirus. The global average score fell to its lowest level since the index began in 2006. (...) 75 of the 167 countries and territories covered by the model, or 44.9% of the total, are considered to be democracies. Of the remaining 92 countries in our index, 57 are ‘authoritarian regimes’, up from 54 in 2019, and 35 are classified as ‘hybrid regimes’, down from 37 in 2019.

The decrease observed by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) is based on five indicators generally used to define a democratic setup. Studies by the V-Dem Institute/Varieties of Democracy, based at the University of Gothenburg, also broadly analyse the overall quality of democracies across the planet, and the evolution of this measure confirms these findings. After considering a multidimensional dataset and more than 450 indicators, the 2021 Report covering the year 2020 concludes the research with an incisive analysis (*Autocratization Turns Viral – Democracy Report, 2021*). From the Executive Summary (page 6),

The global decline during the past 10 years is steep and continues in 2020, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. The level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2020 is down to levels last found around 1990. Electoral autocracy remains the most common regime type. Together with closed autocracies they number 87 states, home to 68% of the world population. Liberal democracies diminished over the past decade from 41 countries to 32, with a population share of only 14%. Over the last ten years the number of democratizing countries dropped by almost half to 16, hosting a mere 4% of the global population.

The report released in February 2020 by the International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), an intergovernmental organisation based in Stockholm, focuses more specifically on the relationship between democracy and populism. The index of democracy developed by the institute – the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) – is composed of 28 different indicators concerning the ruling activity carried out by populist political actors in power in 43 countries around the world between 1980 and 2018. Here are some findings:

The number of populist parties in government has nearly doubled over the past 15 years. The GSoD indices show that populist governments decrease the quality of democracy relative to non-populist governments. Of the 28 aspects that make up the indices, 22 have declined under populist governments. Statistically significant declines were observed for elected government, civil liberties, and three of its subcomponents: freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, and freedom of movement. The only aspect of democracy that has improved more under populist governments than under non-populist governments is electoral participation.

We also find an extensive set of data on democracy and populism inside the 2019 V-Dem Institute Report, already cited, entitled: “Democracy and Populism: Testing a Contentious Relationship”. The authors, Saskia P. Ruth-Lovell, Anna Lührmann and Sandra Grahn, in order to study populism and its relationship to liberal democracy, first drew on the academic literature to identify democratic and non-democratic models and then empirically tested the effects of the actions of those governments that could be qualified as populist-led. What the researchers point out, among the many observations, is the fact that the different contexts demand the utmost attention: it is unlikely that governments with different configurations, however assimilable across a range of indicators, would produce uniform effects. Yet, although the social foundations of democracy, citizenship and political representation differ across countries, some of the findings of this survey are striking. Studying five democratic models – electoral, liberal, deliberative, egalitarian and participatory democracy – the V-Dem Institute’s empirical findings indicate that the actions of populist governments tend to erode the indices of the electoral, liberal and deliberative democracy models the most. The research, therefore, would deny the observation expressed by some scholars that the main characteristics that qualify a populist government can increase democratic quality. Likewise, there would be no evidence of a positive effect of populist-led governments on the egalitarian or participatory aspects of democracy.

Our empirical analysis provides clear evidence that the consequence of populist governments is not a decoupling of liberalism and democracy. Rather, what we are seeing under some populist governments is a decline of liberalism, deliberation and the electoral core of democracy. At the same time, populist governments do not live up to their promise of substantially improving and rejuvenating democracy as indicated by the absence of positive changes on the democracy indices.

5 Democracy as a Learning Process

In brief, even though it is difficult to translate populism into specific indicators, since there is still a lack of exhaustive theoretical categories, and even though it is necessary to identify populist political actors on the basis of different sources, what is recorded is an important decline in democratic qualities. Searching for relevant correlations between the numerical growth of populist governments and the variation of the indicators that characterise the current forms of liberal democracy, the debate between populism and democracy and between populism and authoritarianism, clearly cannot be resolved with these brief lines. The question remains open: which specific aspects, among the different models of democracy, appear most affected by populist governments? Moreover, future research will have to take into account the consequences of populism when populist actors are in opposition; we should not forget that, in the European scientific literature, it is mainly the populist radical right that is associated with authoritarian tendencies, while Latin American scholars associate the rise of authoritarian regimes with leftist populist parties. Again, one cannot read outside of a careful interpretation of context any increase in citizen power as an increase in democracy; it would be to misguide the search for such a relationship.

In this framework, it seems possible to better understand why it has been written about a parasitic relationship of populism with representative democracy. The metaphor of the parasite is an image first used by Benjamin Arditi (2004) to suggest that populism grows within and competes with representative democracy. Following this track, two directions of research would open up at the same time: on the one hand, a scenario in which democracy inevitably brings with it the development of certain indicators of dissatisfaction and protest that populism has clothed along the decades with specific characteristics. In this regard, Nadia Urbinati observes that the very model of constitutional democracy, which has contributed to consolidating the institutional structure of our societies, has not been able to avoid certain normative rigidities to which populism reacts:

Contemporary populism is not the product of some malevolent force but of the very model of democracy, representative and constitutional, that stabilized our societies after World War II. The success of that model in burying totalitarianism and favouring economic growth for several decades has run the risk of freezing it into an eternalized scheme that works as a cage. (Urbinati, 2019, p. 124)

On the other hand, we are faced with an equally challenging scenario, in which populism appears to be anchored to the form of representative democracy and to represent a vector of transformation, which not only measures the conditions of change in different historical and cultural contexts but also pushes them forward. It certainly remains to be clarified in which direction this process is moving. The same political science of the twentieth century is far from considering democracy as a strictly normative paradigm; if democracy is one of the main regulatory structures of collective life, it is first of all a laborious and continuous learning process (Morlino, 2014) that advances along empirical coordinates. And it is precisely

political science that puts the processes of democratisation at the centre and not only the analysis of individual democratic dimensions. The ongoing transformation of the model of democracy is a central chapter: describing and understanding the evolution of political parties and the problems of representation, the role of the media in the construction of consensus, the forms of democratic participation and even its alternative expressions, all these aspects convey a set of information that allows us to extend our gaze. We must include in our analysis cultural, social and communicative dynamics, to extract and elaborate some potential reconstructive conditions from the critical democratic elements that populism underlines and sometimes favours. The most suitable dynamics to move forward the refinement of the democratic form of coexistence are those of collective learning, sometimes contradictory, which require a distance from the phenomena, but that facilitate a more correct understanding of the complexity and centrality of the relationships between institutions, intermediate bodies and citizens.

We move, therefore, within a democracy “still in the process of invention”, as Eric Schattschneider wrote in 1969. The theory of democracy continues to be an object in movement, which coagulates ideas and ideals that essentially come from life, from the history of peoples and from the continuous test bench that is their coexistence. It is from the people, from concrete and daily life that, in the end of the day, the main impulses for political change come. It is the people who come up against their own and other people’s mistakes, who evaluate the quality of social structures and decide whether and in which direction to modify habits and behaviours, to respond to the distortions, accelerations and brakes that such cultural transformations bring with them.

6 Scenarios of Democratic Quality

Is it plausible to consider the different voices of populism in the world as an expression of a strong demand for change, which invests contemporary representative democracy to strengthen its qualities? And vice versa, does deepening and discussing the urgent refinement of the current democratic order respond directly to the criticalities that populism denounces and affects? After focusing on the main aspects of populist phenomenology on which the literature converges – the antagonistic relationship between people and establishment, the choice of an immediate democracy and the central idea of *demos* – in the next pages, we will ask whether it is possible to consider these aspects not only as faces of populism but also as specific points of weakness of the representative form of democracies and as consequent directions of development.

Due to the limits of this work, taking into account the theoretical deficits that make it difficult to interpret populism in the current democratic context, we will offer only a few indications. An adequate presentation would certainly require much more than a few pages, but I think it is nevertheless useful in order to verify the heuristic possibility of a future research. The objective of the following paragraphs

is to explore three scenarios which, in my opinion, can facilitate the identification of both some tools and, above all, some paths that can strengthen the dimensions of accountability, deliberation and co-governance of contemporary democracies:

- (a) Looking at the claim that absolutises the popular will and demands a more mature idea of accountability both electoral and inter-institutional, it is possible to restore centrality to political relations and to a coherent ethics of care.
- (b) Looking at the claim that promotes the personalisation of politics and disintermediation, it is possible to recompose political pluralism and deliberation, giving new value to the exercise of mediation and dialogue.
- (c) Looking at the claim that projects the illusory image of the people and makes them an antagonist, denouncing a politics far removed from the life of the community, a different articulation of the function of government is possible, moving from an opaque governance to a collaborative and polycentric governance.

6.1 Representation and Accountability

The historical process that has given us the current model of representative democracy today appears to be dominated by the philosophical vision of Schumpeter and Popper: it is the elective democratic dimension that prevails, the choice of representatives by citizens and the mechanisms of selection and voting. However, this dimension must be considered in itself to be only one of the constitutive conditions for the proper functioning of the institutional framework. Considering that it is the character of representation that defines modern democracy, the right to vote continues to constitute a turning point in the processes of democratisation and a frontier to be defended; nevertheless the twenty-first century demands more from its institutions.

We must recognise that the accountability deficit that weakens representative institutions, long denounced by political science, in the horizon of contemporary democracies has not yet found a concrete response framework (Ascani, 2014). Considering, in particular, the call for accountability that citizens address to elected representatives – electoral or vertical accountability – we can observe that in recent times new initiatives have been added and new tools are assigned to civil society to evaluate and control the political mandate of decision-makers with the support of technologies. Public attention seems to be drawn mainly to the procedural and technical aspects of an operation that promises greater transparency. But claiming a greater measure of accountability does not only mean making the digital arena available to citizens, in order to facilitate the transmission of information between voters and elected representatives, concerning the legislative work carried out, electoral fees and expenses, etc. First, it means asking a question and trying to answer this fundamental point: whose political power is it? How do we prevent the power, we confer on someone to act on our behalf, from being exercised in an opaque and arbitrary manner?

Representative democracy is not a mere process of authorizing a group of delegates by the citizenry (...). It is much more the effort to act in concert, in constant dialogue, in mutual respect of the roles temporarily occupied, not only to 'account' for a function, in the sense of 'informing' citizens about one's activities (something in itself absolutely necessary), but also to recover that 'feeling with the people' that is a cornerstone of democracy. (Nicoletti, 2014, p. 8)

Populism does not cultivate the idea of accountability: leaders' power becomes a sufficient condition to establish a bond of trust with people, and once this connection is confirmed, it seems that the people ask for nothing more. The demand for change continues to occupy first place in the current democratic framework, but populism's paths to reforming democracy follow other directions.

The choice to justify the representative mandate in itself, putting aside the question of accountability, in my opinion once again presents us with an illusory scenario: as if citizens are only to surrender themselves into the hands of the leader and renounce any further verification concerning the content of the mandate. Moreover, after casting doubt on the legitimacy of competing political actors and after separating the people from the elite, once in government populism weakens institutions by weakening accountability mechanisms and structures, reinforcing the distance between the stage of protest and the stage of government. In short, we are faced with a further widening of that detachment between political institutions and society that constitutes one of the greatest fragilities in the fabric of contemporary democracy.

We need to ask whether the procedures or the social ties are able to intervene more effectively. The theme is not a formal one. Assigning a mainly procedural response to the question of accountability, thinking that innovation lies primarily in experimenting with new tools, we may underestimate the growing dimension of civil society and the territory as a space of values and encounter of experiences. Our democratic institutions will have to recognise not only the different opinions and interests that demand representation through methods and techniques but also to make room for contents, proposals and plans continuously emerging for market and labour, for savings and consumption, for health and care and for democracy itself (Ropelato, 2008) that civil society actors do not stop generating and fostering. The social fabric with its networks remains the foundation of democratic life, a rich fabric of experiences that cannot be compressed and simplified within a framework regulated once and for all. The freedom of social organisations precedes the democratic institutional structure and must, at the same time, be protected by it. To confirm this, we can think of what our cities would be like if voluntary associations, cultural centres, environmental groups, movements for citizens' rights and so on suddenly disappeared from the public arena. Overcoming the ideological divide that has now occurred between the right and the left, the local territory is the new political space of the twenty-first century.

6.2 *Disintermediation and Deliberation*

Over a long period of time, political parties have been major aggregators of political identities and social demands. Today, citizens' perception of this cornerstone of political representation has deeply changed, and the function of these parties is considered similar to a filter. In addition to the protest against the party system, populism hardly tolerates what are traditionally called the intermediate social bodies, able to perform a valuable mediation where different interests are confronted, as well as to channel dissent into constructive participation. A significant cause of the estrangement from the parties is the disappointment of citizens, but an important role is also played by the individualisation and fragmentation of societies. In fact, if people's interests are increasingly isolated, it is increasingly difficult for traditional mediators, such as parties, trade unions and associations, to take them on. We can therefore understand how the phenomenon of political disintermediation has grown, expressed by new movements and parties that remove traditional mediators and re-evaluate tools and methods of direct democracy controlled by strong leaderships and supported by information and communication technology.

Yet the reality continues to be more complex; the democratic process belongs to the freedom of citizens, rooted in their histories and relationships. The core of a democratic politics should consist first and foremost in making it possible for each person to cultivate its unity and its history and culture, valuing all legitimate rights and differences. Compressing the multiplicity of interests existing in society, the dynamics of their tensions and often of their conflicts only produces a massive simplification that ends up crushing those who have fewer resources, both from social and cultural points of view. Citizenship cannot be reduced to an abstract image of a single homogeneous public that communicates with political decision-makers by sending questions and proposals by digital means. Can we really oppose the political parties, withdrawn to the palace, and the citizens, understood as a whole, as if we had in front of us a sharp contrast between rulers and ruled? Is it reasonable to think of citizens as an organic and indistinct whole, capable of expressing in a unitary way their otherness with respect to the world of politicians? We cannot ignore that divisions and conflicts pass first of all, horizontally, among the citizens themselves and among their different interests and their different visions of the world. Visions that reduce social and political complexity and devalue pluralism generally create the conditions for the reproduction of inequality and violence: in fact, every time a part of society does not see its interests represented, conflict can only re-emerge.

Moreover, to what extent can the decision-making process of a democracy that claims to call itself immediate actually proceed without intermediaries? It is more likely that we are facing a phenomenon of replacement and redefinition of mediators. Looking, for example, at the impressive use of the Internet in political communication, the action of new actors, even if less recognizable, is evident. Political decision-making is an extremely complex moment of political architecture that cannot be compressed into a series of automatisms; it must proceed from dialogue and confrontation, seeking consensus through the ethics of persuasion.

Before opinions are counted, it is important to give them a chance to be formed and confronted. Opinions are not facts that precede the decision-making process and that we must take note of. Rather, they are the products of the process itself that emerge, are transformed, and are refined through the acquisition of information and the analysis of arguments and counter-arguments. (Bobbio, 2013)

The long-standing debate that surrounded the majority principle with broad and solid constitutional guarantees should not be forgotten or diminished, but, in itself, the majority principle is not the only normative basis of democratic power. A decision binding for all, based on majority vote, can be mainly justified because of a public and inclusive deliberative process (Florida, 2017). While the approval of the majority makes it clear that a certain set of arguments prevailed, the institutional formality makes it possible that different positions may emerge in the near future through a rigorous deliberation process. In so doing, the institutions also legitimise the existence of other reasons and the dynamics of dialogue that have contributed to its elaboration (Manin, 1997). For this reason, the perspective of a deliberative democracy, with its theoretical foundations and its experimental methodologies, appears today as one of the most innovative democratic scenarios.

6.3 Government, Governance and Co-governance

With the appeal to the people, despite the vagueness of the expression and its meaning, populism makes a precise claim: the need to recover the central role of citizens at the heart of democracy. It gives voice, also in this way, to the pressing demand for participation that emerges in many ways, in today's time, from civil society. After decades of political experimentation and after learning to distinguish the participatory dimension in its different levels of effectiveness (Ropelato, 2010), the current moment interprets citizen participation in a framework that is certainly more mature. It is not just the request made by a lively segment of public opinion or the offer of a space for consultation and collaboration by policy makers. Participation today means co-design, co-implementation, co-assessment and co-governance.

It is a development of the meaning of participation that questions the current patterns of democracy and seeks to respond with an innovative interpretation to the increasingly widespread attempt to combine citizen participation and the function of government. Co-governance means recognizing the co-responsibility of the institutions of the "state-apparatus" together with the actors of the "state community", composed of citizens, students and workers, third sector subjects, members of popular movements or neighbourhood communities, media operators, subjects of the business community and educational and cultural institutions (Iaione, 2015). It means pushing forward democratic innovation and citizen participation at the level of government.

Global society has witnessed enormous changes in the last two decades: the transformations induced by the digital revolution have imposed the model of the network and flows on communication, finance, work and education; yet in politics, decision-making methodologies remain mostly those of 50 years ago.

Cities amplify this strong demand for involvement by men and women who now call for a new collaborative management. New subjects and new themes are advancing: one of these is urbanisation with its heavy load of problems. To give an example, the protest that is at the heart of many social movements against the appropriation of urban space by large financial groups is not just the claim of an economic right but an expression of the right of communities to protect resources that could be more widely shared (Sassen, 2018). A key factor in the growth of populism in the cities is the pressing demand for security felt by citizens, which is added to the labour and welfare crisis, growing economic and social inequalities, and the demand for the future of new generations. It is not unusual for populism to give voice to the most basic reactions of the population such as anger, fear, insecurity and defence of identities and to trigger explosive social response mechanisms. It is widely known that when a social model jams or stops, angry people more and more hostile towards institutions occupy the public space.

Another challenge is posed by the governance and care of the commons, which are not only the environmental commons but also public health, education and culture, art and historical heritage and infrastructure necessary for collective life. Elinor Ostrom (1990), a 2009 Nobel laureate in economics, faced with the tragedy of the commons and their progressive impoverishment, has highlighted how the two traditional solutions, privatisation and public ownership of tangible and intangible heritage, are overcome by a third way: a community governance, a collaborative and polycentric one. For this reason, an approach of co-governance is also foreshadowed in the field of common goods: cooperating in the maintenance and management of common goods through decision-making processes and public choices that redefine the very conditions of functioning of democracy.

The demand to recognise such forms of sociality, which translate into experiences of collaborative and polycentric governance, is advancing rapidly. In the months of the pandemic, we had an evidence of the crucial relevance of urban sociality, when politics failed to make the most of the skills and resources that the assistance and aid networks in the cities made available to deal with that tremendous social and health emergency. The resilience of the social, economic and institutional fabric of our cities in this dramatic situation is certainly due to the bright, diversified and uninterrupted presence of so many social networks. Cities themselves are becoming the new commons for today's time (Foster & Iaione, 2016).

All of this does not escape the social and cultural asymmetries, the constraints, the long timescales that building collaboration requires, etc. Nevertheless, and here probably lies the novelty in order to move towards an inclusive society, alongside the state and the market, politics must find its third pillar, the community (Rajan, 2019), with the multiplicity of its subjects, engines and custodians of collective intelligence and social entrepreneurship. We are still talking about isolated minority experiences, but the phenomenon is spreading. Good governance is not the rule of the enlightened leader; rather, it is an integrated and cohesive function, which allows the community system to collectively process a common social vision and act in co-responsibility.

7 The Strength of Social Cohesion

It seems urgent, especially in European society where the individual subject has progressively dissolved many of the traditional social ties we inherited, to regenerate the sense of community and social co-responsibility. At the centre of this complex phase, as we have seen, imaginary subjects take often shape, a people who are clouded by abstract thought in their individual political roles, isolated from the concreteness of the relationships of collective life, theoretically free from the constraints of social differences. On the contrary, there is a living subject who is at the heart of the daily life of our cities, and who chooses and acts concretely, accepting the weight of responsibility, solidarity and memory. The democratic process will be able to respond to the contradictions and unresolved conflicts of populism if it is able to take care of this network of social and community ties, which should be its first public duty.

We owe to Luigi Bobbio the reference to a well-known image. Dealing with democracy and public policies, Bobbio (1996) mentioned the myth of Gordium, the city in Phrygia where Alexander the Great cut an intricate tangle of ropes with his sword, instead of stopping to untie it patiently. By cutting the Gordian knot, Alexander the Great became emperor: it is a myth that shapes the history of civilisations in Europe, because with the strength of that gesture, the king opened the way for the conquest of Asia. It is an image that might adapt to this time, whenever political action stops in front of an inextricable skein of problems. How many times, when faced with the most intricate and tiring passages, we asked a quick and clear decision, hoping some spectacular shortcut and an immediate solution, curtailing the long drawn-out process of decision-making. It is not easy for anyone to accept the challenge of going for an agreement among different and seemingly irreconcilable visions. Yet, reality confronts us with the decision of Alexander the Great and all too often reveal the inadequacy of his sword. The timeframe and constraints of reality rarely lead to quick and clear-cut solutions. For this reason, Bobbio titled one of his volumes: “Democracy does not live in Gordium” (Bobbio, 1996).

In order to deeply understand the nature of the political dimension, we prefer to look not so much at the sword but at the knot and its interweaving. It is the image of the knot that sheds light on the connections that structure and support the construction of coexistence. It is the image of the knot that represents political action in its craftsmanship, woven of confrontation and encounter, of listening and dialogue, and is the backbone of the democratic model. In the image of the knot, a richer vision can be perceived, one that considers complexity as a starting point, and perceives the limit that each person places on the other not as an obstacle to be overcome but rather as a dimension that democracy is called upon to embrace, organise and harmonise.

The direction to move is not that defined by a new procedural format for living together but by a new “relationality” not dictated by an instrumental logic. The times we live in confirm the need to make room and promote and strengthen social ties: there are no formal solutions and abstract procedures that can replace the strength of social cohesion that political action must also prioritise.

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Chapter 10

Sense of Belonging and Disillusionment: A Phenomenological Reading of Community Dynamics



Valentina Gaudio

1 Introduction

The study of the social fabric of communities which is proper to sociology saw a blossoming of philosophical reflection, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century, with certain phenomenologists. Even though they were in the forefront of the analysis of the ego and therefore apparently only interested in the individual person to whom all reality could be traced, clear demands of a more social nature emerged even in the founder of the phenomenological school, Edmund Husserl. From Adolf Reinach to Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Gerda Walther and Dietrich von Hildebrand,¹ the analyses of the social dimensions of the human person and the consequent characterisation of the interrelational fabric of society and the relative differentiations between community, society, state and peoples still offer us an interesting and rich framework in which to observe and explain some of the dynamics of today's communities.

What is most open to reflection is the interconnection of the individual and his/her relational fabric with others, or rather, the analysis of this interrelationship,

¹These German thinkers, all of whom lived between the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, were in various ways inspired by the philosophical approach developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), attending his lectures and the phenomenological circles in an intense and vital exchange, among themselves and with other colleagues. Husserl himself gave more space to the analysis of the subject and the gnoseological process at the basis of the sciences, first and foremost philosophy; however, his reflections on intersubjectivity – which run through a little of his entire production – have just recently been re-read highlighting a concept that is decidedly undeveloped in its scope, but clearly social, namely that of the *Gemeingeist* (common mind), as a key element of Husserlian social ontology (Caminada, 2019).

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starting from and in the light of the constitution of the person who is fully understandable precisely in virtue of the relational world that surrounds him/her and the person's experience of that world. For this reason, we will dwell on the reading of the social fabric of the community by following the analyses of the aforementioned phenomenologists, while constantly referring to the concept of the person that underpins them and the consequent relationship between the individual and the community. An initial distinction between community and society which takes up the sociological distinction made a few decades earlier by Tönnies² will allow us to clarify terms by differentiating the areas of inference to the sphere of the individual and, vice versa, of influence on them. In this sense, we will give space to emotions and feelings, trying not only to understand their origin and scope in intersubjective relations but also their possible autonomy and typicality as 'social and/or shared emotions'. The result will be a bond of dependence/belonging between the individual and the community, by virtue of which we can explain certain situations and dynamics that deeply innervate the living and political action of the individual and community and can lead to socio-political phenomena such as populism and so on.

2 Community and Society: A First Insight Between Sociology and Phenomenology

The theme of community and society in general has been central to sociological reflection since its inception, but it is undoubtedly from Ferdinand Tönnies' study of the functioning and the differentiation between community and society that the foundations were set for a wide-ranging sociological reflection on the social dynamics that constitute the nucleus of the socio-political actions of individuals taken as a whole. Also philosophy had always posed the social question as an expression of the human being and human ethical-political actions. The beginning of the twentieth century marked a moment of great development and diffusion of the academic disciplines as autonomous sciences aimed at the study of particular sectors of knowledge, generating great fragmentation and specialisation. In this context, certain philosophers returned to the central question – which is their task – about the 'what', or the essence of phenomena while never neglecting the precious data of the particular sciences and their descriptions of the 'how'.

The topic of society and inter-human relations examined through the lens of the common fabric of aggregates with their own identity and characteristics also receives a great deal of attention, beginning from a critical reading of the results proposed by Tönnies' sociological research. The distinction he proposes between types of human interrelationship considers community and society on the basis of

²This is the habilitation work developed and presented in 1881 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Kiel under the title *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. It remained for many years as a text of discussion on the subject of community and the social fabric, especially in the light of the definition and distinction it proposes between community and society.

prevailing tendencies. The community would therefore constitute the fabric of relations within which there is a tendency

to abstain from (certain) hostilities and to perform (certain) services in the interests of certain lasting relationships which prevail among the wills of such persons, so as to ensure that such exercise and abstention always have the same direction. (Tönnies, 2012, 46)

Society, on the other hand, represents the interrelational fabric in which another tendency occurs: 'All human beings are ready to abstain from hostilities towards others insofar as they also abstain from the same; and to grant benefits to each individual on condition that they grant the relative counterparts' (Ibid.).

Within a community, the tendency to be assertive towards the community's demands is a matter of 'duty', that is, one feels obliged to do something for the community and to obey, a feeling that is driven both by fear and by the sheer habit that underlies it. Having said this, Tönnies also states that the community is not to be considered as

an organism or something that is alive in some way; (it is) primarily by nothing more than an enduring relationship between persons that results in certain facts; in this sense, the community to be described with an image, as the promotor of one will and in that sense as a person equal to other persons even if it lacks other essential characteristics of this word. Thus, communities, thought of as entities, can stand with each other in the same relationships as individual persons: hostile, social, communal and friendly. (Tönnies, 2012, 55)

In contrast, society is traversed by attitudes of indifference or hostility that are taken to be part of a preceding situation which can only be overcome by one specific action: that of the contract, in which two or more wills, absolutely different and autonomous from each other, agree on certain mutual provisions. Then it is habit and a sense of duty which characterise the community just as much as desire and fear the society. Thus, kinship, neighbourhood and friendship fall within the framework of community, the essential features of which are being together (*Zusammenwesen*), living together (*Zusammenwohnen*) and acting together (*Zusammenwirken*) (Tönnies, 2012, 226–227). For Tönnies, the first feature stresses the sense of belonging that marks any community; the second indicates the desire to occupy the same space and is therefore a sign of proximity, including physical proximity, which allows a whole series of interchanges; and finally, acting together makes explicit the common will or common desire that underlies the actions and activities of individuals or parts of a community.³

³ It is very interesting how Tönnies ascribes to these three characteristics of the community the meaning of an expression of the community's soul: being together would represent the vegetative soul – the common consciousness of belonging – living together would be the animal soul – the condition of a common action in the sign of pleasure and well-being, as well as of suffering – acting together would express, finally, the superior part of the rational soul – a superior consciousness of working together for the unity of the spirit and in the search for a common superior ideal (Tönnies, 2012, 226–227). This tripartition of the soul, of Aristotelian origin, then returns in various anthropological studies of the early twentieth century, such as in Stein, Conrad-Martius and Walther. See: Stein, 2000, 2004; Conrad-Martius, 1946; Walther, 1976.

On the basis of these distinctions, Reinach in *Die apriorischen Grundlagen des bürgerlichen Rechtes* (Reinach 1913) offers a first philosophical reading of society through a definition, taken up later by some colleagues, that of ‘social acts’⁴ that are at the basis of every form of community interaction. These are all those intentional acts, such as promises, orders, questions, concessions, announcements and so on, which have no meaning and therefore do not make sense and therefore fail to succeed if they do not have a subject to address, if they do not have a manifestation function and, finally, if they are not ‘received’. Acts understood in this way generate social entities: if I make a promise p, p will be a state of affairs (or fact) and not an object and will necessarily be linked to a future action of mine, that of realising the p content of the promise, and to a person to whom I address it⁵ (Reinach, 1913, 158).

Walther would make this explicit by stating that the members of a community are moved by a higher leitmotif or melody that

runs through the psycho-spiritual life of the community among all the members, even when they play different variations and with different instruments. Each must play in his and her own way so that ultimately, despite any slippage, the overall piece does not disturb the overall harmony but rather make it grow and be realised together with the other players. (Walther, 1923, 28)

Like Tönnies, this young phenomenologist⁶ also stresses that it is only the inner feeling of mutual belonging, the intimate bond that makes any social group of human beings become a community. When this occurs, one can also speak of common experiences, actions, wills and desires; otherwise, all forms of social groupings – such as associations and institutions – remain social groups or represent society in general.

Now, reflecting on the social acts that bind individuals in a community, Walther makes a distinction that seems to overcome the difficulties that the Reinachian one would encounter (Salice & Uemura, 2018), where, for example, one finds oneself acting in a certain way for the common sense of the community, without being

⁴The theme of social acts or social action was taken up a few years later by a phenomenologically oriented sociologist, Alfred Schütz, who reinterpreted Weber’s sociological proposal in the light of Husserlian phenomenology. He describes and distinguishes social behaviours and social acts, precisely on the basis of the concept of intentionality used here by Reinach (Schütz, 1960).

⁵In a very similar way, Schütz also uses examples of this kind, such as asking: “When I ask you a question, I do not only have the final motive of making myself understood, but also of obtaining from you the answer to the question. Your answer is the ‘what in view of which’ of my question” (Schütz, 2018, 203).

⁶The work *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* is the doctoral research Walther completed under the guidance of Pfänder in 1921 in Munich. This work was published two years later in the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, edited by Husserl.

personally fully convinced or even agreeing with it⁷. Walther distinguishes⁸ between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ persons, while emphasising the profound unity and intertwining within the individual: this means that a member of a community may find himself/herself obliged to act in a certain way because of his/her role in the community, even though he/she thinks that personally he/she would act differently. And this does not cause any kind of schizophrenia in the individual, precisely because these two ‘souls’ are in fact profoundly united; they simply do not have to always move in unison. However, it is precisely because of this distinction that it is possible to differentiate between ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ experiences both for the individual and for the community – where authenticity does not lie in the behaviour or action itself but in the full correspondence between the self and the gaze of the community (Walther, 1923, 107ff), which may mean that the individual has not yet fully taken on board the community’s visions or perhaps believes that he/she is embodying them, even though time is still needed.

On the other hand, those who are the proper organs of the community perform those acts that Walther defines as social acts in a meaningful sense,

through the empathic awareness of these acts, ways of behaving and general attitudes, the subject who perceives them is referred, above the individual subject who experiences, acts, etc., to the community ‘in whose sense and name’ all this is done. (Walther, 1923, 111)

Clearly, the social acts we have been talking about so far – following both Reinach and Walther – strongly recall the inter-subjective dimension and the fact that there is a basis of understanding and sharing between human beings, such that one can not only intentionally address others but also be able to perceive what is intended by others in its external content, the gesture or the word by means of which one intends something, as well as in its internal content, that is, what is not immediately evident from the gesture or the simple word, if not for a previous understanding. A profound understanding of the community fabric therefore requires one to look at the human person in his singular and intrinsically interpersonal constitution.

⁷As Salice and Uemura point out, the Reinachian definition of social acts could run the risk of internalism: i.e. describing acts that, in fact, could also be performed by a ‘brain’ outside of a body, but which has all the elements to express a social act as it is ‘addressed to’. If then such an act does not in fact reach the other person, it does not matter (Salice & Uemura, 2018, 31–32).

⁸Walther’s study does not only inspire and refer to Reinach, but also to Husserl, specifically to the lectures on *Natur und Geist* (Husserl, 2002) which she was able to attend in person and in which the teacher developed certain aspects of his social phenomenology. One of these is that for Husserl – as well as for Walther – social acts are constitutive of sociality and specifically give rise to community. See Salice & Uemura, 2018.

