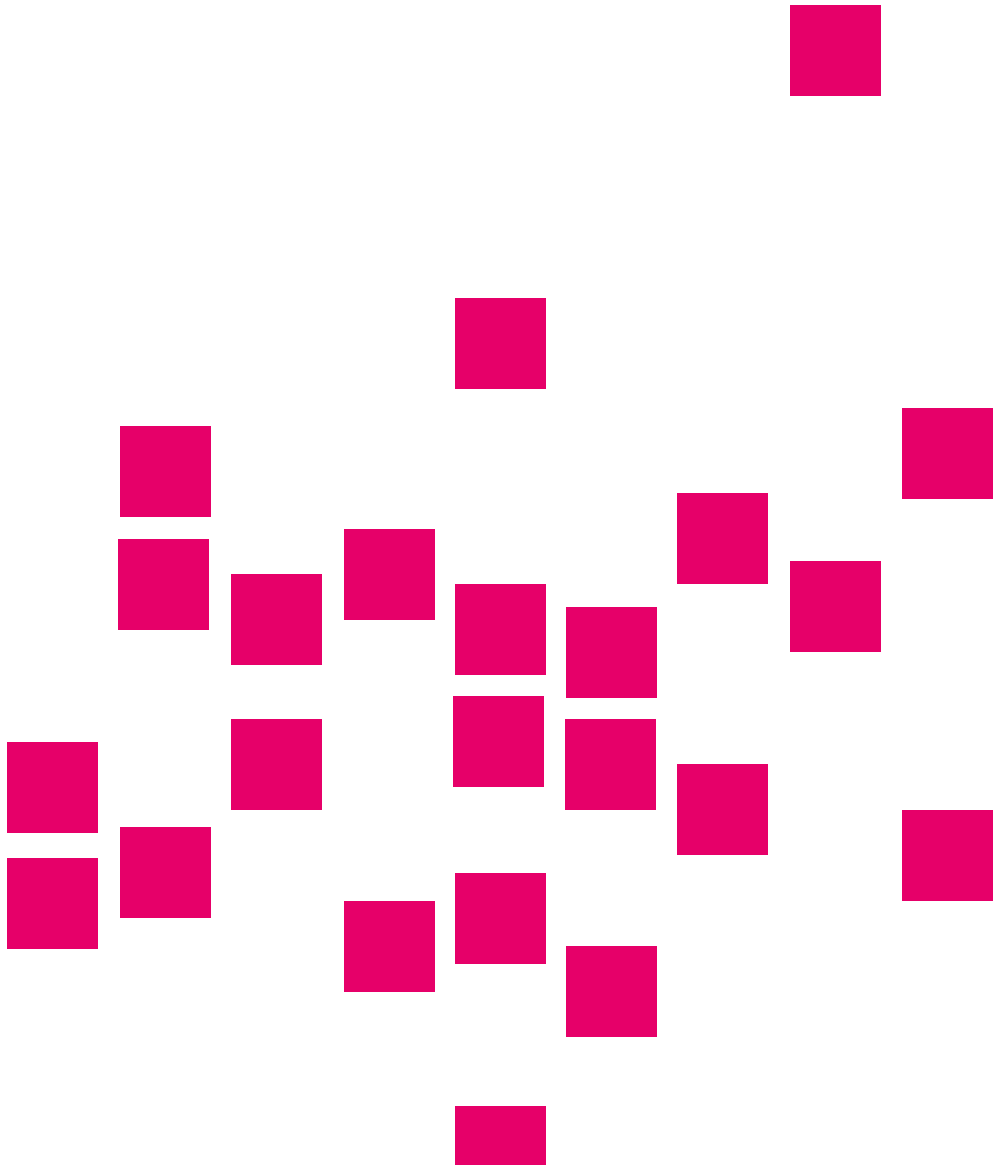
Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo

cheFare

Words of Active Participation



Words of Active Participation

Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo
*che*Fare - Agency for cultural transformation

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Engaging with territories: active participation as a driver of cohesion and development.

Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo

This publication is an expression of FCSP's commitment to understanding, supporting and promoting active participation across various sectors of society, and recognising it as a vital component of fair, sustainable development, in line with the Foundation's strategic objectives for the period 2025-2028[1].

The experience gained over the previous four-year term of office has highlighted multiple interconnected fields that affect social cohesion and local development, both of which are key pillars of FCSP's action: social cohesion, based on recognising and promoting rights and the value of participation and democracy, and helping people fulfil their potential by creating opportunities for study and professional development; and local economic development, that is only worthy of the name if it takes place fairly and sustainably in well connected communities that are open to innovation. Both revolve around a close focus on individuals, communities, solidarity and shared well-being.

Within this framework, an emphasis on participation in forms of community living, from culture to civic engagement and democratic practices, advances our work towards the most important Sustainable Development Goal at this historical juncture, namely Peace – one of the five Ps that form the central focus of Agenda 2030.

In line with its role as a learning organisation, furthermore, FCSP draws upon its know-how to deliver targeted content dissemination activities in collaboration with other public and third-sector bodies, with a view to helping develop new policies to encourage systemic change.

This focus on words, concepts and practices therefore reflects the emphasis that FCSP places on studying participation and promoting knowledge of the subject.

FCSP is confident that *Words of Active Participation* is a valuable resource for anyone aiming to further their understanding of active participation and its potential to generate positive change.

Alberto Anfossi
Secretary General
of Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo

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1. The 2025–2028 Multiannual Strategic Plan of the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo is available at the following link **https://www.compagniadisanpaolo.it/wp-content/uploads/CSP_DPP_2025_2028_ENG-1.pdf**

Introduction

by **Sandra Aloia**
Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo

"What do you mean by active participation?" and "Can you give us a definition?"

are two questions we have often been asked over the past four years.

Even before 2020, FCSP was promoting intervention programmes related to active participation in different operational areas, from cultural participation and inclusion, to direct involvement in the design of Polo del '900, audience development and engagement, bringing science to a wider public, active citizenship and youth dynamism. In the four-year strategy 2021-2024 – the planning document on which FCSP activities are based – these programmes have been brought together under a deliberately broad and flexible conceptual framework, where the Foundation has worked in two directions. The first has involved intervention programmes designed to encourage, embrace and support local forms and interpretations of active participation. These include *guidelines on schools of politics, guidelines on collaborative practices and guidelines on participatory festivals*. They also include programmes such as *Space*, relating to participation spaces, and *Well Impact*, on actions linking Culture and Health; and they include operational projects such as *La cultura dietro l'angolo* (Culture round the corner), *Apice* (Apex) aimed at fostering youth entrepreneurship in hinterland and mountainous areas, and *Beni in rete* (Networked assets), focusing on assets confiscated from organised crime. The second has taken the form of work, study and discussion on the subject of active participation with a series of strategic allies identified as partners for the co-building of new work horizons through the observation and joint reformulation of ideas, practices and evidence.

This resulted in the identification of the most urgent **themes**, along with **methods** and specific **contexts**.
In recent years, there has been an increasingly widespread demand for participation, due to growing **inequalities** and a reduction in the opportunities for personal interaction brought about by Covid and the economic crisis. The research carried out by LaPolis-University of Urbino and Demos, on the relationship between "Italians and the State", which reached its 27th edition in 2025, shows what has changed and is changing in our democracy and the activities that go hand in hand with it, such as participation, the relationship with politics and the work of associations. As Ilvo Diamanti maintains "(...) with the era of Covid now behind us (...) we're anxiously facing the era of war. (...) The effects of these events on public opinion can be seen in Italians' perception of the institutions and the State, marked by a general decline in trust. (...) The political parties and the State, in other words, are at risk of becoming a past participle. The parties have departed, no-one knows where to. And the State is a has-been, slipping into the past. But without political parties and the State, it's not just democracy declining, it's the entire system of services that support and regulate our lives. Without trust and public participation, there's no hope of governing the country"[2].

2. 27th edition of the annual report entitled "Gli Italiani e lo Stato", produced by LaPolis "Laboratorio di Studi Politici e Sociali dell'Università di Urbino Carlo Bo", in collaboration with Demos & Pi and Avviso Pubblico..

We have also come to understand that treating participatory methods as a mere democratic embellishment is risky: if the relationship with those involved in the process is not genuine and grounded in mutual trust, it can end up heightening frustration within ecosystems rather than adding value. The same holds true for our work, as a Foundation, with those who join us out of curiosity and willingness to collaborate, acknowledging that they share a fair—if not equal—co-responsibility.

We have begun to recognise some of the **characteristics of the territories** in which we work, which are peculiar to them and which make them particularly fertile today, each with its own strength: Turin has a high concentration of systems typical of its civic, cultural and social structure (examples include the unique experience of the *Case del Quartiere* [neighbourhood houses] network, the *Abbonamento Musei* [museum subscription] scheme, the *Polo del '900*, the *Portinerie di Comunità* [neighbourhood concierge offices], the various and widespread clubs, including bowling clubs, and the tradition of social innovation that has flourished ever since the days of Giulia di Barolo); just as the city of Genoa is one of the Italian cities with the greatest number of active local agreements, experimenting with forms of "decentralised" management based on the central and active role of city councils; or the Olivetti tradition in the Ivrea area, of *Società di Mutuo Soccorso* (mutual aid societies), the first of which in Italy was founded in Pinerolo in 1848, and the Alpine experiences, which are among the most interesting in the country because of their ability to promote local development through active participation.

Lastly, we have determined that **only a minority of the population currently take part in collective processes**. Increasing the number of these actions does not automatically translate into an increase in the number of people involved. On the contrary, this sometimes causes further polarisation between those who participate and those who are (or feel) excluded. Two types of gap have been identified: firstly, disparities in opportunities caused by the shortcomings and intrinsic features of local areas, and secondly, the difficulty that growing segments of the population experience in making their voices heard in democratic arenas, sometimes because they are unrepresented or under-represented and sometimes because they go unrecognised.

Partly in view of FCSP new strategic plan for 2025-2028, we decided to take stock of our work so far and put it to the test with a selection of our privileged stakeholders in these areas (municipalities, associations, universities, research and training centres, national institutional entities, other second-tier entities, foundations of banking origin) with which we worked for three days. We assigned the task of sharing and summarising the outcomes of this work to *che*Fare, a cultural association.

This tool is designed to reflect the conclusions reached collectively and provide guidance for anyone seeking to foster processes that encourage the active participation of citizens.

In our perspective, the text below translated primarily into the new planning framework on this topic for the next four years:

*We encourage people to take a leading role in the fair and sustainable development of the catchment area: we strive to **extend and diversify the social base** involved in **civic, cultural and democratic life** including in the form of **activation spaces, collaborative tools and methods** and the dissemination of the importanceof being well-informed as a means of **developing critical thinking**. We view culture as a driver for building a **new citizenry**.*

Multi-year Planning Document 25-28
Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, Culture Goal,
Encouraging Active Participation Mission, p. 114.

Available at: **https://www.compagniadisanpaolo.it/wp-content/uploads/CSP_DPP_2025_2028_ENG-1.pdf**

Methodology

This publication draws inspiration from the **Words, key concepts and outlooks** research programme undertaken in 2023. The aim of the programme was to identify practical and theoretical dimensions of particular relevance to organisations involved in **active participation** in FCSP's catchment area.

It therefore focused on a vast range of forms of participation made available in Liguria, Piedmont and Valle D'Aosta, from major cultural institutions in Genoa and Turin to small associations in hinterland areas, local committees of second-tier national organisations and community foundations. All these entities have widely varying geographical coverage areas, organisational histories, scales of intervention and sets of tools and methods. And as a whole, they interact with tens of thousands of people, sometimes by targeting small, specific groups and sometimes by targeting mass audiences cutting across every segment of the population.