3 The Individual as the Basis of a Community Subject

Walther posits as a basic element or foundation of community⁹ a certain sociality in human beings who would have a real social instinct (*sozialer Trieb*) that moves them to seek a relationship with other human beings (Mühl, 2018, 73–74). Using different terms, but with the same intention, Stein also devotes her first works to the question of interpersonal relations and thus to the relational phenomenon that results in community. Starting with a careful and deep analysis of empathic experience, in her doctoral thesis, *On the Problem of Empathy* (Stein, 1964), she moves on to a double work in which the uncovering of interrelational dynamics moves from the explication of causality and motivation as the two ‘laws’ of the psychic and the spiritual sphere, to the development of the community fabric *qua analogon of the person* (Stein, 2000). Finally, in *An Investigation Concerning the State* (Stein, 2006), the communitarian discourse is expanded into a further differentiation between community, society, association, mass and state. Stein sees within the subject a matrix of experiences that leads to the outside and that is intimately part of the subject itself, to the point, I would say, that it almost constitutes the most characterising element: it is in community living, in fact, that the individual expresses more of his psychic and spiritual dimension – not in solitude. This is understandable if we reflect on one human ability that enables us to access and in some way know what others feel and experience and thus ourselves: empathy.¹⁰ This capacity to recognise what the other person is experiencing at a given moment, starting from what I can perceive externally and interiorly by putting myself in their place in an ideal way, is in fact what restores us to ourselves in our own completeness as psycho-physical and spiritual beings. For if I were completely alone, I could only constitute myself as a body that occupies a certain space that has a point of orientation from which the

⁹It should be emphasised that Walther’s anthropological analysis is subsequent to her sociological one, i.e. her movement of reflection leads her from the observation of the existence of communities and societies to the explication of the anthropological structure of the individual as naturally social. This analysis, in fact, was developed only many years after her first doctoral work on the ontological structure of the community (Walther, 1976). Walther, therefore, arrives at results very close to those of her colleague Stein, even though she follows a practically opposite itinerary. While she could be said to take the community phenomenon for granted and from it wants to arrive at an explanation of the individual, Stein starts from the individual and his structure in order to be able to explain his/her relationship with others and thus develop the community phenomenon at various levels. See in this regard: Calcagno, 2019; Mühl, 2018; Pezzella, 2018.

¹⁰The empathy of which Stein, and before her Husserl, as well as other phenomenologists, speaks is neither a volitional nor an emotional act, but a theoretical one; that is, it is a conscious act that induces the individual to identify with the other’s experience and thought in order to understand its content and with it acquire an additional element in the constitution of the self as psychic-spiritual. In the empathic act, in fact, what happens is precisely the perception of the distance and distinction between oneself and others, since the empathising act is proper to the one who empathises, while the content that is empathised is other people’s. (Stein, 1964). However, not all phenomenologists are in complete agreement on this; Scheler is criticised by Stein for his confusion of empathy, and Walther, for example, believes that a state of fusion occurs through empathy – something Stein does not accept at all. See: Hackermeier, 2008; Calcagno, 2019.

spatial-sensory perceptions of the world are received (Stein 1916, 35–50). But it is only in the encounter with another human being that our interiority – made of feelings, emotions, values – opens us, allowing us to recognise in the movement of others something deeper and something not visible to the eyes or perceptible through sensory levels alone.

When two human beings look at each other, one ego stands before another. It can be an encounter that takes place on the threshold or in the interior. When it is an encounter in the interior, then the other ego is a you. The gaze of the human being speaks (Stein, 2004, 78)

Empathic experience allows us, therefore, to recognise us as structurally inter-related and capable of building spaces of exchange, sharing and coexistence based on a common understanding. It is based on the human structure which, according to Stein, lives of a profound unity among several levels: the purely physical one of a material body traversed by life and sensations (*Leib*), the psychic one of feelings (*Psyche*) and the spiritual one of intelligence and openness to values¹¹ (*Geist*) whose centre is, finally, the soul (*Seele*), which constitutes the dimension of absolute openness to transcendence, the place of spiritual interiority and the ‘seat’ of the ego. This structure becomes the interpretive grid on which the more sociological analysis of individual and community and an investigation on the state are developed. In fact, Stein warns:

It is quite extraordinary how this ego, notwithstanding its solitariness and inalienable aloneness, can enter into a community of life with other subjects, how the individual subject becomes a member of a super-individual subject, and also how a super-individual current of experience is constituted in the active living of such a community-subject or community’s subject. (Stein, 2000, 133)

There is, therefore, a parallel between the human person and the community and between the individual subject and what she calls the ‘supra-individual’. The community, too, has vital experiences that are rooted in the individual, but there are some whose scope is such that they can only be experienced in the community. What we recognise within any group of people is the living out of certain situations as a group or the living for specific ideals: Stein gives the example of a troop experiencing the death of its leader (a situation), which also live and work for the defence of peace (ideal). However, at the basis of every community, there are always experiences and the world of values to which the individuals making up the group are attached. It is in their being people that they find each other and intentionally

¹¹Taking up Reinach’s and Scheler’s analyses on values, as well as Husserl’s, Stein considers a complete understanding of the human person impossible without a world of values. As Mette Lebech succinctly points out, Reinach develops the question of the apriority of values, Scheler their order and Husserl the act of valuing by linking it to the fact that values are grounded in things (Lebech, 2015, 27–28). For Stein, values are linked to the sphere of motivation that represents the legality of the world of the spirit – otherwise not explicable in terms of causality alone, which characterises the sphere of the psychical (Stein, 2000, First Part). Values constitute the background that moves us to act in a certain way, to prefer or avoid certain situations and/or experiences; they allow us to recognise that we are persons, that is, capable of values and moved in our living and acting by motives.

exchange experiences and visions, and it is therefore in a common search for meaning that they flourish in community, in whatever form and expression.¹²

A community will be traversed and sustained in the same way as the individual, by that energy or 'life power'¹³ emerging from the sum of the life power of the individuals, and will 'live' certain experiences by virtue of the individual experiences of its members whose object or value is the same. Taking the example of the troop, it is made up of a number of soldiers, each of whom has his/her own life and experiences but lives together with the others what affects them all, such as the death of one of them. In that case, the object of the personal experience is common to every member of the troop, so that it as a community experiences grief. The relationship between the individual and the community already emerges here. The more the individual grows in his/her life power, the more the community grows, and vice versa, the more they weaken, the more the community suffers, along with how similarity is not the identification of the two entities, which always remain distinct¹⁴ on pain of the loss of the individual and with it the community as such. We will return to these dynamics later.

At the same time, Walther argues that the human person whom she also sees as a living body, soul and spirit experiences his/her own self and the self of others by virtue of the close link between these planes, that is, by virtue of the fact that his/her body is always permeated by soul and spirit. This makes him/her capable of being aware of his/her own experiences, of accepting and freely directing them and therefore of experiencing something in a more peripheral way or in depth. It is because

¹²Stein, in dialogue with Scheler, points out how different formations can occur in a community: "We regard as the highest mode of community the union of purely free persons who are united with their innermost 'personal' life, or the life of soul, and each of whom feels responsible for himself or herself and for the community. Beside them stand the communities in which only a portion of their members are free and self-supporting persons, determine the mind of the community, and bear responsibility for it. In the third place would be named the communities where although there's a common living out of a unitary mind" (Stein, 2000, 278).

¹³The concept of life power is developed in the first part of the book *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, where Stein deepens the study of the individual in its psychic and spiritual dimensions. In the stream of consciousness, there is a real and concrete experience of the individual who lives certain experiences, is aware of them and through them acquires strength or is consumed. The life power is the vital source of psychic and spiritual life, through which certain experiences can be sustained, but which is also consumed by some. It is an 'enduring real property' of the ego (Stein, 2000, 22). For more, see: Betschart, 2009, 2010; Hagengruber, 2004.

¹⁴In the in-depth analysis that Stein carries out, and which she has not posited here, it becomes clear that "We won't be allowed to talk about any 'consciousness' of the community in the strict sense" as for the individuals (Stein, 2000, 140). The intensity and type of experiences also differ, since the community experience, although resulting from the individual experiences, is not simply a sum of them, but the unity of meaning of them, which, as such, would not be experienced by the individual. Again using the example of the troop: one thing is my personal mourning for a person dear to me, to whom I am particularly attached, quite another is the mourning that I share with my troop mates for one of them. And even in this shared mourning, the personal intensity of each person's suffering will remain distinct and unique, because it is the result of a personal fabric with its own history and character, as well as of a link with the deceased, which is not in itself interchangeable.

of this interweaving that for Walther as for Stein there is openness to others and the condition of sociability, which also consists in the sharing of experiences of meaning and not simply of physical spaces, common external features or blood ties (Walther, 1923, 18–30). The transition from I to We takes place precisely within the communal fabric where one becomes part of a We or of a supra-individual subject because of the social instincts that drive one to share experiences with others that are similar to itself and because of the need of a non-I in order to fully develop as a person.

4 How Community Works: Feelings and Intersubjective Relationships

In order to give a framework to the functioning of the social fabric of communities and differentiate communities, it is necessary, following Stein and Walther as well as their colleagues Scheler and Hildebrand,¹⁵ to bring into focus another aspect of the human person, namely, the whole realm of feeling and the emotions. In virtue of the above, we come to understand that the human being is characterised by his/her psycho-physical and spiritual structure and thus by a dual ‘sentient’ capacity (Stein 1916, 45–47) insofar as it is linked to the external world by means of its body, it is crisscrossed by sensations, psycho-physical experiences that demonstrate human sensitivity as the enduring characteristic of one’s living soul – and also by feelings – which are subdivided into vital feelings (feelings of pain or pleasure), feelings in general or moods (that which in some way ‘colours’ present mood) and finally the actual feelings (everything that is produced by other people and things, such as love, hate, gratitude, nostalgia and so on).¹⁶

Scheler delved even further into the sphere of the feelings, developing a genuine theory of emotional intentionality; for him, it is precisely social and emotional acts that constitute the basis of community life. Similar to what Stein says, feelings and their life are stratifications with different depths. We experience a different range of values at each level since they are perceived by us through a specific feeling

¹⁵A common aspect shared by these phenomenologists is the personalistic view of the human being and the link with the world of values. For reasons of space, we have privileged here the anthropological analysis of Stein and partly Walther, but Hildebrand and Scheler are animated by a personal vision of the human being too. Hildebrand always speaks about it within the ethical discourse on values and love, therefore in a more indirect way; nevertheless, his vision of the person in the balance, properly Steinian, between individuality and substantial completeness (*Welt für sich*) and belonging and openness to the community fabric is very clear. (For a brief discussion of this, see: P. Premoli de Marchi, 1998; Gaudio, 2013/Gaudio, 2020.) In Scheler’s sense, the human person is a free being, a creator and bearer of values, capable of loving, to the point that he even proposes a reinterpretation, apostrophising Descartes, in terms of *ens amans* (Scheler, 2004, 127).

¹⁶A thorough analysis of this, also with a view to the individual-community relationship and the current of experience generated in it, can be found in *Individual and Community* (Stein, 2000, 145–167).

comparable to the sensitive perception of things but distinct from the levels of feeling (Scheler, 1973, 330). The levels of feeling are thus stratified into emotional reaction to an intentional feeling (*Gefühl*) and the act of grasping a value in an intentional feeling (*fühlen*). Feelings, in turn, are stratified into four levels: sense feelings, vital feelings, psychological feelings and feelings of personality. The former correspond to feelings in the Steinian sense and, as such, are not directed towards a specific object nor open to a range of values. The latter, which are closer to moods, are feelings such as tiredness, freshness and so on, which do not correspond to a specific area of the body but affect it in its totality and open it to a whole sphere of vital values. Psychological feelings are intentional since they are explicitly addressed to a specific object. They do not have a particular allocation in the body even though they affect it, and they are related to the values of beautiful/ugly, true/false and honest/dishonest. Finally, along the line of actual Steinian feelings, there are what Scheler calls spiritual feelings that are related to the sphere of values, of the sacred and of the profane.

Vital, psychological and spiritual feelings are responses to values that are felt through the act of axiological perception¹⁷ (*Wert-nehmung*). In its most elementary form, feeling characterises the openness to the world of the individual belonging to a primary social context in which implicit forms of recognition prevail, based on the automatism of vital processes. This is immediately followed by the phenomenon that Scheler defines as unipathy¹⁸ or that process of mutual affective fusion in which two selves are constituted. The ways of feeling with others (*mitfühlen*), which Scheler describes in a precise sequence, in order to clarify the experience of authentic sympathy (*Mitgefühl*), indicate the differentiation in the various animal species of this basic disposition, reaching as far as love – the only source of real mutual knowledge between people.

In this view – which stands out as a fundamental anthropological dimension and for Scheler clearly autonomous in its ‘legality’ – love is the original act through which the human being puts into action his/her ability to transcend itself to participate in the life of another human being. This vision is common to both the Steinian and the Hildebrandian because they also come – although in a different way, in

¹⁷As Vendrell-Ferran points out, this distinction made by Scheler, which restores to value perception its own autonomy with respect to individual and possible responses to perceived values, seems to avoid the problems that, instead, remain in the Steinian proposal, since it allows us to explain how, for example, it is possible to perceive a certain value, but not to respond to it emotionally (Vendrell Ferran, 2016, 222–223).

¹⁸An extensive survey of this not exclusively human phenomenon can be found in *The Nature of Sympathy* (Scheler, 2008, in particular *The Sympathy*, 49–224). Here Scheler discusses it in order to differentiate between the various forms of feeling and to specify the typical character of sympathy, starting from Lipps’s concept of *Einsfühlung* (unipathy), which Stein also discusses, criticising it in the same way as Scheler’s approach (Stein, 1964).

terms of form and intensity¹⁹ – to consider love as the real engine of community coexistence and development.

In the light of what has been said thus far, a key has emerged for interpreting the interpersonal relationships that are the basis for all forms of community. The human person lives by values, recognises them and realises them in his/her own life by responding to them through feelings, so that everything he/she prefers, is interested in and concerns him/her, constitutes his/her world of values: it is on the basis of this that every interpersonal interrelationship and exchange takes place – from simple contact to meeting and entering into a real relationship (von Hildebrand, 1955, 121–128) – but it is also by virtue of the constant relationship with others that a human being's world of values expands and/or changes.

Clearly, it is not the same thing to talk about communities such as families, marriages or friendships and community phenomena such as a political party, a religious or an academic community or sport association. The distinctions between types of communities and between community and society are not completely overlapping. Walther, for example, distinguishes intentional communities from non-intentional communities (Walther, 1923), linked or not clearly linked to an external object of reference for all the members of the community. In this sense, for her, it is possible to experience an us that is not completely intentional because the love between the members is such that a possible common object of reference is implicit. In a marriage or in a family services to each other, providing assistance, sharing moments together and so on are natural without the need to be explicit about the reason for it or having to explain why they do it or what they expect to achieve together. In other communities, on the other hand, it is necessary to make explicit the object to which everyone is intentionally directed in order for the community to exist as a community. The intensity of life and participation and even active participation in the common experience may vary from one person to the next and depend on different factors, but there will be a unique common sense that will be clearly shared.

Hildebrand starts primarily from the distinction between I-Thou-relations and We-relations (von Hildebrand, 1955) to clarify how one can speak of community in both the strict and in the broad sense (meaning any human aggregation) as well as – in terms more clearly consonant with Walther's – formal and material community where the former represents the model of group relations in which a social act with its formal institution is required, while material communities are all those in which love and mutual recognition/acceptance are at the base. For Hildebrand, love holds a central place in the discussion about community with what he defines as the process of union (*Vereinigung*) between two or more persons that leads to the

¹⁹Hildebrand dedicates an entire work to the theme of love, *The Nature of Love*, and also in his *Metaphysik der Gemeinschaft* love plays a central role, with respect to Stein's references in the analyses dedicated to the community, to such an extent that it is not only the element that makes a simple contact a true relationship, but it comes to be the general distinguisher for an authentic community of several people (von Hildebrand, 1955, 2009).

constitution of a ‘body’, of something that is no longer just a single person next to or together with another single person, but a dual us:

Wherever becoming one in the true sense is not yet realised, but a human being ‘identifies’ his own life to such an extent with that of another, so that events are generally directed no longer only to the ‘I’, but to a ‘we’ – which must not only happen uniquely, but bi-univocally – a characteristic level of bonding is created that leads in itself to the formation of a body. (von Hildebrand, 1955, 152)

Of course, one cannot imagine that every multi-personal community can reach such a level. Indeed, in certain communities such as the state, the association and the political party, there may not even be a mutual knowledge of all the members, let alone love among everybody! These communities require the formal social acts that give life to them in a shared manner, as well as the unitive virtue, or the deep desire for union. Although they appear to be very far removed from communities in which love and unification are at a high level, here also we experience a *sui generis* unifying process.²⁰

Ultimately, following this analysis, we can conclude that in the relationship between the experience of the individual person and the community, experience is constitutive and not summative, because from the mere sum of the individual experiences, we do not obtain the experience of the community, which requires the unity of meaning of these individual experiences. Community experience therefore has its own ‘colouring of experience’, to put it in Steinian terms, which contains a nucleus of meaning and is determined by the particularity of the individual contents of individual experience. It does not, however, have its own consciousness because only the constituent flow is originally accompanied by consciousness – that of each individual member of the community. The relationships that exist between individuals and from the basis of the community network are of different kinds, from social acts to feelings such as love.

5 A Specific Form of Interdependence Among People in a Community

One phenomenon that we notice in community life, which Stein’s analysis particularly dwells on, is the influence of the individual or of the entire community on a single individual, that is, the situation in which one has a certain experience or a particular emotional state because one is grasped by that of others without necessarily being aware of this influence (Stein, 2000, 187ff.). For this to occur, one has to receive a certain impression from someone else, and in that sense, the physical presence is relevant. If I have someone in front of me, I grasp their vitality, energy, state as they are conveyed to me through the gaze, the voice or the gestures the other

²⁰Hildebrand defines this with a typical and in its own way unique expression, namely the ‘looking into each other’ (*Ineinanderblick*) of lovers (von Hildebrand, 1955, 2009).

persons make and the way they make them, their stance and their movements. These external perceptions, as Stein teaches us, provide us with the basis for empathising with the corresponding inner state and, by 'living' it in its place, understanding it.

However, the physical presence of another is not a necessary condition for being influenced, because it can also happen in other ways and according to the further modalities of the spiritual life of the other and of oneself. This is the case of reading an article or a book whose words can motivate me to act, to the extent that I am able to follow the reasoning of the writer and grasp the writer's state of mind, to feel the author's spiritual energy, and this can arouse new strength and spiritual vigour in me or drain my strength.²¹ In the same way, it can be influenced by the actions of a character in a play or film, by the lyrics of a song or a work of art, even a visual one. These kinds of influences are mostly one-sided in character, since there is no direct interaction between people, but by interacting, we can influence each other:²² at which point we are faced with a form of co-operation that is established between different individuals, and only on this basis is a supra-individual unity of experience possible. Thus, if a multiplicity of subjects is united by the same will, then, a single communal, voluntary position and a single action to carry it out will result, and this is irrespective of whether they all do the same thing or not. In the unity of voluntary action, there is the moment in which my voluntary intention is filled with the doing of the other, and the other experiences his/her doing as fulfilling my intention, even though he/she may not know its ultimate meaning. The common action then becomes our common issue, and we feel like members operating within a community.

In the community, there is a relationship of mutual dependence between the individuals, and the community is like an organic whole, in that its character depends in part on the individual particularity of its members, and these are comprehensible from the community to which they belong. We realise then that the community is not a free subject in the way that the individual is and is therefore not in the same way absolutely responsible: it is they who have the ultimate responsibility for what they do in the name of and for the community (Stein, 2000, 194–195).

When these individuals arrive at a union of mind and action that touches the deepest interiority of their being, one can also speak of a community soul, and the community, as it acts and bears the imprint of this interiority. Such a community has members who are persons in the full sense of the word, who take part in community life with their souls and who are conscious of their personal responsibility in and for the community but at the same time autonomous in leading their own personal lives without being completely absorbed by the community. Perhaps there will be

²¹ Stein clearly reports how love and all positive value stances (esteem, sympathy, acceptance, etc.) have a doubly constructive effect: they generate new and positive energies for both those who experience them and those who receive them. In contrast, hatred with all its negative range of stances (sadness, dislike, contempt) consumes both (Stein, 2000, 210–216).

²² Evidently, the typical phenomena of imitation present not only in humans, particularly in their developmental years, but also among some species of higher mammals, can also be understood here. Scheler discusses imitation as a stage of feeling in his study of empathy and in ethics (Scheler, 1973, 2008).

individuals who give themselves to the community in a particular way as its supporters and give it solidity and durability. These can then agree to create a society – in which individuals stand in front of each other considering each other as objects for which certain actions are valid – transforming the community of people into a state, that is, into a system of rigid rules, in which sovereignty is expressed (Stein, 2006, 66–82).

Let us now turn to the sense of belonging to the community, which for Stein, as for Walther and Hildebrand, is based on a certain unification of its members. As Calcagno points out, both Stein and Walther have spoken of a unity of sense that must be achieved in order for it to be realised; however,

Walther claims that community is marked by a profound unity, a becoming one, even a melting into a oneness, a fusion (*Verschmelzung*) of individuals. In the grasping of the unity of the sense of the collective we, Stein says there is a solidarity, but individuals remain individuals while grasping the we of the experience of collectivity. Walther goes further and claims not only is there grasping of the sense of the collectivity, but there is also a fusion or a becoming one of the members. (Calcagno, 2018, 11)

In fact, for Walther the deepest sense of community is oneness (*Einigung*) (Walther, 1923, 34–36) experienced in two ways, through the feeling of unification and through a habit: in the first sense, we mean a feeling of union with a certain object – which can be the intentional pole of a community of people or a person in itself – that one’s soul is directly and consciously or even unconsciously, through a process of growth over time, although this leads to an appropriate union only in the moment when it then becomes conscious and does not remain passive (Walther, 1923, 36–38). The actual momentary feeling of union brings with it not only a being intentionally directed towards the object with which one wishes to achieve such union but also a being oriented and directed towards it; this also means that one can turn away from the object of union, move away from it and turn towards other objects, without this leading to the loss of the feeling of union. In fact, when one is attracted to something and moves towards it intentionally, ‘investing’ it with one’s spiritual ray in a relationship of union, it is accepted and remains in the ego even when it is no longer present and/or one simply turns to something else, perhaps sinking into a sort of conscious background and becoming habitual²³ (Walther, 1923, 40).

The feeling of habitual union, however, has a communitarian scope when it is lived not by an I with other I’s but by a We or rather by an ‘I along with others’. It is a matter of all those situations in which one lives a certain experience and union with a certain object (Walther gives the example of God) which can be of two types:

²³ Hildebrand speaks in these terms of love and the unitive intention with the object of love: when one loves someone, one invests them through one’s own response of love and the desire for union, which becomes union achieved at the moment in which this love is communicated and reciprocated, subsists and persists in the lover, even when he/she is not in the constant presence of the beloved (von Hildebrand, 2009). Walther, for her part, explicitly asks the question whether feelings of union are the same as attitudes of love, friendship, affection in general and answers, in line with Hildebrand, that love cannot be confused with the feeling of union.

either ignoring the rest of the people and living only from one's own relationship with the object of union – in the case of God, living one's own relationship in mystical union with God without this involving and affecting other people – or by turning one's gaze and co-involving in such an experience all those people who also live a relationship with God or who are created/loved by God; in this sense, one can speak of the religious community or of believers, which does not imply knowing and having present to one's inner eye all the believers or people loved by God.

The lived experience of belonging to the oneness of a community, which is intentionally grasped when one understands that a person is one with and in others, is constituted in the grasping of a certain sense of a social objectivity. To feel the oneness of a community, we need four elements: a subject and an object of unity; a widening of the feeling of oneness; the complete and full experience of oneness of the subject and the object must be anchored in subjects (Walther, 1923, 64).

For Walther, as for Stein, empathy is the means to achieve this, although Walther believes that the empathic process enables us to grasp a similar experience between several people intentionally directed towards the same object and with it the experience of union with each other:²⁴ when A empathises with B, B also empathises with A, but at the same time, they are also given, again through empathy, the union of each with his intentional object, which is then the same for both (Walther, 1923, 85). The basis of this is the recognition of a common humanity, through which each one then experiences his/her own selfhood and on the basis of which it is possible to share and live the same experiences,²⁵ to influence each other and act in the name of the community.

²⁴On the question of unity between persons, Stein states in a contribution on education that “the human being is at the same time an individual and a member of the community, but not in perfect unity”; a reference model for this is, in fact, for the Carmelite saint, the Trinity, whose divine persons are individuals in community, but who experience full unity because God: “God is one in three persons. An indivisible nature, completely simple and unique – therefore individual in the fullest sense of the word. But a nature that is three persons together and unites them in unity; unity of being and unity of life in knowledge, love and action – hence community in the fullest sense of the word” (Stein, 2001, 18). In us, on the other hand, individual characterisation stands alongside community belonging. For community belonging we have the same way of feeling, thinking, wanting and doing – the one human nature that unites all human beings – or expressing a certain social type; individuality, on the other hand, puts a brake on this belonging in preserving that unique and totally our own trait that cannot be in full unity with that of others.

²⁵In this sense, Walther comes close to the Schelerian position of the common humanity, also understood as a community subject in a broader sense (Calcagno, 2018). Scheler even speaks of a *Gesamtperson* (Scheler, 1973), a unique subject of the community, explicitly criticised by Stein for the confusion it may engender (Stein, 2000, 276–278).

6 The Contagion Phenomena: Mass Versus the Community?

Even if we cannot claim that through empathy, we achieve union and/or fusion with the experiences of others, the fact remains that Stein also points to similar phenomena, more psychic in character, involving individuals within communities. This phenomenon can simply provoke in a person a decision or an attitude that he/she would not have had without the example and influence of others, or

a change in the behaviour of one individual under the influence of another, a regularity in the relations of a series of individuals who influence each other and finally an interweaving of the activities of different individuals that objectively serves a purpose. (Stein, 2000, 209)

This in itself is neutral and may even allow for a broadening of horizons, when it moves on positive attitudes and positions that are based on values. It is also possible, however, that, by virtue of our psychic life and our ability to perceive others with their psychic states, if we leave too much space to psychic emotionality alone, we can suffer a genuine ‘psychic contagion’. This happens when we react to the doing or feeling of the other by virtue of his/her expression/action or when we are seized by his/her psychic state. In the absence of spiritual activity, there can be no reciprocal stance, no understanding and therefore no cooperation with real and true community action.

This happens and is typical of a group of people called the mass, where individuals do not compare themselves with each other and do not perform acts on the basis of a possible understanding of others but are simply bound together by a spatial commonality and by the uniformity of behaviour that is based on the excitability of the individual psyche through extraneous psychic life. By virtue of this, one of the most typical phenomena of the masses is contagion through suggestion²⁶ in which someone becomes awoken of the conviction of the existence of a certain state of affairs that may, however, not be so or may not exist at all. The belief, then, may be unfounded, in the case of uncertain things; or it may arise from one’s own desire – then it is a lie and an autosuggestion. What happens in psychic contagion is that such an accepted belief is then propagated further to other individuals and there follows a possible recourse to force through excitations that leads to a putting in brackets of spiritual capacities – specifically the critical intellect, which makes one further disposed to be convinced: a group of people is created who have no inner commonality (Stein, 2000, 241–255).

It is clear, as Stein states, that a mass of individuals, who are and remain spiritual by nature, needs a guide, a leader who cannot be part of the masses, since he/she is the spiritual element that produces what infects and generates conviction. If this guide, who must be linked to the mass by a mutual understanding, is coherent and

²⁶Walther also mentions a distinction between community and mass, where the members of the mass are precisely individuals who do not recognise each other in a condition of sharing and unity, but who are only together because of a common suggestion; they do not then live certain experiences intentionally, but only because they are driven by others (Walther, 1923, 98).

decisive, the mass can behave as a community; but if this person is not a real guide,²⁷ the behaviour of the mass becomes disconnected (Stein, 2000, 270ff.).

In this sense, the masses can be guided to actions that are morally just, or not just, depending on who activates the contagion. But it remains a low-level human whole and, in itself, more dangerous than a community, because the spiritual sphere is somehow deactivated, something that happens in all political and social contexts in which emotions are leveraged, activating processes of uniformity of common feeling and flattening of cultural production in a single direction, and where the level of suggestion is such that one has the illusion of activating vital force through a certain action. In fact, this only concerns the sensory life power and not the spiritual one,²⁸ which, instead, is weakened. When in *Communités* such as an entire population – the premise of which is human life that grows like an organism, extinguishing itself only when all its members cease to exist because they are extinct,²⁹ – personalities emerge who become, or are made, leaders of the people through processes of suggestion that focus on the values of self-maintenance and absoluteness of identity, these communities lose, according to Stein, its communitarian character and become a mass (Stein, 2004, 152; Stein, 2006, 3).

7 Belonging and Disillusionment in Community Dynamics and Actual Situations

Communities, in fact, are different in terms of the types, purposes and experiences that generate the bonds of belonging. They can arise involuntarily or on the basis of a common life or of styles – the religious community, an artistic community. They can arise from original bonds – such as the family, the lineage, the people – or through free acts – think of friendship, marriage – or they can arise in mixed forms. In virtue of this, it happens, according to Stein, that the people who become part of a certain community become bearers of that given personal type that characterises the members of the community. There is, therefore, in addition to a common object of intention, also a common denominator of certain communities, which is the type

²⁷“A single strong leader can suffice to hold a community together and impress upon it his stamp. But if he alone is the soul of the whole thing, then it falls apart with his elimination; or, it barely holds together externally like any accidental formation, to be shattered by the first difficulty that threatens it” (Stein, 2000, 281). Scheler explicitly analysed the figure of the *Führer* (the guide) in community and societal contexts in the short text *Vorbilder und Führer (1911–1921)* (2004). Walther also expresses herself regarding the figure of the guide, without a specific elaboration like Scheler, but within her analysis of the community (Walther, 1923, 106–107).

²⁸Stein, speaking of the life power, makes it clear that there are two forms of it, the sensitive form, which corresponds to psycho-physical energy, and the spiritual form, which is more directly linked to the spirit and its activities (Stein, 2000, 9–128).

²⁹Stein considers the community distinctly from society and this leads her to consider the former as an absolutely natural fact, indeed, almost prior to man’s very individuality; we find, therefore, positions similar to hers in political thought, but which refer only to society.

of its members:³⁰ social types united by a certain quality or characteristic that distinguishes them from others.

This bond among individuals forming communities is neither obvious nor automatic. Merely belonging to a particular community, being aware of it as well as being aware of its other members does not mean that each member feels naturally and always part of that community or in full harmony with its ideals and convictions. It is possible, therefore, as both Stein and Walther point out, that there are people who, finding themselves within a community, do not feel completely at home, even though they respond in some way to its type, nor can it be said that a type that expresses a community in the purest way can be completely exhausted in this, by virtue of his individual nucleus. Walther gives the example of a religious community, taking the extreme case of Luther who, despite being a member of the Christian community, at a certain point found no longer correspondence between what the community was supposed to embody and what actually was lived, to the point of experiencing a condition of disillusionment and detachment from the community (Walther, 1923, 102). But it can also be a question of smaller communities – such as family units that come together through marriage, thus leading some individuals from one family community to expand into a new community by joining or welcoming another community. Even in these situations, it may happen that one still finds oneself part of an extended family unit that does not fully correspond to one's vision and needs, even if only in one of its members or a few. Finally, such situations of not fully adhering and sharing the experiences of the community can affect people within a political party or an association, as well as within larger entities such as a people or a state.³¹

In this sense, it may be helpful to recall with Walther that it is one thing to 'know' that I belong to certain communities but another to feel united with the members of each of these and in tune with their specific lifestyles and ideals. To exemplify this, my belonging to the family comes from the fact that I was born into it without being able to choose its members. But it is my family I feel that I belong to it even though I may not always agree with certain attitudes and ways of doing things of each of its members and the family as a whole. However, the blood bond and the habit of living together that is generated in the individual are very strong and easily lead to a sense of unity with that community. One willingly acts and even of one's own choice in

³⁰ Human types are determined not only by external traits, manners, clothes and customs, but above all by internal traits, i.e. beliefs, attitudes that mature over time due to influences from the outside world.

³¹ In this regard, Hildebrand underlines how the belonging of individuals to a community also depends on the general type of the same and introduces a distinction between material and formal community, where the first represents the general-generic for friendship between two or more persons, humanity, the nation, the family – even if this, like marriage and the church, turns out to be hybrids that have in themselves the characteristics of both community expressions – and the second that of association, of the State. Whereas purely material communities are bound by love, mutual choice and a certain degree of closure to the entry of others as members, formal communities arise exclusively from specific social acts that establish them, and in them the members are not necessarily bound by love, nor is there closure, but other members can join (von Hildebrand, 1955).

the name of one's family; and what an individual member does, he/she often does also for and in the name of others, without everyone having to follow it all the way and be aware of it.

The condition of larger community complexes, such as a religious group or even a political party, is quite different. Here it will obviously take social acts of a certain kind to allow individuals to achieve a sense of belonging, such as to share the community's action and experience. Even when one is not completely convinced, because of the trust in the community and in an action, it will at least in its deepest intentions be the expression of all and sustain the community itself.

Community dynamics – as was mentioned above – are necessarily linked to a reciprocal subsistence and relationality between the individual and the group or between I and We; that is, there is such a bond of interdependence or co-belonging between the individual and the community that it is impossible to fully understand the human being by separating him/her from the community nor can the community be understood except in relation to its individual members. This means that the absolute uniqueness of the individual, beyond any common character he/she may share with humanity as such and then with the different communities and social groups to which he/she belongs, remains fundamental and inviolable, that is, it cannot be coerced by the community as a body superior to the individual. The latter, as a 'private person', cannot and must not necessarily spend energy and time on the communities to which they belong and, above all, cannot be forced to identify himself or herself always and in everything with them, let alone to act in their name where his/her conscience prevents them from doing so. One may, however, do so of one's own free will, because one feels that he/she is one with the community and, therefore, wants/needs to act for and with the community, over and above any internal conflicts. In this case, the private person comes to correspond completely with the 'social or public person' (Walther, 1923, 106), that is, with the 'social type', it represents within the fabric of society.³²

The identity of each human being is profoundly marked by relationships of belonging, and a human being's life, we could say, is played out on the threshold between what determines and defines that person in a unique and unrepeatable way, distinguishing him/her and in some way also distancing him/her from others, and what he/she belongs to and cannot escape, on pain of losing himself or herself. Indeed, the individual person, as Stein goes on to say, 'isn't surrendered to external impacts in a totally powerless way, but rather has the freedom, within certain limits, either to consent to their influence upon her development or to withdraw herself from it' (Stein, 2000, 284). On the other hand, the community also has its own identity to safeguard and as such gives its individual members an imprint, characterising

³²We refer here to Stein's definitions of 'types' from a more strictly philosophical point of view, and to Schütz's more clearly sociological definitions (Stein, 2000, 2001; Schütz, 1960).

them and distinguishing them from other people belonging to other communities of a different fabric.³³

At this point, the question becomes when and how does the disconnection between the individual and the community occur? When, that is, starting from a situation of initial conscious belonging to a community, situations of disillusionment are generated in one or more of its members such as to give rise to discontent and disorientation, which are sources of destabilisation of the community fabric since, as Stein well points out and we have had the opportunity to explain, the life power of each community depends completely on that of its members and on how much they are willing to share it.

A possible answer to this and therefore a key to interpreting certain socio-political events that are affecting several national communities worldwide can only emerge from what has been said so far and by putting into focus those aspects and elements that are essential for individuals and groups who are aware of being communities, to develop a sense of belonging to the community fabric such as to live with awareness and responsibility every event and situation as if it were their own, that is, in good times and in bad.

In this sense, it is clear that if there is not the mutual openness of individuals, that is, the willingness to meet and welcome others in their specificity even if it is annoying or incomprehensible, one cannot feel fully a member of a community and consequently live and act for and with it. Nevertheless, one can also be open and welcome but not feel that one is part of a whole. Openness and welcome are a necessary but not sufficient condition for triggering the organic wholeness that is a community. If within a community some of its members turn towards others exclusively with negative stances (distrust, antipathy, suspicion, hatred), this can only lead to situations of malaise that may also lead the people affected not to feel fully recognised as part of the community, withdrawing from it spiritually – reducing their contribution to it and consequently weakening the whole community – or starting to respond with the same stances. This generates an internal struggle within the community (i.e. family feuds, social wars) which, in turn, leads to a weakening or even dispersal of the community.

Obviously, stances are much more incisive on the internal dynamics of a community. But even these do not seem to us to be sufficient, since it could also happen that the community succeeds in any case in persevering because the thing affects a very small number of its members, while the others are and remain clearly at a level

³³The insistence on the relationship between the individual and the community (*Gemeinschaft*) and not on the social relationship between the individual and the society (*Gesellschaft*) is dictated by our intention to deal with the dynamics of the community since these are also the ones that determine social action in the most eminent sense. We are given to a common world that is first and foremost a community – not only biologically because we are born into a family, the first community nucleus of non-chosen belonging, but also at the level of people and nation by virtue of blood ties as well as a shared history. The social level, the expression of formal action based on roles and regulations, builds on the community levels. Undoubtedly there are differences, but in the terms of this research it is not possible for us to extend the range to this aspect as well, wishing precisely to support the original foundation from which to read the social and state dynamics.

of psycho-physical and spiritual involvement. This is the third aspect I wish to emphasise here: When we spoke of the phenomena of influence and psychic contagion, we pointed out that they occur as a result of a natural human predisposition but that they are extreme and have negative consequences only where they generate a mass, that is, where people cease to live spiritually and follow only the wave of feelings and emotions that come from the outside. In concrete terms, it means deciding on a lifestyle that gives little importance to the development of one's own capacity for reasoning and constructive criticism, as well as to the enhancement of the collective memory of one's own community and ancestors, but aims only at productive efficiency and the material well-being of the moment. Such a situation arises because of previous conditions that have not been sufficiently met and which lead some to an attitude of disillusionment with their community and consequently to a loss of meaning and commitment. It can also occur the intervention of some or even just one member inside or outside the community who, moved by their own vision of the right and best way of life, are capable of such a level of suggestion from others, as to move a mass of people to think or act in their 'appropriate' way, extinguishing the spiritual activity of individuals and consequently the level of critical capacity and ethical responsibility towards others, as well as towards themselves. In fact, a healthy and fulfilled community develops from individuals who freely adhere to it, who are, therefore, capable and spiritually awake, to be able not only to follow a current and adhere to a community due to objective facts or conditions preceding or superior to themselves but are always moved by what Stein calls the *fiat*, meaning that entirely individual and private moment in which one adheres with one's own will to something superior. No one can intervene in another person's conscience in order to move him/her by physical or psychological force to do what he/she does not feel able or willing to do because it is contrary to his/her own conscience, provided that the conscience has not been previously extinguished – but then we will no longer be faced with a free and responsible person, that is, spiritually awake, but with a mannequin in the hands of others.³⁴

Social cases that exemplify what we are expounding here are those of today's multimedia communities in which a few know-it-alls convey knowledge and information without effort or difficulty, let alone careful verification of the truthfulness and ethicality of the content, but rather the easy ability to convince and influence the psyche of others. This is not necessarily a case of bad intentions but only of economic or lobbying intentions, and it is based on the dependence generated by being

³⁴The clear reference here is to every form of individual or mass coercion that underlies totalitarianism of all kinds. The socio-historical study of totalitarianism has, in fact, shown how in such contexts real organised systems of contrast to the spiritual formation of individuals are triggered through the adoption of self-suggestion mechanisms, which generate needs and necessities that did not exist before and which are satisfied in only one way – that of the totalising system – up to the adoption of systematic violence for all those who go off the track or recognise its perversion and do not want to adhere to it. On this, we refer to the extraordinary analyses of Arendt (1976).

online or not:³⁵ ‘a few minds’ generously put themselves at the service of the multitude, relieving it of burdens. Another example is the various forms of fanaticism or populism and sovereignty, which, on the other hand, take advantage of and exploit the Internet to appeal to certain religious, ideological, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other values of identity and belonging, demonising or simply discrediting everything ‘other’ as foreign in the sense of strange and therefore dangerous.

Paradoxically, therefore, an aspect that turns out to be fundamental and necessary in order to have a community in the full sense of the word – the sense of cohesion and belonging that stems from common values and shared ideals – is precisely what can turn into poison and a deterrent of the community itself. If, in fact, in order to feel part of a whole, it is necessary to have a level of sharing that cannot be limited only to blood or only to shared physical space (Walther, 1923) but that an intimate cohesion is necessary that stems from convictions and ideals to be followed and put into practice in order to feel fully realised, it is equally evident that fixing oneself only on certain ideals and values to be referenced can freeze the community and, perhaps in time and in a slow process, lead to not accepting new or old members who try to develop, expand and perhaps question their styles and ideals of life, which naturally tend to lose colour and vigour over time, not to mention their structure which as such are transient and destined to be rethought or replaced. This requires a continuous exercise of openness and spiritual cultivation of the individual as well as of the community. If one does not inwardly live the values and ideals of reference of his/her community, does not feel them to be his/her own and at the same time does not develop his/her own identity in autonomy, without conforming to the mainstream, but having the courage and the possibility to be completely oneself.³⁶ Even when one may be ‘out of tune’ or out of place, one ends up either by capitulating – becoming a sacrificial victim of the collectivity – or by homologating and, therefore, no longer existing as a person, but only as part of a collectivity to which one adheres without and ifs, buts, etc.

If we bring all these dimensions and aspects of communities back to the fabric of the state, which is a specific community form in which the decision to converge into a we is the basis, together with the law as its maintenance tool and the mutual acquaintance of the members is neither attainable nor necessary in and of itself. Differences are evident not only with those communities that Hildebrand calls material but also with formal but numerically smaller ones. Above all, it has perhaps become explicit that the maintenance of a healthy state community is very fragile and complex, since it is closely linked to that of the individual communities that are

³⁵ In this regard, Floridi has coined the term *On-life* to indicate the lifestyle of today’s generations, especially in countries and contexts where the level of connection is so widespread/accessible that it has created a generalised condition of network dependence (Floridi, 2014).

³⁶ On this aspect, Stein is perhaps the thinker, among those considered, who much more and tirelessly does not give in to the defence of individuality for the best and fullest success of every community, strongly calling into question the pedagogical aspect of education, which should not be a guide towards a pre-established model and therefore the same for all, but towards a model of ideals to be embodied individually, each one developing what is already placed in their own interiority (Stein, 2001).

its foundation (families, groups of friends, associations of all kinds, religious communities, parties, schools, academies and so on) and to their harmonious coexistence and intertwining. We could therefore interpret the dynamics analysed so far between the community and the individual, in terms of the relationship between the state and the individual communities that comprise it. If the individual communities that make up a state have the space and capacity to develop and act in full autonomy and freedom, in full recognition of each one's dignity and identity while respecting shared rules and laws, as well as a body of values and ideals recognised by tradition and conviction, these communities will naturally contribute to the life of the state that welcomes them, even when some of them do not feel full adherence to a line of action or to certain intentions reached at a state level. In such cases, free expression may lead to a request for reflection or rethinking of what has been decided or is planned.

However, when certain situations occur, the already fragile and, shall we say, mysterious sense of belonging of individuals and communities to the state is undermined and leaves room out of complaint and discontent. Situations that can lead to this are the following:

1. The individual communities of a state begin to drift away from its intentions because they no longer find room to flourish and contribute nor are they actively involved in building and supporting the supra-community fabric (through genuine communication of decisions and steps to be taken, as well as requests for proposals and visions that meet their needs).
2. The attention and support given to education are reduced to the detriment of other aspects of the state's economic life, so that the level of education and upbringing is flattened to a single reference model in which the life of the spirit is little or poorly cultivated.
3. The state representatives, elected by the citizens, stop acting 'in the name of' but exclusively seek fame and their own benefit. Such contexts can easily feed sellers of hidden hopes and desires, who appeal to a cultural archetype, that of the people, which is abused through the illusion that it can really be a sovereign political subject by virtue of its identity traits alone (which in an absolutely univocal and homogeneous way do not exist because of the biodiversity that characterises us, as well as the natural and historical movements of displacement and mixing) and direct participation in the economic and political governance of the whole by the individual communities of people, getting rid of the so-called intermediate bodies typical of democracies, which is objectively unfeasible due to the large number of citizens that make up the state communities.

One could, therefore, conclude that the movements and motivations that lead to the emergence of disillusion and with it of forms of populism or other phenomena as such are manifold but that they certainly emerge from a latent disconnection between individual communities and the state or, put another way, when a state assumes exclusively the form of a corporation and its members no longer feel that they are members of a large community with shared organisations, rules, customs, etc., but rather a structure imposed for the sole purpose of coexistence and whose governance is alien or distant from the community fabric of the citizens.

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Chapter 11

Accountability and Populism: An Anthropological Perspective



Feliciano Tosetto

1 Introduction

This chapter proposes to look at the relationship between accountability and populism, starting from some of their salient features. As a methodological approach and important premise, this paper will avoid static definitions of concepts. This will allow to explore them as processes in progress, enabling an anthropological reading of the phenomena at stake. In particular, populism and accountability will be understood as two processes that interact with each other. Respectively, populism will be interpreted as a specific language, which leads from a particular political experience to political action itself, while accountability will be understood as a form of relationship based on control. In this way, we will account for the moral nature of the two phenomena and the plurality of their forms and variations. Recognizing accountability not only as a tool or a quality, but also as a set of relational and anthropopoietic practices, will enable us to read the phenomenon of populism as a hegemonic clash between forms of accountability. This also accounts for some paradoxical phenomena, such as the importance of individual leaders in populism—despite it being a form of politics that claims the primacy of an indistinct “people.” To do this, we will start from a partial reconstruction of the global flows affecting the relationship between populism and accountability on the various scales of political and social action. In particular, the analysis will highlight the global dimensions that favor the experience of political exclusion and crisis and that seem to open the way to populist phenomena.

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2 Resisting Definitions

In the last two decades, the term populism has been playing a key role in political debates, yet it does not have a precise or unique definition (see Allcock (1971), Mény and Surel (2002), and Dubnick (2014)). It is used to characterize, often negatively, leaders from all over the world such as Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen, Nicolas Maduro, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Rodrigo Duterte, Viktor Orbán, and many others. It is used to refer to both left-wing parties, such as the Greek Syriza and the Spanish Podemos, and right-wing parties, such as British Ukip and AfD in Germany. Due to such high incidence across different countries, academic attention to populism has sharply increased in recent years.

When we use the term populism, we can understand it as a global phenomenon, but more often, we mean specific political groups or leaders (Devinney & Hartwell, 2020). However, the two dimensions cannot be separated without overlooking part of the nature of the phenomenon. In fact, populism is the result of global interconnections that are expressed locally through flows of ideas, information, languages, and specific policies that interact with specific localities. Populism relies on daily practices of political imagination that are tangled with what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai calls “scapes” (Appadurai, 1996, pp. 33–47). The analysis of specific cultural dynamics of globalization led Appadurai to move away from the idea of a delimited place, and he arrived to a form of anthropology dedicated to the study of connections and ramifications. Appadurai’s introduction of the concept of “scapes” accounts for unprecedented relationships between identity, culture and the production of new areas of imagination. Hence, the use of the suffix “-scape” assigns a relational and perspective dimension to global flows: ethnoscapas as human migrations and diasporas, mediascapas as a stream of symbols, technoscapas as a movement of technologies, finanscapas as the movement of money, and ideoscapas as flows of ideas. This framework helps us take into account the perspectival nature of these neologisms; more importantly, though, “the suffix -scape allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33).

In order to understand the relationship between the local and global dimensions of populism, we also have to take into account the global and local dimensions of accountability, because “[...] populism relies on pre-existing theories of accountability: it curves reformulations of recycled interpretative trajectories” (Theodossopoulos & Kapferer, 2019, p. 5). The two concepts are in fact inevitably linked in the tangle of social becoming. Regarding both the phenomena of populism and accountability, there is a differentiated distribution not only of meanings and their manifest forms but also of the types of cultural processes (see Devinney and Hartwell (2020) and Douglas and Laade (1980)). However, before attempting to deepen the analysis, we must adopt a perspective that enables us to treat populism and accountability as integrated and processual objects, avoiding the reification of both.

Associating the terms accountability and populism with specific definitions is a difficult undertaking that risks excluding some elements of the two phenomena in favor of others. Not giving in to a definitional anxiety, on the one hand, allows us to maintain the variety of meanings that both concepts take on depending on the contexts. On the other hand, not having a strict definition presents a problem of clarity. Both populism and accountability are cultural elements that characterize our contemporaneity, particularly in modern industrialized democracies. For these reasons, when anthropology starts to investigate the two terms, it can only recognize their changing nature and their inextricable link to historical dynamics. We will attempt to recover part of the clarity of presentation in dealing with these concepts by providing partial definitions, from time to time, or by highlighting salient features. We must maintain the awareness that analyzing a film starting from single frames inevitably distorts it.

3 The People's Enemies

Even though there is variety among different populisms, we can highlight some common traits to sketch a wide definition as a starting point. The narrative that describes the establishment and the people as antagonists seems to be one of the common features of all the various populisms. Jean Comaroff seems to reverse this idea by stating that populism is a precondition of all anti-establishment movements: “it is important to acknowledge that a certain populist radicalism—an opposition to the dictatorship and doxa of elites, [...]—is a necessary, if not a sufficient condition for mass movements in all times and places. Such populist mobilization forces a clear line between “the people” and those who oppose their interests” (Comaroff, 2011, p. 104). In other words, defining “people” by tracing a line between what can be included and what must be excluded is needed as a starting point to develop the idea that there is an elite that has to be blamed. There is a cognitive habit of separating the world into “pure people” and the corrupt “non-people”; the boundaries that are drawn to guarantee the purity of the imagined community (Anderson, 1983) gradually accumulate.

In this way, populism relies on the creation of an idealized “people.” This process shares the same trajectories of every collective subject built upon an Identity-Otherness dynamic, like nationalism, racism, or suprematism. As stated by anthropologist Francesco Remotti,

the construction of any subject (whether the subject is an individual ‘I’ or a collective ‘We’) cannot ignore the delineation of boundaries: a subject must gain recognition and the boundaries perform an irreplaceable function in this sense. But – as has been said – not all borders are equal: some borders are made to close off, to protect and to prevent access to their respective territories, and other borders are made, instead, to organize exchange and communication with others. (Remotti, 2019, p. 12)

In the case of populism, borders are internal to society itself, and they are based on systems of experiences, rhetorical devices, and, as we shall see, accountability practices.

It is the public narratives, a set of languages and symbols of power, which allow the concept of people to take shape within the community. Consensus building in populist rhetoric takes place with a hypertrophy of ideoscapes involving the concepts of popular sovereignty and people-nation. The people are created by emphasizing certain shared values and traits through the exclusion of others. In other words, the maintenance and multiplication of borders represent a process underlying the practices of daily imagination in the populist experience. This shapes the perception of belonging to a specific people. As in the case of national identity (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012; Anderson, 1983), the populist people thus become an unquestionable and totalizing category. Where national identity is closely linked with the territory of the state, the populist idea of people is characterized by opposition based on different experiences.

Different forms of populisms currently share another feature: the crisis of political representation. Political representation may be thought of as an institution undergoing “crisis” due to several and varying reasons. While that level of institutional crisis is crucial, political representation faces a much more profound level of crisis within populism, whereby the very concept of representation succumbs. As noticed by William Mazzarella “what the word populism marks is a challenge to mediation as such” (2019, p. 49). Challenging mediation may lead to believe that mediation is not necessary, building what we can call a myth of non-mediation, as mediation is inevitable (see Agamben (2018)) even in contexts of direct democracy.

Representative democracies relate voters and elected officials based on the possibility to transpose the interests of the former into the political arena. The two contexts, that of political practice and that of voters, are often characterized by the adoption of different languages for which the work of representation is in fact a real work of translation. However, when the citizen is no longer able to recognize the validity of the political delegation, the difference in languages is perceived as a source of exclusion from political life. In this context, representatives are no longer trusted to be a tool to translate people’s demands into language proper of the political arena. Due to this mistrust that happens independently from actual political performance (even prior to it), voters will grow to view their representatives as those who are preventing their access to politics, instead of facilitating it. The experience of feeling excluded from political participation is one of the reasons why “populism typically operates at the margins of or outside accepted organizations of the political and their ideological rationalities” (Theodossopoulos & Kapferer, 2019, p. 2).

One of the most evident examples of such phenomenon in the last few years has been the rise of the “Movimento 5 Stelle” (Five Stars Movement) in Italy, led by Beppe Grillo, who is by profession a comedian. His being an entertainer allowed him to embody his populist message of fueling the conflict between the existing political elites and the masses. He could represent the outsider par excellence, claiming to enter the world of politics to dismantle it in the name of the people. Even public figures that were more publicly known to belong to a privileged class

managed to exploit the same rhetoric, as in the cases of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and former US President Donald Trump. As stated by Nadia Urbinati,

this antiestablishment rhetoric does not refer to socioeconomic elites and is neither class based nor money based. Ross Perot, Silvio Berlusconi, and indeed Trump were (and are) part of the economic superelite. But this seemed to be acceptable to their electors, who were ultimately looking for a person who was successful but who still shared the same values as theirs. (Urbinati, 2019, p. 40)

Indeed, their perceived belonging to “the people” was formed and promoted by their overt opposition to the political establishment, rather than by their actual economic status. In fact, their real socioeconomic status would have situated them much closer to the elite they campaigned against, rather than to the people who voted for them. Winning in the political arena of democratic elections thanks to a rhetoric centered on anti-politics may seem to be a paradox, and it indicates a deep crisis of democracy. Moreover, while sometimes leading to politically ineffective measures, as mentioned before, the victory of populism in Western postindustrial democracies signals the incidence of political exclusion of certain groups and its real impact on people’s lives and their political decision-making.

4 A Political Language for a Global Experience

At the same time, the ideological premises for populism are contained in the very idea of democracy (see Rancière (2014), Laclau (2005), and Kapferer (2017)). In a moment of crisis where the existing forms of democracy are unable to translate the new dimension of global flows (Appadurai, 1996, 5–10) into effective policies, populism becomes the language with which to express the lived experience of crisis.

The constant changes in the global framework and the inability of States to give effective answers have posed a fundamental question, namely, whether “tomorrow we will have a world” (De Martino, 2019, 69). This question inevitably arose from the inability to plan for tomorrow and for people to rely on their cultural resources to face constantly changing issues.

For Appadurai, the ability to imagine the future, or the capacity to aspire, is at the basis of the production of the locality or of the continuous shaping of one’s own context of life (Appadurai 2007). The inability to plan for the future creates a state of crisis, insecurity, and precariousness. This insecurity has involved all aspects of society, from the institutional and organizational level to the more personal level.

According to anthropologist Hugh Gusterson, populism can be seen as a paradoxical reaction to the new neoliberal order (Gusterson, 2017). Most of the characteristics that he lists under the description of the neoliberal order, such as the hyper-financialization of the economy or the fluidity of new capitalism, can be described with Appadurai’s terminology for globalized modernity. Financescapes became more and more unpredictable with digital capitalism and the increasing

power of the banking sector over the economic and political field. The lives of citizens all over the world are affected like never before by the changes in exchange rates and commodity prices. The working class is now competing in a wider labor market thanks to the offshoring possibility.

Another central dimension are the ideoscapes regarding the idea of well-being or, in other words, the promised quality of life widespread by new media. Such values and ideals, of how a modern life should be, are becoming the center of a globalization of aspirations. As shown by Geshiere and Rowland, “for large parts of Africa the term ‘globalisation’ is increasingly acquiring a cynical overtone. There is at most a globalisation of dreams – *lecher la vitrine*, as Achille Mbembe calls it” (Geschiere & Rowlands, 1996, p. 553). The French expression, borrowed from Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, means “window-shopping,” but its literal translation is “licking windows” and can evocatively describe the phenomenon. Even though the expression is used to summon the experience of many African countries, the resentment growing from a perceived broken promise seems to be a common ground of populist experience. This process is very similar to what Katherine Newman describes in her ethnography of Pleasanton, New Jersey: the expectations of postwar baby boomers crashed against the shifts of the economy, leading to the experience of frustration and precariousness (Newman, 1993).

The unpredictability of financescapes, the widespread new ideas of well-being, the increasing ethnoscapes, and the evolving mediascapes and technoscapes shape the populist experience. All these dimensions overwhelm the nation-based political system, in such a way that it seems unable to provide solutions at the same speed of the global flows or, worse, it cannot provide any at all. This, at least perceived, inability, alongside the feeling of being marginalized from part of the population, is the very cultural substratum of the local and specific populisms.

5 Migration as a Synecdoche

The transport revolution that has reduced the relative distance between the various realities of the world has facilitated a hypertrophy of ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33). Business travel, tourism, and migration of entire peoples have accelerated, bringing the diversity that characterizes globalized modernity into people’s experience. Although the impact on local realities of other scapes produces considerable transformations, ethnoscapes seem to directly threaten the integrity of local social groups. This may be due to their physical nature: in their everyday life, people can experience immigration and emigration with their five senses, by physically seeing immigrants or by seeing the “Other” in the inhabitants of new countries they move to. This is quite different from the other scapes, such as ideoscapes and financescapes, which cannot be perceived directly through the senses. As a consequence, the encounter with diversity takes place not only in the cognitive recognition of the difference in customs, but the physical, sense-based feature of the ethnoscape lays the foundations for the naturalization of difference. The insecurity caused by rapid

changes in social contexts and the inability to rely on one's own cultural repertoires create the experience of a cultural apocalypse. For this and other reasons, such as sharing the features of charismatic leaders and unifying rhetoric, populist movements can be compared to millennial cults: "Anthropologists might note that populism, especially of the current historical moment, has some affinity with cargo cults, millenarian and revitalization movements [...] It is significant that these movements occurred at times of crisis in socio-cultural orders" (Theodossopoulos & Kapferer, 2019, pp. 2–3). One of the most direct signs of contemporary times and the experience of cultural apocalypse is the arrival of the different.

The immigrant synecdochically represents the downsides of globalization and can be held accountable for the crisis. The ethnoscape are not temporary and provide a scapegoat to be sacrificed in order to regain lost security.

Migration is one of the manifestations of globalization that most permeates people's experience and is therefore one of the main targets of populist rhetoric. It is sufficient to think of Trump's wall against Mexican immigrants, Salvini's campaigns against migrants and their arrival through the Mediterranean, or Viktor Orbán's rhetoric, according to which "immigrants threaten not only Christian civilization but also the living standards of ordinary Hungarians" (Hann, 2019, p. 2).

There is a link between the intensification of the ethnoscape and the spread of populist rhetoric. The latter tends to provide a new political language through which the fears that are created around a similar demographic change can be expressed. Nevertheless, this link is not a fatality. We are simply faced with the problem of the "perception" of the phenomenon. Indeed, the populist attitude toward the migratory phenomenon is characterized by an obsession with its physical presence and a refusal to take cultural pluralism into consideration. As we previously mentioned, the making of "the people" is based on an identity/otherness dynamic, and ethnoscape challenge the physical perception of people's borders. Borders must be defended by preventing access to migrants and, if possible, by expelling them. As foreign bodies, or something "out of place," they pollute the integrity of the "people" itself (see Douglas (2005)); the practices of security and surveillance, therefore, appear as a necessary response.

6 Acting by Negating

The populist response to this situation is to abandon political language in favor of a language that should allow direct access to politics, thus undermining representation. Populism at this point becomes a culturally defined language for political action and debate that postulates, as a fundamental value, the supremacy of people over political control. The replacement of political language with populist language is the imposition of an ideology that sees popular will as immediate and infallible. This is an ongoing process, as the rhetorical devices and utterances that form the populist discourse positively orient the sayable and the thinkable about something. This language set has started to merge with the wider political language. Even the

derogatory use of the term “populist” is a defining feature according to Fukuyama (2016), and it shares with populist views the idea of a crucial dichotomy in politics. Populism “is almost always used in opposition to what is defined, by contrast, as ‘elite’, ‘exclusive’, or ‘establishment’, its deployment being more about marking differences than denoting content” (Comaroff, 2011, p. 100).

However, with the abandonment of purely political language, the capital of knowledge and practices that served to hold together the plurality of points of view with the ability to design the future goes missing. Populism as a language for political action bypasses confrontation, listening, and dialogue. On the one hand, it does not allow action within the orthodoxy of the political field; on the other hand, it is effective in influencing the political context by changing the ideological premises of its legitimacy. Although populist parties are often a minority, it is they who, to a large extent, dominate the public discourse and set the agenda in almost every country (Mény, 2017, p. 44).

For example, in its local declination, the populist ideoscape crossed Italy at the end of the eighties. This period is indeed characterized by the simple, blatantly popular, dialectal language of the right-wing nationalist party, Northern League. Its language claims a diversity based on popular and peasant roots but leads the Northern League’s rhetoric to an inevitable and necessary simplification. Simplification itself, as recalled by Aime (Aime, 2012, p. 75), “seems to have become a watchword in today’s Italy, to the point that a simplification ministry has even been set up and has been entrusted to a Northern League minister.” Simplification has become a fundamental part of populist rhetoric and has proven successful in the new electronic media. In television shows of the 1980s and 1990s, talk shows dedicated to politics and current affairs already had time constraints. Since then and up until the contemporary development of social media, several media outlets and their audiences have been calling out for a further simplification to increase content’s accessibility and save people’s time. The timings of multimedia communication currently seem insufficient to expose a complex argument (see Campbell (1962), Lang and Lang (2018), and Firth et al. (2019)). Since the imposition of television language, we have socialized at a rapid pace and with that came fragmented speeches. Thus, in many cases, we resort to a joke or a slogan, which offers the illusion of synthesizing a thought into a sentence. All these tendencies are summarized by the frequent use of various gestures in substitution to verbal expression, performed by the Northern League’s former leader Umberto Bossi (Belpoliti, 2012). In particular, one of the most famous of these gestures by Umberto Bossi was when he raised his middle finger during the Italian national anthem in correspondence to the mention of swearing obedience to “Rome” (“Federalismo,” 2008). A whole concept was reduced to a simple gesture that utilizes immediacy and physicality. In the midst of all the arguments aiming to grasp, as far as possible, the complexity of the problems, it is the only thing that remains etched into the minds of many listeners and viewers.

7 From the Relationship to the Measure

The demand for direct control over politics by people expresses a lack of trust between political elites and citizens. But how can people directly control the work of politics? Among the various tools, accountability seems to fill the gap in trust. The ideoscape of accountability has spread from the Anglo-Saxon world to all modern democracies (Dubnick, 2003, p. 405). In its current historical meaning, which results from such expansion, accountability is in fact a relationship that transforms specific elements into controlled objects. When accountability is a specific tool or technique to control, it can also be seen as a technoscape: establishing tools to measure political action responds to the need for control which characterizes the populist sentiment. It is clear that the elements to be measured and to be reported about, making the political elites subject to control, still respond to the populist ethos. Therefore, the arbitrariness of which dimensions to select from political processes, to respond to the lack of citizens' confidence, takes decision-making power away from the current democratic governments. In fact, those governments have already been deprived of such power by the global economic and financial dynamics (Khanna, 2016, pp. 53–59) for a long time now. With accountability, the power left to political elites then moves into the hands of those who are able to shape the conscience of the people and of those who are capable of shifting the opinion of the masses.

We must not imagine these two groups as distinct, but as two intersecting and mutually influencing realities. The desire for hegemonic control of a large part of politics has in fact translated into large investments in the communication sector. Some scholars have gone to great lengths to highlight the role of the media in affirming the populist narratives that have led to the success of events such as Trump's election or Brexit (see Gusterson (2017)) and to clarify the strong dependence between populism and new forms of communication (see Cesarino (2020)).

Until this moment we used the idea of accountability as a set of actions carried out by a subject against another to account for their actions in a specific context. The accountability technoscape is not a mere diffusion of a technical tool: it is mutually shaped with the ideoscapes it encounters. It is to say that the configuration of accountability, as a local practice borrowed from the accountant toolbox and brought to different social configurations, drags with itself values that are negotiated with the new context. Accountability raised in Anglo-Saxon contexts over the years (Dubnick, 2003, p. 405) seems to cross the boundaries of its accounting genealogy to become part of global history. It will therefore be read as a particular accountability, among various forms of the phenomenon. Broadening the meaning of accountability, according to Mary Douglas, we can see it as the basic tool behind cultural dynamics: "A person tries to live at some level of being held accountable which is bearable and which matches the level at which that person wants to hold others accountable. From this angle, culture is fraught with the political implications of mutual accountability" (Douglas, 1990, p. 10). From this perspective,

accountability is not a mere governance tool anymore, but it can be seen as a form of relationship based on control, attribution of responsibility, and blame.

Even if accountability loses its managerial and efficientist dimensions, it gains a very important role for understanding culture as a continuum, in which structure and agency interact constantly, producing a competition between different forms of accountability. This approach makes it possible to think of accountability as a process that integrates political and ethical dimensions. If, as we have seen, populism claims the primacy of an idealized people over an elite, it is precisely because it holds the latter accountable for the experience of crisis. This is the premise of a populist form of accountability.

Accountability is the constant negotiation between agency and structure, and it is the practice that makes people resemble their idealized image. When populists hold elites accountable, they are expressing a new form of accountability, since “the link of hope to mass politics is a response to the realization that democracy without full popular participation is a form of oligarchy” (Appadurai, 2007). All blame toward the establishment is a request to conform the situation to the ideology of direct democracy. Understanding accountability as a form of relationship strengthens the comparativeness of the concept, making it possible to understand accountability’s specific features in the various contexts.