In the face of this complexity, the words, concepts and outlooks emerged from the research programme have been treated as multi-dimensional conceptual objects, where risks and opportunities, nuances and ambiguities, emerging conflicts and calls for change co-exist.

The programme was undertaken in accordance with the **Emerging Collective Definition** method developed by *che*Fare. It is an empirical method – derived from the Grounded Theory, developed by Strauss and Glaser (Anselm Strauss, Barney Glaser, *Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*, 1965) – to explore the ways in which organisations develop practices and attribute meanings to them in new, emerging contexts in the process of being determined.

It revolves around a participatory process, divided into multiple stages, involving representatives and experts from over 70 bodies, including municipalities, associations, universities, research and training centres, national institutions, second-tier organisations and banking foundations.

1

The first stage of the process consisted in collecting and analysing the documentary material that FCSP used to construct its own **operational definition of Active Participation**, and holding discussions with Active Participation Mission staff.

2

The second stage kicked off with an invitation-only day attended by 13 Strategic Allies of the **Encouraging Active Participation Mission** and the staff of that Mission. This provided a crucial opportunity to draw directly upon the knowledge of experts who have been developing participatory practices in the catchment area for a long time (28 June 2023).
The analysis of the results allowed the theoretical and practical definitions adopted by the organisations to be established, along with the scenarios they refer to, the critical issues they encounter in their work and some possible trajectories for change in the future.

3

The third stage started with two days of meetings with representatives of **55 organisations and public administration bodies** selected from among the primary stakeholders of the Encouraging Active Participation Mission (3 and 4 October 2023). These entities have not always been part of the multi-year process of discussion implemented by the Mission, but are distinguished by their knowledge of the participation contexts, linked to practices, research or the development of policies. In this stage, the **hypotheses** developed in the second stage were **explored and questioned**, giving rise to new and more nuanced interpretations.

The final summary generated **12 headings** making up a reference framework for active participation:

Alliances and Collaboration

Change and Continuity

Co-Responsibility

Involvement and Accessibility

Collective Bodies and Representation

Conflict

Collective Intelligence and Impacts

Intergenerazionalità

Power

Risk and Economic Sustainability

Tools

Time-frames

Some of these have already been published in the way-stage document entitled "Active participation. Words, key concepts and outlooks: outcomes of a participatory process" at the presentation held on 5 December 2023 in the Multi-media Room of Gallerie d'Italia in Turin. This marked an important initial phase in the development of the debate with the extended networks involved in active participation, including some located outside FCSP's catchment area.

In the publication you are now reading, all **12 headings are accompanied by critical texts by academics and practitioners**: this marks a second stage of broadening the focus, with a view to escaping the tendency towards self-reference that inevitably affects such long programmes.

The third stage will consist of a series of meetings to be held in various cities across Italy at which we will meet representatives of the institutions, organisations and policy-makers that deal with the challenges of active participation on a daily basis.

Bertram M. Niessen

Scientific Director
of *che*Fare - an agency for cultural change

Words of Active Participation

Alliances and collaboration

"efforts should be made, above all when it is least expected, to develop local alliances."

Alliance-building is one of the most valuable goals of active participation processes, but also one of the most difficult to achieve. It is valuable because it forges long-term **bonds of trust and collaboration**, across networks that may be small, medium or extensive, on a case-by-case basis. From this point of view, building trust is an essential enzyme for collaboration, which makes it more effective, efficient and meaningful.

In order to be effective, alliances need the cement of **common meaning** between their various members. Bonds such as these can originate from multiple factors, such as sharing **common, or at least compatible, values**; or identifying similar civil, cultural or social priorities, even on the basis of differing values; or recognising oneself in certain "ways of doing things", in relation to specific approaches and practices; or a shared aesthetic sense highlighted by the use of specific artistic or poetic languages, ways of curating cultural content or ways of inhabiting the spaces that host it.

Trust and shared meaning are affected across the board by the question of language, which has proved to be one of the key factors in closing or opening collaborative processes, and therefore plays a decisive role in their success or failure. On the one hand, this is because institutions and citizens use languages that are far removed from each other, thus preventing mutual understanding, so it is important to encourage participatory pathways based on modulation, translation and the acquisition of different forms of language. On the other hand, it is because conflict-generating languages need to be understood and, if possible, included, so as to avoid preaching to the converted.

The generative management of each of these factors requires sensitivity and acquisition of specific skills and experience, which therefore need to be considered in capacity-building pathways, the strategic development of organisations and the local policies relating to participation.

Alliances and collaboration

Fabrizio Barca

Let's say it straight. In the face of a growing appetite for authoritarianism, caused by widespread mistrust in democracy's ability to deal with complex issues, the only way to take the wind out of authoritarianism's sails is to build **alliances** between organised, well-intentioned people that demonstrate, through real-world action, that democracy based on widespread participation in collective life is the only way to resolve complex issues in a fair, collaborative and timely manner.

Participation is both a means and an end. It is an end, because taking part in designing and implementing our social organisation is one of the fundamental dimensions of our freedom and of the "full development of the human person" that Italy's Constitution asks every citizen to protect. It is a means, because it allows and promotes public debate and conflict. We all have our own values and interests, which can be vastly different: the participation of everyone – regardless of class, gender or origin – in the difficult process by which political decisions about our life in society are taken, is the way to find common ground between these values and interests, both in representative assemblies and in any public space where people interact.

It was thanks to the participation – and the often heated debate that participation spawns in the street and in the corridors of power alike – that Italy made such exceptional social and economic progress in the three decades following the end of the Second World War. We can do it again.
What characteristics do participation and debate need to have in order to truly engender fair, robust and shared **collaboration** and solutions? The answer is plain to see both in practice and in theoretical analysis (first and foremost in "The Idea of Justice" by Amartya Sen).
Debate needs to be heated, in the sense that every individual and every diverse group must be given the opportunity and the stimulus to have their say, forcefully, and make themselves heard.

It needs to be open, because while all values and local knowledge should be appreciated, they also need to be exposed to alternative values and external or global knowledge. It needs to be informed, because every opinion must always be underpinned by data and information that everyone can verify. And, lastly, it needs to be reasonable, in the sense that the arguments we bring to the debate need to be more than just internally logical and coherent – let's say, rational. They also need to take account of the contrasting values and interests of the other participants. However strong our convictions may be, we need to allow others to criticise them. We need to develop the ability to listen before we speak, and to understand how other people think. This is what enables us

Alliances and collaboration

to penetrate mental bunkers, raise doubts, open windows and highlight common ground, and to allow the same to happen within ourselves.

When participation and debate have these characteristics, it becomes possible to reach shared decisions, which might not be unanimous but enjoy the backing of a clear majority. The participants will find a landing zone because some will have been persuaded to change their minds. Because they will either spot common ground between different opinions, or see their way to taking partial steps forward that are deemed positive even by people with different opinions. According to Sen, this is a helpful form of short-sightedness that enables us to appreciate the improvement achieved through compromise, while giving up our final goal "for now".

This method can be seen in use today, in many social and business-related experiences in Italy. This is what encourages us and gives us collective hope in dark times. But it is not enough on its own. Those experiences, put together, do not add up to a change of system. Because there are countless other places where this does not happen and which engender pockets or pools of backwardness. And because the system does not take the method and content of those experiences on board when designing rules, laws and investments. This is why the country is going backwards in terms of growing economic and social inequality, and inequality of recognition and access to universal services. Not to mention the anger and resentment. And hence the temptation of authoritarian dynamics.

At this point, it is fair to ask: "What can 'people of goodwill' do to bring that method and its outcomes into the system?" Or better still: "What can be done by the associations, networks and movements in which those people operate?" Clearly, in a democracy, only a revitalisation of the political parties can provide a solid vehicle for this transition. But in the meantime – or perhaps just to make that happen – there is a lot of work to be done.

It is vital that anyone involved in building solutions through participatory processes must transcend their own domain and spend a bit of their time on building alliances, across different geographical areas and fields of action, to shape the building blocks of systemic change. If your battle is primarily environmental, you need to ask yourself about the social effects of the proposals you make and the actions you take and you need to interact with, learn from and influence the associations that are dedicated to those social goals. And vice versa. If you are building a local educational agreement, which already has the merit of transcending school in order to address every aspect of childhood educational poverty, you need to seek relationships, give to, receive from and interact with other people who are approaching their work with a similar method to yours. If you are defending your job in a factory, you will be in a much stronger position if you build relationships and alliances with the people who live in the area surrounding that factory and might be affected by the environmental consequences, and aim to find a common goal. And then, in each of these and other cases, the key is to find convergence with common national disputes that give everyone a glimpse of the possible alternatives.

These alliances need to reckon with the power dimension: if you do not build structured relationships of strength, you lose. There has long been widespread resistance to talking about and reasoning in terms of organisation and leadership, in a framework that Nick Srnicek calls "*folk politics*", which worships spontaneous action and the local level. The path to alliances, however, requires the construction of organisations that are stable, but not set in stone; porous, but a source of certainty; capable of implementing the four canonical requirements of participation, but also of recognising the importance of leadership and thus wisely building future successions of leadership. So let us channel our energies into this, with more conviction.

Change and continuity

"there is a need for things to change and there is a need for things to remain"

The process clearly showed that the parties involved in Active Participation are following two kinds of trajectories, which are only apparently contradictory.

The first is connected with a pressing demand for openness to **change**. A demand that originates with equal strength – albeit with different forms of language and connotations – both from the institutions and from the external parties who interact with them.
This is not an appeal to the predominant systems: on the contrary, it is quite clear that the rhetoric of innovation at all costs now arouses widespread distrust. Instead it is a demand for specific organisational procedures, administrative devices, guidelines and institutional strategies built specifically to operate in a world that is changing ever faster. And which, because of this, has to be approached with specific adaptive abilities, so that it can re-organise itself quickly.

The second relates to a – parallel – demand for **continuity**: if everything is constantly changing, continuity of meaning, relationships and procedures is needed in the long term. The demand is to establish common threads within institutions and in the relationship between institutions and stakeholders across the catchment area.
This is because activating Active Participation processes above all involves taking risks and continuity is the indispensable prerequisite for these risks to be distributed fairly.

Perhaps more than anything else, the two poles of change and continuity are linked to implicit and explicit skills. A collective intelligence spread across the catchment area that can mobilise resources while being surprisingly volatile and which, for this reason, needs to be constantly facilitated, supported and assembled into a system.

Change and continuity

Liborio Sacheli

Talking about **change and continuity** within the broader framework of active participation carries considerable risk: thinking in terms of predominant systems, without considering deployment and pragmatism.
So I gave up trying to detach myself from my own field, which is fund-raising, and tried instead to drop these two words into it.

When we talk about fund-raising, we inevitably talk about change and continuity to ensure the sustainability of an organisation, while remaining true to its identity in all exchanges and interactions with its various stakeholders. In this case, the concepts of change and continuity are interchangeable with "fear" and "reassurance": excluding fixed values and an organisation's own missions and visions, the concept of change also presupposes internal change, a response time to external stimuli that is sometimes sub-optimal, and above all push-back against the idea that "it has always been done this way".

As a Sicilian, the expression "it has always been done this way" reminds me of the novel *The Leopard*, but not in the pejorative sense (because transcending the dynamics of power privileges is a prerequisite of active participation), but in relation to the two concepts, change and continuity.