8 Experience-Near and Experience-Distant Accountabilities

Adapting Geertz’s distinction between so-called experience-near and experience-distant concepts, we can classify accountabilities by the distance they have from the experience of social actors (Geertz, 1974). An experience-near accountability is a form of relationship that one can naturally and effortlessly experience through practices of control, responsibility, and blame. What also characterizes experience-near accountability is that the subject is part of a group where, regardless of someone’s role and level of power in the accountability relationship, what is perceived is readily understood.

For example, in contemporary Western Europe, school teachers are accountable to their students for delivering classes and educating them on their assigned subjects, while students are accountable to their teachers for completing their assignments and learning the material. Both teachers and students are then held accountable by the wider community who shares the same ideas about what the role of a student and a teacher should be. The community’s understanding of those roles is naturally based on its own cultural experience of schooling, and of teacher-student relationships, which will thus be reproduced by the teachers and students that specific community holds accountable.

Another example is that of demanding that the government takes responsibility for and acts upon the fallacies of the public health system: we can understand this initiative as an expression of experience-near accountability. Similarly, a peer-to-peer request such as “keep me accountable”, aimed at fostering personal

responsibility through an outsider's accountability, would also classify as an example of experience-near accountability.

Instead, an experience-distant accountability is a set of practices used by specialists in the field of accounting, management, governance, and so on. This set of practices is used as a tool to develop efficacy, efficiency, and good governance and achieve other practical and measurable aims. For example, "drafting the budget" is a practice of experience-distant accountability, as it requires technical expertise that only professionals of accountability can exercise. The emergence of economic and political systems weaved with a normative state and that have bureaucratized daily life has brought the experience of experience-distant accountability to all strata of society.

Populist ethos is based on the refusal of mediation, so all knowledge based on experience-distant accountability is a stain on symbolic capital. It declares the participation of the accountability expert in the opposite faction: the political elite. As we previously stated, we are looking at populism as a culturally defined action, and we now have to ask: what is its effect on the field of accountabilities? In an attempt to answer this question, we can take the suggestion of Wood and his colleagues, who examine the impact of populist discourse in the bureaucratic machine of the State (Wood et al., 2021). Their article proposes three stages wherein the new language for political action influences, or even shapes, accountability relationships: accountability environment, perception, and practices. In fact, it does not seem possible to simply impose an experience-distant accountability as a guarantee for the good governance of the State. Emphasizing the role of "emotionally driven moralizing claims in the environment surrounding formal and informal organizational accountability processes" (Wood et al., 2021, p. 13), the article shows how populist rhetoric puts the accountability system under pressure. That eventually leads to a change in perception of "accountants" and accountability itself.

The opacity of accountants' practices calls for some form of transparency, which, however, seems impossible to guarantee, opening up three possible scenarios:

1. The imposition of an accountability that is not understandable and would only strengthen the perceived boundaries between people and elites. Furthermore, it would always be possible to accuse it of data mystification and it would lead to a total rejection of the new accountability itself.
2. The adoption of a new form of accountability based on populist ethos.
3. The adoption of forms of participation that turn practices of experience-distant accountability into experience-near ones.

9 Value, Evaluation, and Education

The moral dimension of accountability is often hidden behind the understanding of accountability as a technical tool. However, accountability as a form of relationship is in fact a moral ideoscape: it is a means through which social groups build

morality and abide by their values. Clyde Kluckhohn defines value as “a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action” (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 395). Values refer to what is desirable, not to what is actually desired. Both the desirable and the desired hide their social nature, but differently: in the desirable, a projectual objectification takes place; instead, in the desired, the projectual objectification is substituted by an exclusion of the social, due to an expression of absolute personal determination. In this way, value as the desirable takes up a normative and universalizing dimension, meaning that it becomes seen as objective and true for all. Universalism, normativity, and objectivity do not pertain to value as the desired, which is a synonym to the concept of “preference” and is within the subjective realm.

Accountability has a central role in making the desirable into a daily practice. Indeed, a group comes to share the same values through practices of experience-near accountability. Through practices of responsibility and blame, we align our actions to our idea of how society, and the world, should operate; this process becomes much stronger as these practices involve our social group.

A fascinating example of this, which can also illuminate its connection with populism, comes from analyzing the French revolution. Haim Burstin (2016) highlights how much protest, of which populism is a contemporary form (Mény, 2017, p. 27), is characterized by the will to make a clean sweep to build a new man. Although the distance of today’s context and sensitivity from the French Revolution does not allow us to include it among the phenomena of populism, the temporal hiatus that separates us from that now mythical and archetypal popular uprising allows us to differentially analyze the characteristics of contemporary populism. Utopia and the project of a new man are a first major difference: in the French Revolution, the scrapping of the political system was functional to a regeneration, while contemporary populism seems to stop at the disintegration of the current system. The only “desirable object” becomes the subversion of the present system and not necessarily the presentation of an alternative system to which one aspires.

In the case of the French Revolution, Bronisław Baczko (1979) underlines the role of collective imagination in the exercise of political power – an imaginary that, through utopia and the use of symbols, aimed at strengthening power by shaping behavior. This role of utopia and the imaginary translates into a specific pedagogy. Pedagogy is a set of systematic practices to achieve a human ideal. However, as Appadurai (1996, p. 33) points out, people’s imaginaries are increasingly shaped by ideoscapes and mediascapes disjointed from the locality where they influence daily imagination practices. This makes it more difficult to have a common imaginary and, therefore, populism is limited to expressing a common unease. Another important element is the aforementioned perceived apocalypse: the impossibility of thinking about a future (De Martino, 2019; Appadurai, 2007). Once the design dimension of pedagogy is removed, we remain in the context of learning by participating in a “community of sentiment” (Appadurai, 1990). That is a particular type of imagined community (Anderson, 1983) created through its members’ exposure to the same mediascapes and ideoscapes, which produce common practices of feeling and

imagination. Indeed, as Appadurai underlines, “collective experiences of the mass media, especially film and video, can create sodalities of worship and charisma” (Appadurai, 1996, 8). If Appadurai noticed such trends in 1996 and already emphasized the role of multi-mediascapes such as film and video, we can now certainly add websites, blogs, and social networks to the mediascapes contributing to the creation of communities of sentiment. In this type of community, anthropogenesis is delegated to daily interactions, which are in turn attributable to the concept of accountability in its relational form.

Everything we learn, we do through practical exposure to a context (see Bourdieu (1982), and Lave and Wenger (1991)). However, the mechanism that makes this possible is precisely in the practices of accountability in a broad sense. When relationships are deprived of their specific theory of managerial measure and their bureaucratic implications, they are presented as a tool to align experiences with a socially shared “desirable object.” This, which may seem like a contradiction, underlines that the salient aspect of accountability is the system of responsibility and blame attributed on a value-based basis. Accountability thus understood becomes a practice of moral anthropopoiesis. Historically, people have become human by being held accountable for their actions through their daily interactions with others. This type of accountability is based on relationships, rather than on formal rules or laws. Still, it is effective in teaching which values one must be held accountable to and which mistakes one has to be blamed for.

We have seen that the drive for change, not only political but also human, presupposes a specific pedagogy; yet, the context of populism does not allow for the creation of a pedagogy, as any form of mediation is opposed. The only pedagogy that can occur is a form of pedagogy by participation, which is in fact a form of accountability. Such silent and implicit pedagogy that coincides with forms of accountability differs from explicit pedagogies by lacking a project-oriented dimension and a clear direction. This “crisis of the capacity to aspire” (Appadurai, 2007) implies an incapability to plan for the future, and it produces forms of accountability which are characterized by a negative reversal of what marks the difference between the political elite and the people. This negative accountability is well exemplified by one of the case studies of contemporary populism in politics, which has already been mentioned but which is also worth investigating from this point of view: the Italian Lega Nord (Northern League) party. In his ethnography of the Northern League, Dematteo (2010) tells us how anyone who did not adopt a mimetic attitude toward the leader Umberto Bossi or otherwise expressed a desire to adapt to the political system was heavily sanctioned. This constitutes a form of negative accountability, since the negative social sanction is aimed at what is attributed to the political elite. The aim is not to create a “new man” but simply to point out the difference from the political “other.” From this example, we notice that the practice of moral formation through populist accountability is a practice of rupture, challenge, and contestation that claims its space by denying it to the establishment.

10 Polarized Accountabilities

The success of populism lies precisely in its ability to impose a new type of political accountability. As we have seen, its impact is not so much on the individual policies but on their ability to guide public discourse. This is done through a system of accountability and blame. The bureaucratic accountability attributed to the elite cannot be immediately understood by people, while populist accountability, as in the case of migration discourse, is closer to experience. Even the preferential instruments of opposition to the establishment are those where direct popular uprising is involved: occupying public squares and calling for referendum (and, if possible, direct online voting) are some of the exemplar means of populist accountability. While referendums were born as an exceptional consultative tool for democracies, populism managed to normalize the idea that the referendum could be a normal mode of government, such as in the case of Brexit (Mény, 2017, p. 44).

Returning to the managerial and accounting concept of accountability, we can observe that the practices of measurement in these fields consist of selecting significant dimensions to describe the work of a subject. Creating accountability measurements is a work where one has to translate objects and meanings from the continuum of the real world to that of symbols and narration, in order to make reality measurable. Therefore, what accountability does is to provide a map. However, in his work of reduction to a scale when drawing a map, the cartographer is forced to eliminate some dimensions (Eco, 1992, pp. 148–154), which will inevitably be chosen based on the cartographer's values. If accountants and those they are held accountable by share common grounds on the values defining the dimensions to be selected and deemed worthy of measurement, then there is no issue between them.

For example, the successful outcome of someone's work, and their consequent remuneration, can be measured through different forms of accountability, which express different underlying value orientations. Namely, one could be held accountable based on how many clients they enlist, or differently, on the success rate of the client's pursuits, or again in a different fashion, based on the time a worker spends toward the project of enlisting clients. All these are different forms of accountability in the workplace, which illustrate how there can be different value systems making up the framework that informs how accountants and accounted share their understanding of the dimensions to be reported. If those dimensions are shared between them, their value systems align and there is no conflict between them. However, if visions on which measures are legitimate to report diverge, the hiatus between the people and the elite is reinforced. In this context, it becomes apparent that measures of accountability always have limitations and cannot actually account for all the dimensions of interest. Such inevitable gaps between the accountable and the accounted have to be bridged with trust, and they open up avenues to antagonisms and the politicization of differences.

In fact, as Wood, Matthews, Overman, and Schillemans point out, the accountants guarantee the goodness of their work with their reputation (Wood et al., 2021, pp. 4–7). Knowledge of political action can only be mediated, and each medium

reduces the complexity of reality; simplification can increase efficiency, but it relies on the trust accorded to the medium. With the crisis of representation, which is also a crisis in the mediation field, trust will always undergo a *regressus in infinitum*, meaning that trust will have to be given to a medium, often chosen arbitrarily, in order to navigate the world. According to the populist logic, this translates into considering the accountant's work as either in favor of the people or in favor of the elite. Indeed, there is also a certain degree of indexicality produced by non-participation in politics, which means that any reporting can be understood as a mystification of data.

This issue can be partially solved not with accountability alone but with transparency; as Christopher Hood (2010) explores, the concepts of accountability and transparency are connected but have a complex relationship. Hood (2010) uncovers various frames in which different combinations of transparency and accountability are found in different contexts. His analysis allows us to see that aspects which seem inevitably intertwined in some situations fall apart in others.

11 Accountability of Political Reversal

Deception (Dematteo, 2010), lies (McGranahan, 2017), parodies, and foul language (Cosenza, 2013) often characterize the communication and action of populist leaders. These characteristics make their success paradoxical. But it is precisely thanks to the concept of negative accountability, which we talked about earlier, that we can account for this paradox. By exasperating the popular character and the fury against the elite, the political field makes a new space for a ritual of inversion (Bateson, 1999; Morehead, 2014).

In the rituals of social inversion, social roles are overturned in a symbolic action. The divine king – where this figure is in charge of the socio-political order – is insulted, attacked by his subjects, and he is obliged to accept all this, laughing. The potential risk of social and cultural disintegration that hangs over a stratified and hierarchical society is thus exorcised; and this is done through a praxis structured on precise determinations of symbols, circumstances and times. The playful component is however fundamental, and its socially cathartic function is essential. (Lanternari, 1983, p. 246)

In the rituals of social inversion, a rebellion against the conventional behavior of culture and society takes place. Since this reversal is normally expressed through play, in the ritual space of the celebration, it is functional to maintain order. Therefore, inversion rituals, as well as satirical attacks, open a moment of reflection on the social order. At the same time, though, they are also institutionalized in a very specific space, making it so the traditional models are reconfirmed through their own ridicule. The difference with populist action is that this inversion has no defined ritual boundary. The risk of disintegration therefore becomes real: there is no longer catharsis but only reversal. This grotesque inversion, typical of carnival rituals (Bakhtin, 1984), creates a minimally structured community of equal individuals. In other words, we can observe what Victor Turner defines as *communitas* (Turner,

1995) which, due to its anti-structural features, creates a leveling of status within its members.

Those who participate in the carnival become a people seen as a whole, organized in a different way than socioeconomic and political structure (Bakhtin, 1984). The egalitarian sentiment and the opposition to the structure inaugurate the liminality of the ritual space of the people as a *communitas* (Turner, 1995).

In this way, the populist leader is not a mediator, but she/he embodies the community itself. Through this ritual device, “populism attempts to resolve the problem of representation by collapsing the divide between government and the governed. The claim of every populist movement is to embody the direct, unmediated will of the people” (Samet, 2013, p. 537). Participating in the same community of sentiment (Appadurai, 1990) and indeed bringing the performative expressions of that community to paroxysm, the populist leader manages to attribute an authenticity to herself/himself.

A characteristic that can be seen in the so-called populist leaders is what Enli calls “mediated authenticity”: the illusion of trust that can be created through the media while being part of the political elite (Enli, 2015, pp. 131–137). Somehow, the populist leader is recognized at the same time as part of the establishment and as trustworthy, because she/he is capable of embodying the populist demands. The leader conveys this ability, and thus this identity, by having adopted in all respects the specific language that responds to populist demands. It is here that we can see how accountability in populism is driven by the sanction of the political performance; the electors’ feelings of anti-politics are embodied and displayed explicitly by the leader, who gains their trust while actually being part of politics. The inversion ritual that describes the negative accountability is at the very basis of what Herzfeld calls “cultural intimacy,” defined as “the recognition of those aspects of an officially shared identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality” (Herzfeld, 2016, p. 7). The embodiment of anti-politics by the politician creates cultural intimacy with the electors; at the same time, though, it is a context of reversal, where Lanternari’s divine king becomes one with the jester, jeopardizing actual political institutions by creating a state of perpetual carnival.

Up to now, the article has presented the dichotomy between elites and the people as a key feature of populisms. Yet, it must be specified that elites themselves have increasingly played on this dichotomy to gain popular appraisal and electoral success. The negative accountability system is also used in political language, when the adversary is accused of compromising or not respecting the will of the people. Furthermore, not all the characterizing elements of populism are equally distributed among local populisms. The same is true for the various accountability systems: they are not only stratified but also overlapping, sometimes competing for a niche, sometimes reinforcing each other. Some of these accountability systems are tangled in shaping the scapes that produce populist experiences of crisis.

For example, the ethnography of Wall Street by anthropologist Karen Ho highlights how high risk and high reward performances of investors are positively sanctioned (Ho, 2009). The very local system of accountability shapes not only a

workplace culture, but also much broader markets and corporate ideologies, since Wall Street is a neuralgic point for financescapes and ideoscapes on well-being. Here we have an accountability that is both relational and measure-based. Its relational part molds a specific type of investor, understood as a particular human being oriented to high risk. The theory of measure of this accountability system is based on the practice of weighting success upon the return on investments, so in this case as well, high risks are remunerated. This high-risk accountability system generates high chances of systemic crises on multiple levels, displaying a case of accountability not grounded in the dichotomy of elite and people but still showing an instance of local accountabilities shaping global phenomena. The example we have examined above helps us remember that discourse about accountability should not be thought of as a binary opposition between the experience-near accountability of the people and the experience-distant accountability of elites. The two-way accountability systems are an analytical tool that has to be adapted situationally from context to context. Moreover, when analyzing populism, we have to carefully avoid replicating its own rhetoric.

12 Conclusion

The relational nature of accountability allows us to compare the different forms of accountability. From the comparison, we note how accountability inevitably refers to a universe of values; when accountability is a management tool, it is also characterized by a specific measurement theory. The theory of measurement, which is learned after a long apprenticeship and exposure to a context far from the experience of most, is what makes accountability more difficult as a tool for solving the gap of confidence in political systems. In order to implement an accountability system that can grasp the experiences of exclusion at the basis of populism, it is necessary to rethink more widespread and inclusive practices of political participation. The only way that a specific accountability can reaffirm good governance is to be close to the experience of those excluded from the political arena.

It is useless to think of solving the trust gap with accountability techniques that do not take into account its relational nature. As we have seen, excluding the moral and contextual dimensions can give rise to an opacity and a polarization that would reinforce populist rhetoric. We need to start from accountabilities that are close to experience and from the development of new forms of political participation. It is in fact through participation that one can also be socialized to new forms of accountability, becoming able to also approach accountabilities that are distant from one's experience.

From this analysis, we can understand how populism is not some kind of wrong turn along the path of political history but that it is based on accountabilities rooted in local contexts. The relationship between experiences of globalized modernity and the control systems of local political performance produces the current phenomena of populism. It therefore becomes difficult to support positions, such as Laclau's, in

which populism is seen as the logic of the political itself (2005). Political discourse, in fact, is involved in a system of reciprocal shaping of accountabilities that express local cultural ethos and global flows. These, in turn, influence the practices of imagination underlying political discourse itself. Therefore, any policy that makes use of accountability systems must take into account that it cannot ignore the relational dynamics that form and precede it, many of which are manifestations of populist ethos. Each new accountability must be able to either mediate the human project whose performance it measures, or find participatory spaces from which to draw its own implementability.

Human groups develop shared values through practices of experience-near accountability. Indeed, through practices of responsibility and blame, we align our actions to our idea of how society should operate. Populism is a reaction to the disconnection between accountability systems and the experiences of those excluded from the political scene; only by being close to the experiences of those excluded can an accountability system be a tool for good governance. Through participation, new forms of accountability can change the way we frame the relationship between people and elites.

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Part IV
Leaders and Masses in Populist
Phenomena

Chapter 12

Populism and Political Leadership



Paolo Giusta

1 Introduction: Leadership and Leaders

When we think of leadership, what comes in mind to most of us is not a concept (that of leadership) but a person (the leader). Indeed, both leadership studies – which have traditionally been leader-centred – and leadership practice – where the dominating conception of leadership is somewhat heroic, seeing leadership as lodged in single individuals (Crevani et al., 2010: 77) – tend to focus on the formal leader as individual and not on leadership as a construct.

Likewise, when we think of political leadership, what immediately occur are the images of the great leaders of the past (Charlemagne, Napoleon, Atatürk, Hitler, Wiston Churchill, Thomas Sankara, et al.) and of statespersons of the present times (Nelson Mandela, Angela Merkel, Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, et al.). Focusing on leaders is one possible approach to political leadership, but not the only one and perhaps not the most relevant one, in particular with respect to populism, where, “though [populist] leaders may be decisive in the appearance and the functioning of a populism movement, to a very large extent, they themselves are the rather fortuitous products of structural factors” (Pasquino, 2005: 10).

Seldom, if ever, the idea comes forth that political leadership consists both of people (leaders and followers) and of all the interactions between the players on the political scene: not only the heads of state and government but also the civil servants and not only elected officials but also the voters. On the one hand, leaders embody leadership, which remains an abstract concept without them; in particular, the populist leader is the vehicle that transforms populism from being an idea to becoming a vector that creates substantive institutional change (Hartwell & Devinney, 2021). On the other hand, leaders, knowingly or not, practice leadership, an interaction process where – as we will see – they are not only, or not always, just leaders.

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2 Populist Leaders

Since early studies on populism, scholars have considered the leader's figure a fundamental element of populism. Worsley considered the institutional desire for a direct relationship between the people and the leadership as one of the two cardinal principles of populism, alongside the supremacy of the will of the people upon every institutional prescription (Worsley, 1969: 245). Moreover, Berlin maintained that, as central as people may be to populism, the latter is "an ideology elaborated usually by the intelligentsia and other elements" – thus, generally, by political leaders – "for or on behalf of the masses" (1968: 168).

One of the definitions of populism, which considers populism a political strategy for winning and exercising power, is leader-centred: "populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (Weyland, 2001: 14, 2017: 59).

The components of this definition shed light on three features, common to most populist leaders: first, the authority they exercise tends to be personalistic rather than institutional; second, populist leaders are persons who seek government power; and third, their relationship with followers is direct, unmediated and uninstitutionalised. We will now expand on each of these features.

Populist Leaders Exercise a Personalistic, Rather than Institutional, Authority

Personalistic leadership can be defined as "the exercise of authority vested in influential individuals based on personal attributes rather than organizational role" (Kostadinova & Levitt, 2014: 490).

As far as populist leaders are concerned, what comes into the limelight are neither institutions through which the political power is exercised nor the role of such leaders in party organisations but their personalised figures. This pertains to both the personal traits of populist leaders and the way they exercise power.

The Personal Traits of Populist Leaders

The person of the populist leader takes centre stage, with personal traits that such leaders possess in varying degrees.

First, what matters are the person of populist leaders and their personalistic attributes, not their place in the establishment. The populist leader typically mobilises the masses and gains support not through an existing party organisation but on the basis of his personal appeal (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 43). It is not rare the case (for instance, Silvio Berlusconi and Beppe Grillo in Italy and Alberto

Fujimori in Peru) of political leaders that found brand-new parties only in view of seeking to exercise – or to secure – government power.

Many populist leaders having held power in the last decades presented themselves as outsiders to the institutionalised – and, they claimed, oligarchic – political system, as free from traditional party ties and coming from outside the (corrupt) social, economic and political elite. It was the case of Juan Perón and Nestor Kirchner in Argentina; Fernando Collor in Brazil; Juan María Velasco Ibarra, Abdalá Bucaram and Rafael Correa in Ecuador; Narendra Modi in India; Joko Widodo in Indonesia; Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel; Silvio Berlusconi in Italy; Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico; Alberto Fujimori in Peru; Joseph Estrada and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines; Roh Moo-hyun in South Korea; Donald Trump in the United States; and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (see Funke et al., 2020: 77; 81; 90; 96; 99; 108; 112; 113; 116; 122; 128; 129; 130; 131; 133; 142; 149 and quoted literature).

Populist leaders use the fact that did not emerge from established political parties and their anti-elitist background as a source of legitimacy. Indeed, what legitimises populist leaders is the fact that they speak for “the Little Man”, in antagonism towards the elite (Bjerre-Poulsen, 1986: 32), and not their formal position within a party’s bureaucratic apparatus.

Second, populist leaders often cultivate the image as a leader who has emerged from the common people and remains an ordinary person, sometimes also building a narrative around their humble background: this was the case of Boyko Borisov in Bulgaria; Abdalá Bucaram in Ecuador; Narendra Modi (who presented himself as the son a tea seller) in India; Joko Widodo in Indonesia (with humble origins as a small-town carpenter); Lázaro Cárdenas, Luis Echeverría and Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico; Alberto Fujimori (a non-White child of working-class Japanese immigrants) in Peru; Jacob Zuma (who often made reference to his background as a goat herder with no formal education) in South Africa; and Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand (see Funke et al., 2020: 92; 98; 108; 112; 122; 124; 125; 129; 130; 131; 133; 142; 141; 146 and quoted literature). These characteristics are not exclusive to populist leader. For instance Jimmy Carter – who described himself as a “populist” (Canovan 1981: 269) during his election-campaign but is certainly not to be considered a populist leader – justified his mandate to speak on behalf of the people with its own social background, as well as with the fact that he had been elected President of the United States without being an “insider” of the political establishment. Carter also used a lot of energy during his term of office to maintain his image as “the ordinary American” (Bjerre-Poulsen 1986: 33). Nevertheless, populist leaders cultivate the image of being one of the common people to an extent that makes this a feature rather common to populist leadership.

Yet, often populist leaders are not “the ordinary citizen” or newcomers but belong to the same sociodemographic strata as the political elite and, sometimes, to the political elite itself. They are either enormously rich (such as Berlusconi and Trump), famous (like Grillo, who was a well-known comedian in Italy before founding the Five Star Movement, and Joseph Estrada in the Philippines, whose coming to power was supported by his celebrity as an actor) or members of the political

establishment, having already held elected public office before they became leaders of a populist movement or party (for instance, Marine Le Pen in France, Matteo Salvini in Italy, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil and Rafael Correa in Ecuador).

Third, populist leaders are often seen as being charismatic. According to Robert House's (1976) theory of charismatic leadership, charismatic leaders display certain personality characteristics, such as being dominant, having a strong desire to influence others, being self-confident, and having a strong conviction in the moral righteousness of his or her beliefs and ideals.

Charisma as a possible trait of populist leaders has to do with the fact that such leaders lie at the bottom end of Ostiguy's high-low axis in politics. The political-cultural component of this vertical axis is about forms of political leadership and preferred (or advocated) models of decision-making in the polity. On the high, the model of authority is institutionally mediated and impersonal; on the low, political appeals emphasise strongly personalistic leadership yet not to be equated with "authoritarian". Personalistic versus procedural authority is a good synthesis of this polarity (Ostiguy, 2017: 77–82).

Not only does this opposition between institutionalism and personalism mirror the antagonism between the "state" (or the "elite") and the "society" (or the "people") in Cas Mudde's definition of populism in its ideational dimension (Mudde, 2004: 543, 2017: 29–30: "a ['thin'] ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people"). Indeed, it also echoes Max Weber's theory on the different types of authority and, in particular, the difference between the legal-rational authority and the charismatic authority. As is well known, Weber describes three forms of authority, two of which (rational, or legal, authority and traditional authority) are the result of the organisation of society. The third, in contrast, has to do with personal ("charismatic") characteristics of the leaders: "the charismatic leader acquires this role by virtue of personal trust in revelation, heroism, or exemplary qualities within the domain where belief in such charisma prevails" (Weber 2019: 341-2). It is true that many populist leaders possess charisma, which Weber defines as "the personal quality that makes an individual seem extraordinary, a quality by virtue of which supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers or properties are attributed to the individual" (*ibid.*, 374).

Charisma, however, does not seem to be a required trait of populist leaders.

It is true that many authors emphasise the importance of charismatic leaders in the rise of populism (e.g. Weyland, 2001; Abts & Rummens, 2007), and some populist leaders show indeed strong charismatic traits, such as Perón, Berlusconi, Chávez and Trump.

However, we also observe charismatic politicians, though non-populist, who use simplifying or confrontational rhetoric that appeal to the masses, such as Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher in the UK, Vladimir Putin in Russia, Ronald Reagan in the USA and Nikolas Sarkozy in France (Funke et al., 2020: 8).

Moreover, for other scholars, charismatic or strong leadership is not a defining attribute of populism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014). Sometimes, populism even comes forth as a seemingly leaderless process (e.g. populist movements such as the right-wing Tea Party and the left-wing Occupy Wall Street emerged spontaneously, without a strong leader): if populism can emerge as a collective leadership process, there seems to be no need for a charismatic leader at its helm.

The Way Populist Leaders Exercise Power

As concerns the exercise of power, populist leaders tend to act not through the mediation of the traditional representative institutions, but thanks to their own personal action. It is the populist leader, and not such institutions, who guarantees – or claims to guarantee – the “public well-being” (Revelli, 2019: 16). One component of Pierre Ostiguy’s socio-cultural definition of populism points to “personalism as a mode of decision-making” (Ostiguy, 2017: 84).

Once in power, populist leaders tend to show disrespect towards democratic institutions, in particular those, such as supreme courts, that are not the expression of the “popular will”, as well as towards constitutional guarantees for the individual liberties of the citizens, judicial independence, media freedom and electoral freedom.

Interestingly, such contempt for democratic processes and rituals is shown not only when populism follows a top-down dynamic and the leader governs almost without constraints (e.g. Hugo Chávez in Venezuela) but also when populism coexists with grassroot networks that are quite autonomous and limit the room for manoeuvre of the chief executive (e.g. Evo Morales in Bolivia). In both cases, populism tends to disregard deliberative and liberal conceptions of democracy (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014: 384).

A possible consequence of populists’ disdain for democratic institutions – on the assumption that the legacy of a populist experience is an erosion of the democratic structure of the State – could be that countries that have experienced populism are more likely to see the rise of new populist leaders. As Funke et al. (2020: 3) note, having studied populist leaders in power worldwide since 1900, “populism is of a serial nature. Countries that had a populist leader in history have a significantly higher likelihood of seeing another populist coming to power”.

Populist Leaders Seek Government Power

Populism, as a political strategy or a political project, is embodied in a “political subject” (the populist leader or the populist movement or party, with the leader at its helm) that works not only to give voice to protest but also to contend for government and the exercise of power (Revelli, 2019:11).

Since contending for government is inherent to populism, populist leaders belong to the category of political leaders who seek to exercise government power, either as chief executive or as head of a junior party in the ruling coalition, which is logical, since populism aims at nothing less than the upheaval: chasing the usurper-oligarchy and restoring the popular sovereignty (Revelli, 2019: 11). Hence, populist leaders can only be heads of political parties (whether in the opposition or in the ruling coalition) or heads of government.

This only apparently contradicts the statement above that populist leaders exercise authority in a personalistic way, rather than in an institutionally mediated and impersonal one. As little interested that they may be in democratic institutions, they need to climb the ladder of the representative institutions to exercise the sole kind of power they are interested in, that is, executive power. If they succeed, populist leaders will use this power to directly express the “general will of people” in action, disregarding, in doing so, unelected body that exist to limit the power of the demos.

This means that populist leaders can only be top politicians, those who, for the majority of people and for most authors, are the only real “political leaders”. Indeed, “for many scholars and practitioners understanding political leaders comes down to studying the characteristics, beliefs, and deeds of people formally occupying the top roles in political life” (Rhodes & ‘t Hart, 2014: 3).

Yet, not all political leaders are such top politicians. There are at least three other categories of political leaders, and none of the leaders who belong to them come into account as populist leaders.

First, senior legislators and key party officials: senior and key, but not enough to become heads of government or heads of a political party.

Second, senior public officials, including the heads of important international organisations and of supranational institutions. They may be – are often are – very influential actors in the political realm, but do not hold top positions in national government.

Third, political leaders, who do not hold any formal public office but contribute in an important way to the political life, through personal commitment (activists) or through associations operating in civil society. Without having the power attached to an office, they possess moral authority and have exercised or exercise a great influence on policy-relevant issues, such as climate change (Greta Thunberg) and women’s rights (Malala Yousafzai). Single individuals such as Mohandas Gandhi and Jean Monnet who, never elected, shaped the destiny of a nation or of an entire continent are definitely to be considered political leaders.

As prominent figures as they can be, and irrespective of whether they pursue a populist agenda or not (and many of them do not, such as transnational civil society actors that play a significant role in responding to the moral discourse developed by populist forces – Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 496), political leaders who do not aspire to rule a country can never be included among populist leaders.

The Direct, Unmediated and Uninstitutionalised Relationship Between Populist Leaders and Their Followers

The leader-mass linkage is direct and immediate, since populism rejects all forms not only of political but also on institutional intermediation, as instruments bound to distort and betray the true will of the people (Pasquino, 2005: 31).

While it has been considered that all politics consisted to some extent in establishing some kind of relationship between the leader of a party or of a movement and those whom he claimed to lead (Berlin, 1968: 142), the relationship the populist leader has with its followers is a peculiar one. The populist goal, in fact, is that of an immediate democracy, in which the leader can speak directly on behalf of the collective body of citizens (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 417), since populist leaders claim to be the sole representative of “the people”, the only authorised speakers for the whole people.

In the populist logic, there is no need either for intermediate structures, such as political parties’ organisations or institutional bodies. Indeed, the rise of populism is parallel to the decline of parties as intermediaries between the citizens and the public policy. For some, this decline introduces the spectre of “partyless democracy”, a democratic regime where parties have lost their representative function (Mair, 2002: 96; Kriesi, 2014: 361).

Populist leadership is a “way to shorten the distance between the legitimate authority and the people”, which, at its extreme, leads to a “fusion” between the leader and the masses (Ostiguy, 2017: 82–83).

Equating themselves with the voice of the people defined as part of the in-group (“vox populi”), populist leaders claim to embody the prototypical average citizen through the strategic use of style, the “populist style” (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013), rhetoric and performance, mobilising collective emotions, in particular negative ones: feelings of collective resentment, anger, threat and fear (Obradović et al., 2020), rather than appealing to rational arguments.

Indeed, a peculiar style of communication is a feature shared by many populist leaders.

Carlos Menem in Argentina, following the example of Pope John Paul II, visited common people in their neighbourhoods in his *menemóviles* (a series of open-top vehicles, one of which was a converted garbage truck) and used to play soccer with Maradona (de la Torre, 2017: 205–6). Alan García in Peru used the so-called *balconazos*, impromptu appearances on the balcony of the Government Palace, microphone in hand, to make announcements and to conduct face-to-face dialogues with “the people”, to create a direct rapport between president and people (Funke et al., 2020: 128 and quoted literature). Among populist leaders who held power, many addressed the “ordinary people” using the man-of-the-street simple, colloquial language, such as Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, Junichiro Koizumi in Japan, Jacob Zuma in South Africa, Roh Moo-hyun in South Korea and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey (see Funke et al., 2020: 113; 116; 121; 140–141; 142; 147 and quoted literature). Some even did not disdain vulgarity, such as

Umberto Bossi in Italy, who would excite crowds by saying that “the League has a hard-on”, while giving the finger to Rome (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 66).

Sometimes populist leaders, among which Evo Morales in Bolivia, Boyko Borisov in Bulgaria and Abdalá Bucaram in Ecuador, even dressed like the common man, in particular excluded groups, to underline their proximity to the people (see Funke et al., 2020: 87; 92; 98 and quoted literature).

Populist leaders oppose to intellectualism or indirect language and adopt to popular or direct style of expression and use an antitheoretical rhetoric and antiintellectual oratory to exploit feelings of resentment politically (Urbinati, 2013: 141; Abts & Kessel, 2015: 610).

The people respond to the communication style of populist leaders also in a direct manner: gathered together at public places or political meetings, the people express their will by cheering their leaders and acclaiming the proposals put forward. Acclamation replaces deliberative processes (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 416), which is the exact contrary of what Jürgen Habermas advocated: acclamation disfigures the public sphere in mass democracy, since the public forum must remain public, pluralistic and autonomous from private interests of all sorts (referred to by Urbinati, 2014: 4).

It is true that nowadays all party leaders, and not only populist leaders, communicate directly with the public audience via the media and no longer need the party apparatus to get their message to their constituency (Kriesi, 2014: 365). Yet, populist leaders often also get rid of journalistic interference, having unmediated access to the public through channels of direct communication such as online and social media channels. This gives them the possibility of establishing a close and direct connection to the people, fosters the potential for personalised forms of communication and can create a feeling of community, belonging and recognition (de Vreese et al., 2018: 428).

Populist leaders do not hesitate to spread “fake news” and to manipulate the narrative, throwing suspicion on the mediating institutions that produce and disseminate knowledge: universities, science and the press, hence weakening their authority. Having rid themselves of these mediating institutions, populist leaders are able to claim knowledge of what objectively is the truth. “‘Truth’ is embodied only in a particular leader – and not the marketplace” (Hartwell & Devinney, 2021: 9).

In sum, if it is true that populism has an underlying relational logic (Obradović et al., 2020: 130), then populist leaders, through their direct, unmediated and uninstitutionalised relationship with followers, embody this relational logic.

3 How Populism Interacts with Political Leadership as a Process

Having examined the personal component of leadership (the populist leaders), the present section of this chapter deals with political leadership as a process of influence and its interactions with populism.

Leadership and Political Leadership

Leadership as an Interactive Process

Leadership, irrespective of the formal position of the leader, is best defined as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2019: 5).

Followership, the mirror image of leadership, can in turn be defined as “a process whereby an individual or individuals accept the influence of others to accomplish common goals” (Northouse, 2019: 295).

Their roles are different, but both leaders and followers bear a share of responsibility in the pursuit of common goals within the reference group of individuals.

The opposite of the leader is not the follower (followers participate fully in the leadership process: there is no leadership without a group of people who agree to be influenced by the leader or leaders and act to pursue common goals) but the victim. Indeed, according to Peter Senge, “leadership exists when people are no longer victims of circumstances but participate in creating new circumstances” (Senge, 2011: 3).

Defining leadership as a process, and not as a leader’s trait, implies that a leader affects and is affected by followers and that “leadership is a phenomenon that resides in the context of the interactions between leaders and followers and makes leadership available to everyone” (Northouse, 2019: 5, 7).

The leader is someone who, at a given moment, exercises influence, irrespective of their formal position. In fact, leadership is not necessarily based on occupying a position on an organisation but is something that “happens”, at a given moment in time, within groups or organisations (Denhardt, 1989: ix–x).

The input in the leadership process consists of the actions carried out both by the leaders and by the followers in their interactions; the output is any intermediate step produced by these actions contributing to the ultimate result of the leadership process: achieving the goals that are common to the leaders and the followers.

Collective Leadership

The conventional view of leadership as positional authority tends to focus on the leader and his (more often than her) personal traits, rather than on the act of leading.

However, influence – at the core of the leadership process – can be exercised not only by an individual but also, collectively, by a group of people.

The group of people exercising collective leadership can hold a position of authority. This is the case, for instance, of the co-presidency system based on gender balance of the Alliance 90/The Greens party in Germany and of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament. It is also the case of the Swiss Confederation where, although the president chairs the federal council, he or she is merely a *primus inter pares*, and “the presidency is vested in the collective of the Federal Council, rather than in a single actor” (Hendriks & Karsten, 2014: 51).

Collective leadership can, however, also be exercised without formal authority. It was the case of the engaged people of the Arab Spring and the Solidarity Movement in Poland, who “[gave] direction, or meaningfully participate[d] in the giving of direction, to the activities of a political community” (Couto, 2014: 355–357). Also the four founders of the Sardines political movement in Italy intended, through the metaphor of sardines, to give rise to a collective phenomenon: “a mass of people stronger than a single man holding the reins of power” (Garreffa et al., 2020: 6).

Collective leadership and populism do not go well together. The personalistic authority exercised by populist leaders, with the central role of the person of the leader, is at odds with leadership as the action of several people, let alone ordinary people interacting in the pursuit of shared goals.

Indeed, as Mudde (2004) states, “the current heartland of populists ... wants leadership” (558). What is needed is “a remarkable leader ... Just look at the flamboyant individuals that lead most of these movements” (559–60).

Yet, populism is not only an ambivalent concept (corrective and threat to democracy – Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b); it is also a multifaceted one. One can see populism through the lens of personalism, an approach where the leader has a pivotal role with his strong personal traits (Weyland, 2001; Ostiguy, 2017); if, however, one considers populism as an ideology (Mudde, 2004, 2017) involving an antagonism between the people and the elite, then the leader is less necessary.

Indeed, the masses that consider that “the people” have been ignored and unrepresented can express their moral indignation and rebellion with no need of a formal leader at their helm. As we have seen, populism can occasionally emerge as a seemingly leaderless phenomenon – in reality, as a collective leadership process, fruit of interactions between several ordinary leaders, that is, people exercising influence. In particular, grassroots movements can genuinely aim at bringing in democracy within a society (such as the Arab Spring and the Solidarity Movement in Poland) but can also have populist traits (such as the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street).

Political Leadership as the Pursuit of the Common Good

Leadership as a process consists of five elements: the influence, the leader(s), the followers, the group within which leadership takes place and the common goal (Northouse, 2019: 5).

In politics, leaders are those (not only politicians but also citizens) who exert influence at any given time; followers those who, at that moment, are influenced; and the group within which such influence process happens is the polity; the “common goal” is the pursuit of the common good, which is “common” only nominally, since each political party, including populist movements when they organise themselves as a political force participating in polls, has a vision of society and of what the common good should look like.

Building on Northouse’s definition of leadership, we can hence describe political leadership, in liberal democracies, as a series of processes of influence involving citizens and elected officials (with the addition of the administrative machinery) that should aim at pursuing the common good, that is, the interest of the polity as a whole.

Several influence processes happen in the political realm, for example, within governments, within parties, between rulers and opposition, etc. In the next sections, we will discuss a peculiar kind of influence, that between voters and elected representatives, which we consider the most crucial one in a democracy. As we will see, under each of such processes of mutual influence, the input of the political leadership process – which we will call “vector of influence” – and the output vary.

It happens that the interactions of mutual influence between citizens and politicians break off instead of functioning. Populism can interfere in this malfunctioning, either as a remedy or as a worsening factor.

What we address here is not the way populism is considered to be, subject matter on which the opinions diverge among the scholars. Indeed, some consider populism as being of an essentially negative nature: a “syndrome” (Wiles, 1969), a “pathology” (Taggart (2002), a “parasite” of representative democracy (Urbinati 2013), a “disfiguration” of democracy (Urbinati 2014), a “perverse inversion of the ideals and procedures of democracy”, a counter-democracy that totally absorbs and sucks the lifeblood (“vampirizes”) the democratic project (Rosanvallon 2006: 269; 276), a “proto-totalitarian” phenomenon (Abts and Rummens 2007), a “profoundly illiberal and undemocratic understanding of representative democracy” (Müller: 2014). Other see it as something positive, as populism helps to revitalise democratic life and contributes to mobilising excluded and marginalised groups (Kazin, 1995; Canovan, 1999; Laclau 2005) or to allowing the people to rule itself (Tännsjö 2017). Some other have a rather neutral view on populism, regarding it as “ambivalent” (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012), “ambiguous” (Olson 2017), a “bellwether” for the health of representative politics (Taggart (2002), a “warning signal” about the defects, limits and weakness of representative systems (Mény and Surel 2002), an indicator that a specific democratic regime does not work or does not work satisfactorily (Pasquino 2005), a “mirror in which democracy can contemplate itself, showing all its imperfections, in a discovery of itself and what it lacks” (Panizza 2009), something that follows democracy like a shadow (Arditi 2004). What matters, within the frame of our reflections, is the way populism functions and how it interacts with the particular influence processes taking place between citizens and their elected representatives.

Physiology of Interactions Between Citizens and Politicians as a Component of Political Leadership

The mutual influence processes taking place between citizens and elected officials occur mainly in three areas: first, political representation; second, the political project, which should aim at the common good; and third, popular control over government and, more generally, over political action.

Figure 12.1 summarises the vectors of influence from citizens to elected representatives and vice versa (the arrows indicate the direction, from the group exercising influence and the content of such influence), when their interactions function well in the political leadership processes.

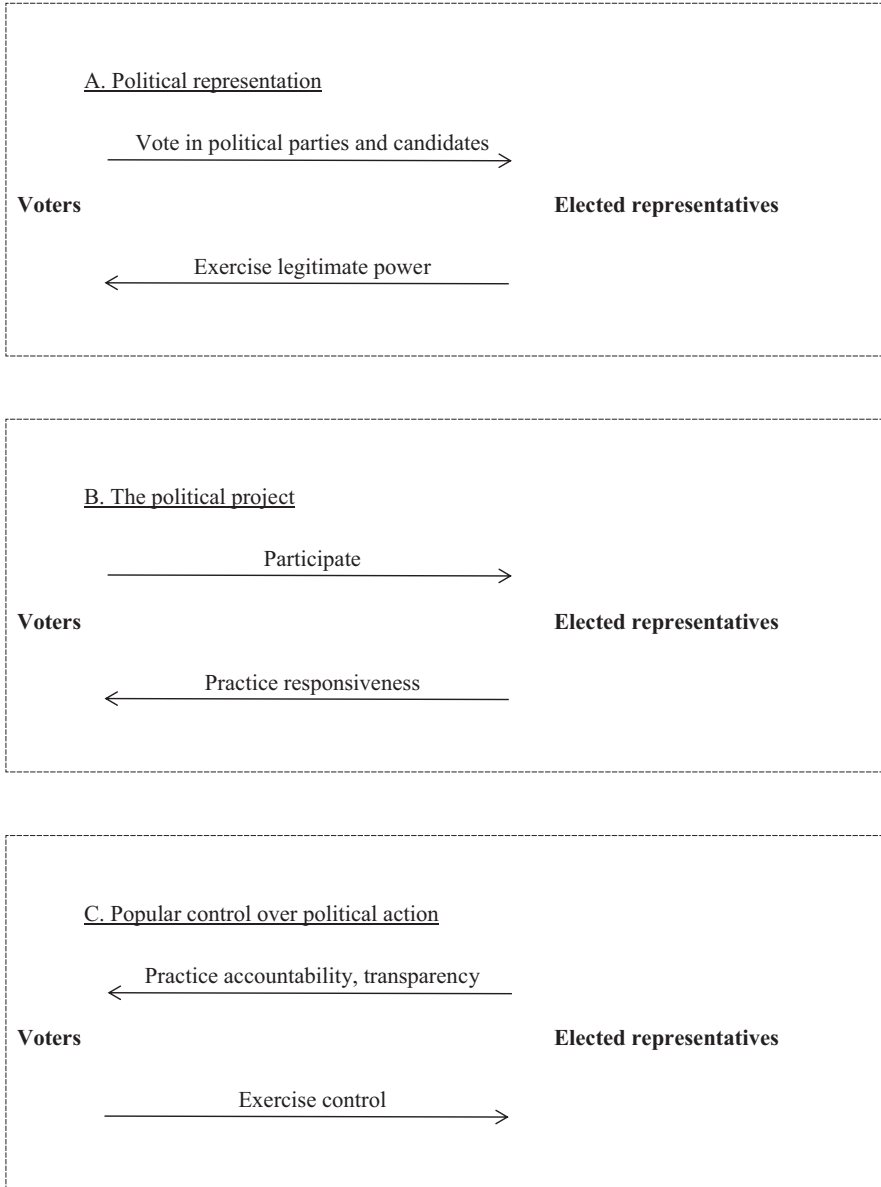


Fig. 12.1 Vectors of mutual influence between voters and elected representatives in the political leadership processes

Political Representation

The first vector of influence has to do with the citizens as political leaders. In fact, in a liberal democracy, political leadership originates with the citizens. Only subsequently, after receiving a representation mandate from the citizens, those we commonly consider the political leaders, that is, the top politicians, are able to exercise influence in their turn.

Citizens exercise political leadership in the first place by electing their own representatives, who will hold political power on their account and, at least in theory, make decisions according to the orientations that emerged from the vote. Without this first moment of leadership by the citizens, the leadership of the elected officials is not possible.

When voting, citizens exercise a form of collective leadership: electoral representation is, indeed, a model case of influence exercised not by a single person but several people together (the electoral body).

Leadership by elected representatives is a derived one, resulting from the original leadership exercised by the citizens. Their first vector of influence on citizens relates to the exercise of the legitimate political power conferred upon them by the vote. By virtue of such power, rulers – and the administration through which they operate – make decisions that govern the daily life of citizens and define their rights and duties. This involves, for those who hold government power, the capability to define the objectives of political action.

The output of the processes of influence in this area is to elect representatives who legitimately exercise power in the name of the people or at least according to the will expressed by the majority of it.

The Political Project

Second, citizens can, beyond the vote, exercise influence by upholding their own political project, expressed in the ballot box, by participating in political life, both on a personal basis and on an institutional one.

On a more personal level, citizens can, for instance, engage themselves in an association aimed at addressing local problems, participate in training programmes and debates on politics and become members of a political party or movement.

Moreover, citizens can provide a daily support to those holding an elective public office, by cultivating a personal relationship with them and accompanying their action. Voters only rarely make the effort to stay in touch with their representatives during the latter's term of office. This effort however, if carried out, nourishes the necessary trust between the elected representative and the voter, which exercises sovereignty only indirectly, having delegated its share thereof to the first. This relationship also allows the voter to verify whether this trust is well placed, that is, if the ingredients that make trust possible are present: competence and integrity (Covey & Merrill, 2006: 30). This means ascertaining whether, on the one hand, those who received one's vote are knowledgeable of the matters which they must decide on or

possess the qualities to acquire knowledge during the term of office and whether, on the other hand, they keep the commitments made during the electoral campaign and pursue the general interest, not sectoral interests only or their own personal interest.

On an institutional level, citizens can have their voice heard in the political sphere, beyond the vote, when they make proposals, through institutional forms such as referenda, petitions to government or legislative bodies, bills of popular initiatives and participatory budgeting or through less formal means such as online petitions and collections of signatures.

The second vector of influence of elected representatives relates to responsiveness, which “denotes the government’s responsibility towards the citizens to abide by its promises and the preferences expressed by the governed” (Curini et al., 2016: 1).

In defining the policies that are worth pursuing, mediating between legitimate particular interests, political rulers need to pay attention to the preferences of the community they represent. They can adequately perform this task only if they know the problems and demands of citizens and make choices that respond to these problems and demands. Representative democracy only functions insofar public policy is in accordance with the needs and wants of society.

The output of the processes of influence in this area is the political project stemming from the popular vote, which rulers carry out – at least in theory – in accordance with the wants and needs of the public and to which active citizens contribute through their participation to the political life.

Popular Control over Political Action

In this area, the leadership of elected representatives precedes (logically, if not chronologically) that of the citizens. In fact, the third vector of influence of elected officials consists of accountability and transparency, which are expression of their political responsibility towards the citizens. In order for the latter to be able to exercise democratic control, rulers need to give an adequate account to the voters of the use of their power, the use of resources and the decisions made. Transparency is necessary to make accountability effective: only if public officials abide to their obligation to share information with citizens on the way the conduct public business can the voters make informed decisions and hold officials accountable.

The third vector of influence of the citizens is the exercise of control on lawmakers and government, whereby the former verify whether the latter actually did what they said they would do. Citizens can do so both during the term of office, by informing themselves and making their voices heard and in subsequent elections by rewarding or sanctioning elected officials, based on the actual choices made on their behalf – and the way these choices were made public.

The output of the processes of influence in this area is to make it possible for the voters to control the political action of elected representatives and to keep in office or vote out government and lawmakers.

Pathologies Affecting the Political Leadership's Processes of Mutual Influence Between Voters and Elected Representatives

Each of the political leadership's vectors of influence between leaders and followers can undergo a crisis of greater or lesser depth.

Figure 12.2 summarises the pathologies affecting the political leadership vectors. The lines representing the vectors of influence are no longer arrows as is Fig. 12.1. Instead, they are now dead ends, to display that the interaction between citizens and politicians is broken.

Pathologies of Political Representation

Political leadership's influence by the citizens as voters enters a crisis when they consider themselves as victims – which, as we have seen, is the opposite of being leaders.

Citizens who feel powerless in the face of events and power games of politics may abdicate their role as original leaders, renouncing to exercise the influence that is intrinsic to the share of sovereignty that belongs to each and every citizen.

A first and increasingly widespread form of this renunciation is abstentionism, that is, refusal to exercise the right to vote. The citizen who does not vote performs a transfer of sovereignty that is not physiological and vertical (from the voters to the elected representatives) but pathological and horizontal (from those who do not vote to those who vote hence also choose for them).

On the negative side, populism accentuates this phenomenon, since it proposes models of participatory-deliberative democracy that undermine the very concept of political representation. Indeed, “the populist logic of identity is at odds with the typically (constitutional) democratic idea of representation ... Since there needs to be an immediate identity between rulers and subjects, rulers can only represent their subjects in some kind of immediate representation” (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 416).

Populist actors favour, at least in theory, plebiscites and other forms of direct democracy (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b: 207). At least in theory, since populism does not fully accept the usual instruments of representative democracy but neither does it adopt strictly unconventional forms of political participation and populists do run for elections (Mény & Surel, 2002: 17). As Taggart (2002: 79) rightly points out, “the irony of populism is that while representative politics is the source of frustration it is also the means by which populism expresses that frustration and wins support”.

On the positive side, populism can give political representation to groups who do not feel represented by the elites, “who don't vote and don't participate and don't ordinarily have a say” (Frank, 2020: 254), by putting forward topics relevant for a “silent majority” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a: 21).

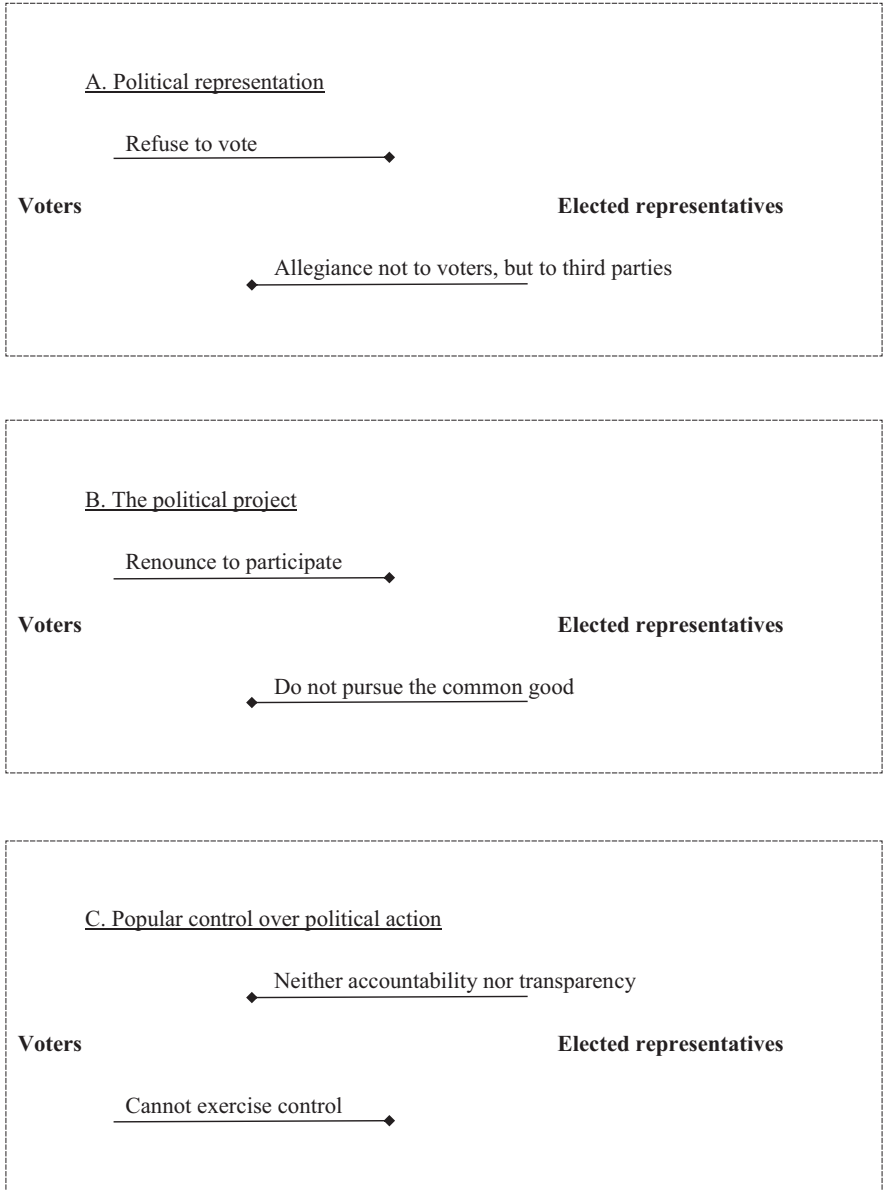


Fig. 12.2 Pathologies affecting the vectors of mutual influence between voters and elected representatives in the political leadership processes

Populism can also mobilise excluded sectors of society, improving their integration into the political system (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 83) and overcoming political alienation (Canovan, 1999). When populist movements transform themselves into political forces (or ally themselves with existing parties), the political offer is expanded, which allows voters who otherwise would have withheld their vote to be willing to go to the polls again.

Populist parties also contribute to enlarging the political discourse not only by producing new political actors but also through the transformation of the existing party systems, since they oblige mainstream parties (the “elites”) to react upon issues the latter tried to avoid, which are now brought forward by populist movements (Plescia et al., 2019: 527). This might make those traditional parties more palatable to sectors of the electorate who did not feel, or no longer felt, represented by any of them.

As far as elected representatives are concerned, the vector whereby they influence the electoral body is broken if they are not selected by the citizens but by others such as lobbies, power groups that penetrated the institutions and party leaders, thanks to electoral laws that deprive citizens of the power to choose their representatives, leaving voters the only apparent freedom to put a cross next to a party’s symbol. Government does exercise power, but this power is only formally legitimated by the popular will. Rulers no longer exercise power in the name of the people but on behalf of other entities and actors. “What is the sanction that is most feared [by elected representatives]: that of the electorate, the party apparatus, or third-party support groups?”, asked Giovanni Sartori already five decades ago (1969: 375).

On a theoretical level, the immediateness of the relationship between the populist leader and the masses that is a defining feature of political leaders can constitute a positive answer to this shortcoming, insofar populism can bring about the practice of entrusting people’s interests to a directly chosen leader (“inclusive empowerment”, Canovan, 2002: 29).

More practically, populist parties in the opposition can help to give voice to groups that do not feel represented by the political establishment (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b: 209), contributing to filling the gap between “winners” and “losers” in the society. Populism can move the latter group from a psychological condition marked by resentment, delusion and disenchantment on which populist parties can capitalise (Betz, 1994), giving it a voice not only to criticise the power of the elites but also to more proactively bring forward the view, opinions and action of all, thus recalling the rulers that they respond to the people and not, self-referentially, to sectors of the elites. In other words, populism can help the “losers” no longer to feel victims but become leaders and start exerting influence in politics.

Pathologies of the Political Project

Political leadership’ influence by the political representatives collapses when they do not fulfil, or no longer fulfil, their duty, which is to make choices in the interest of all, in view of the common good (we defined political leadership as aiming at

directing collective action towards the “common” interest of the polity as a whole). Healthy influence exercised by elected officials ceases to exist when they make partisan choices, favour a few and benefit those who already have resources (and perhaps are able to guarantee them the perpetuation of power), instead of those who are most in need.

This vector of political influence by the citizens fails when they relinquish their right and duty to participate beyond the simple exercise of the vote, to uphold over time the political project they expressed, at one point in time, in the ballot box. There is no longer this form of political leadership by citizens when they renounce to have their voice heard in the political sphere.

Populism can have a positive impact by upholding one or more political projects that pursue the common good, “by empowering previously unrepresented social groups and forcing democratically elected governments to address overlooked social problems” (Aslanidis, 2017: 318).

Populism can improve the responsiveness of the political system, by fostering the implementation of policies preferred by excluded sectors of society (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 83) and by offering an alternative opinion about the demands of the voting public (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 501). By responding to the needs of the people, populism can indeed turn resentment into progress (Frank, 2020: 247).

By focusing on issues the elites had neglected, “populism can trigger a sort of learning process by which established political parties renew their programmes and policies in order to reduce the gap between governed and governors” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b: 214).

At the same time, the fact that populist movements give voice to unspoken questions of sectors of the population can amplify the tension between responsiveness and responsibility that democratic regimes are increasingly experiencing (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 500). Indeed, political representatives have the duty not only to respond to the demands of voters but also to be responsible for the long-term needs of the electorate (including future generations), for the care of the planet and for the needs of international actors, foreign governments and global institutions.

Responsibility entails that governing parties’ manoeuvring space is reduced (Kriesi, 2014) whereas populist movements, in particular when in opposition, might feel free from such constraints (Plescia et al., 2019: 526). Plescia et al. (2019: 514) posit that the most likely outcome of the tension between responsiveness and responsibility is a division of roles between mainstream parties (responsible but not responsive) and peripheral populist parties (responsive but not responsible).

This is not an optimal outcome for the influence process bringing about a political project, since the latter should be able to “satisfy the governed by executing the policies that correspond to their demands” – as Morlino (2008: 54) defines responsiveness – while, at the same time, abiding by the responsibility constraints.

Pathologies of the Popular Control over Political Action

This vector of political leadership by rulers evaporates when governments do not inform citizens, or when information is incomplete, misleading or not timely; when elected representatives lie, forge “alternative truths” or make propaganda and not information; when there is no reporting; or when the bodies responsible for controlling the action of those who govern (such as constitutional courts, courts of auditors, independent administrative courts and independent authorities) do not function.

This aspect of political leadership by the citizens collapses when they cease to exercise control over those who govern (up to refusing to vote overall, in protest against both government and opposition, whom they no longer deem worthy of their support) or when they cannot exercise such control, due to lack of information by the elected officials or by the media. As concerns media, this is the case when the latter do not provide a correct and independent representation of reality, when they no longer act as watchdogs who make pressure on those who govern but are condescending towards the powerful and when there is no pluralism in information.

An important, though indirect, component through which citizenry can control the government are the constitutional independent unelected bodies (such as courts, human rights institutions, electoral commissions, central banks or inspection offices), which watch over the manner governments exercise power and limit such power. Populism can be deleterious in its view that political authority ultimately falls on the “people” only, thus rejecting all kinds of unelected bodies, which are becoming increasingly powerful today (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b: 208), chiefly the guarantee institutions designed to protect fundamental rights and minorities and to avoid the emergence of “tyranny of the majority”.

These unelected bodies are intrinsic to liberal democracies and perform an irreplaceable function of control. Yet, since they are not elected by the people, the populist logic entertains a tense relationship with the constitutional guarantees, which it perceives as external and “undemocratic” constraints on the will of the people, the latter being supposed to be sovereign and have the supreme authority in the state (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 417).

In fact, “populist movements speak and behave as if democracy meant the power of the people and only the power of the people”, whereas democracy combines the rule of the people with the rule of law as counterweight to the discretionary or arbitrary power of the people’s representatives (Mény & Surel, 2002: 9). Populists claim that such unelected bodies tend to act irresponsibly and, therefore, to protect the interests of (powerful) minorities instead of defending the popular will (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 497). If they are able to acquire sufficient power, populist leaders and parties are therefore likely to try to bypass essential parts of the representative and constitutional checks and balances (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 421).

Moreover, populism tends to erode media freedom: not only do populist parties and movements have a strong incentive to undermine freedom of expression and to control the media due to the highly personalistic way they are organised; but populist rule in general is associated with a decline in most measures of media freedom

(Kenny, 2019). In fact, there are many examples of populists in power taking legislative actions or other measures directly impinging on the media, such as concentration rules (partial), takeovers of media companies by the state or the leaders' cronies, nationalisation, influencing appointment to key position in media companies and withdrawal or redirection of state funding (Holtz-Bacha, 2020: 115–16).

On the other hand, populism can have a positive impact if it does not limit itself to expressing a protest but when it increases the level of participation of citizens, and therefore also the pressure that the latter are able to exert on governments and lawmakers, by exposing opaque areas of their action.

Populism can increase democratic accountability by making issues and policies part of the political realm (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 83), rather than the economic or judicial realms (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a: 21), and, in particular, contribute to enhance democratic accountability in political systems characterised by high levels of corporatism (Fallend, 2012: 124), bringing new actors and fresh ideas in the political arena.

4 Conclusion

What is that we want to understand: is it the people we commonly call leaders, or the process we call leadership?, asked Rhodes and 't Hart (2014: 3) in their introduction to the volume on political leadership they edited.

In this chapter, we endeavoured to deal with both populist leaders and political leadership as a process, suggesting that populism interacts, in beneficial and harmful ways, with the relationships of the mutual influence between citizens and their elected representatives.

Populist leaders very often are political outsiders: when they enter the political arena, they often bring a political turmoil with their peculiar personal traits and the way they exercise power, as we have seen in the first section of this chapter. Yet, the appearance of populist leaders contributes to elite circulation, bringing in new actors who, though often inexperienced, challenge the political establishment. What would be needed is further opening of the political establishment to political leaders who do not seek executive power, since they promote crucial issues, such as fighting climate change and enhancing women's rights. These leaders could temperate the populist stance, which often aims at replacing a particular interest (that of the supposedly corrupt elite) with another particular interest (that of the excluded and marginalised masses) and open up the political horizon to the true general interest, including that of future generations, who do not vote and have a say in current political debate. The "common goal" of the political leadership process is, after all, the common good and nothing less.

Indeed, if leadership is relational, the political leaders (not only the populist ones) should take charge of entering into a relationship not only with the mass of those who protest (and who can bring them to power) but with everyone. The

planetary horizon is the testing ground for the capacity of populisms to stimulate politics to bear positive fruit.

The second section of this chapter dealt with how populism intervenes in political leadership as an interactive influence process, mainly between voters and their elected representatives, at the core of liberal democracies. To an extent, it acts as a corrective to the malfunctioning of this process but also poses a series of threats. The challenge is to find the “sweet spot” where populism can bring in fresh air, new actors, innovative ideas and rights claims, as it often does by asking the right questions (unfortunately, however, populism is seldom able to also provide the right answers). The challenge is then neither to ignore the populist phenomenon nor to attempt to destroy the populist supply, but to “weaken the populist demand” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 118), by taking seriously and addressing the unanswered needs and requests that populism movements voice, first and foremost the claim of ordinary people to gain control over their lives.

If, in many Western democracies, elite liberalism is “utterly discredited” (Frank, 2020: 245), populisms are, if not the remedy, at least a useful reminder that politics is there not to serve the happy few, but all the citizens, including the citizens of the future who will have a right to a liveable earth. Hence we need to act. What we need is to engage in an open and honest dialogue with populist actors and supporters, which should strive not only to better understand the issues that are being politicised by populists but also to consider how to address these issues within the liberal democratic framework (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 501).

Reflecting on political leadership as a process can contribute to this dialogue, first and foremost by recalling citizens that, in politics, it is they who are the original leaders and that sovereignty lies in their hands.