To paraphrase Tomasi di Lampedusa, the novel's author, we could say that "if we want everything to change, everything needs to continue", or even "if we want everything to continue, everything needs to change", in the order of priority that every individual or every organisation, considers appropriate. Between change and continuity there is a responsibility, which is probably absent from the novel, that we are all called upon to take, which also involves taking a risk. It is not a foregone conclusion that change equals improvement or that continuity enables us to fulfil the need for which we are acting, namely that of active participation.

But without taking the risk, Visionary Days would have remained nothing more than an event.
It may have been unconscious, but taking up the challenge and structuring a third-sector body erased the boundaries of our comfort zone and prompted a large group of people to take responsibility. The change therefore took place internally, to generate another change, with the greatest possible impact, externally.
Continuity took the form of continuous dialogue with foundations and companies: a relationship that, at alternate stages, made it possible to share procedures, guidelines, skills and vital feedback on how to structure a capital of

Change and Continuity

collective resources in such a way as to assemble them into a system.
This was done through the essential lens of intergenerational listening, without which the needs of young people will always be underestimated by previous generations, and anger towards the latter will always prevail over appetite for a future. In other words, it was done by means of a bottom-up approach that embraced and respected the people and context in which the need for active participation (if perceived) materialised, and not by means of paternalistic or prescriptive imposition.

The other major risk is that change and continuity trigger a perverse mechanism of reaction and catalyst, two key concepts in processes of active participation.
To quote the Treccani encyclopaedia: "*a chemical reaction is defined as a transformation that changes the composition of substances*", whereas "*a catalyst is a substance, even if present only in small quantities, that changes the speed of a chemical reaction, without changing the state of equilibrium of the reaction itself.*"

The concepts of reaction and catalyst may not equate totally to those of change and continuity, but organisations involved in active participation (alongside many third-sector organisations) are often called upon to play both roles: for example, they have to react to a call for proposals, propose a change and implement it, by presenting a project that is in line (or not) with their own identity, using resources, skills, know-how and speed that have no equivalent in the issuer of the call for proposals; and then they have to kick-start the process, with an initial input that represents their coverage of active participation or, more generally, of the cause, without which the chemical reaction (i.e. the change) would occur at a different speed.

In this respect, organisations provide change, in other words the desired change to society, and continuity, in the sense of being present. The risk, however, is that continuity can be one-sided, and that despite the lack of tools, guidelines, skills and processes, it is taken for granted. Change and continuity, or being a reaction and being a catalyst, therefore need to become inherent features of institutions, decision-makers, foundations and organisations, in a continuous, constructive exchange aimed not at consensus but at the welfare of the population.

Fostering active participation must be the prerogative of entities that, in various capacities, are making up for the absence of suitable and adaptive policies. Fostering active participation, in fact, requires a network of equally distributed responsibilities that takes account of the specific features and functions of each party.
Which, by professional bias, brings us back to the spirit of fund-raising: it is vital to cultivate relations between all the different stakeholders, and to identify strategies and continuity of meaning. This is the only way to overcome intergenerational and intersectoral dynamics and stereotypes (young people don't want to do anything, institutions don't do anything) that prevent change and continuity.

This marks a paradigm shift that, to quote Fabrizio Acanfora, tends towards the coexistence of differences, which is the only type of continuity that can enable a civil society to move forward, and to deliver a future for everyone, not just the few, where everyone feels heard and everyone feels free to express themselves and play their part.

Co-responsibility

"no-one gets through alone"

Active Participation processes build relationships of responsibility in at least two main dimensions.

The first is the one that links the organisations that promote the processes with the people who inhabit them.
These are relationships built on an agreement, which must be explicitly stated as clearly as possible. The organisations undertake to mobilise resources, both tangible and intangible, in the geographical area concerned, while the people commit to playing an active role, using their time, skills and knowledge, and in some cases their work and resources – including financial.

The second is the one that connects institutions and organisations involved in Active Participation. This is a delicate relationship that can be endangered by institutions, due to excessive bureaucracy and exploitation for purely political ends, and by organisations, due to an inability, impossibility or unwillingness to translate "basic" demands according to institutional logics.

This **network of co-responsibility** triggered by participatory dynamics obviously extends much further, both horizontally and vertically. Between institutions and inhabitants, between different institutions, between different organisations involved in Active Participation, whether first- or second-level.

When these dynamics develop in a co-responsible way – i.e. when there is two-way responsibility – positive mechanisms can be triggered to build and consolidate social capital in the geographical area concerned. When one of the parties disregards them, however, there can be a loss of trust, effectiveness and widespread social capital.

It would therefore appear to be essential to learn how to build relationships of co-responsibility as a pre-requisite of building active participation pathways. Similarly, it is essential to establish lines, strategies and tools to give these pathways real economic sustainability, so that they can last for as long as necessary and do not fizzle out before at least a significant part of the commitments made by the parties have been fulfilled.

Co-responsibility

Ivana Pais

The word I have been given is ***co-responsibility***. As a starting point for reflection on this term, I would like to revisit the past and reconsider two concepts formulated in the second half of the last century, which I believe could help us move towards a desirable future.

The first concept comes from the work of Albert O. Hirschman, an economist and social theorist of German origin, who wrote a highly influential book, published in 1970, identifying three possible reactions to the crisis of businesses, political parties and the state: loyalty, where people continue to make the same choice, despite their dissatisfaction; defection, where they exit the relationship with the organisation, by choosing a different product or service or abandoning the inefficient institution; and protest, where people give voice to their disappointment collectively and try to persuade the organisation to change and improve the situation.

In an essay from 2014, Stefano Zan, an organisational sociologist, noted that in cooperative enterprises there is a distinctive mode of collective action that does not fall within Hirschman's three categories but can complement them. He defined this new form of action as *entry*, in the sense of entering new markets, organisations or institutions, with a view to creating new opportunities and changing the situations that are the source of the dissatisfaction.

I find that this concept helps illustrate the idea of co-responsibility and effectively describes the propensity, which is especially prevalent among the younger generations, to create new forms of organisation that are a better fit for their interests and values. It applies to start-ups, but also to projects and initiatives within existing organisations, aimed at encouraging processes of organisational transformation. *Entry* is an especially compelling form of collective action for young people, partly for a structural reason: as a result of the falling birth rates that are a particular feature of Italy, the younger generation is outnumbered, making the expressions of dissent used by previous-generation youth movements, such as street protests, less effective. Against this backdrop, co-responsibility also finds expression in new forms of intergenerational alliance.

As far as the second concept is concerned, I refer to a process of reflection initiated by the literature on industrial clusters and local development. This relates to "local collective assets for competitiveness", meaning local resources, infrastructure or conditions that contribute to the competitive advantage of organisations based in a given geographical area or industrial cluster.

Co-responsibility

These collective assets include resources such as social capital, in the form of relationships of trust, cooperation and knowledge-sharing between businesses in a geographical area; infrastructure, especially transport systems, logistics services and telecommunications networks; training and specialist skills, developed through schools and training institutions; and support services, through institutions that provide consultancy and research and development services or financial resources.

How have collective assets for competitiveness changed in recent decades and how can they support co-responsibility between actors operating in a given geographical area?
Traditional local collective assets are still relevant, but they are changing. Physical infrastructure, especially infrastructure for the transport of goods and people, has taken on a more central role in the delivery of goods and services purchased through digital platforms. Social infrastructure is undergoing profound transformation as a result of digitisation, which has changed the everyday habits of citizens and workers and is prompting a rethink of social spaces, from offices to public services such as libraries.

Places where people congregate need to be designed to facilitate contact, cross-fertilisation and hybridisation between people and ideas. Vocational education and training institutions are redefining their role in the face of growing demand to upskill workers within a given sector and function, and to reskill workers to facilitate their transition to new roles or new sectors.
In addition to the transformation of traditional local collective assets, there is a need for new resources to enable individuals and organisations to take action to transform contemporary capitalism. Consider, for example, the new infrastructure needed for the purposes of digitisation and automation, which require ever-larger data centres, with very high energy costs and adverse effects on environmental sustainability.

Who are the actors called upon to take co-responsibility for the design of these new collective resources? Which alliances, which short-range networks can support local actors capable of operating in the long-range networks of digital global capitalism? How can we turn spontaneous initiatives and social movements into institutions capable of taking the long-term view and helping us to move in the direction of a desirable future? These are the questions we need to answer if we are serious about the concept of co-responsibility.

Involvement and accessibility

"the people we need to involve most are the ones who aren't there"

The process clearly showed that Active Participation is seen as an opportunity to integrate the **accessibility**-related experiences gained by communities and institutions over decades of work into a system. These varied experiences have taken multiple forms, including practices, pathways, methodologies, organisational and planning skills, administrative devices and forms of communication.

The term "accessibility" is used to mean two different but complementary things here.
First of all, "physical accessibility", in other words the opportunity for people with all types of motor, neurological and sensory abilities to use spaces and services fully independently and safely. This relates not only to the material dimension of overcoming physical barriers to access, but also to the opportunity for social and cultural sites to be accessed, inhabited and enriched by a multiplicity of different bodies, with as many potentials and limits.
Secondly, accessibility also means "digital accessibility", in other words the opportunity for all social groups to use digital content easily and immediately, without being constrained by inadequate skills or equipment. In this case too, the widespread demand among participants is for digital spaces to increasingly become democratic public arenas where diversity is wide-ranging and valued.

In this respect, accessibility is closely linked with the **involvement** of new individuals and groups in Active Participation pathways. Involvement is essential to escape the self-referential approach which inevitably develops over time among professionals and which can be counteracted through two main lines of action, namely by kick-starting dissemination mechanisms, which address complexity without trivialising it, and working on geographical areas or social communities that have no prior experience of participation.

Involvement and accessibility

Catterina Seia

Accessibility is a wonderful word, with its own magnetism. It is poetic, it inspires action.
But it also underpins the real goal, which is participation on the basis of equality, in other words, the opportunity for everyone, each in their own unique way, to belong and feel a sense of belonging, to express their potential and achieve happiness. In the spirit of the times, it has multiple related meanings and spans a range of disciplines. We see it as physical, sensory, cognitive, cultural, economic, digital and, in terms of social change, generational.
It is much more than a question of adopting a set of tools, it is a state of mind. For cultural organisations it is a guiding principle that underpins missions and institutions and permeates them at every level.
One example of it is ICOM, which, on the basis of an international exchange, launched a new definition of the term "museum" in 2022, incorporating the concepts of accessibility and inclusion, in line with the IFLA-UNESCO manifesto for libraries as social infrastructure.

Although much has already been achieved, today's scenario promises a major scaling-up. Let's explore it in three steps. Culture as a resource for individual and collective welfare. In the dark days of the pandemic, we recognised that health is a complex, dynamic, multi-faceted and multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is influenced by socio-economic conditions, and the factors that determine it are closely linked with the contexts in which people are born, grow up, work and grow old. And inequalities of opportunity are reflected in inequalities of health, with effect from the first thousand days, which impact on life-quality and longevity. We have known, ever since the beginning of human history, that participation and cultural expression help people flourish. They have positive correlations with well-being and they facilitate self-determination, convalescence and disease management. The World Health Organisation is now an ally of the world of culture: it confirms and supports a growing body of scientific evidence.
But if participation improves quality of life, it is crucial to ensure that these effects are long-lasting, for the benefit of society in as broad and cross-cutting a way as possible. It was this vision that spawned the neologism "cultural welfare" and prompted the European Union to add the Culture and Health pillar to its Work Plan 23-26.