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Chapter 13

The Psychological Roots of Populism



Antonella Deponte

1 Populism and the Crowd

As stated above, we start considering populism from a collective perspective. Populism is mass; the political and economic forces interested in populism indistinctly aspire to move the people. Among the first to study crowd phenomena, Le Bon (1895) and Freud (1921) claimed that masses arise from individuals' loss of identity and subsequent identification with a leader, which in psychodynamic terms can be thought of as the incarnation of the father. There is enough to fill every aspiring leader's ego.

According to this perspective, the members of the mass lose their individuality and recognize in each other the same internalized image of the father/leader. Thus massified, individuals regress to primitive, easy-to-manipulate states of mind. They respond or better react to emotions, without mediation or reflection. Referring to people and their complexity becomes superfluous; a group mind (McDougall, 1920) is born and guides the blind body of the crowd.

The loss of one's identity, confused in the group's shapeless anonymity, fits the definition of populism as either a political strategy of a leader who aims to reach power through his followers' direct support without mediation or as folklore that politics adopts to move the masses (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). The picture of people abandoning their minds to chase the simulacrum of the father could be fascinating, especially in face of some crowd demonstrations or in face of the devotion that surrounds populist leaders, but it does not tell the whole story. And one might question whether people can really relinquish their identities.

Later studies overcame the concept of group mind, yet the idea that the crowd arises from people's loss of awareness and hence identity survived (Diener, 1980;

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Duval & Wicklund, 1972). The perspective is still at the level of individual functioning, although massified.

Aslanidis (2018) correctly notes that “actual politics involves complex social processes irreducible to the forces of individual psychology.” Of course, many factors of different order come into play. Economy, politics, and sociology can tell different stories since every discipline focuses on different aspects. To remain in the psychological sphere, overcoming a purely individual perspective means widening to the intergroup. A fundamental observation in this direction, useful to unravel the issue, was made by Reicher (1984). He stated that the behavior of the crowd must be examined in an intergroup context. Far from being blind, the crowd moves in a context of us/them – namely, it proceeds individuating a “we” and a “non-we” and directs its actions accordingly. What one observes in the masses is not a loss of identity but rather the assumption of a new identity, which is groupal or social in origin rather than individual.

Trough depersonalization, “individuals tend to define and see themselves less as differing individual persons and more as the interchangeable representatives of some shared social category membership” (Turner et al., 1994). The assessment of reality moves, as observed by Aslanidis (2018): from a personal identity viewpoint to a social identity one, from thinking in terms of “I” to thinking in terms of “we.”

A “we” is born that is opposed to a “them” – an ingroup opposite to the outgroup. In populism, the opposition is usually between the pure people and the corrupt elite (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), where the ruling elite is described as corrupt, unreliable, and intent on protecting their own interests to the detriment of the common good. Conversely, the people become the “pure” holder of morality and traditions. Usually, also another “them” appears, to which the present analysis will come back later. For now, the focus will be on the formation of group identity and its relationship with personal identity.

2 The Group and the Person

The creation of the identity of the mass then does not imply a loss of (personal) identity but the assumption of a group identity.

Social categories, whatever they are – nation, gender, membership of a club, sports team, or religious group – provide individuals with a social identity. Social identity is distinct from personal identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) but becomes fully part of the self-concept and shares the fate of the group narrative. If the group has a positive image and a good reputation, the individual’s self-image will also benefit. If the group has a negative connotation, the individuals will assume the same characteristic on themselves, unless they leave the group.

Self-categorization theory (SCT, Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987) and social identity theory (SIT, Tajfel & Turner, 1986) state that group identity overlaps with personal identity. If the social identity at a given moment is salient with respect to personal identity, the interchanges that the person will have with others will be

examples of intergroup relations, not simple interpersonal contacts. For example, if Mario's closest friend is supporting a football team other than his, when they discuss the results of the championship, their interaction is between the supporters of two different teams, not simply between two friends, that is, more intergroup than interpersonal.

Something happens also at the individual level. When people assume a social rather than individual identity, they adapt their behavior not only to the group's norms but also, in consequence, to the representation of the stereotypical group member (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). There is a definite way in which the "typical" group member acts, feels, and speaks. How the "typical" member should be is clear to the other group members and to the outgroup, that is, the stereotypical representation is commonly shared. When the group identity becomes salient for the individuals, they behave accordingly, in a more predictable, less original way.

Latrofa et al. (2010) observe that this alignment between personal and group identity takes place differently depending on the group's social status: members of a group with low social status tend to attribute deductively the characteristics of the group directly to themselves ("I am like my group"), whereas members of high social status groups tend to adopt an inductive method – from the particular to the general – by ascribing their individual characteristics to the group ("My group resembles me"). This at least partially explains how populism attracts exponents of different social groups who adhere to it in different ways but with the same result – homogeneity of the ingroup. The perception of an ingroup homogeneity comes from the mere adhesion to the group and is reinforced by the behaviors of group members. In turn, members will manifest more similarities in opinions and behavior when their attention is directed toward being part of the group, that is, when the group identity is active, and the personal identities are on the background.

In the case of populism, another factor is involved in the construction and maintenance of the group homogeneity: the general will.

As Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) stated: "... the general will is based on the unity of the people and on a clear demarcation of those who do not belong to the demos and, consequently, are not treated as equals. In short, because populism implies that the general will is not only transparent but also absolute, it can legitimize authoritarianism and illiberal attacks on anyone who (allegedly) threatens the homogeneity of the people" (p.18).

A common view in personality and social psychology is that the need for uniqueness – the sense to be distinct from others – is one of the strongest self-motives and is essential for the well-being of the persons and for the identity construction (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Furthermore, uniqueness is a universal human motive, present both in individualistic and in collectivistic cultures (Vignoles et al., 2000).

Only other important needs can push individuals to put uniqueness in the background. Social identity theory helps to understand when it happens. The identity based on groups has two main functions: self-enhancement and reduction of uncertainty. Both are just as essential needs for human beings, for some people more than for others. As the individuals do, also the groups compete to maintain a positive

distinctiveness and to gain a sense of prestige that, in the case of the groups, returns to the individual (self-enhancement). Through membership, the individual acquires the identity and the recognition associated with the group. This is particularly important for people with a fragile self-esteem or a lack of self-confidence: for them, membership means acquiring a stronger identity and consequently greater well-being. Furthermore, group rules clarify to the individuals what to expect and how to behave, membership tells them who they are, and both reduce uncertainty.

The notes above lead to the question of people's fundamental motivations and needs, but before tackling them directly, the focus will be on how the outgroup is created.

3 The Rest of the World

When it comes to creating the “we,” the easiest way is to identify a “them” – not a “you” – that implies recognition of the other and chance for dialogue but a distant and irreducibly different “them.” The “we” is created by contrast, simple categorization, or even on an arbitrary basis, as demonstrated by the classical experiments conducted with the minimal group paradigm (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). The subdivision of people into groups, such as group X and group Y, on a coin toss, without any other specification or even contact between each group's members, is sufficient to cause the perception of differences between the groups, ingroup favoritism, and sense of belonging.

The perception of diversity between the members of a group and the outgroup – the “others” – is enough to ground group identity. It is not essential that the group members actually look alike, and whether the differences with the outgroup are real or fictitious does not significantly matter.

As already noted, when group identity is salient and prevails over personal identity, relationships between members of different groups are no longer interpersonal but intergroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Granfalloon technique, a method of persuasion in which individuals are driven to feel part of a group on the basis of irrelevant cues, is the demonstration that is possible to create groups literally from nothing. Once the group is created, it occurs the dehumanization of the outgroup: “they” are less human than “we.” Dehumanization is the road to prejudice and discrimination.

In populism, “them” is defined by context and chosen ad hoc through a process that Aslanidis (2018) calls “politicization of specific categories.” The primary “them” is the ruling elite, but another “them” usually appears, chosen according to the given sociocultural and historical context and invested with the role of scapegoat, sole, and unique responsible for all evils. Immigrants, women, ethnic minorities, homeless, and virtually every nondominant group can become the target on which the populist narrative throws the responsibility for difficult times. More specifically, the narrative predicts that there is a group on the one hand that represents a threat because they could subtract resources, or power, or privileges. On the other

hand, there is the elite group, protecting their own interests, culpably declining to defend “us,” the people, from “them.”

After the creation of a “we” versus “them,” diversity is amplified and acts as a reinforcement of group identity. At this point, when the second “them” is made salient, other psychological mechanisms are activated that leverage the automatic reactions of fear of the different, sense of deprivation, and social and economic insecurity. The initial distinction between “us” and “them” is accompanied by elements from the context that reinforce it by underlining the difference between “we” and “them” and “good” and “evil.”

Such narratives are shared in the ingroup; contribute to strengthen the sense of identity, in contrast with the outgroup; and motivate people to make group identity prevail. Exemplifying in this sense is the extreme territorialism of some populist groups that react in this way to the collective fear, or angst, of the extinction of the nation (Kende & Kreko, 2020; Wohl et al., 2012). In particular, Kende and Kreko (2020) analyze the case of Eastern-Central Europe, where the rise of right-wing populism corresponds with the trend of growing nationalism. The authors emphasize that interestingly, in those countries the national identity is strong and unstable on the same time. Instability is caused by limited experiences of national sovereignty and aggravates the fear of losing territory. Losing territory means losing identity, and losing identity is a source of indefinite fear, very close to terror (Greenberger et al., 1997). Another interesting observation in the work of Kende and Kreko (2020) is about “socialist nostalgia.” Conservatives and antiegalitarian attitudes are linked to a wish to be “taken care of” by a powerful authority. Even in countries that have not experienced socialism, populism and nationalism could hide a basic need to feel “cared for,” to which authoritarianism responds through power and perceived (potential) protection. More generally, collective nostalgia increases in times of crisis because it gives a sense of stability and helps to face the threatening implications of a changing world. The direction of nostalgia effect depends on what aspects of the past are salient. Curiously, right-wing populism is reinforced only by nostalgia for a past “political incorrectness,” where racial segregation and gender inequality were part of the system. If the past is good-mannered and plenty of decorum, nostalgia decreases the support for populist ideologies (Lammers & Baldwin, 2020).

The evocation of “them” has the dual purpose of directing the group’s attention to the outside and increasing internal cohesion to face the external threat. Populist leaders take advantage of the threat represented by culturally different outgroups – both historical minorities and immigrants – and promote themselves as “entrepreneurs of identity” (Kende & Kreko, 2020). The “we” factor is so relevant that the cultural threat to identity is a stronger predictor of negative outcome toward refugees than perceived economic threat (Renner et al., 2018).

We did not mention economy at random. Usually, economic instability is considered one of the main factors promoting populism. Economic and social crises trigger fears of not being able to achieve one’s life goals or not having enough resources. In such situations, the theory of realistic conflict (Sherif, 1966) predicts an increase in intergroup hostility. Some studies have observed an active growth of populism in

economic or social competition scenarios (see, for example, Caiani and Graziano (2016)). However, the perception of potential danger or deprivation of rights, wealth, or security is sufficient to bring both the individual and the group to a defensive reaction and to identity reaffirmation. The case of inequality is noteworthy. Inequality does not have a direct influence on populism but operates through mediators, both at the macro level of economic instability and political polarization and at the micro, individual level through anxiety, perception of social injustice, mistrust in the system, and sense of threat from external groups (Oxendine, 2019). A state of inequality is not enough, per se, to boost populist feelings. Inequality must be salient; sometimes it is intentionally made salient. The economic situation must be unstable, thus generating uncertainty and political polarization so that exasperation of the distance between different representatives is implemented. Therefore, populist rhetoric amplifies economic and social inequalities while emphasizing the government's system's flaws, thus paradoxically reinforcing the dynamics of enrichment that it condemns. By moving people away from institutional politics, populism makes it hard to move toward greater equality, which passes precisely through public proegalitarian policies. Those who stir up populism do not see the paradox and succeed in creating and contrasting ingroups and outgroups. The mass becomes a group, with enemies to fight and with an identity made of power, strength, and truth in which to recognize itself. All that is left to do is to suggest the strategy and to incite the battle.

The problem is there will be no winners in this battle. Making inequality overt is effective in attracting people to populism but results in significant social costs both for the rich and the poor. The rising of inequality causes collective anxiety. For different reasons, all the social parties perceive a heightened threat; all social groups are concerned about their status. Many seek safety in a nationalism/populism of convenience that does not work to reduce inequalities but merely points to one or more external enemies. Populism then perpetuates the status quo and fuels dangerous social tensions (Jay et al., 2019).

4 The Motives Behind

The mass is composed of persons, each one with a story, personality, needs, and aspirations that make them unique. Nonetheless, they comply with the representations provided by the leader and mirrored by the group; apparently, they surrender their uniqueness without hesitation. What makes people adhere to a leader's vision in such an uncritical way? Why they merge themselves in a "we" that from the outside appears confusing and disturbing, to the point of putting democracy itself – the government of the people – at risk?

Many investigations have addressed this issue focusing on internal dimensions of the individual, such as personality, emotions, and motivations. Starting from the controversial work of Adorno et al. (1950) about authoritarianism and F-scale, a number of studies investigated specific individual orientations and personality traits

that would lead the person to adhere to populist ideologies, especially those expressed by far-right parties. These approaches favor an individualistic perspective, in which political choices are thought to be a direct expression of personal dispositions or traits.

In the 1990s, the hypothesis that populism is rooted in the individual personality has gained renewed attention, and its discussion has been inserted in the framework of the Big Five theory of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1996). The Big Five theory states that all the human dispositions could be grouped in five general traits: openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism. The dispositions are structured internally in early stages of human development and are relatively stable throughout life and originate partly from genetics and partly from experiences and environmental factors. Their use in political psychology is motivated by the hypothesis that they are related to attitudinal and behavioral tendencies in all areas of life (McCrae & Costa, 2008).

Applying the theoretical framework of the Big Five model to research in populism, Bakker et al. (2016) found that people low in agreeableness are more inclined to support populist parties. The definition of low agreeableness, coming from the above cited theory, involves the person to be intolerant and uncooperative and to express antagonism toward others. Furthermore, in politics, the low-in-agreeableness person is more likely to believe in conspiracy theories and to be more distrusting of politicians. Similar results were obtained by Ackerman et al. (2018): both openness to experience and agreeableness are negatively related to voting for a right-wing populist party.

In 2018, Obschonka et al. tested the relation between neuroticism and populism. The prevalence of neurotic traits in one region predicted voting behavior for Trump in the USA and for Brexit in the UK. Both campaigns were carried out through topics that aroused fear, aversion to loss, and lost pride, all relevant to the personality dimension of neuroticism (Obschonka et al., 2018).

Vasilopoulos and Jost (2020) extended the analyses to comprehend the differences between the supporters of right-wing and left-wing populism. They studied the “rightists” and the “leftists” not only in terms of personality traits but also for authoritarianism, social dominance, and system justification. The traits of openness to new experiences and conscientiousness were both positively associated with the endorsement of populist attitudes, but whereas the first was correlated with a left-wing populism, the latter was typical of the right. People high in openness are drawn to novelty and feel less threatened by changes; therefore, they are more likely to adopt an “inclusive” left-wing populism. On the other side, people high in conscientiousness tend to adhere strongly to social norms and to be more punitive in front of violations. It is likely that they will prefer an exclusionary populism, based on cohesion of the ingroup.

The authors do not limit their analyses to the traits of the Big Five model but also consider three other dispositions: SDO (social dominance orientation), authoritarianism, and system justification. Social dominance orientation (SDO) measures the extent to which one supports inequality between social groups; authoritarianism refers to the importance attributed to hierarchy within the group; and both are more

salient in populist voters (see also Obradovic et al. (2020)). Authoritarianism, with rejection of personal autonomy and readiness to follow a strong leader, is functional to all kinds of populism. However, the results from Vasilopoulos and Jost (2020) indicate that the right-wing populists with a high orientation to authoritarianism tend to vote more often extremist leaders.

System justification refers to the individual motivation to legitimate the social, economic, and political systems. In the studies of Vasilopoulos and Jost (2020), system justification is generally negatively related to populism; hence, low system-justifiers adhere more enthusiastically to populism.

From a different perspective, some authors explore the role of emotions as motivating factors in supporting populism. Emotions are often seen as “the Other to reason” (Bonansinga, 2020), the obscure opposite of rationality. “Phenomena such as totalitarianism, propaganda and populism have historically been examined by equating emotionality with demagoguery, manipulation, and treating the ‘masses’ as slaves to irrational desires” (Bonansinga, 2020, p.84), but “Such an approach is problematic in that it dismisses populism as irrationality en masse, downplaying grievances and concerns of populist voters as irrelevant or wrongly placed” (ibidem, p.85). There is systematic evidence that a substantial part of the life – of the political life, too – is emotionally grounded. There is no “rational thinking” that is entirely independent from emotions. Emotions, judgments, and behavior are mutually influenced. The relevant question then is not whether populism is emotionally more characterized than other political expressions but rather what the peculiar relationship between emotions and populism is. Bonansinga (2020) explores the emotional components of populism on structural, subjective, and communicative dimensions. The structural dimension refers to the development of an affective ground favorable to populism, the subjective dimension specifies how those affective states are perceived by the individuals, and the communicative dimension explores the interplay between emotions and populist discourse.

This analytical framework leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the different functions that emotions play in populism. There are interconnections to be studied between the production of emotions at the macro level, the perception of subjective emotions, and the political narratives.

If Bonansinga (2020) consider the emotional component per se, as a global framework, others focus on specific emotions, typically negative ones. Fear and anger are the emotions typically linked to populism, often without a clear distinction between the two. Both were usually considered to contribute to the spread of populism in an undifferentiated way. Rico et al. (2017) specified that populism is preferably linked to anger than to fear. The expression of populism is often accompanied with blame for “others,” perceived as accountable for various inconvenient as financial crisis or unemployment. Vasilopoulos et al. (2019) confirmed those results for far-right parties in France, after terroristic attacks in Paris, in 2015: anger was associated with voting for the Front National and fear was associated with voting against the Front National. Contrary to expectations, fear seems to produce a more attentive process of information search and more systematic processing in judgment making. Fear encourages a more careful, less automatic processing of

information in decision-making (Rico et al., 2017). Apparently, in certain circumstances, fear drives judgment away from automaticity of emotive response observed in the case of anger. This departure from automatic thinking, however, does not translate into less populist positions. Fear and anxiety lead people to think of conspiracies by minorities and to search for threatening news, confirming their fears, for example, about immigrants. Emotions make individuals more vulnerable to persuasion, and populist parties make use of negative emotions (fear, anger, disgust, sadness) more than non-populist parties. The rare focus on positive emotions (joy and pride) has usually the aim of creating a positive ingroup identity, predominantly based on nationalism (Widmann, 2021). Positive affects emerge also in the narratives – complementary to those that elicit anger and fear – that emphasize the positive power of values such as honesty, hard work, and ordinariness (Bonansinga, 2019).

Considering the motivational perspective, Grundl and Aichholzer (2020) found that populists are in need of epistemic certainty. Nativism, authoritarianism, and populism are ideological features that satisfy the need for closure and the need of certainty. Both uncertainty avoidance and need for cognitive closure are individual traits and refer to a desire for familiarity, order, predictability, and decisiveness. Both promote an exclusive identity, that is, higher preferences for a homogeneous and closed ingroup. The right-wing populism seems particularly suited to fulfill the needs for certainty, because its demand for change is presented as a restoration of order and traditional values.

However, I posit that the most accurate models are those referring to the relational dimension of human life whereby humans find their identity through relationships and build their self-concept from interpersonal and intergroup experiences. In populism, a strong, winning identity is produced through the identification with the leader or the prototypical image of the group itself (Bos et al., 2020). Being part of a group fulfills the fundamental need for belonging and reassures against existential threats and ancestral anxieties due to loneliness, abandonment, and death. Furthermore, belonging to a group reestablishes a sense of control when the latter weakens at a personal level (Fritsche et al., 2013), as it allows its followers to reaffirm their presence, though group identity nurtures the conviction that everyone will get back what they feel they have lost and put control of destiny back in hands.

Human beings' primary needs include the need for relatedness, defined as the capability to establish and maintain positive social relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2002). The need for relatedness is the need to experience connection and to feel significant to others. Populism manipulates the people's need for relatedness through a certain degree of authoritarianism and offers a strong sense of group identity but requires a deeply committed and uncritical loyalty. The need for relatedness is inserted in power mechanisms, and so being, it works in the opposite direction. Instead of promoting the satisfaction of the need for relatedness, with the experience of warmth, bonding, and care, populist communication stresses the inevitable negative outcomes of the nonadherence to the group's attitudes, that is, social alienation, exclusion, and loneliness. The need is satisfied in reverse, through the fear of not reaching it.

5 Communication and Propaganda

Communication is paramount to the construction of populism from the outset in the intentional accentuation of data and news, sometimes partially generated or totally invented to alarmingly highlight the “us versus them” and cause a sense of insecurity to which only the populist party or leader will be able to respond. In this regard, it is noteworthy that fake news has a longer-term effect than verified news: memory retains content that is often artificially made more vivid through emotions and forgets judgment on authenticity. Even the most baseless news, after a while of time and especially if it is repeated, leaves in the audience a sense of truthfulness. Attention by the media is crucial to populism, and in the social media era, uncontrolled generation and spreading of news are easier than ever – journalists’ or editorial staff’s mediation is unnecessary. Following McDermott and Hatemi (2018), modern technologies allow for a direct communication between the politician and the auditory, but the communication itself has regressed to an emotional, immediate, and personal form.

As Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) said, the right word to indicate this kind of communication is propaganda. More than 20 years after its publication, their book *Age of propaganda: The everyday use and abuse of persuasion* retains all its relevance and helps to clarify the persuasive aspect of the populist strategy. They make an important distinction between propaganda and persuasion. The latter, fair and thoughtful – in their words – encourages reflection on the proposed issues and gives the audience all the elements to build an autonomous judgment. On the contrary, the primary purpose of modern propaganda is less and less to inform and enlighten and more and more to drag the masses toward the desired point of view.

Modern propaganda relies on the limited processing capability of hasty and stressed individuals who inhabit modern cities. When not interested, in a hurry and in front of a huge amount of data, people simply do not process the content of the messages. They draw conclusions based on peripheral clues as elicited emotions, message verbosity, agreeableness, strength, or perceived competence of the communicator. It is the so-called peripheral route to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Certainty about one’s own opinions do not come from source verification but rather from social clues. Consensus reinforces one’s own attitudinal positions; if social consensus lacks, (populist) minorities can opt to compare themselves to majorities in terms of status. As Prislin et al. (2012) stated: “Because of their strong sense of validity, minorities who perceive themselves superior in terms of status should be more likely to step out of their traditional roles of targets of social influence to become agents of social influence. By the same token, individuals whose attitudinal positions are associated with low status may preserve their sense of validity by emphasizing social consensus they have for the positions” (p.10).

Deliberative persuasion is vital to democracy, but people rarely use this tool. It is what Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) call the essential dilemma of modern democracy. On the one hand, democracy is based on freedom of speech and on the fact that the exchange of ideas can lead to better decisions for everyone; on the other hand,

people rarely listen to each other and even more rarely they make a detailed analysis of the persuasive messages. Time pressure and the huge amount of information lead people to give credit to the first information that passes or almost.

Aristotelian persuasion practices have long been transformed into highly effective propaganda tactics in the manipulation of public opinion and the mass, and populism makes wide use of them. These tactics have a greater resonance today, as their effects can be intensified by cognitive overload and social algorithms. The plurality of information people had deluded themselves with at the beginning of the Internet era is much harder to reach. Indeed, the very opposite happens: the great amount of data constantly available is impossible to manage for the human mind, which takes refuge in heuristics – mental shortcuts used to reach decisions based on a few data (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). When too many options are available, humans have too much choice and ultimately cannot choose, which makes them remarkably more manipulable. The use of persuasion techniques is exasperated in social media and computer-based communication. Algorithms decide for them what news people will see and what not, producing effects such as false consent and self-fulfilling prophecies. As simple as a click, populism starts building its structure.

People rely – consciously or unconsciously – on information selected by others or by a system; in any case, they have no access to the full story. They ground their opinion on a limited piece of information, but nonetheless, they feel empowered to “spread the verbum” as if they possess the real truth. If the opinions are shared by the ingroup, they acquire even greater force in the eyes of the individual.

Furthermore, as Spears et al. (1990) claim, computer-based communication leads to deindividuation and extremization. Deindividuated and yet affirming the group’s identity, people take their judgments to extremes in the direction of the group norm, which explains why in social media, where deindividuation is strong because people are hidden by screens and keyboards, judgments and comments are so fierce and absolute, bordering on violence and beyond. They affirm their (group) identity in a world where the only destiny seems alienation and anonymity.

It also explains populist leaders’ predilection for social channels, which offer a relatively cheap way to increase followers’ cohesion and adherence to the rules and the group identity they have promoted. As Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) noted, “when a propagandist unscrupulously plays on our feeling of insecurity, or exploits our darkest fears [...], the goal becomes to prove yourself superior and right no matter what” (pp. 100, Italian edition).

Ultimately, through information-building mechanisms that amplify and distort normal social dynamics, people come to perceive insurmountable diversity, existential threats, and broad consensus in their reference community – so broad to potentially encompass everyone. Precisely because it is so overestimated, consensus reaches the status of absolute truth. It is not true what the facts prove, what the experts say. It is true what (almost) everyone believes and what the media relentlessly repeat. Reading or listening to news will be followed by similar news, and then again, in a chain of reinforcements that minimizes the view of alternative opinions.

Those who stray from the mainstream become dangerous deviants, who must be brought back under the light of truth or banned for eternity.

Ladies and gentlemen, populism is served.

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Chapter 14

The Populist Leader: A Profile That Emerged from the Investigation Perspective of Phenomenological Psychopathology



Fabio Frisone

1 Introduction

The progressive success of populist parties has taken place over the years in various parts of the world. Although populism has pervaded the world political picture for some time already, there are still many difficulties in framing the phenomenon.

Mudde (2004) defined populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’”. Concerning populist ideology, the Author continues, “politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (p. 543).

Bale et al. (2011) instead noted that “although descriptions of populism often involve something like an appeal to the ‘common people’ and an anti-elitist critique, they are often too imprecise to help us properly pin down which actors are populist, or which parties can be classified as populist parties” (p. 114).

Belanger and Aarts (2006) highlighted some components that appeared essential for the proliferation of populist parties, noting that “lack of confidence towards government and politics is fertile ground for challenging party movements” (p. 16).

Canovan (1999) observed that it is not enough to identify an anti-system mobilization to obtain the populist trait. In this regard, the Author indicated that “anti-system mobilization is not enough by itself to identify populist politics, for that description would also take in the ‘new social movements’, generally acknowledged to be something else. The crucial difference”, Canovan continued, “is that while both are anti-system, populism challenges not only established power-holders but

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also elite values. Populist animus is directed not just at the political and economic establishments but also at opinion-formers in the academy and the media” (p. 3).

Jagers and Walgrave (2007) also contributed to outlining populism, noting that “populism (1) always refers to the people and justifies its actions by appealing to and identifying with the people; (2) it is rooted in anti-elite feelings; and (3) it considers the people as a monolithic group without internal differences except for some very specific categories who are subject to an exclusion strategy” (p. 3).

Another study by Taguieff (2005) showed that the populist leader is characterized by the personalistic use of language, the manifestation of sincerity, and the ostentation of behavior aimed at bringing out the guarantee of being able to change the situation for the better.

However, Mair (2002) highlighted that it is not possible to speak of populism in univocal terms as “on the one hand, there is the more conventional sense of populism, conceived as a form of popular protest against the political establishment. On the other hand, there is a more ‘respectable’ and possibly more relevant sense of populism, understood as a means of linking an increasingly undifferentiated and depoliticized electorate with a largely neutral and non-partisan system of governance” (p. 84). Therefore, according to the author’s thinking, the phenomenon of populism could be observed by grasping its dual nature. Indeed, within the populist ideology, there is a space for those who are moved by the desire to overturn the top of the political organization and those who would not identify themselves with the political messages promoted by other parties. This large slice of the electorate that votes for populist parties might help to understand why subsequently many other parties have also chosen to soften their interpretation of their reference ideology and instead promote political messages more suitable for those that characterize populist discourse.

In line with the latter thesis, several studies have found that “some parties can be moderately populist” (Pauwels, 2011, p. 114) or that “even mainstream parties might sometimes adhere to populist appeals” (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011, p. 1279), perhaps to bring together the part of the electorate that seems to have found its own space for political identification in populist movements.

The heterogeneity of these considerations shows how difficult it is to identify populism using precise definitions, and all this can only affect further research that could help shed light on the phenomenon.

So how can we identify the main differences between traditional and populist parties? And how can we identify the differences between the leaders of traditional parties and the leaders of populist parties?

1.1 Populism: An “Ambiguous Figure”

As seen above, the phenomenon of populism is characterized by the tendency to divide society into two antagonistic groups, by the promotion of protest behavior directed against the élite and using a personalistic type of leadership.

At present, however, it does not seem entirely clear what the fundamental differences are between traditional and populist parties and whether leaders of populist parties are characterized by particular traits compared to those of traditional parties.

As Roberts (1995) noted, “unfortunately, few social science concepts can match populism when it comes to nebulous and inconsistent usage; like the proverbial blind man trying to describe an elephant by feeling its individual parts, conceptions of populism are shaped by selective attention to its multiple components, as well as by national or regional particularities. These multiple dimensions have allowed the populist concept to be applied to a wide range of loosely connected empirical phenomena, ranging from economic policies and development phases to political ideologies, movements, parties, governments, and social coalitions” (p. 84).

These considerations are also in line with those of Baggio (2021), who stated that “given this complex variety of phenomena associated with populism, it is not surprising that Isaiah Berlin invented the ‘Cinderella complex’ during the London debate: any definition elaborated by a theory – and therefore that of populism – is comparable to the Cinderella’s shoe: perfect in itself, it cannot find a foot that fits it exactly” (p. 2).

Moreover, Stanley (2008) noted that the difficulty in deciphering a phenomenon such as populism is so apparent because it is based on assumptions of a structural nature: “the plasticity of the concept of ‘the people’ assists the individual populist, for whom it can expand or contract to suit the chosen criteria of inclusion or exclusion. However, the openness of this concept has hampered the development of populism as an ideology in its own right. In order to engage with politics in the concrete, the abstractions of core concepts must be translatable into those peripheral concepts which link ideology to a particular context. The particular vagueness of the people makes it very difficult to do this, impeding the development of an intellectual tradition possessing a fuller range of responses to political questions. The people may be decontested in so many ways that going beyond the ‘who’ of politics to identifying what the people want and in what way they should receive it has not elicited a coherent body of ideas that may be identified with the ideology of populism. Thus, whilst there are certain family resemblances between different instances of populism, no coherent tradition informs them all” (p. 107).

Gerber et al. (2011), in attempting to explain the lack of clarity that characterizes the phenomenon of populism, instead noted that so far “political research has relied exclusively on self-reports of personality” (p. 283), indicating an apparent lack of knowledge material with which to contend.

The distinctive feature of these studies was that they did not focus on the phenomenon of populism in general but attempted to provide an investigative perspective aimed at grasping the personological characteristics of the populist leader. In this regard, the empirical studies that have examined the psychology of the populist leader and have attempted to trace a personality profile have found that, compared to traditional politicians, the populist leader tends to show some personality traits related to the use of more original and spectacular behaviors (Ashton et al., 2007; Reinemann et al., 2016) and a political leadership that not only aims to reduce any kind of cultural distance from ordinary citizens but also strives to show open

hostility and cynicism toward opposing politicians (Cross & Pruyers, 2018; Stockemer, 2017).

For example, Nai and Martinez i Coma (2019) indicate that populist leaders score differently on personality inventories compared to traditional party leaders: their scores are lower on agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness and higher than extroversion and the so-called dark triad, which consists of personality traits related to narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism.

Although a study by Paulhus and Williams (2002) suggested measuring the dark triad traits separately, other studies have opted to group them instead. For example, Lee and Ashton (2005) noted that “psychopathy refers to a pattern of callous, remorseless manipulation and exploitation of others, and has been investigated as a psychological cause of antisocial and criminal behaviors. Narcissism, which has been widely studied as a personality disorder, has been conceptualized as a ‘normal’ personality variable characterized by dominance, exhibitionism, and exploitation as well as feelings of superiority and entitlement. Machiavellianism refers to individual differences in manipulativeness, insincerity, and callousness, and has been widely studied in social psychological investigations involving persuasion, leadership, and ethical behaviors. Although each of these three constructs may have some unique features not shared by the other two, they do appear to share some common elements such as exploitation, manipulativeness, and a grandiose sense of self-importance” (p. 1572).

Blais and Pruyers (2017) also noted that “although psychopathy has traditionally been associated with maladaptive behaviors, there is also evidence that sub-clinical levels of psychopathic traits can be beneficial in the realms of business and politics” (p. 170), suggesting that the electoral victory in the elections of those who present this personality profile is not so surprising because it is as if something other than asserting prosocial attitudes is also required to fill some positions. This is confirmed by the research of Joly et al. (2019), which shows that “*less* agreeable politicians receive more preference votes, have longer political careers, and are more likely to achieve elite status” (p. 12).

Bakker et al. (2016) hypothesized that a low score on the personality trait of agreeableness might be consistent with the antiestablishment message typical of populism and demonstrated a relationship between low agreeableness and voting for populist parties.

Nai and Martinez i Coma (2019) also proposed three key characteristics to describe populist leaders: provocateurs, charismatic leaders, and “drunken dinner guests.” For the authors, “according to what we might call the ‘drunken dinner guest’ narrative, populists take pleasure in displaying ‘bad manners’ by introducing ‘a more negative, hardened tone to the debate’ and displaying overall a ‘low’ style of politics” (p. 1342).

Considering that other research, such as that of Caprara et al. (2003), has shown that voters generally tend to support leaders who have a similar personality profile to themselves and that, as Bobba and Roncarolo (2018) have noted, disparaging populist content may have increased appeal in today’s world; the picture seems worrying. After all, if populist leaders reflect the people, and today’s most successful

leaders exhibit these types of personality traits, in what direction is the society going?

1.2 *The Limits of Empirical Research*

Empirical research that has focused on identifying personality traits of voters and political leaders has yielded various results. For example, Barbaranelli et al. (2007) found that “voters’ personalities, including their traits, values, and moral preferences, may account for significant portions of variance in political judgments, more than commonly studied demographic and structural variables, such as education, gender and age” (p. 1200).

In this context, the results of a study by Fortunato et al. (2018) regarding the 2017 US presidential candidacy showed that voters with a certain constellation of personality traits related to high conscientiousness and extroversion, low openness, low agreeableness, and low neuroticism would contribute to Donald Trump’s victory.

However, it should be noted that empirical research has not always yielded the same results. As Fatke (2019) highlights, it could be argued that empirical findings “fail to document consistent relationships between personality traits and populist attitudes” (p. 141); and as van Holsteyn and Andeweg (2010) also note, “personality traits and party preference may correlate but are not necessarily coinciding” (p. 629).

In this regard, several studies have shown that it is difficult for empirical researchers to make a clear distinction between the different dynamics that distinguish traditional parties from populist parties. For example, as Kedar (2005) indicates, searching for motivational differences between the electorates of traditional and populist parties may yield vague results. Nevertheless, a study by Pruyzers (2021) went in the opposite direction to Nai and Martinez i Coma’s (2019) hypothesis of portraying populists as “drunken dinner guests.” Pruyzers showed that populist attitudes were neither related to low agreeableness nor to the narcissistic trait but instead showed high scores on the honesty-humility trait. In this context, the Author emphasized, “if honesty-humility is positively related to populist attitudes, narcissism should be negatively related and this is indeed what we find” (Pruyzers, 2021, p. 14).

The assessment to which some studies associate populist attitudes with narcissistic behaviors, while others associate them with opposite personality traits associated with honesty-humility and high agreeableness, shows how complicated it is to analyze the phenomenon of populism without considering the possibility that there are different types of populist leaders. However, if the interest is in providing an eidetic account that aims to grasp the fundamental core around which the different typologies of the populist leader revolve, it might also be useful to use further methods of inquiry that have so far received little attention, as denounced by Gerber et al. (2011).

1.3 *Be a Leader and Have Leadership*

What unites the different types of leaders is the need to be socially competent in their context of reference (Olivares et al., 2007). However, it is not the same to explain the phenomenon of leadership and to understand a leader phenomenologically, if only because *being* a leader and *having* a leadership role do not always coincide, and effective leadership can be exercised by individuals who do not hold this role.

In this regard, Giusta (2011) has shown that there are quite a few examples of people who exercise a genuine leadership role even though they do not hold an official position: those who advocate for freedom and dignity in the streets, for example, “exercise a real leadership and sometimes pay with their lives for this desire to become a leader” (p. 91).

Given the divergence between *being* a leader and a *having* leadership role, it is appropriate to try to understand what elements characterize each profile.

Regarding having a leadership role, some Authors such as Burns (1978) have noted that the topic has not been truly clarified or defined despite numerous contributions.

For example, Dubrin (2015) found that “a Google search of articles and books about leadership in organizations indicates 123 million entries. In all those entries, leadership has probably been defined in many ways” (p. 3). This is probably an indication that it is not always possible to get a precise picture of *what* a leader is supposed to do, in part because sometimes it is not enough to give others instructions to get a follow-up, but *how* certain information is given also matters.

To coordinate the meaning of leadership, we can refer to Northouse’s (2016) definition, which states that “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 6). This definition, although minimal, offers at least two clues: (1) it is not necessary to hold an institutional position to exercise leadership; (2) to influence a group of people, it is necessary to work toward achieving a common goal rather than giving specific instructions about *what* to do and *how* to do it.

Further studies (Licciardello, 2015), proposing a fundamental tripartition to illustrate the main models through which it is possible to exercise leadership, have described the main differences that characterize the different styles: *authoritarian* leadership to show those dynamics of command that, compared to others, represents a vertical arrangement to express the relationship between leader and followers, *democratic* leadership in which vertical and horizontal dynamics alternate according to the needs of the moment, and finally *laissez-faire* leadership to describe the situation in which those who hold a leadership role cannot really represent it.

Compared to studies that try to explain what happens in leadership dynamics, Blaug (2016) found that the ability to structure a hierarchical social model of leaders and followers facilitates the information processing process, thus improving the organization of the context. However, the same Author underlined that this hierarchical model can contribute to the occurrence of the so-called pathologies of power

and cognition, which can be observed not only by looking at history with the typical vertical societies associated with the great totalitarianism but also by observing the present. It is possible to observe such pathologies even in the cases where the leaders, who get into trouble with some questions asked in front of the camera, start to lie. According to Blaug, it can be observed even today that what the leader declares clearly acquires the characteristics of a lie to an external eye, but not to him, because the leader, influenced by cognitive distortions, believes in what he says in front of the cameras in such a pathological form that he loses an adequate awareness of the proper distinction between what is realistic and what is not: “leadership and hierarchical social relations are effective ways of coordinating human activity because they simplify and focus organizational information processing”; yet, the Author continued, “it is just this reduction of information and gradual narrowing of awareness that threatens degeneration into the pathologies of power” (Blaug, 2016, p. 76).

The current rise of populist leaders cannot be fully understood without considering such reflections. Upon closer examination, the great success of populist parties today may show that populist leaders are better able to influence the electorate through the exercise of their leadership roles compared to others.

If a populist leader is gaining wide appeal today, it is likely due to at least three factors: (1) today’s society seems to rely less on vertical leadership dynamics compared to the past (Giunta et al., 2018). This would be an advantage for the populist leader, as his behavior alone highlights the flattening of the gap between social classes, thus evoking proximity to an unspecified type of voter; (2) the populist leader, regardless of whether he exhibits what Blaug defines as “pathologies of power and cognition”, seems better able to navigate contemporary society than other political leaders; (3) if it is true, as Northouse (2016) argues, that being a leader requires commitment to achieving a common goal, then the success of populist leaders is obviously huge because their goal is more likely to be shared by voters.

But what is the goal of a populist leader?

1.4 Populist Leadership

Research by Laclau (2005), through the concept of “empty signifier,” explained that the great success of populist leaders in our days is because a series of unmet popular demands have generated a sort of global demand and the success of populism would represent an attempt to respond to this emptiness generated by politics for the multiple needs of citizens.

However, for Abts and Rummens (2007), the theme of emptiness should be understood in a different meaning, that could be the space to construct the essence of democracy. Compared to other regimes, the space for power in a democracy, which configures itself as empty space, would generate openness. According to the same Authors, populist logic, as an “thin-centered ideology concerning the structure of power” (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 408), would tend to circumscribe this openness filling the emptiness through the representation in power of the people,

mistakenly understood as a homogeneous body. As the Authors themselves have indicated, “in what we will call the logic of populism [...] the empty place of power is closed by a substantive image of the people as a homogeneous unity” (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 406).

In reference to research that has highlighted the link between populism and power dynamics, Barr (2009) also noted that populism is “mass movement led by an outsider or maverick seeking to gain or maintain power by using anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitarian linkages” (p. 38).

Although each of these studies has provided plausible explanations for why populist leadership seems to be more successful today than the others, it should be noted that the common thread among these studies is that they all started from a methodology that aims at pursuing a causal approach typical of explanatory methodology. However, this is not the only approach to examine the argument.

1.5 *Explaining Leadership and Understanding a Leader*

Explaining the dynamics of leadership and understanding a leader is a very different process, mainly because the methodology that must be used to capture one phenomenon and the other is different. To *explain* a phenomenon, it is necessary to resort to an explanatory method, that is, a method whose results are the outcome of knowledge obtained through the filter of a causal approach. To *understand* a leader phenomenologically, it is necessary to use a method that requires different premises, because, as Dilthey (2005) stated and one of the founders of phenomenological psychopathology such as Karl Jaspers (1964) indicated, explaining (*Erklären*) and understanding (*Verstehen*) refer to two different methodologies.

The possibility of understanding the leader’s phenomenology requires an approach that attempts to highlight the way of *being-in-the-world* of the leader himself, because understanding aims to perceive the background from which the experiences that constitute the world where the populist leader lives emerge.

Although a certain discrepancy can be observed between the results of empirical research, it seems that the main studies on the populist leader currently favor an “external” psychological viewpoint. It uses a research method that examines the phenomenon through a third-person study.

However, in addition to looking at what emerges when trying to grasp the personality traits of the populist leader, it is equally important to note what emerges when trying to understand a leader without using tools aimed at highlighting a particular trait.

Exploring the phenomenology of the populist leader means using a comprehensive method that requires a first- and second-person approach. Thus, the study of the characteristics of the populist leader is not relegated to preestablished categories and explanatory systems.

The difference, then, is that the third-person approach tends to grasp the characteristics of the phenomena it investigates through a pre-coded rationalist system.

However, understanding the phenomena in the first- and second-person means trying to grasp the characteristics of the phenomenon that emerge from the encounter between the researcher and the subject under study.

2 Method

The data collected by conducting structured interviews improve the replicability of the results but at the same time leave aside several details that could be of similar importance. The fact that different studies obtain consistent or incongruent results on a relative trait (e.g., the scores obtained by populist leaders on the Machiavellian personality trait) demonstrates the possibility of strengthening or weakening a particular initial hypothesis. However, it also reveals that this research method prefers to sacrifice complexity to ensure homogeneity of results (although, given the incongruence of the results reported above, it could honestly be said that this is not always the case either).

The tautological tendency of this epistemological framework highlights that what emerges from the study of a phenomenon is, in any case, the fruit of research that has already operationalized its criteria of investigation. So, anything that does not meet the same criteria automatically remains outside the study of the phenomenon.

The difference between the third-person approach and the first- and second-person approach proposed by phenomenological psychopathology is that, in the latter case, the aim is not limited to proposing investigations that start from a predetermined reference, as in the case of measurement scales. Indeed, the prerogative of the phenomenological method is to unfold as much as possible the *life-world* (*Lebenswelt*) of an individual to bring out its meaningful totality, therefore, considering not only what is contained in standard classifications, but the *lived* world (Dilthey, 1883, 1894), that we can see when we put ourselves on the same side as the individual. As Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) note, “all approaches draw on German philosophy, seek to understand the life world or human experience as it is lived” (p. 19).

Thus, to adhere to this method, it is necessary to propose a survey that aims at grasping the structure of the phenomenon under study. It should ensure that the essential characteristics are captured as they are given and not, for example, based on personality inventories that show the characteristics wanted to be studied.

Adherence to this method is also consistent with all perspectives that show that some aspects, considering their characteristics, can only be grasped from a survey that reveals not what can be operationalized but what concerns an inner movement that describes what is happening “from within,” not denying the need to neutralize the prejudices and admit that it is impossible to fully understand the experience of the other.

This is not the first time that there is a need to go beyond what can be obtained from a third- person interview. For example, in relation to the question of what can

be grasped starting from the triptych of the French Revolution, Giusta (2013) has highlighted the difficulty of operationalizing all three principles of freedom, fraternity, and equality. In this context, the Author has noted that “freedom can be enforced, for example, by making laws to protect people’s freedoms, or to restrict individual freedoms and punish those who violate another’s freedom. Equality as well is enforceable, for instance, by creating equitable opportunities for all and by redistributing resources. But fraternity cannot be imposed from outside. It is a duty that comes from within, in a movement from the inside out. Fraternity is both a condition and a matter of a personal, inner choice” (p. 79). This small example is meant to show that not everything can be measured according to an operational logic that allows to quantify phenomena. Neglecting what is not quantifiable also risks neglecting several resources that, if taken seriously, could make a difference not only to the understanding of the phenomena themselves but also to the impact they might produce: consider only what the abandonment of the principle of fraternity has led to in modern and contemporary political societies (Baggio, 2007).

Using the phenomenological method to study the elements that affect the populist leader allows not to neglect the internal dynamics that characterize him. This requires adherence to a rigorous criterion of investigation that starts from an exercise of suspension of judgment (*epochè*).

The phenomenological method aims to grasp the intentionality of the populist leader’s consciousness, and to do so, it needs to explore some of the essential structures that distinguish him as a human being. These structures, referred to in phenomenological language as *existentials* or *existentials a priori* (Heidegger, 2015; Stanghellini & Mancini, 2018), constitute the condition for the possibility of any experience, and in this study, they refer to how the populist leader lives his own time, space, body, and relation to the others (*Mit-welt*).

The method proposed by phenomenological psychopathology allows us to understand the way of *being-in-the-world* of another (be it a populist leader or any human being), because instead of providing explanations that can be obtained from an investigation in the third person, it helps to put the individual in the position of someone who lives in a particular situation; therefore, it proposes an investigation in the first and second person. Moreover, the same method makes it possible to understand the peculiarities of those who play the same role (populist leader) or those who have a certain disorder from an eidetic point of view. For example, by analyzing the *life-world* of melancholics, it is possible to grasp the essential characteristics of melancholy. In this case, through the deepening of the *existentials*, it is found that in the melancholic world, an individual tends to live his temporality through a painful retrospection (i.e., present and future are dominated by past experiences); from a spatial point of view, witnessing a coarctation (things are experienced as inaccessible), regarding corporeality, there is a crisis in the “lifting” of the body; likewise, from the point of view of alterity, it is possible to observe a loss of emotional resonance (Stanghellini & Mancini, 2018).

These coordinates aim to map the *life-world* of the melancholic, but it is one thing to see the map and another to see the specific itinerary that an individual takes. An eidetic account will not – and cannot – substitute for the subjectification of the specific melancholic experience of an individual. Nevertheless, it provides coordinates.

In this context, an attempt is made to provide an eidetic account of the populist leader's way of *being-in-the-world*, recognizing that this cannot be a “tailor-made” description for every populist leader, but only a starting point to better grasp the heterogeneity of each populist leader.

The proposed method, therefore, aims not to capture the inevitable subjectivities that characterize each populist leader but to identify at least some of the basic structures that characterize the phenomenology of the populist leader. Nevertheless, the approach starts from a first- and second-person perspective, because the data obtained through this method start from the analysis of experience.

As Souba (2014) indicates, “a phenomenological inquiry into leadership does not study the properties and attributes of leaders, but rather the fundamental structures of human ‘being’ that make it possible to be a leader in the first place” (p. 78).

2.1 *Epochè*

Creating *epochè* in this case means making a great effort to neutralize one's biases against all the knowledge material that can be obtained from observing populist leaders. This approach allows to leave the beliefs and experimental system outside to open up to the totality of the phenomenon. Once it is managed to get on the side of the populist leader, the method requires to extract the characteristics that can clarify and reconstruct the *lived* experience of the leader himself, that is, the way he sees the world. The other studies that have proposed a survey of the leader's personality traits have not been able to use subjects, samples, or direct interviews because it is apparently not possible to meet political leaders, administered them questionnaires, or other tools. Most of the research on leaders has, therefore, focused on administering questionnaires to the general population (usually experts), who have had to evaluate (primarily on personality inventories) the characteristics that they believe the leaders had. However, this study does not select experts to fill out inventories to obtain results. It is a type of study that seeks to provide findings that are not tied to the predetermined questions of the questionnaires.

The way to obtain the leader's experience starting from the application of the *epochè* may consist in studying the literature on the subject, observing the attitude of populist leaders through possible means (TV, social) and studying the narrative they propose (interviews, comments).

2.2 *Intentionality of Consciousness*

In the phenomenological perspective, the intentionality of consciousness expresses the fact that consciousness is always consciousness of something (Husserl, 1976). Thus, to investigate this relation, it is necessary to recognize the directionality of the mind to its objects (Crane, 2001), whether they are given in external or internal space. The intentionality of consciousness does not concern the intentions of a subject. It concerns the fact that, for constitutive reasons, the act of consciousness (*noesi*) has a way of expressing itself only to the extent that it goes beyond consciousness itself, by finding its own sense in relation to another object (*noema*). As Sheehan (2014) states, “noema is the observable phenomenon—and is texturally rich. Noesis is the internal structure/structuring that drives interpretation of the noema—the noetic framework produces noematic meaning” (p. 13).

2.3 *The Existentials*

Compared to other methods, the study of *existentials* does not require investigations that aim to capture properties, performances, or characteristics of a particular object of study. *Existentials* concern the existential structure of human beings. They aim to grasp a *Gestalt* that implies the meaning of all voluntary and involuntary experiences, regardless of a particular object.

This study does so by exploring some of the *existentials*:

- *Lived time*: far from coinciding with the meaning of ordinary time marked by the hands of the clock (referring to objective time), *lived time* concerns the subjective temporal consciousness with which everyone lives their time (Kupke, 2005). Through the functions of *retentio*, *praesentatio*, and *protentio* (Husserl, 2012), the individual articulates his conditions of possibility in an implicit way (pre-phenomenal temporality), even before experiencing his state associated with his becoming (phenomenal experience). The study of *lived time*, among the various phenomena it examines, is also the one that allows us to question the weight that the past exerts on an individual’s present and future choices and on the relationship that characterizes a present state for future.
- *Lived space*: the spatial dimension is often associated with the temporal and bodily dimension, to the extent that the hendiadys of space-time is frequently used, and the body is considered as the epicenter of subjective space. As for the time, a preliminary clarification of the subtypes constituting space must be made. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty (2014) distinguishes physical and geometric space from *lived space*, and the latter refers to the subjectivity of space/experience. Associated with the spatial dimension, there are qualities related to proximity/distance, vastness/narrowness, etc. (Fuchs, 2013). Moreover, an individual also “inhabits” space (Callieri & Maldonato, 2008) based on his own needs, emotions,

and desires that guide him to position himself in his context according to what Jaspers would define as his *outlook* (Jaspers & Loriga, 1950).

- *Lived* body: in this case, the *lived* body (*Leib*) is distinct from the organically understood body (*Körper*). This distinction is useful to denote the difference between the phenomenological approach and the organicistic approach, which studies the body from a third-person perspective. The study of the body understood as *Leib*, among other characteristics, has the property of revealing, even in an implicit (precognitive) form, what precedes the explicit (cognitive) act of consciousness. Not all acts of consciousness are directed toward a specific intentional object, yet they preserve intentionality in the form of openness. An example of this is the study of moods, which, although not directed toward a specific intentional object, still reveal how an individual intends toward objects. Investigating the possible opening/closing to the things of the world thus requires exploring the precognitive and cognitive levels of the *lived* body.
- Alterity: based on the assumption that human being, understood by Heidegger as *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 2015), is by nature constitutive a *being-with* (Schatzki, 2005) endowed with intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty, 2014), alterity explores the relations that characterize intersubjectivity (*Mit-welt*). The way the individual relates to the others, regardless of the being with which he relates, can take a personal form through the “I-You” relationship or an impersonal form through an “I-It” relationship (Stanghellini & Mancini, 2018). As Kraus (1996) observed, when an ethical or social role is attributed to the other, there is a tendency to stabilize a fixed relationship pattern over time, with the risk of using mostly stereotypical representations.

Using the research method proposed by phenomenological psychopathology, the present study aims to the following:

1. Grasp the intentionality of consciousness that characterizes those who hold leadership positions in populist parties.
2. Explore the *existentials* of populist leaders.

3 Results

As shown in Fig. 14.1, when compared to the way the populist leader scans his *lived* time, a picture emerges in which the weight of past political plans does not seem to weigh appropriately on future political plans. These political projects, freed from responsibility for past situations, are therefore configured as an opportunity to upset the reality, but without the necessary awareness of progressive and delayed change.

To propose a representative example of the way of *being-in-the-world* of the populist leader, we could examine some statements of Beppe Grillo as an emblematic figure in the context of populism.

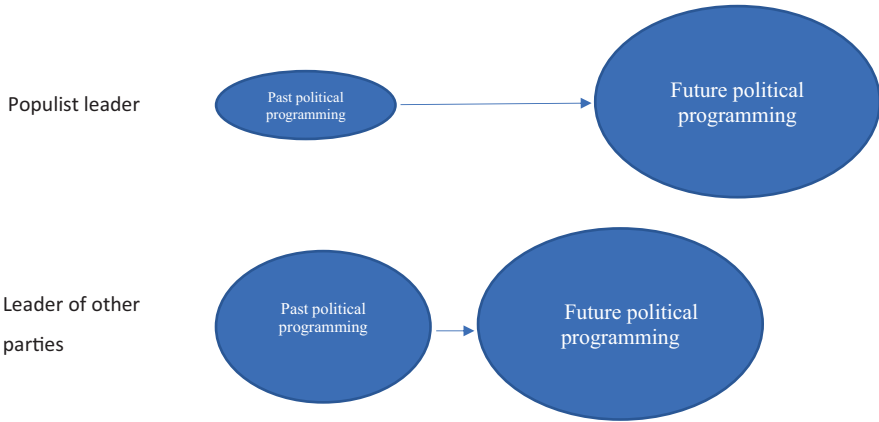


Fig. 14.1 Future political programming based on past ones

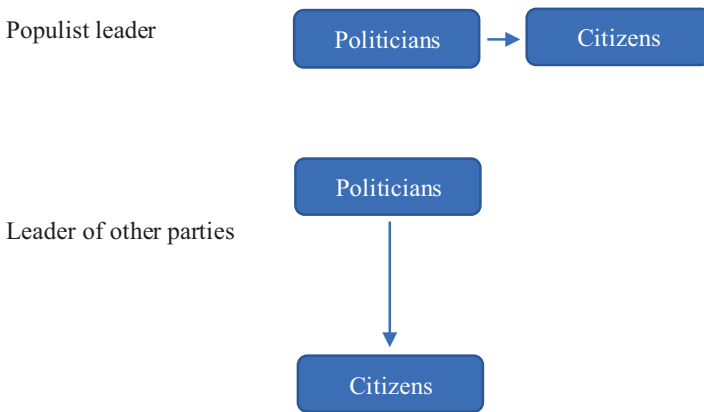


Fig. 14.2 Distance between political representation and citizens

In examining the temporal dimension experienced by the leader of the Five Star Movement, we can point to several statements (La7 Attualità, 2014; M5sParlamento, 2016) that reveal a certain “manic” peculiarity, among which are the following:

- “We no longer have time, there is no more time.”
- “We must move forward, focus on the future.”
- “This conception of Europe is over, we want another.”
- “In the past there was no such Movement.”
- “Everything has to be redesigned.”
- “I think this inflation phobia is an economic concept from 30 years ago.”
- “We have revolutionized the parliament.”

Figure 14.2, on the other hand, emphasizes the different spatial modality that the populist leader experiences about his electorate and common citizenship. The prerogative of the populist leader is that of bridging the gap between the political class

and the citizen, and this approach is highlighted every time the populist leader can propose himself as a political representative.

An example is the following statements addressed to citizens (La7 Attualità, 2014; M5sParlamento, 2016):

- “I don’t want money, but I want your love.”
- “I want you to hug me for all we have done.”
- “For the first time they feel represented by citizens like them.”
- “They should hug us, why don’t you hug us on the streets? Don’t vote for us but at least embrace us. Don’t vote for us, we don’t want the vote, we want affection and love.”

In Fig. 14.3, the *lived* body of the populist leader seems to be characterized by a dysphoric mood in which states of tension, irritability, and nervousness predominate. Even the emotional image is characterized mainly by feelings of anger and is usually directed at those (élite, opposition) who are considered to be the creators of the perceived malaise.

Some examples of this are the following statements (La7 Attualità, 2014; M5sParlamento, 2016):

Referring to the élite and the opposition: “Four crooks who think and are delirious like being mentally ill.”

- “I find myself being a leader, a leader of a movement, although I have always detested leaders, bosses, movements, parties.”

Compared to the municipal elections in Rome on June 5, 2016:

- “If Raggi [candidate of the Five Star Movement] does not win, I will set myself on fire in the square.”
- “Today the reality is reversed, you have to get your legs up and your head down, and see that when you are criticized by all the media, then you are right.”
- “This is an inverted world upside down.”

Finally, Fig. 14.4 describes the different ways in which the populist leader experiences alterity based on his social role. To the populist leader, the ordinary citizen appears closer than someone assumed to belong to an élite that is far from the interests of the people. In the narrative of the populist leader, no hierarchical model emerges in which the political representation that has the task of guiding the people is placed at the top of the pyramid.

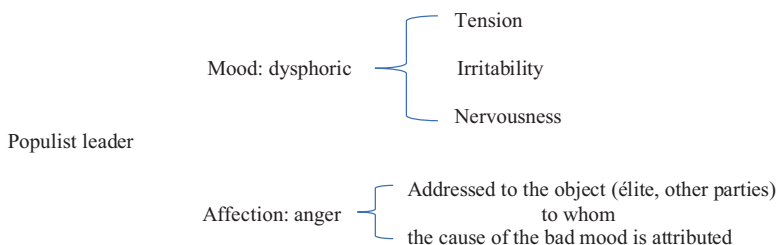


Fig. 14.3 Emotional tone of the populist leader

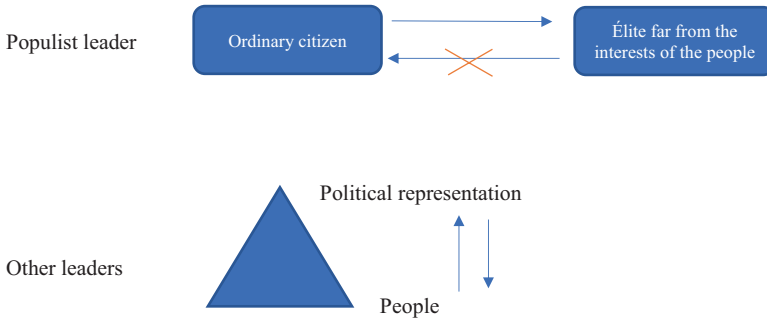


Fig. 14.4 Alterity observed by leaders through circumscription to the social role held

The model that emerges from the populist leader’s narrative appears horizontal: paradoxically, the ordinary citizen and the *élite* are seen as having equal rights and duties. However, this contiguity is interrupted and even split because the *élite* is believed to be incapable of fulfilling the interests of the citizens.

An example of this are statements like the following (La7 *Attualità*, 2014; M5sParlamento, 2016):

“We are the only force out the chorus, they are on the verge of extinction, the parties are already extinct.”

“It’s not the fault of a crook, it’s a system.”

“How do you think you like a crook?”

“The true instincts of the parties are these: they lie, always.”

“The news of this country should be put on trial.”

About the opposition: “they go on television, say one thing, and then they do something else.”

“Parliament, without telling anyone, has signed treaties that will strangle us for 20 years.”

“World Confindustria does not like that a trade unionist is president of Brazil, it will never like it. They will never like that a peasant goes to Bolivia to become president of the Republic, or that a partisan becomes president of the Republic, they do not accept these things.”

4 Discussions

The results of the present study show the phenomenological-existential profile of the populist leader. It turned out that the populist leader seems to live in a “manic” dimension which is characterized by the fact that it becomes impossible to proceed in small steps. A slow but effective maturation gives way to a rush to reach a new Enlightenment soon. In this context, Young-Bruehl (1996), looking at the emotional impact of populist rhetoric, has noted that the main core revolves around the promise of reaching a situation where fears and anxieties are soon replaced by a state of well-being and relief. The past is therefore experienced by the populist leader as something to get rid of as soon as possible, because the planning to which he aspires

has something different from any other previous project. So, for the populist leader, the best should be done to be freed from what has been, even at the cost of offering simple solutions to complex problems. However, as in psychopathology, there is a risk that a temporal dimension that does not grant the necessary measure to promote a slow but constant and mature change is planned on a not very solid basis. Allowing the legacy of the past to come alive in the present is one way of placing future projects on a stable ground, which allows for a gradual improvement in current conditions. However, when the link with the temporal dimension of the past breaks down, what concerns planning for the future naturally runs the risk of proving ephemeral. An effective project needs a present that develops in the future on the basis of the past; otherwise, it risks to find the simple equivalent in a dream or utopian dimension. According to several historians (Assmann, 2002; Geary, 2009; Remotti, 2012), many leaders have adopted a mechanism to distort the past to legitimize their political program. However, one difference between this type of leader and populist leaders is that while classically the discourse has been used to legitimize the proper ideology at the expense of another, the populist leader appears to delegitimize the entire past, regardless of the ideology of reference, to package the entire past political experience through the representation of a single grand élite that is far from the interests of the people.

Further research has identified the “manic” vision of the populist leader and explains this aspect precisely in terms of the contrast between ingroup and outgroup. In this regard, Bobba (2019) stated that “populism relies on a ‘Manichean outlook’ that combines the positive valorisation of the people with the denigration of their enemies, namely the elites and the ‘others’ supposed to be neither homogeneous nor virtuous” (p. 3). Hawkins (2009), who introduced “populism as a Manichaeian discourse that identifies Good with a unified will of the people and Evil with a conspiring elite” (p. 1042), agrees. Schumacher and Rooduijn (2013) also highlighted the character of immediacy, noting that “populists loathe elites and want the relationship between the state and its citizens to be as unmediated as possible” (p. 125).

Space, on the other hand, is experienced by the populist leader as reducing the distance between the world of politics and that of the ordinary citizen. In this context, a study by Taggart and Parkin (2000) sheds light on why a populist leadership style mostly focuses on proposing referendums and popular initiatives. The study also highlights that most populist leaders want to use direct democracy initiatives to reduce the distance between the state and the ordinary citizen and build a strong bond with the latter.

It could be argued that the populist leader “invades” the space to try to get closer to the ordinary citizen at any cost. Populist rhetoric is characterized in this respect using simple language that is as close as possible to average intelligibility. Moreover, the use of traditional mass media makes a large distance between political representation and the citizen, which is why the populist leader prefers the use of social media, which, more than any other technological instrument, allows distances to be overcome. As Ernst et al. (2019) also argue, “Facebook and Twitter are more susceptible to the use of populism-related communication than talk shows because

social media makes it easier for politicians to bypass the traditional media, to tailor their messages to their target groups, and to present themselves as close to the people” (p. 10).

Spatial realities, then, highlight the essentially horizontal nature of the relationship between the populist leader and the electorate.

Not all research, however, seems to be oriented in this sense. Ostiguy (2009), for example, comparing populism to other forms of political action, has proposed it not as a horizontal dynamic but as a low apex in terms of vertical alignment. Indeed, the Author himself has stated that “the [...] definition of the low in politic constitutes a particularly solid, intuitive, minimal, and—something now rare—not overly polemical definition of populism. The low is [...] an essential and noncontroversial defining feature of populism” (p. 23). In this study, however, it makes more sense to emphasize the horizontal aspect of populist dynamics, since referencing a vertical perspective again risks continuing to conceptualize this phenomenon in terms of parameters that may be better suited to describing other types of political experiences. Also because if populism is seen as a low peak and the role of political representatives is placed at the top, where would all the populist leaders who have won elections and who find themselves in a role at the top of institutions be placed?

Previous regimes seemed to shape society more from a vertical perspective. In the past, the distance between the ordinary citizen and the political representative was much more noticed. Moreover, the vertical relationship was also evident in the same behavior of citizens and political leaders. In this context, Giunta et al. (2018) noted that “previously there existed totalitarian regimes, which managed to establish themselves as a reaction in the wake of an anxiety-provoking and destabilizing socioeconomic crisis. The people would call forth a leader who promised a rapid, authoritarian solution to the said crisis. The foundation on which the masses are based in a totalitarian regime is the identification of said masses with their leader” (p. 33). At present, it is more appropriate to believe that the identification of the electorate with his leader is taking place in any case but through a different path that does not recall a vertical perspective. It seems to rely on a horizontal rapprochement between leader and citizen.