A chain is as strong as its weakest link. The fault-line of inequality has opened up significantly and structurally over the past decade. The latest Caritas report has an eloquent title: "Everything to lose". 9.7% of Italy's population is in absolute poverty, 30% of them are from migrant backgrounds and Italy hands poverty down from one generation to the next more

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than any other country. The inequalities of opportunity that originate from experiential and educational poverty are the roots of subsequent economic and social poverty.

If culture is a resource, the people we need to involve most are the ones who aren't there. The trend revealed by ISTAT surveys of cultural participation sends out a clear signal. The latest BES report highlights two phenomena. Cultural anorexia, in other words people who do not participate, do not read newspapers or books and are not involved in cultural activities outside the home. One third of the population. The cultural drought spanning the entire peninsula, with peaks in central and southern regions, but also affecting marginal areas and urban outskirts, where there is no cultural rainfall. These factors are connected with another expression coined by Censis: social sleepwalking, which is affecting many of us.

Culture itself is not inclusive if the overall system of projects, programmes and policies is unequal. In fact, it fuels inequalities, dividing us all into League 1, League 2 and League 3. Topping the league are families with broadband, a Netflix subscription, dance classes and early-years reading; and then everyone else.
Accessibility is synonymous with proximity; it also means being close to the places where life is lived. Widespread civic centres. It is not enough to hand out entrance tickets or season-tickets to facilitate access. The most fruitful approach is to build collective community pathways to provide access to experiences together, which might be sporadic at the outset but can become an everyday occurrence, offering pleasure in living and tangible well-being.
Another of the responsibilities of cultural action is to help make a fragmented, plural society fairer. To reach everyone, and not just as an echo or a faint reverberation. To do so without acting like crusaders or missionaries, intent on converting everyone to the path (or more precisely their own path) of culture.
Accessibility is a close cousin of attractiveness, which in turn is **involvement**.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an outstanding document that shows us a different way and a new paradigm that shifts attention away from a reparative approach to one based on the construction of empowering, health-generating conditions. And it focuses on involvement, with a view to turning everyone into a protagonist, both creatively and intellectually. From audiences to authors of cultural experience and social experience. This vision does not concern just a handful of people with disabilities, it concerns the whole of society, which is increasingly plural, and each and every one of us: disability is a social fact, it is the result of interaction with contexts that we do not understand, that limit us. What do we do? That's the 20th century question. Never before have we had the great collective opportunity, which is even favoured by currents of digital innovation, to have an impact in terms of profound cultural change. We can redesign all the systems, and that's what we're doing. Our cities. The age of pioneers is over. The scale of social challenges makes it imperative. Consider the widespread fragility, the mental health of the entire population and the new generations in particular, and the ageing of the population.

How can we do it? By combining research and expertise. By transitioning from the sum total of projects and practices to systemic and systematic interactions between sectors and policies.
Agenda 2030 provides us with an outstanding metaphor for culture, in the form of cultural crossovers, borrowed from biology: the value of differences that meet, with structural alliances beyond all rhetoric and self-reference, and beyond *social washing*. To build ecosystems that help us perceive frailties and distress as an opportunity for growth, to build an open society together.
It's a love letter to the future, a desirable future.

Community and representation

"it isn't true that people don't participate, but their ways of doing so are often unexpected or unforeseeable"

Many studies argue that community life is contracting: the number of people who vote in elections is falling steadily; the main actors of political life and intermediate bodies are losing their centrality; since the pandemic, the statistics for volunteering work also indicate a sharp decline. While not denying these critical issues, the participants indicated that we must learn to search in new and different places. Active Participation is therefore seen as an opportunity to identify, integrate, relaunch and promote new forms of community practice at local level, often characterised by little formalisation or by recourse to emerging categories of people, which are not therefore fully known and agreed.

The people who experiment with these forms of public action use different categories of **community** on each occasion as it arises: communities of place, practice or care; users of common assets; audiences participating in musical, artistic, theatrical or literary scenes. The groups who take action – or are involved in action by others – are very diverse: from parents to pensioners, as well as early childhood; primary and middle school pupils and university students; groups of professionals and freelancers; civil rights associations and informal migrant groups. In each of these cases – in different forms, places and at different times – the many parties involved take part in Active Participation processes that seek collective identities capable of building bonds, not barriers, increasing the circulation of social, cultural and symbolic capital at local level.

The widespread demand is to broaden the opportunities for these actors, encouraging under-represented or non-represented collective identities to speak out and exercise power. This translates, on the one hand, into a demand for better positioning flowing from the "sense of community" of the inhabitants: a demand for greater visibility of social ambitions. And, on the other, into a demand for strictly institutional **representation**: the chance to create tools with which to influence public agendas so that minority views can be taken into account.

Community and representation

Massimo Cuono

Contributing to this reflection on the vocabulary of active participation starting from the concepts of **representation and community** means first and foremost asking which bodies or institutions are currently capable of representing the community and the groups and orientations that make up this community. Clearly, the complexity of these issues requires broader and deeper analysis than I can provide here. Nonetheless, I still feel able to offer a few thoughts on the problematic relationship between these two notions, with a view to providing some possible starting points for considering the present.

In this respect, we need to quickly go back to the genesis of the modern concept of representation, which, like all the great notions in the political lexicon, has to be linked back to the historical context in which it was established. Modern representation originated from a combination of philosophy and revolutions – the great revolutions that straddled the late 1600s and early 1700s – at a time when people were seeking new solutions to the problem of how to reconcile the protection of individual rights with the collective dimension of the State. Representation is the institutional form that modern philosophy developed in order to restructure the relationship between government and governed in the light of the great modern project of rights: those fundamental rights, enshrined in written constitutions, stemming from political battles that often involved much bloodshed. It is, however, a political project based on the defence of individuals against the collective. This starting point reminds us that historically the battle of the revolutionaries – British, American (although it is worth remembering that the American Revolution was first and foremost a war of independence) and French – was aimed primarily against the state, but also against intermediate bodies such as classes or corporations: all those collective organisations that, in the eyes of the revolutionaries, held back the freedoms of individuals by propping up the status quo.

The great modern ideal of rights is certainly a problematic project which has, not unreasonably, been called into question because of its class genesis, its patriarchal features and its Euro-centric and colonial flaws. These characteristics persist to some extent to this day in the contemporary form of constitutional democracy based on rights. We live, moreover, in a world in which some people imagine that they can export rights and democracy through war. And yet those calling the model of rights into question today – to the extent that it looks to many as though it is breathing its last – are not socialist, feminist or post-colonial critics, but new forms of

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conservatism and reactionary thinking that make it imperative for us to go back to some of the characteristics that made the constitutional model an unparalleled example of emancipation. Even Marx and Engels – who were fierce critics of that project – recall, in the first chapter of the Communist Party Manifesto, the disruptive and revolutionary power of the individualism that typified bourgeois representation, although they saw it as a stage in a broader and still unfinished revolutionary journey.

Moreover, despite the fact that representation originated as an ideal for defending the individual against the overwhelming force of the collective, this purely individualistic dimension of representation remains – as Norberto Bobbio reminds us – the first and most important unkept promise of democracy. The idealised image of a representative Parliament as the sole mediator and spokesperson for the interests of individuals is in fact counterposed by the history of a democracy made up of large collective entities and intermediate bodies – the drive belts between state and citizens, they used to be called – including political parties, trade unions, trade associations and associations in the broad and plural sense.

The constitutionalism of the 20th century – by somehow reconciling representation and the collective – has taught us that defending the rights of individuals, even against abuses by the State, cannot be achieved without large collective organisations that watch over this defence and update the catalogue of rights. So much so, that the crisis of the intermediate bodies that we are experiencing today is accompanied by a profound questioning of rights: social rights, first of all, but also political rights, called into question by decades of reformism that worships governability at the expense of representation; and the same could be said of civil rights: despite living in an age when the political lexicon cannot do without the word "freedom", we find ourselves face to face with attacks – that would have been inconceivable until just a few years ago – on rights of freedom, and the US Supreme Court's ruling on abortion is a worrying political manifesto of the years to come.

Here is not the place to dwell on the reasons for this crisis. Instead I will merely attempt to raise doubts rather than provide answers to the Leninist question "What is to be done?" Bringing back old intermediate bodies based on the 20th century model would be out of step with the times, however desirable it might be from many points of view. So, when we ask ourselves what the new collective entities in which we should invest culturally and politically might look like, we need, in my opinion, to start off by asking what type of representative function we expect them to fulfil. Whether, and in what sense, we imagine them as being representative. For years we have invested in identitarian, sociographic representation. There have been calls – quite rightly, in many respects – to give a voice to those who are not represented in institutions forcibly occupied by old, white, heterosexual males – i.e., in our case, Italians according to the criterion of blood. We should perhaps add "wealthy" to that list of adjectives, but that would open up another, thornier chapter. At the same time, there has been much debate about the representation of interests: our political language has changed and now incorporates words that refer to the world of interests, often in the form of Anglicisms such as "stakeholder" and "governance".

If these paths look insufficient or, worse, we believe they have contributed to the crisis in the culture of rights, perhaps we should take a new and critical approach based on the old idea of political representation, which, despite its limitations, fostered the establishment of constitutional rights. And political representation can only be ideological; in other words, it can only be based on common values and ideas, not on identity or interests. While the socially widespread climate of intolerance towards dissent and the opinions of others is very worrying, it is also a sign of the end of the post-ideological illusion of recent decades in which many have acted as if the left-right dichotomy was a thing of the past.

I therefore think that all we can do is hope for new ideological and partisan movements, such as those supporting climate action, in which generational identity plays an important role, but nonetheless remains secondary to the political aim of defending the human race against ecological disaster.

Conflict

"saying no is sometimes the only way to work towards a future intention"

Across a disparate range of disciplines, observers have noted that the generative dimension of **conflict** has gradually disappeared from public discourse. Of the many possible meanings of the term, there is an increasing tendency to use those connected to with destruction of contenders, oppression and war. And yet conflict does not necessarily imply abuse of power. Conflict can be a way to recognise inequalities, trigger positive social changes, encourage discussion and make communities more dynamic.

The process revealed the need to find new cultural and organisational devices to create space for emerging forms of conflict in the catchment area, recognising their potentially generative nature and opening the way to forms of collaboration, mutualism and cooperation that are established not only "for", but also "against" something.
It is a widespread demand among very different entities – both at grass-roots and institutional level – who observe how the removal of these dynamics risks triggering exasperation and disaffection, thus paradoxically becoming counter-productive for social cohesion.

There is also a manifested need to be more explicit about the power differential that is created – even in participatory processes – between people, organisations and different types of institutions. Power, in this case, means a different opportunity to access and mobilise forms of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. And it is therefore closely connected with the competition for access to audiences, relationships and public and private resources that inevitably arises even between entities that aim to foster participation on a mutually supportive basis.

In order to empower this demand for change, there is a need to create new opportunities for dialogue, institutional tools and cultural frameworks that highlight this complexity and manage it effectively.

Conflict

Claudio Paolucci

I would like to start with something I have said before – also with *che*Fare and Compagnia San Paolo – about participation[3]. I identified five component parts of which participation is built:

1 / Participation takes place when people are asked to attend something, such as by a wedding invitation (the enemy of participation is absence, the state of not being there).

2 / Participation takes place when this presence, however, does not exclude those who are absent, i.e. when the presence of one thing does not imply the simultaneous absence of another or of those who are opposed.

3 / Participation takes place when an attempt to overturn a hierarchy or an asymmetry is made (for example, in "participatory design", designers carry out their design work in conjunction with consumers and purchasers.

4 / Participation takes place when efforts are made to transition from a vertical, tree-structured organisation into a horizontal, non-hierarchical, network-based organisation (networks are structurally participatory);

5 / Participation takes place when efforts are made to translate others, to bring them among us and to include them in practices or decisions from which they were previously excluded.

The last point is helpful in understanding the generative and creative dimension of **conflict**, which too many people think is the opposite of participation, when in fact it is not. In active participation, we try to translate others and bring them among us: we encourage the participation of those previously excluded. But every translation – and I say this as a linguist and a semiologist – is the construction of comparability between heterogeneous systems, the construction of a common measurement between a system we know (our native language) and a system that is radically unknown to us and that we want to understand by embracing it and translating it into the system we know.

Consider the role of simultaneous interpreters: they are mediators who construct a common measurement between an unknown language – that we are unable to process – and a language we know, by passing us from one to the other. Well, *conflict is a form of participation that*

3. Claudio Paolucci, I cinque sensi di Partecipazione, video content, 2020.

Conflict

does not accept translation, that does not accept the construction of a common measurement between heterogeneous systems, because it thinks – for various reasons – that this comparability does not exist or should not be built. Conflict is perfectly expressed by Bartleby's formula "I would prefer not to": that is not my world, it is not my logic. Sometimes systems are untranslatable, and it is not right to look for a Rosetta Stone that makes it possible to read one through the other. If you'll pardon the metaphor, conflict is the response of someone who does not accept the rules of the game proposed to them, and insists on shouting "Snap!" when they were invited to play pontoon.

And this thing, whose fundamental power I would like to show, has become absolutely intolerable in our societies over the past 20 years. Let us be clear that this is not normal: for my father's generation – the one born in the 1950s and who were in their twenties in the 1970s – conflict was the first expression of every possible intervention in the real world. Participation was not this generation's way of intervening in the real world. Something has changed radically: we have thought of conflict (perhaps for too long) solely in terms of overcoming it and of resolving it: a difficult moment that we need to "get through" on the way to a synthesis, a conciliation, a mediation. And perhaps that is why, now, with fresh outbreaks of war and escalating social conflicts, we find ourselves somehow unarmed and unable to rethink our system of social practices – health, urban planning, education, politics – without denying an overall picture scarred by intractable tensions. This is what we have seen with the war in Ukraine: they'll have to negotiate, they'll have to surrender, they can't win, they certainly won't want to fight and go to war. And yet they are still fighting.

So the question is this: *how can we think of conflict in terms other than the prospect of overcoming it and the idea that anyone who acts according to a totally different logic should ideally take active part in designing the system*?
I believe that, in Italy at least, we have been rather misled by Giorgio Gaber (a singer-songwriter) and the idea – now repeated here, there and everywhere – that "freedom is participation". So I was very interested in a recent interview with the co-author of all of Gaber's songs, namely Sandro Luporini, who not only said that he deeply regretted writing the line "freedom is participation", but that they did not actually intend to write it at all, because they wanted to write "libertà è spazio di incidenza" (freedom is the space in which you can influence the world around you)[4]. In other words, freedom is when you can have an effect on the real world, not when you merely participate in it (i.e. when you start getting the others to play "Snap", not when you start playing pontoon). So we need to ask an important question: how far does participating affect the real world, and to what extent is "participation" the space in which you can influence the world around you? They are not the same thing at all. Why?

Because participation is always the inclusion of another party within the logic of a system: a budget is participatory when

4. Sandro Luporini, Ti ricordi che c'era Gaber? "Libertà non è partecipazione", article in Liberatv.ch, 2022 .

Conflict

citizens participate in the reasoning and decision-making about an investment to be made by a municipality or an organisation. The latter, however, not only makes decisions on other matters without citizens, but does so within a system whose logic already exists before the participatory decisions are taken and makes them possible. Art is participatory when viewers becomes authors and artists within a system created by the artist. Theatre is participatory when the audience become actors within a system developed by the company. In short, the upending of a pre-existing hierarchy, which is typical of all forms of participatory culture, does not necessarily involve building a symmetry. Hence the real danger of participation, which is immunisation, in other words, an operation designed to "include part of what it intends to exclude in order to neutralise the force of its impact". It is what we do with vaccines: we inject a small dose of what we want to exclude, to make ourselves immune. The problem starts when we do not want to make ourselves immune, we just want to change things, but our "dose" is too small to effect change and participation therefore has an immunising effect: it excludes by inviting participation; in fact, it excludes *precisely because it invites participation*.

So – to move away from the logic of immunisation – I think we should not oppose conflict and participation, as we often do. Conflict is a fundamental form of participation. In fact, as we have seen, active participation does not imply equality, *but the management of inequality*. And conflict is the management of inequality. After all, why should someone in a privileged position give up *everything*? They will be willing to give up parts of it, perhaps the least significant ones, if they are allowed to seek the active participation of others.

Hence the difference between participation and conflict: active – asymmetric – participation is the participation of others within an established logic or a logic set by those inviting the active participation, whereas *conflict is a form of active participation that goes beyond the logic of the party inviting it*. Active participation and conflict are two terms that describe participation between unequal parties, where, in the former, the party invited to participate accepts the rules laid down by the party inviting them to participate, whereas in the latter, the party invited to participate does not accept those rules and wants to participate on its own terms, because it believes that, under the rules proposed by the inviting party, its lower standing in the participation, will deny it sufficient "space to influence the world around it". In short, conflict is a rejection of the code espoused by the party inviting participation. Conflict is participation on the basis of its literal meaning, i.e. "to take part," in the sense of "taking sides," and thereby unmasking unsustainable ideas within the system and evaluating the narratives and practices to which we have become over-accustomed.

So perhaps it makes sense to end with Luperini: freedom is not participation, it is the space to influence the world around us, and that space always passes through conflict. Because conflict is by no means the opposite of participation, it is simply a form of participation that does not accept the rules of the party promoting participation and inviting you to participate.

Collective Intelligence and Impacts

"active participation is the mechanism that allows individuals to have an impact in terms of expression, power and action on collective dimension's processes"

One of the findings that has emerged most clearly from the initiative is the inextricable link between active participation practices and the emergence of forms of **collective intelligence** in local communities.

The ongoing work of connection, exchange and processing involving various actors creates new synergies, characterised both by the development of common visions and interests and by the exchange of knowledge and skills aimed at collaborative learning.

Where these ongoing efforts to foster interaction build up and bear fruit, the cognitive and cultural capital generated by processes of active participation transcend the individual level. They radiate out towards seemingly distant actors, relationships and communities through complex mechanisms of references, echoes and connections, often involving faint signals, unspoken knowledge and implicit links.

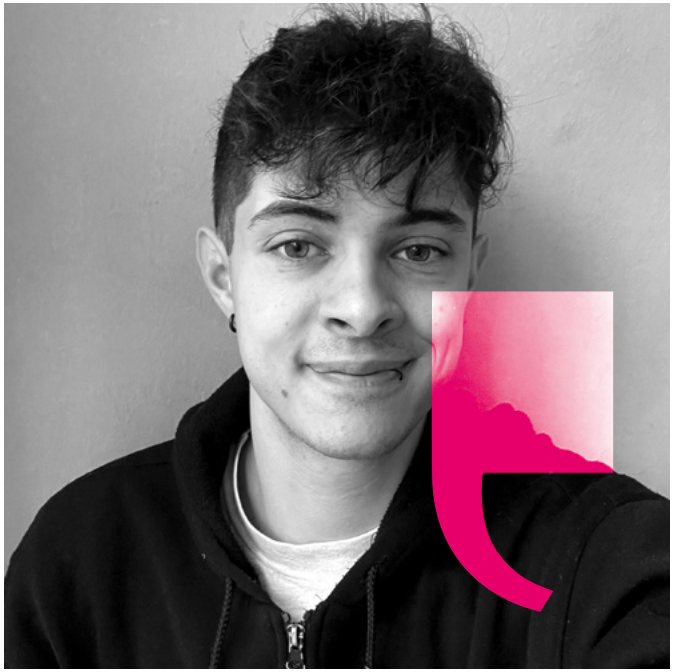
The ability of participation pathways to generate positive **impacts** in the long term confirms that there is a relationship between collective intelligence and participation. The existence of active participation programmes makes communities more connected, boosts their formal and informal skills, and enhances the generativity of actors in terms of multiple forms of capital (cultural, social, symbolic and economic).

At the same time, many people point to the constant, widespread difficulty of defining, measuring and valuing these impacts. Firstly, because – even more than in other areas of social and cultural work – the boundaries between "planning", "doing", "observing" and "analysing" are blurred: working in active participation means being immersed in highly reflective practices in which it is difficult to segregate distinct factors from each other. Secondly, because the intangible, lateral and long-term nature of the impacts generated makes it particularly difficult to establish reporting systems that do justice to them. And lastly, evaluation and reporting is an extremely demanding task for working teams that are already overburdened and routinely working beyond capacity.

The demand that has arisen therefore involves facilitating the adoption of impact strategies geared towards striking a balance between defining measurable targets and generating maximum value from unexpected outcomes not covered by those targets.

Collective intelligence and impacts

Gabriele Magro



Until a about hundred years ago, Turkish was written in Arabic characters, not in the Latin alphabet in which it is written today. As well as various political issues that we won't go into here, the decision to adopt a new alphabet gave rise to a phonological problem: the language had to be adapted to an alphabet that was not designed to serve it. It was like wearing clothes made-to-measure for someone else, so a bit of cutting and stitching had to be done. Certain sounds in Turkish could not be represented effectively using the system of signs made available by the Latin alphabet, so various special characters had to be developed: a Ğ, an Ş and an "ı" without a dot to denote a closed vowel sound that does not exist in the Neo-Latin languages: "ı".

When my colleagues and I in culture and the third sector adopt the method and alphabet of **impact** assessment, we are choosing to operate within the perimeter of a system of signs that was not designed to fit our work. So why do we do it? Because adopting this alphabet, and measuring and quantifying a whole range of parameters, enables members of other worlds that speak other languages – whether finance, business or public administration – to read us more clearly.

But if we want the alphabet of impact assessment to express the complexities and nuances of cultural work effectively, we need to invent our own special characters that denote the specific nature of our practices.
These special characters, these parameters, are all still to be studied, discussed and decided. The glass half-full: imagining the special characters of cultural work in impact assessment is not just hard work, it is also an opportunity to develop and fine-tune a method, by cutting and stitching until it fits like a glove. If we imagine new impact parameters, if we broaden the horizon of what can be evaluated, adopting a new alphabet could be an empowering tool for us. It's no easy task, of course, and it will take time. And until we have those special characters, we are exposed to certain risks.

One of many is that evaluating the practice of cultural work using the "standard alphabet" of impact assessment means, prosaically, promoting the production of art designed to generate impact. That might seem like something of no consequence, but it has the potential to interfere with the language, production and even the poetics of cultural production because, without those special characters that define what our impact is, the winning cultural projects become those that are the most efficient from an economic point of view or in terms of attracting tourism.

Collective intelligence and impacts

When done properly, the job of encouraging active participation includes practices that are inevitably uneconomic, because they expose the public to the unexpected. Under the law of supply and demand, the unexpected is uneconomic: no-one has asked for it, so it stands to reason that few people buy it.

The formula under which the usefulness of an item is measured in terms of how much it produces is rooted in our mindset. The unexpected is therefore useless and is recorded as an unacceptable liability in the accounts. But if no-one can afford to offer the unexpected, the civic fabric of our communities comes undone: after all, it is the incessant proposal of the expected, by algorithms, that is causing echo chambers, confirmation bias and some of the most worrying threats to democratic systems. Cultural production that adheres to this logic gives rise to sterile projects that are incapable of impacting on public debate and becoming instruments for civic emancipation: in a word, they become ornamental.