Compared to the characteristics of the *lived* body by the populist leader, a picture emerges in which a constant state of tension can be noticed. The populist leader’s “nerves on the edge” underlie a dysphoric mood and feelings of anger and aggression. As Diehl (2017) has indicated, the body is one of the most important instruments political leaders have to communicate with their electorates. The facial expressions, gestures, and manner of speaking of the populist leader allow for an intense identification process between him and the ordinary citizen. The populist leader belongs to the people and is reflected in them, and the citizen finds it easier to be reflected in the populist leader precisely because the way he does things seems to be that of an ordinary person.

Moreover, it could hypothesize that the choice of a leader today, more than yesterday, reflects not so much adherence to a particular ideology aimed at remedying a particular crisis. It rather reflects the need to feel heard and to give space to repressed emotions that find a way to express themselves in the reflection with the

leader. The populist leader, perhaps more than the others, succeeds in getting closer to the ordinary citizen and lending his ear to meet his needs. This consideration could also lead to the assumption that the choice of the political leader depends, at least for the moment, more on the emotional than on the cognitive sphere. To confirm this, just consider that the juxtaposition of protest votes and votes for populist parties could be read because of the lack of listening between citizens and political representatives in the past.

Some studies have also shown that one of the main tasks of the populist leader is to find a constant balance between ordinary and extraordinary approaches. In this regard, Moffitt (2016) noted that the bad manners of populist leaders refer both to the need to imitate the ordinariness of the ordinary citizen and to disturb mainstream politics. Such behavior, thus, favors the gathering of protest votes that have the goal of shaking the ruling class.

Finally, the observation that examined the impersonal aspect of alterity highlighted that the populist leader recognizes people as his only ally. Based on this, it can be observed that populist leaders feel they share the same values as the ordinary citizen. These values find their roots not in the great past ideologies but in the desire to address problems in a new, more direct way, without intermediaries, emphasizing the principle of popular sovereignty. As several studies have already shown, alterity is divided by the populist leader into two subgroups, one of which idealizes the profile of the ordinary citizen and the other denigrates all those who belong to an élite that is far from protecting the interests of the people. Also, the language of the populist leader is liable to divide the population into two opposing parts: sometimes the people are opposed to the élite, and sometimes, as observed by Macaulay (2019), the “silent majority” at “one-percent,” and sometimes other labels are used. What remains, as indicated by Kinnvall (2018), is the adherence to the schema of opposition.

Such results help to grasp the fundamental structures within which populist leaders operate. However, it is also good not to neglect those studies that highlight the fact that populist parties and their leaders often begin to adopt different behaviors after achieving electoral success. For example, the study by Rooduijn et al. (2014) showed that “populist parties themselves are not immune to their own electoral success. Contrary to mainstream parties, they do adjust their political programmes once they have experienced electoral growth. If populist parties have gained seats during previous elections, a populist party tones down its populism, probably to become an acceptable coalition partner to mainstream parties” (p. 571).

So, do the results of this article so far refer only to the attitudes that populist leaders show to persuade their electorates? The question seems legitimate because militants of populist movements themselves sometimes recognize a change after electoral success. An example of this is the declarations of Giulia Grillo, who was the leader of the Five Star Movement’s parliamentary group in the Chamber of Deputies at the beginning of legislative period XVIII, before her appointment as minister: “we started as an anti-system force and then governed with the right, with the left and with the center” (De Cicco, 2022).

5 Limits and Conclusions

In the present study, an attempt has been made to bring out the essential characteristics of the populist leader by means of the method proposed by phenomenological psychopathology. In particular, an attempt has been made to grasp the eidetic content that could unify the characteristics of the different populist leaders, which necessarily differ from each other.

The exploration of the basic structures has made it possible to derive the phenomenologically essential traits that characterize the populist leader, trying not to make value judgments by applying the *epochè*. However, as Habermas (1986) noted, one of the inherent limitations of the descriptive process is that an observer will never be able to adopt a completely objective and impartial point of view.

This study has its origins in a historical and cultural background linked to Italian nationality. In Italy, the phenomenon of populism has shown all its importance since the emergence of the Five Star Movement. Considering a series of initiatives promoted by the Five Star Movement since its foundation, in addition to the above statements, it is possible to derive other moments that reveal the phenomenologically essential traits to outline the profile of the populist leader:

- *Temporality*: on October 10, 2012, the campaign for the regional elections in Sicily begins for the Five Star Movement with the swimming crossing of the Strait of Messina by Grillo himself. This initiative manifests the “manic” tendency that characterizes the populist leader, as it shows that difficult situations are experienced with a sense of *proximity* and *usability*. Every initiative seems to be suitable for the realization of the own magnificent project.
- *Spatiality*: Grillo’s blog and the website of the Five Star Movement constitute the space in which all political initiatives, aimed at promoting forms of direct rather than representative democracy, are proposed.
- *Corporeality*: on September 8, 2007, Grillo called for a day of public mobilization, calling it “V Day,” where “V” stood for the Italian expression “vaffanculo” (fuck you) directed at Italian politicians. This denomination recalls the way in which the populist leader expressed himself through a dysphoric mood full of feelings of anger and aggression.
- *Alterity*: following the guidelines of the Statute, the Italian parliamentarians of the Five Star Movement are obliged to deny the honorary title, opting for the term “citizen,” which once again marks the difference between the people and the élite.

These and other initiatives of the Five Star Movement are just examples that illustrate the populist leader’s way of *being-in-the-world*.

Beyond the specific cultural context of belonging, it is believed that the essential structure of the populist leader, which emerges from the comprehensive method of phenomenological psychopathology, can transcend national boundaries and gain its value for the experiences related to populist leaders of other countries. To grasp the essential structure of phenomena means intercepting the few but fundamental nuclei

that allow to realize a similarity of experience. However, further studies could extend the phenomenological observation of the populist leader and enrich the picture of knowledge, especially where they were conceived starting from cultural horizons different from the Italian one.

Finally, it is important to underline that the possibility of grasping the basic structures of the leader stimulates everyone to review his way of *being-in-the-world*. A leader has the possibility of expressing himself starting from a relational background that connects him to other individuals (Souba, 2014). The exploration of *existentials* has shown that even in the case of populist leaders, the exercise of leadership is a way of *being-in-the-world*, and this suggests that everyone, as a *being-in-the-world*, can become a leader (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The same essential structures that make an individual a leader are the same structures that everyone uses to design himself in his own world. Embracing this awareness can encourage everyone to rediscover the human assets that phenomenologically predispose him to become a leader.

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Index

A

- Accountability, 1–6, 21, 55–69, 77, 78, 93, 115–139, 143, 168, 171–174, 176, 177, 179, 181, 182, 184, 191–206, 235–252, 270, 276, 288
- Accountancy profession, 145
- Accounting, 2–5, 55–69, 129, 132, 141–159, 168, 173, 174, 176–179, 181–184, 243, 245, 248
- Accounting for the other, 1
- Accounting harmonization, 141–159, 168, 173, 174
- Accounting systems, 3, 4, 141–159, 176, 178, 179, 184
- Action, 1, 4, 5, 17, 18, 21, 23, 27, 28, 44, 47–49, 57–59, 61, 62, 67, 69, 80, 83–88, 95, 96, 98, 103, 109, 117–121, 123, 125, 129, 130, 137, 138, 167–173, 176, 178–184, 193, 198, 203, 206, 210–213, 218, 221, 222, 224, 225, 227, 231, 235, 241–243, 245–249, 252, 261, 262, 265–267, 269, 270, 273–276, 282, 296, 312
- Administration, 108, 168, 171–173, 176–180, 269
- Albania, 3, 142, 143, 145–146
- Alterity, 304, 307, 309, 310, 313, 314
- Antagonistic groups, 2, 38, 295, 296
- Anthropology of populism, 235–252
- Anti-establishment, 21, 237, 298, 302
- Anti-intellectualism, 18–21, 23, 24, 28
- Appadurai, A., 236, 239, 240, 246, 247, 250
- Arguments, 18, 36, 38, 42, 81, 117–120, 124, 204, 242, 263, 302

- Authoritarianism, 35–38, 197, 199, 283, 285–289
- Authority, 5, 49, 50, 62, 84, 103, 106, 108, 134, 258, 260, 262–266, 275, 285

B

- Being-in-the-world*, 302, 304, 305, 307, 314, 315
- Belonging, 4, 6, 13, 33, 34, 43, 49, 75, 88, 121, 196, 210–212, 218, 222, 223, 225–231, 238, 239, 264, 284, 289, 314
- Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), 146
- Bulgaria, 3, 142, 143, 147–148, 158, 259, 264
- Bundle of rights, 99, 101, 104
- Business, 1–3, 66, 67, 75–88, 240, 270, 298
- Business behavior, 86–88
- Business ethics, 2, 75–88
- Businesses, 37, 151, 152, 155, 156, 204

C

- Choice, 2, 5, 13, 30, 39, 49, 57, 61, 65, 76, 83, 85, 86, 95, 104, 110, 115, 117, 118, 123, 125–127, 130, 141, 144, 145, 159, 168, 173–176, 178, 179, 181, 183, 184, 192, 200–202, 205, 226, 270, 273, 274, 287, 291, 304, 306, 312, 313
- Citizens, 1–3, 5, 6, 13, 22, 25, 30, 35, 43, 48, 59, 60, 63, 64, 67, 68, 115–139, 167, 168, 170, 171, 173–184, 193, 197, 199–205, 231, 238, 240, 243, 259, 261, 263, 266, 267, 269–271, 273–277, 297, 301, 308–314

- City, 33, 37, 47, 63, 103, 135, 202, 205, 206, 290
- Civil law, 94–101, 103
- Civil society, 1–3, 42–50, 80, 85, 86, 142, 182, 201, 202, 204, 262
- Co-governance, 4, 191–206
- Collective leadership, 261, 265, 266, 269
- Colonial influence, 145
- Common, 3–5, 14, 16, 18, 19, 26, 40, 41, 43, 45, 56, 66, 76, 82, 85, 86, 88, 93, 94, 97–107, 109, 110, 115, 118, 120–123, 125, 127, 128, 132, 134, 142, 153, 183, 194, 197, 205, 210–212, 215–219, 221, 223, 225, 227, 230, 237, 240, 246, 248, 250, 258, 259, 263–267, 273, 274, 276, 282, 283, 295, 298, 300–302, 308
- Common good, 5, 75, 101–103, 106, 107, 109, 110, 205, 282
- Common law, 94, 97–101, 103, 104
- Communication, 4, 62, 67, 76, 117, 121, 126–128, 131, 134, 136, 158, 159, 168–171, 173–178, 180–184, 193, 195, 203, 204, 231, 237, 242, 243, 249, 263, 264, 289–292, 311
- Communities, 2–6, 23, 26, 45–47, 49, 50, 56, 64, 86, 87, 93, 96, 100–111, 134–136, 143, 151, 158, 168–176, 178, 180–183, 201, 204–206, 209–231, 237, 238, 244, 246, 247, 249, 250, 264, 266, 270, 291
- Competitive interests, 66
- Comprehensive method, 302, 314
- Conceptual stretching, 2, 32–33, 35
- Conspiracy mania, 15
- Consensus, 43, 57, 60, 63, 67, 68, 79, 80, 87, 88, 119, 121, 122, 129, 181, 182, 195, 200, 203, 238, 290, 291
- Constitutional language, 23, 44
- Cooperation, 3, 25–28, 66, 83, 87, 100, 102, 103, 106, 108, 109, 117, 118, 128, 129, 224
- Crisis of political representation, 238
- Cultural apocalypse, 241
- Cultural context, 148, 199, 314
- Customary ownership, 103, 107
- D**
- Decision making, 4, 30, 32, 67, 68, 115–117, 122, 123, 137, 139, 196, 203–206, 239, 243, 260, 261
- Decision-making processes, 30, 32, 86, 130, 239, 243, 289
- Deductive approaches, 144
- Deliberation, 3, 4, 115–130, 133, 136–139, 191–206
- Demagogy, 31, 45, 288
- Democracy, 2–5, 16, 18, 21, 25, 28–31, 35, 36, 38, 41, 42, 45, 50, 56, 57, 59–61, 64, 65, 68, 75–89, 104, 115, 130, 143, 147, 167, 169, 170, 172, 183, 191–206, 231, 237–239, 243, 244, 248, 261, 263, 264, 266, 267, 269–271, 275, 277, 286, 290, 301, 314
- Democracy of the public, 193
- Democratic economy, 75, 76, 87, 170, 182
- Design, 56, 116, 118, 122, 125, 131, 135, 138, 242, 246, 315
- Dialectical interchange, 178
- Dialogue, 2, 33, 56, 59, 60, 65, 67, 68, 122, 131, 134, 136, 170, 176–178, 181, 182, 201–204, 206, 242, 263, 277, 284
- Direct democracy, 169, 183, 203, 238, 244, 271, 311
- Discussion, 29, 37, 60, 76, 78, 81–86, 88, 93, 101, 115–121, 124–129, 134, 137, 139, 142, 157–159, 175, 178, 219, 287, 310
- Diversity, 5, 21, 122, 127, 129, 182, 240, 242, 284, 285, 291
- E**
- Economic power, 13, 14, 80, 84, 88
- Elected representatives, 201, 267–273, 275–277
- Elections, 11, 21, 22, 38, 59, 79, 130, 195, 239, 243, 270, 271, 298, 309, 312–314
- Élite*, 296, 298, 309–311, 313, 314
- Emancipatory change, 2, 64
- Embedded liberalism, 3, 76, 79, 88
- Embeddedness, 3, 76, 79, 80, 82, 86, 88
- Emerging economies, 141, 155
- Emotions, 4, 5, 210, 215, 217, 225, 229, 263, 281, 286, 288–290, 306, 312
- Epochè, 304, 305, 314
- Ethical firm system theory, 66
- Evaluation, 2, 40, 62, 67, 85, 116, 130, 169, 173–175, 177, 179, 180, 182–184, 192, 196

- Existential, 289, 291, 304, 306, 307, 315
- Expectations, 62, 81, 120, 130, 138, 170, 172–174, 178, 179, 240, 288
- Experience, 11, 16, 17, 20, 25, 26, 34, 44, 47–50, 118, 123, 124, 131, 134, 136, 138, 143, 184, 202, 205, 210, 212–227, 235, 238, 240, 241, 244, 245, 247, 248, 250–252, 261, 285, 287, 289, 302–306, 308, 309, 311, 312, 314, 315
- Experience-distant accountability, 245, 251
- Experience-near accountability, 244–246, 251, 252
- Explanatory method, 302
- F**
- Factual truths, 42–45, 50
- Family resemblances, 40, 41, 297
- Farmer alliance, 17, 21
- Forms of accountability, 235, 244, 247, 248, 251, 252
- Fraternity, 47, 48, 57, 60, 69, 93, 95, 107, 109, 110, 304
- French civil code, 95
- French revolution, 37, 60, 69, 95, 246, 304
- G**
- German civil code, 95
- Globalization, 77, 80, 150, 158, 236, 240, 241
- Governance, 1, 5, 55, 62, 63, 69, 80, 82, 84–88, 106, 107, 172, 195, 201, 205, 231, 244, 245, 251, 252, 296
- Government, 1, 5, 9, 11, 14, 18, 19, 30, 36, 49, 57, 60, 62–64, 67, 68, 77, 78, 80, 82–85, 100, 101, 106, 130, 132, 135, 151, 167, 169–171, 177, 179–181, 193–195, 197–199, 201, 202, 204–205, 243, 244, 248, 250, 257–259, 261–263, 267, 269, 270, 273–276, 286, 295, 297
- Government power, 286
- H**
- Harmonization, 3, 141–159, 168, 173, 174
- Hegemony, 146, 152
- Humanistic management, 81
- I**
- Identity, 2, 5, 13, 17, 22, 23, 25, 43, 46, 64, 110, 118, 133, 181, 183, 203, 205, 210, 225, 227, 230, 231, 236, 238, 241, 250, 271, 281–286, 289, 291
- Ideology, 4, 10, 12–15, 18, 22, 23, 38–40, 42, 78, 85, 143, 169, 241, 244, 251, 258, 266, 295–297, 301, 311–313
- Imagination, 99, 236, 238, 246, 247, 252
- Incentive, 83, 117, 121, 127, 128, 275
- Inclusion, 3, 28, 40, 117, 119, 134, 137, 178, 182, 297
- Index of democracy, 198
- Indigenous ownership, 106–108
- Indigenous rights, 107
- Individuals, 4, 5, 46, 48, 57, 61, 62, 64, 65, 67, 78, 81–84, 88, 94–96, 99, 101, 104–107, 110, 111, 117, 123, 125, 128, 155, 159, 169, 171–173, 180, 194, 200, 206, 209–218, 220–222, 224, 226–231, 235, 237, 246, 248, 249, 257, 258, 261, 262, 265, 266, 281–284, 286–291, 297, 298, 300, 303–307, 315
- Inductive approaches, 144
- Inequality, 2, 17, 75, 77–79, 81, 89, 110, 122, 193, 196, 203, 205, 285–287
- Influence, 5, 11, 24, 36, 49, 76, 81, 83–88, 94, 97, 98, 124, 128, 129, 138, 144, 145, 147, 149, 159, 173, 193, 196, 210, 220, 221, 223, 224, 227, 229, 245, 246, 252, 262, 264–274, 276, 277, 286, 290, 300, 301
- Information, 3, 25, 55, 56, 58–61, 65, 68, 103, 106, 115, 116, 118, 119, 123, 125–132, 134, 136–139, 147, 149, 171, 173, 174, 176–179, 181, 183, 184, 196, 200, 201, 203, 204, 229, 236, 270, 275, 288, 289, 291, 300, 301
- Insecurity, 78, 205, 239, 240, 285, 290, 291
- Institutions, 3, 21, 35, 43, 56, 59, 76–78, 80–82, 84, 88, 98, 99, 104, 106, 118, 122, 128, 133, 143, 146, 150, 151, 155, 156, 167–174, 178, 180–184, 194, 200–202, 204, 205, 212, 219, 238, 250, 258, 261, 262, 264, 273–275, 312
- Intentionality of consciousness, 306, 307
- Interdisciplinary approach, 56
- Intermediate bodies, 3, 76, 77, 81, 82, 200, 231
- International economic policy, 3, 75, 76, 80
- Interpretative analysis, 175
- J**
- Judgement, 16, 17, 125

K

Knowledge, 14, 20, 27, 34, 41, 42, 57, 65,
102, 103, 118, 121, 123, 126, 128,
134, 136, 137, 174, 180, 184, 196,
210, 218, 220, 229, 242, 245, 248,
264, 270, 297, 302, 305, 315

Kosovo, 3, 142, 150–151

L

Leaders, 1, 2, 6, 11, 17, 31, 39, 45, 107, 154,
169, 170, 184, 195, 202, 205, 215,
224, 225, 235, 236, 241, 242, 247,
250, 257–266, 269, 271, 273, 276,
277, 281, 286, 288–290, 296–302,
305, 308–313, 315

Leadership, 4, 5, 49, 63, 83, 153, 169, 192,
194, 195, 203, 257–277, 296–298,
300–302, 305, 307, 311, 315

Left-wing parties, 11, 236

Legal systems, 93–97, 107, 111, 145, 149, 153

Legitimacy, 48–50, 79, 117, 169, 172, 182,
193, 202, 242, 259

Legitimation, 18, 58, 67, 68

Life, 4

Life power, 216, 225, 228

Lived body, 307, 309, 312

Lived experience, 223, 239, 305

Lived space, 306

Lived time, 306, 307

Lives, 12, 19, 26, 27, 30, 43–45, 49, 59, 77,
81, 98, 102–104, 108, 116, 118,
130, 132, 135, 136, 173, 178, 195,
197, 199–202, 205, 206, 212,
215–222, 224, 225, 227–231,
238–240, 245, 262, 269, 270, 277,
285, 287–289, 300, 302–304, 306

Local authorities, 4, 167, 168, 170, 171,
173–175, 177–184

Love, 22, 105, 217–220, 309

M

Macedonia, 3, 142, 143, 152–153, 158

Majority power, 196

Majority rule, 30, 31, 196

Management, 58, 59, 63, 65, 66, 84, 87, 93,
101–110, 150, 170–174, 176–184,
205, 245, 251

Masses, 1, 2, 17, 25, 26, 31, 32, 37, 58, 78, 79,
193, 214, 224–225, 229, 237, 238,
243, 244, 247, 258, 260, 263, 264,
266, 273, 276, 281, 282, 286, 288,
290, 291, 302, 311, 312

Measurements, 62, 67, 68, 132–134, 177, 183,
248, 251, 303

Mediation, 17, 31, 68, 81, 193, 194, 201, 203,
238, 245, 247, 249, 261, 281, 290

Migration, 24, 79, 236, 240–241, 248

Minimal definitions, 36, 38, 39

Minimal group paradigm, 284

Montenegro, 3, 142, 153–154

Motives, 3, 76, 82, 83, 85, 87, 88, 283

Multidimensional accountability, 116, 136

Multidisciplinary approach, 3, 76

N

Narratives, 2, 55, 56, 195, 237, 243, 259, 264,
282, 284, 285, 289, 298, 305,
309, 310

Nation, 19, 45–48, 81, 107, 122, 157, 193,
195, 196, 262, 282, 285

National populism, 37, 143

Nativism, 24, 46, 289

Needs, 3–6, 13, 15, 25, 27, 28, 31, 33, 41, 47,
57, 59, 60, 63, 65, 66, 68, 76–79,
81, 86, 96, 98, 100–102, 104, 105,
109, 110, 115–117, 130, 133,
135–137, 139, 142, 143, 152, 153,
158, 168, 170, 171, 173, 177, 178,
180, 182–184, 194, 202, 204, 206,
217, 219, 223, 224, 226, 227, 231,
243, 251, 261–264, 266, 270, 271,
274, 277, 283–286, 289, 300, 301,
303, 304, 306, 311–313

Negative emotions, 289

O

Oneness, 222, 223

Opinion, 5, 24–26, 29, 30, 35, 38, 39, 42–44,
100, 109, 118, 120, 121, 127–129,
132, 159, 174, 182, 194, 201, 202,
204, 243, 267, 273, 274, 283,
290, 291

Options, 117, 125, 127, 138, 156, 183, 291

Ownership, 93–95, 97–101, 103, 104,
106–110, 131, 157, 205

P

Paranoid style, 18

Participation, 2–4, 17, 36, 57, 65, 75, 86–89,
93, 101, 115, 116, 124, 126,
130–132, 134–136, 138, 170–173,
175, 178, 182–184, 193, 194, 197,
198, 200, 203, 204, 219, 231, 238,

- 244, 245, 247, 251, 252, 270,
271, 276
- Party movements, 295
- Party-system, 195, 203, 273
- People, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13–31, 36, 38,
42–50, 56, 58, 59, 77, 81, 93, 94,
96, 101, 102, 104, 107, 110,
115–117, 122, 124, 128, 132, 134,
135, 139, 143, 147, 153, 155,
167–173, 176, 183, 184, 192–196,
200–206, 209–231, 235, 237–252,
257–260, 262–266, 269, 273–277,
281–287, 289–291, 295–298,
300–304, 309, 311–314
- People's Party, 10, 11, 26, 41, 226
- Perception, 13, 21, 62, 121, 168, 175–183,
203, 215, 218, 221, 238, 241, 245,
283, 284, 286, 288
- Performance, 130, 132, 170–173, 175–178,
180, 182, 183, 238, 250–252,
263, 306
- Person, 29, 81, 94, 96, 101, 102, 156, 206,
209–217, 219, 220, 222–225, 227,
229, 230, 239, 243, 257–259, 266,
269, 282–284, 287, 304, 312
- Personalistic leadership, 258, 260
- Personality traits, 286, 287, 297–299, 302,
303, 305
- Persuasion, 22, 119, 127, 128, 131, 137, 203,
284, 289–291, 298
- Phenomenological psychopathology, 295–315
- Planning, 18, 96, 111, 174, 176–178, 183, 184,
310, 311
- Pluralism, 18, 43, 45, 49, 50, 83, 88, 116, 122,
137, 195–197, 201, 203, 241, 275
- Policy implications, 65
- Political regime, 145
- Political agenda, 116, 130, 134, 136
- Political anthropology, 10
- Political context, 142, 242
- Political CSR, 3, 76, 82–86
- Political dialogue, 60
- Political establishment, 48, 195, 239, 259–260,
273, 276, 296
- Political exclusion, 235, 239
- Political ideologies, 76, 85, 86, 297
- Political mediation, 201, 281
- Political philosophy, 10, 40, 116, 117, 122,
129, 137, 191
- Political power, 48, 59, 80–82, 201, 246,
258, 269
- Political psychology, 6, 287
- Political science, 4, 9, 10, 29–35, 40, 60, 116,
122, 125, 129, 137, 191, 199–201
- Political theory, 3, 30, 39, 76, 83, 84
- Political values, 49, 75–89
- Populace, 2, 16–29, 42, 45
- Popular will, 14, 17, 31, 168, 169, 201, 241,
261, 273, 275
- Populism, 1, 2, 4–6, 9–19, 21–29, 32, 35–42,
44, 45, 48, 49, 56, 68, 75–79, 82,
83, 89, 141–143, 167–171, 173,
181, 182, 184, 191–206, 210, 230,
231, 235–239, 241–248, 250–252,
257–277, 281–292, 295–315
- Populist appeals, 296
- Populist ideologies, 12, 172, 285, 287,
295, 296
- Populist leaders, 5, 6, 249, 250, 257–264, 266,
273, 275, 276, 281, 285,
291, 295–315
- Populist movements, 17, 25, 28, 36, 81, 141,
168, 241, 250, 260, 261, 266,
273–275, 296, 313
- Position, 1, 11, 14, 16, 29, 31, 39, 62, 94, 118,
119, 121–125, 127–129, 137, 138,
156, 167, 169, 170, 172, 177, 181,
196, 204, 221, 224, 251, 259, 262,
265, 276, 289, 290, 298, 300,
304, 307
- Positive emotions, 289
- Possession, 93, 98, 99, 104, 105, 131, 173
- Post-Communist Balkan States, 141–159
- Power, 3–5, 10, 13, 17, 20, 21, 30, 38, 43, 44,
48–50, 56–61, 76, 77, 79–87,
94–97, 99–101, 107, 122, 125, 130,
131, 138, 143, 159, 167, 168, 170,
172, 178, 184, 193–196, 198, 199,
201, 202, 204, 228, 238, 240, 243,
244, 246, 258, 259, 261–263, 266,
269–271, 273–276, 281, 284–286,
289, 300–302
- Preference, 82, 106, 116, 117, 123–127, 129,
137, 138, 246, 270, 289, 298, 299
- Pressures, 4, 63, 82, 172, 176, 180, 183, 245,
275, 276, 291
- Private property, 3, 94–96, 104–106, 148
- Processes, 4, 5, 9, 10, 12–14, 27, 30, 32, 34,
37, 38, 41, 46, 47, 55–59, 61–63,
65–68, 75, 77, 79, 116–120,
123–126, 128–133, 136, 138, 142,
143, 145–148, 150, 152–154, 157,
159, 167, 168, 170–175, 178–184,
193, 197, 199–206, 218–220, 222,
223, 225, 230, 235–238, 240, 241,
243–246, 257, 261, 264–270, 272,
274, 276, 277, 282, 284, 288, 290,
300, 302, 312, 314
- Progressive framework right-wing
parties, 36, 236

Progressive property theories, 104–106
 Propaganda, 42, 275, 288, 290, 291
 Property, 3, 93–111, 148, 305–307
 Protest behavior, 296
 Psychology, 10, 120, 282, 283, 297
 Public administration, 60, 62, 67, 167, 168,
 170, 171, 173, 178, 182, 184
 Public narratives, 238
 Public policy, 81, 84, 101, 168, 173, 181,
 263, 270

Q

Qualitative outcomes, 67, 68
 Quality democracy, 2–4, 75–77, 80, 82, 83,
 86–89, 192, 197, 198
 Quantitative, 62, 67, 68, 123, 170, 176,
 177, 183

R

Rationalities, 117–124, 129, 133, 137,
 238, 288
 Reasonableness, 31, 64
 Reciprocity, 102, 106, 109, 110
 Relationship, 4, 5, 14, 17, 22, 27, 32–36, 41,
 59–69, 83, 94, 98, 102, 105, 110,
 111, 115, 116, 119, 124, 135, 136,
 138, 144, 159, 167–173, 175–177,
 179–184, 191–206, 210, 211, 214,
 216, 219–223, 227, 231, 235, 236,
 243–245, 247, 249, 251, 252, 258,
 263, 264, 269, 271, 273, 275, 276,
 282, 284, 288, 289, 298–300, 306,
 307, 311, 312
 Reporting, 4, 55, 61, 64, 130–133, 135, 136,
 146, 147, 150–152, 156–158, 168,
 172, 175–183, 249, 275
 Reporting system, 152, 168, 173, 174, 176,
 177, 180, 181, 183
 Representation, 4, 5, 9, 17, 28, 31, 45, 57, 58,
 76, 77, 79, 80, 118, 120–123, 132,
 137, 138, 169, 170, 174, 177–180,
 182, 184, 192–195, 198, 200–203,
 238, 241, 249, 250, 267, 269, 271,
 275, 283, 286, 301, 307–309, 311
 Representative principles, 170
 Resentment, 16–20, 23, 24, 28, 35, 49, 240,
 263, 264, 273, 274
 Responsibility, 1–3, 5, 57–59, 62–64, 66, 68,
 76, 80, 93, 97, 100–102, 104, 108,
 167, 171, 172, 174, 176, 196, 206,

 221, 228, 229, 244–247, 252, 265,
 270, 274, 284, 307
 Responsiveness, 5, 172, 270, 274
 Retrogressive framework, 25, 26, 28
 Revolution, 3, 23, 45, 47, 142, 204, 240
 Right to exclude, 99–101
 Rituals of inversion, 249
 Romania, 3, 142, 143, 154–155

S

Scapes, 236, 240, 250
 Serbia, 3, 11, 142, 155–157
 Social, 4, 5, 10, 12–15, 18, 19, 23, 25, 28, 30,
 32, 36–39, 41, 42, 47, 49, 55, 57,
 61, 62, 64–68, 75–88, 96, 97,
 100–105, 110, 117, 118, 120–122,
 126, 128, 130, 131, 134, 135,
 137–139, 143, 148, 150, 151,
 167–184, 193–196, 198, 200, 202,
 203, 205, 206, 209–214, 217–220,
 225–227, 229, 235, 236, 240–247,
 249, 282, 283, 285, 286, 288, 290,
 291, 298, 300, 301, 305,
 307, 309–311
 Social categorization, 13, 282
 Social cohesion, 4, 76, 206
 Social control, 179, 181
 Social democracy, 77, 143
 Social norms, 79, 287
 Social responsibility, 2, 3, 55, 75, 76, 82, 87,
 168, 171, 173, 176
 Society, 1, 3, 5, 12–14, 16, 23, 28, 31, 35–38,
 42, 45, 47–49, 61, 62, 65, 76–82,
 86–88, 93, 102, 104, 110, 118, 133,
 143, 146, 167–169, 172, 174, 182,
 183, 193, 195, 199, 202–206,
 209–214, 219, 222, 227, 238, 239,
 245, 246, 249, 252, 260, 266, 270,
 273, 274, 295, 296, 299, 301,
 304, 312
 Socio-economic context, 4, 170
 Solidarity, 2, 3, 28, 46–49, 56, 93, 95, 100,
 102, 107, 109–111, 167, 170, 206,
 222, 266
 Stakeholder, 2, 55–69, 82, 83, 86, 88, 133,
 134, 136, 151, 168, 170, 173,
 174, 177–183
 Stakeholders engagement, 65
 Stakeholders' map, 66
 Standards, 4, 122, 131, 132, 141, 145–159,
 174, 241, 303

Stewardship, 105
Strategy, 36, 49, 67, 83–85, 87, 88, 120, 124,
126, 150, 155, 170, 181, 195, 258,
261, 281, 286, 290, 296
Structure, 4, 26, 32, 36, 38, 43, 62, 63, 81,
101, 118, 119, 121, 128, 135,
147, 151, 157, 170, 172, 179, 180,
192, 194, 195, 199, 200, 202, 206,
215, 217, 230, 231, 244, 250, 261,
263, 291, 300, 301,
303–306, 313–315
Styles of accountability, 64

T

Taxation, 145, 171
Taxonomy, 33, 39

Transparency, 61, 62, 68, 149, 158, 173, 174,
176–179, 181, 182, 184, 201, 245,
249, 270
Trust, 28, 35, 48, 49, 59, 63, 64, 68, 93, 101,
106, 109, 110, 133, 171, 179, 181,
184, 202, 227, 243, 248–251, 269
Typology, 11, 40–42, 62, 123, 192, 299

U

Uncertainty, 4, 13, 28, 31, 124, 126, 283, 284,
286, 289

V

Voters, 21, 36, 179, 201, 238, 257, 267–274,
277, 288, 298, 299, 301