But it is not just things that don't produce anything that are considered useless: things that produce results that are not (yet) measurable are also considered useless. In this respect, I'm thinking of an unmeasurable parameter that is also one of the special characters that we most urgently need to equip ourselves with: **collective intelligence**. In *Grundrisse*, Marx called it "general intellect": it is the amount of knowledge that accumulates in a given geographical area and, below the radar, becomes a factor of production. It is an ecosystem of local and community skills that are not easy to formalise, because the process takes place without anyone having set it as a planning goal. The Pentagon and Stanford University were just trying to develop security systems, they did not expect the skills generated in their home area to give rise to Silicon Valley. Verrocchio was merely training his pupils in his workshop, but it just so happened that his pupils included a certain Leonardo and a certain Botticelli, without whom we might not have come to think of Renaissance Florence as a miracle of collective intelligence.

We cannot afford the luxury of leaving processes like these to happen by chance: we need them, our local communities need them, and that is why we must take account of them in the equation of our work. If collective intelligence is not identified, valued and recognized as an asset, it usually gets lost. So how can we protect and nurture these bonds, which, as our previous report points out, are characterized by "a low degree of formalization"? How do we build a system out of this "surprisingly volatile" capital, this informal factor that generates silent results that no named individual can take credit for? The question remains open. There is no doubt, however, that the first step is to recognize that the question exists, to name it, to assign a special character to it: our 'i' without a dot.

That "i" without a dot is the "i" in "impromptu" and "incidental" – a space that design leaves to the unexpected. It is accepting that, when it comes to cultural work, impact assessments do not give an exact result, they always leave a remainder: that remainder comprises collective intelligence, alongside a bunch of other things that we still have to give a name to. What's more, we have to say that the result is correct *only if* it leaves an unexpected remainder: a column division with a remainder of two. Sometimes, the two in question are Leonardo and Botticelli.

Intergenerationality

"projects don't just make places evolve, they make the people involved in the project evolve too"

The diversity and fragmentation of the policies, tools, cultural origins and institutional natures of the parties involved in participation have over time created a great wealth of experiences and practices related to social groups of different ages.

The parties involved in the process highlighted that Active Participation is a promising field for building wide-ranging framework programmes capable of fostering unexpected synergies between different age groups. The demand is to find forms of action that go beyond the limits imposed – necessarily – by the conventional stratification of public policies. For this purpose also adopting "cascade" approaches which allow processes to be devised, planned and managed that work with certain age groups while involving others at the same time.

There are Active Participation processes that work with early childhood, and therefore also with parents and other family members. There are also processes aimed primarily at the elderly, which can trigger generative mechanisms of interest also to younger generations. Or projects aimed mainly at university students which instead build relationships with more mature individuals holding senior positions in the worlds of work, research and culture.

This logic can be an effective way of identifying people in marginal conditions, for whom a categorisation by "target", according to age, risks building barriers that reduce potential trajectories for change. It can also trigger unprecedented experiments in social cohesion and unexpected alliances between different organisations and between organisations and institutions.

Perhaps more than any other category, **intergenerationality** sees third places, social and cultural hubs, cultural institutions and public spaces as local enablers of new forms of social capital.

Intergenerationality

Chiara Faggiolani

Is it possible to devise a humanity policy aimed at pursuing and developing the process of humanization, in the sense of enhancing relations between human beings, between human societies and between human beings and their planet?
We cannot eliminate sorrow and death, but we can aspire to progress in relations between human beings, individuals, groups, ethnicities and relationships~. Giving up on the best of all worlds does not mean giving up on a better world.[5]

Intergenerationality is one of the 18 key words that make up the reference framework for Active Participation in FCSP's catchment area.
I have started off with this very powerful quotation from Edgar Morin because it enables us to identify the goal we should be aiming at in the anthropological transformation that we are going through, namely, the process of humanization, which is a change in our thinking and in our civilization.

This paradigm shift is built around two central premises: life-long personal development for everyone, and interdependence, i.e. the network of relationships between human beings themselves, and between human beings and our planet.

The relationship between generations seems to have gone haywire. ISTAT's latest report on fair and sustainable well-being presented the "intergenerational divide" as a major issue requiring urgent resolution.
During the Covid-19 pandemic we all shared and experienced the same fragility, the same sense of threat, and the same sense of belonging to a single community of destiny. But then something happened.
In 2022, while over half of the well-being indicators relating to adults rose to higher levels than they had reached before the pandemic, for young people under 24, only 44% of indicators showed and improvement and almost the same share (43%) had got worse.
In the post-Covid phase, mature people became less pessimistic and more confident about their own and their family's

5. Edgar Morin, Svegliamoci, Milan, Mimesis, 2022, p. 71.

Intergenerationality

future, but young people, incredibly, did not. Instead, they started suffering from what Pascal Chabot, in a wonderful essay on chronosophy, defines as "afuturalgia": the pain of feeling deprived of a future[6].

How can you blame young people? How can you have faith in a plan for the future drawn up by adults that failed to "foresee" our planet's reactions to human actions? I am thinking, of course, of global warming and climate change.
How can you accept economic theories and technological development from adults who are guilty of such an immense forecasting error? I am thinking, for example, of the problem of employment and of the fact that poverty has tripled and is inversely proportional to age. Did you know that the highest percentage of people in absolute poverty is among young people?[7]
These forecasting errors are so significant that they now prevent us from passing a humanly habitable world on to our young people.

Now, having recognised the mistakes that have been made, are we capable of taking a responsible view; are we capable, in practice, of designing the future together? To do so, we need to stop viewing things through the same old lenses, one of which is the classic generational approach, which simply doesn't hold water.
We live in an age when children – generation alpha – have patterns of consumption that were once typical of teenagers – generation zeta – teenagers have levels of freedom that were once typical of young people. Between young people and children today, there is much more than a slight age difference. Young people (generation Y) are increasingly dependent on adults, even economically, while elderly people (baby boomers) have youthful lifestyles: far from being the age of decline, old age has become an important stage in people's life plans.

There's more than one way to be a family. There are innovations and continuities that intertwine. The traditional approach based on targets and socio-demographic segmentation, cannot work. It is as if we had, at the back of our minds, a kind of adult-centric view of development, a kind of bell curve – if we were to draw it – in which the apex is the adult years, youth is a phase of preparation for adulthood and old age the phase of decline. But that's not the way it is: the process of humanization that we need to pursue covers our entire life span and is a non-linear pathway based on transformation. That is why I loved the word "divenenti" (becomers) instead of "young people" used in *Futura*, a collective investigation in documentary form by Pietro Marcello, Francesco Munzi and Alice Rohrwacher, which explored the idea of the future held by young people between the ages of 15 and 20 encountered in the course of a long journey across Italy. The film takes a similar approach to Pasolini's "Comizi d'amore" (Love Meetings).[8]

"Becomers" is my preferred label. It is much more informative and intriguing than "young people" because, instead of expressing the static nature of a dimension, it expresses transition, transformation, travel and change: "becomers" are the people who are no longer children but not yet adults, facing up to the difficult task of becoming – they are like supernatural creatures.
When I discovered this word, I realized how under-equipped our vocabulary still is, because our imagination is under-equipped. And that's what we need to work on.
The film "Futura" highlights the characteristics of time perceived by young people: a ubiquitous time, where everything is measured, where one minute is worth one minute, whether trivial or vitally important, a time accompanied by a continuous call to actions yet to be carried out[9]. A constantly accelerated time: they as though they have to look for an identity and find it as quickly as possible.

We are in a world that looks like it is in a state of evolution, revolution, progress and danger all at the same time. And for young "becomers" and adults who have already "become", these words have a completely different flavour and meaning. Looking through the lens in the opposite direction will help us find common meanings.
I think one of the keys to countering this progressive divide is for all of us to reclaim the most precious asset we have, which is time. Acceleration is one of the side-effects of competitiveness that makes us feel increasingly isolated.

6. Pascal Chabot Avere tempo. Saggio di cronosofia. Rome, Treccani, 2022.
7. Tutto da perdere. Rapporto su povertà ed esclusione sociale in Italia, Caritas, 2023.

8. See my article "I divenenti. Due libri e un documentario per progettare la lettura nel futuro", **www.che-fare.com**, 2023.
9. Pascal Chabot Avere tempo. Saggio di cronosofia. Rome, Treccani, 2022.

Intergenerationality

The relationship between generations, however, follows rules based only on trust and a sense of responsibility, on an awareness that we can learn from each other by exchanging and recombining our wealth of skills and knowledge, by pooling the words care, solidarity and relationship. But these things cannot be accelerated, they take a long time.

We should create "oases of deceleration"[10]: that is why, more than any other category, intergenerationality is inextricably linked with active participation and third places, social and cultural hubs[11] and cultural institutions which, in terms of thinking – going back to the paradigm shift of human development – can remind us of some crucial concepts: that complexity is not an end but a necessary means of conceiving the fundamental, the emerging, the ambiguous and the unexpected; that the important things are done together, between "becomers" and those that have already "become"; and that looking after each other, intergenerational solidarity and active participation will be the key.
So it's not about co-existing, it's about interacting. One way to do that is through stories. The great writers have taught us the power of feeling dismay, amazement, ecstasy. The power of imagination. Which can be the emotional echo that opens up when a word is said at the right time[12].
In 1951, Natalia Ginzburg wrote *Il Silenzio* (Silence) which was published in 1962 in Ginzburg's first collection essays, *Le piccole virtù* (The small virtues). In it she said:

Never before has the fate of humans been so closely interlinked, with the result that disaster for one is disaster for all. This strange state of affairs arises: that the fate of one person is inextricably linked with that of another, in such a way that the collapse of just one wipes out thousands of others, and yet at the same time everyone is suffocated by silence and unable to exchange a few free words. This is why – the fact that disaster for one is disaster for all – the means offered to us for healing from silence turn out to be non-existent.

I believe we should focus on building physical and mental spaces where different generations meet, places that highlight the continuity of what unites the generations and where we can build bridges between ancient and contemporary practices of living in our time.

10. See Hartmut Rosa, Accelerazione e alienazione: per una teoria critica del tempo nella tarda modernità, Einaudi, 2015.
11. Noreena Hertz, Il secolo della solitudine. L'importanza della comunità nell'economia e nella vita di tutti i giorni, il Saggiatore, 2021.
12. Carla Benedetti, La letteratura ci salverà dall'estinzione, Einaudi, 2021.

Power

"The more that power is made evident, the more I can unleash a pathway where I build the tools to overturn it and change it. There is nothing worse than pretending not to have it"

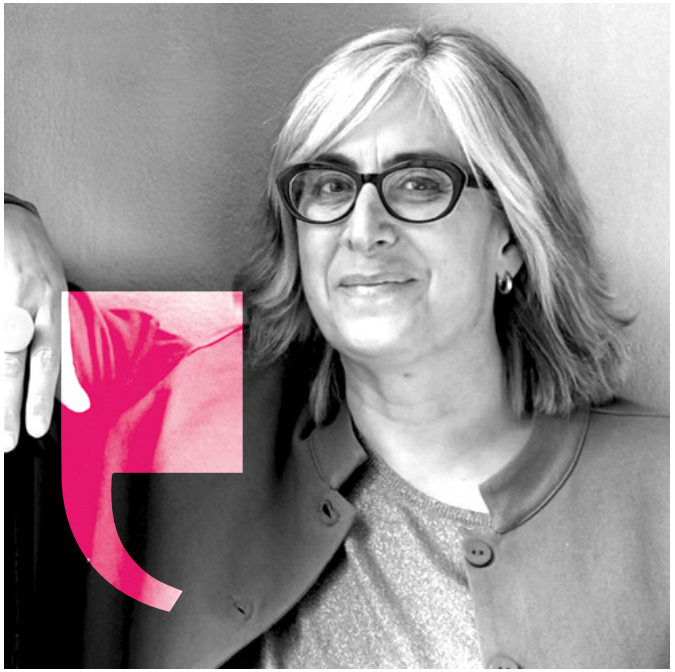
Power is often the proverbial elephant in the room of in active participation pathways, which should be aimed at a certain degree of emancipation and a drive for self-organization. In these cases, the presence of power and the ways in which it circulates through processes downplayed or made invisible by people, organizations and institutions for different reasons.

In the contexts most directly geared towards activism and exercising direct democracy, it is sometimes difficult to recognize, bring out, and manage informal leadership dynamics. Similarly, it is difficult in these contexts to manage the clash with the dynamics associated with a different internal redistribution of resources, responsibilities and privileges. Power is experienced as something to be ashamed of, and the shame leads to a lack of transparency in participatory settings. In these cases, the solution proposed by the participants in the "Words of Participation" initiative is to adopt methodologies, tools and cultural postures that highlight where the power lies in participatory processes, even when it is tacit and not formalized, so as to put all the actors in a position to recognize it, call it by its name and try to rebalance it.

By contrast – in contexts geared towards managing power, authority and authoritativeness along traditional lines – it can be difficult to move beyond the use of seemingly participatory rituals for purely communicational purposes. These give rise to pathways – perceived as "social washing" or "participatory washing" – whose promoters and partners themselves are deemed to lack credibility by substantial share of the stakeholders. In such cases, the unintended effect is to make the adjoining processes, which really are aimed at a transfer of power, look inauthentic or like a pretext. One solution is to foster or launch training and change management pathways even in more traditional organizations, so that they are able – in the long term – to address the question of participation more appropriately.

Power

Elena Granata



Every form of participation aspires to become a way of **redistributing power**, in such a way as to share knowledge, decision-making and resources between multiple people. Many of us share the view that the choices relating to a community should be shared between as many people as possible, that knowledge should originate from opportunities for collective intelligence and discernment, and that the community should be generated and regenerated through practices of communication and sharing. But the transition from words to deeds is much more complex.

Participation appears in theory to benefit from its own natural reliability, whereas the dimension of power, symbolic rituals and their pitfalls are somehow removed and viewed as something to be exorcised, until – after the initial stages of enthusiasm – it becomes clear that the power dynamics and the inequality of access to the rules of the game are what cause disappointment, frustration and disillusionment among the participants. Recognising power and the way it is exercised even in the smallest organizations, and observing the asymmetries of treatment it generates and the constraints it applies during processes is therefore essential. In a secular way and without rhetoric.
Taking part in social action fosters cohesion, instils motivation, enhances personal skills and makes initiatives more incisive, both socially and politically. It empowers us. On the other hand, participation often clashes with personal and group self-referencing, judgemental attitudes on the part of leaders, a lack of recognition of the efforts made, a lack of involvement and a lack of sharing with all participants.

Power – of someone over others – is something we have pretty much all made a habit of. We have become accustomed to the idea that it is normal, entirely normal, that some should the stage, take the microphone or even snatch it when they want to, while others have to stand in the shadows, passive and subordinate, as if their thinking counted for less. We have set up institutions on the basis of an unequal distribution of participation: everyone can participate – in theory – but some have more incentive to do so than others.

Think about how classrooms work, for example. Who is really taking part in the lesson? Certainly the teacher, who has the right to determine how and when students speak in class, but who often gets used to a "conversation" that favours the most outgoing, the least shy, the ones who have studied most, the ones who know the language best, and boys over girls or girls over boys depending on the context. Amartya Sen would use the term *capabilities*, which represent our actual ability to act, not just our abstract power to do so. It goes without saying that, in a classroom, everyone has the same right to speak –

Power

no-one would dispute this as an abstract principle – but of course not everyone has the same capabilities (mastery, confidence, sense of self, acceptance, group consensus, recognition by the teacher or peer-recognition), and this disparity in capabilities translates into inequality.

In all group relationships, whether within schools, workplaces, families, voluntary organizations or associations, we get used to the idea that there are different degrees of participation: some people are entitled to leading roles and recognition, others are not. In all arenas of exchange, whether major or minor, it is easier to have your say if you are older rather than younger, a man rather than a woman or a higher-ranking staff post-holder (Chairperson, teacher, coordinator) than the latest arrival, and this happens even when what counts in the discussion are personal thoughts and ideas rather than roles and cultural merits. Participating cannot therefore mean just taking part – as the French philosopher Joëlle Zask explains – in the way you might take part in a dinner or conference, it needs to be an opportunity to make your own contribution (we are thinking of the systematic exclusion of women, who might be physically present without bringing anything specifically their own to the table) or to share in the benefits deriving from collective action, as happens in a business context, where individuals share in the benefits accruing to the company for which they work. It takes time and patience and it has to be done by trial and error, without resigning ourselves in the face of uncertainty and fatigue. Participating is tiring and toning at the same time, while requiring considerable intellectual honesty and the ability to think critically.

But there is a simplified version of participation that compromises its outcome. There is a high risk that there will always be someone who has more power than others, who thinks they know how to do something, and clips the wings of women, young people and anyone who does not fit. There is also – and we need to admit it – a terrible form of participation, consisting of conventional meetings, discussions in name only, pre-written scripts and paths chosen by those who have the power to do and decide and who use participation for the sole purpose of increasing the consensus around their decisions.

Lastly, there is a paradoxical dimension of participation, which is always worth considering. The more honest, complex and inclusive participation is, the more it struggles to achieve a universally acceptable solution. Countless participatory pathways die of exhaustion, because they do not have the energy, capacity or power to generate something useful for everyone. We have all experienced wearying processes that go round and round in circles before reaching a dead end. In cases like these, it is the positive dimension of power – as in the energy to make something happen, the ability to do and the ability to change – that has got lost along the way.

There can be no good participation without coming to terms with power, in its healthiest sense. “I couldn’t”, “I can’t”, “I won’t be able to” are the words most often spoken by people who play a leading role in institutions or the world of work. Such as a manager in a municipal administration who becomes aware of an offence or an irregularity, but refuses to pursue it for fear of jeopardising his or her career. A benevolent judge in a trial involving a prominent politician, in order not to compromise friendly and professional relationships. A senior leader in a school who turns a blind eye to a failing teacher, so as to avoid having to deal with conflict and jealousy in their institution. And society seems to be especially forgiving of powerful men or women who could do something but don’t, and quickly finds a justification for it.
But “I can”, we all can. I can be vigilant, I can respect the rules, I can make room for others, I can reward people who deserve it even if they are not in my circle of friends, I can turn down personal benefits deriving from my role, I can listen to those who criticize me, I can enable the vulnerable and the voiceless to have their say.

Risk and economic sustainability

"it's essential not to lose sight of the point"

There is a widespread demand for the correct identification and designation of the different forms of **risk** in participation. For institutions, the risks of reputational damage within participation pathways can be very high. Organisation also face risks to their credibility, but these risks play a much more significant role in terms of overall logic. The reputational capital of organisations is indeed a specific asset, located in the catchment area and built up over a long period of time, and – in extreme cases – losing it could threaten their existence.

Lastly, for citizens and groups that take part in participatory pathways, there is a risk that time and effort they invest will bear no fruit, resulting in a loss of interest or even a hostile rejection of the entire process. This complexity is transposed into the economic arena even more clearly. Organisations dedicated to active participation are permanently operating in a context of scarcity, in which relational and emotional components continuously intersect with professional ones, often making up for shortages of economic resources. In this sense, the work of participation is has all the features of emotional labour, a professional service whose success depends on the ability to produce and manage specific emotions in the different actors involved in the initiative. As such, it is a risky form of work in terms of personal and organizational well-being and sustainability.

All actors are exposed, across the board, to a significant additional risk stemming from the inherent unpredictability of the outcomes of participation. Of necessity, these are always open processes, the results of which cannot be guaranteed and can be very different. The road to **economic sustainability** is clearly marked, and lies at the crossroads between three needs. The first is the need to learn to set out clearly the hidden costs of participation, which all too often remain hidden among project entries that are insufficiently flexible and up-to-date to represent them in terms of time-sheets, professional staff, specialist consulting and work-flows. The second is the need to build – in the various parties involved – the necessary skills to recognize and manage different types of risks, both organizationally and economically. Among other things, this means learning to identify, name and deal with risks that are situated on different levels. The third need is to build cultural, organizational and economic systems capable of managing pathways with a high rate of uncertainty and that are – potentially – open to failure.

Risk
and economic sustainability

Tecla Livi

The focus on participation, in Italy, has grown in recent years, at both a social and institutional level. Following the significant era of participation of the 1990s – the results of which failed to meet citizens' expectations in many cases, thus contributing to a sense of frustration and mistrust in politics and institutions – participation is once again in high demand. On the one hand, interest in these processes is stimulated by public bodies' growing awareness of the need to interface with citizens and social partners to design new pathways in response to emerging or unfulfilled social needs, partly thanks to the recent possibilities opened up by co-planning, co-design and shared administration. On the other, the local level is seeing considerable growth in active citizenship initiatives and new forms of collective action and self-organization, which, in response to social challenges that the traditional welfare system is unable to address effectively, are taking independent action to take care of their places and communities.

When participatory processes are based on co-responsible relationships between the different parties involved – institutions, civil society organizations and citizens committed to building shared projects on a collaborative basis – this triggers self-propagating mechanisms for building and strengthening social capital in the local area and empowering local communities, and generates collective learning spaces capable of building or rebuilding relationships of trust and mutual recognition between institutions and local communities. Participation then becomes an important analytical and design-oriented tool for interaction, which cuts across every stage of construction, conception and implementation of interventions for the benefit of communities. Participation is what makes it possible to highlight and explore community needs and projects, connect informal skills with technical skills, and engender creative processes that lead to innovation.

It is worth noting, however, that these are delicate, fragile processes, involving obstacles and challenges that risk weakening them, compromising their effectiveness and undermining the ability of participation to acts as a truly "transformational" and "generative" process, for people, communities and contexts alike.

Firstly, the **risk** of compromising the continuity and effectiveness of participatory processes stems from the difficulty that institutions face in adapting to participatory dynamics, which, by nature, require flexibility, the ability to listen, proximity to processes, a willingness to experiment and, often, rapid responses. The shift from a purely insti-

Risk and economic sustainability

tutional responsibility to a responsibility shared with the community in the design and implementation of public policies requires institutions to exchange their existing culture and design procedures for integrated, networked methods that are open to risks and spontaneous dynamics. However, the public administration does not always succeed in launching the necessary overhaul to build real participatory spaces because of cultural obstacles, unfamiliarity with experimenting with structured and systemic methods, and administrative practices that do not facilitate flexible planning and implementation, integration, cross-cutting approaches or the ability to learn experience-based organisational lessons that such spaces require. As a result, participation runs the risk of turning into nothing more than a narrative and a formal exercise, involving nothing more than 'listening', information and consultation about projects defined elsewhere – or a mere exercise in consensus-building – without succeeding in implementing any changes that give citizens real decision-making power or opportunities to be genuine co-creators of solutions. The collaborative approach comes under severe strain when there is no participatory culture within the public administration, in other words, when the public actor is unwilling to enter the empirical field of experimentation, change the way it relates to the other actors or try to co-design the process of change on an equal footing with them. Failing to understand the participatory process or using it superficially or instrumentally risks generating negative effects, loss of trust, ineffectiveness and the de-legitimization of public action, thereby curbing the transformational potential of the process.

Conversely, civil-society organizations and associations are also at risk of losing legitimacy and credibility when the participatory spaces they put in place have ambiguous aspects, in terms of inclusiveness or democracy, for example, or when they lose sight of the dimension of collaboration for the general interest, or when they are unable to translate requests into forms that are compatible with institutional methods. In these scenarios, where the relational dimension plays an important role, and where the close relationship established with local communities is a decisive factor (their continuity and long-term durability are also important), if the relationship of trust is undermined, there is a high risk of losing not only the effectiveness of the participatory process, but also the role of the organization within the community.
Moreover, in civil-society organizations, which often have low profitability but high social impact, participatory processes that are not underpinned by a real understanding of the conditions that make them effective can become "burdens" for the participants, weighing down on them in terms of demands on their time and resources and responsibilities that are not adequately shared.

To ensure that these risks are adequately addressed, by promoting spaces of real generative interaction between public administration and civil society, it is essential to take care of the surrounding conditions. These are the conditions that make it possible to participate, by building a participatory culture, providing stable, continuous funding for the processes (that take due account of all the costs of participation), and encouraging investment in skills and in open, inclusive governance structures that swap more traditional competitive models for more cooperative decision-making processes, co-responsibility and mutual legitimacy between public institutions and active bodies.

Tools

"Different contexts require different tools, in order to involve people other than the usual stalwarts"

The question of **tools** is one of the most complex because different organizations address it in very different ways, in line with the many disciplines, viewpoints and positions they represent.

In this respect, there is cross-cutting demand to recognize the differentiation of the tools available for active participation processes in dealing with different contexts and audiences. It is essential to use them for the right purposes and in the right combinations so as to widen and differentiate the spectrum of participants, thereby reducing selection and self-selection bias.

From this point of view, the main role of tools is to keep real access to processes open, including through the use of contemporary languages and themes, by translating them between very different communities. Tools therefore play a key role in building trust and maintaining it, not only from the point of view of involvement and co-design but also in terms of the ongoing task of reporting on the processes and results of participation, even on a partial basis.

On another level, the significance of the tools triangulates with that of impacts and learning, because the outcome of participatory processes is inherently uncertain, open to failure, or to outcomes that differ considerably from those that were forecast. Results can be positive or negative, broadly as expected or completely different: in all cases, however, the learning that accrues to the various stakeholders is a fundamental impact that leaves its mark on the catchment area for a long time. This link can be highlighted by means of empowering tools that make it possible to build horizontal relationships. In other words, tools geared towards surrendering a certain amount of power in exchange for collaborative, inclusive relationships, within the framework of forms of administrative innovation and contributory democracy.

Tools

Teresa Pedretti

This essay explores the **link between tools and participation**, and highlights the nature, role and complexity of this relationship in collaborative processes. It is based is the belief that the desires and ideas that emerge from a participatory pathway are not something that already exists and needs to be brought to light through the judicious use of tools, but are something that is created by the participating community through the forms of interaction with the same means and tools that are used to express themselves. In this respect, therefore, participatory pathways are not seen as a mere set of tools, participants, facilitators, places and projects, but as the flow created by the interaction between all the objects and subjects in play.

For this reason, reflecting on instruments and participation separately overlooks the heart of the issue, namely that flow, that process capable of giving meaning to the future, which is created from time to time in the interaction between tools and people.

Furthermore, writing about tools in themselves prompts reflection on the techniques that need to be mastered, but neglects the recognition of the mechanisms underlying the use of the tools themselves, including, for example, the fact that relying on a tool is always, first and foremost, a form of delegation.

Whatever tool is used within a participatory pathway is, *a priori*, a technique to which the person facilitating the process (or the community itself) delegates the power to shape different ideas, suggestions, and reflections. Failing to understand this mechanism has the effect of confusing the tangible products of a pathway (maps, diagrams, reports) with the actual results of the process, thus side-lining what the interaction between tools and people makes possible: the creation of communities, learning, imagination, a plan for one's own future.

In itself, therefore, the fact that is worth emphasising and bearing in mind when considering the relationship between tools and the participatory process is that the tools do not remain in the background of this process, because they are always "non-neutral" and therefore play an important role in guiding discussions and decisions. This role should not be confused with the role of mere intermediaries: graphics and images do not simply represent or express ideas and thoughts that exist independently; they are mediators that act in the process and are capable of defining or changing pre-existing thoughts and situations.

So in practical terms, within a participatory pathway, the ideas and desires of a community should not be spent on the sole purpose of building word clouds,

Tools

post-its and road-maps. In fact, reflections and projects within the process are created in close correlation with the tools to which the power to shape them is assigned and the nature of the interactions that take place between individuals and between the participants and the tools themselves at the various moments of interaction.

Confining reflection to the tools themselves, therefore, denies the possibility of trying to grasp what the tools are for within the participatory pathways, namely to substantiate that relationship with and between people that serves to reveal the desires of communities. Lastly, focusing exclusively on the tools enables them to become pre-eminent within a flow. This pre-eminence, i.e. the fact that the choice of tool, its correct use and keeping on schedule is the most important aspect of a participatory flow, becomes the actual goal of the pathway, thus playing a major role in causing it to fail.

When collaborative processes work, they are about the desires, aspirations and expectations of a community. They do not focus solely on needs, because shortcomings are often obvious, and if the purpose of the participation was a shared analysis of shortcomings, it would be enough to just talk about techniques and how to use them to produce the relevant lists. Since the purpose of participation needs to go beyond this, however, collaborative processes are expected to produce a projection, i.e. a plan concerning the future of the participating community and people. From jointly identifying the functions to be implemented within a building, to thinking about the forms of use of a public space, everything relates to planning, in other words, building a tangible projection for something that does not yet exist. This projection and the ability to produce it represent the value that underpins the relationship between participation and the tools that are used from time to time, that is to say, the participatory process.

A process that works by relying on the relational balance between humans, non-humans, and quasi-humans highlights the value and importance of the ability to foster interactions in which that balance (which is not located at a specific and defined point, as would naturally happen) is continuously changing and changeable. It also draws attention to the need for the balance between the factors in play to be kept unstable, i.e. it needs to incorporate those unformalised traits, that multitude of different opportunities, that variety of tones of voice, that degree of informality and randomness that enable everyone to enter and exit the process, to take active part or to listen, to have their say or to keep quiet, to have or not have ideas, without feeling rigidly included or excluded, citizens or technical specialist, volunteers or workers, experts or participants, people or community.

Time-frames

"Doing and staying:
it is important to do things and do them together,
to stay connected, to stay in touch with things.
And to have time to stay in touch with things."

The initiative has shown that the time dimension is crucial in the development of active participation pathways, in two different but complementary ways.

The first relates to the **objective time-frames** involved in participatory processes. The various stages of contact between individuals and specific groups, engagement, listening, processing, discussion, representation and dissemination are inevitably time-consuming.
They inherently involve setbacks, periods of stasis and settling, partial changes of course and – in some cases – taking backward steps along lines of action undertaken.
These dynamics are not well suited to the organization of pathways according to the administrative, management and financial criteria of working on a project basis, which often involves relatively short time-frames.

The second relates to the various **subjective time-frames** in which the actors involved in active participation processes are perceived. Third-sector bodies, cultural institutions, public administration agencies, specific groups of citizens, families and individuals think and act according to very different timetables in terms of hours, timetables, deadlines, bureaucracies, paces of life and rates of production. Aligning these different paces is long, delicate and demanding task, which is also subject to constant monitoring and tuning.
The widespread demand is to learn to recognize and value the multiplicity of objective and subjective time-frames, and to build programmes that are consistent with the aims and mechanisms of participation. In many cases, this means making it possible to implement long pathways, sometimes exceeding project time-frames. In others, however, it involves enabling fast, dynamic, short-term actions, aimed at systemic intervention and striking the right balance between change and continuity.

Time-frames

Valentina Porcellana

For nearly 20 years, I have been testing tools and methods and for participation by supporting processes of reflection and transformation requested by organizations, institutions and communities, and analysing their outcomes, in such a way that an external, non-judgemental reading, such as anthropological one, can assign value to those actions and instil trust in the people who took them.

The various opportunities to work in urban and rural settings, often characterized by social and geographical marginalisation, each contributed in their own way to shaping a transformational anthropology, applied to and often implicated in the processes of change. These were mostly long, non-linear pathways, the outcomes of which had take account of the resistance that coexists side by side with the desire for transformation, and processes remodelled by and with the participants, all of which were surprising and none of which were trivial. The long **time-frames** of participation – determined by the non-mathematical sum of the processing times of each participant combined with those of the context – require what the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai calls the "practice of patience", in other words the political strategy of sharing, listening and taking care of the processes as an antidote to the rhetoric of emergency and actions imposed through violence, including institutional violence.

Genuinely shared and participatory processes, however, are also demanding and require a large investment of intellectual and emotional energy, which needs to be regenerated from time to time by slowing things down, getting the chance to find your own pace, listening to others and yourself, looking around without haste and taking back a bit of time for yourself. As Vito Teti wrote, in fact, staying does not mean "staying still", but rediscovering the pleasure of taking things slowly and pausing, the enjoyment of waiting and the amazement triggered by unexpected outcomes.

While testing out this slow pace around town, I spotted things in the urban environment that I had never noticed before, and began to find, where I least expected to, in cracks in the pavement and interstices in the streets, small but highly evocative and symbolic objects: paper clips.

This unexpected encounter reminded me that the city can be experienced in different ways and time-frames, that even the most familiar places can surprise us if we take the time to get to know them again, and that paper clips can be a pretext, however unusual and light-hearted, for thinking and saying serious things about the space and time we live in. As David Farrier says, we are leaving our tracks everywhere and they constitute a heavy legacy that will last

Time-frames

hundreds of thousands of years. Seeing and reflecting on the tracks we are leaving is a common task that binds us together and reconnects us to our common human and planetary destiny.

Paper clips connect things, people, places and even thoughts: they are a "can opener", which, by linking our thoughts together, re-shape reality and enable us to look at ourselves and the world around us in an entirely new way. The inextricable tangle of paper clips that I have collected over the years has brought me back to studies on complexity, the reflections of Edgar Morin and even *Sociologia degli Interstizi* by Giovanni Gasparini, which suggests trying to value the little things that are usually overlooked in favour of what we consider important. Like anthropology, which is the interstitial science par excellence, interstices invite us to revise our established ideas and categories, and open ourselves up to the possibility of alternatives.

The tangle of paper clips, moreover, illustrates the power of concatenation and shines a spotlight on the paradigm of complexity, according to which the whole is more than the sum of its parts. And it is this diversity that creates the beauty of this whole, which links up with the meaning of participatory projects and workshops in which creativity and the ability to change point of view, look and posture by working together is the basis of political action, in the sense of caring for people, relationships and places. Those paper clips, each different from the others in shape, size, colour and condition – which many see as waste, rubbish or forgotten oddments – are a metaphor for people of different ages, origins, roles, genders and social statuses, who are seeking a connection by creating and doing things together, rather than in mutual indifference or, worse, clashes between different factions. The connections between the paper clips, the fact that they are linked to each other, illustrates a concept that is central to human life: interdependence. Miguel Benasayag warns us against the ideology of autonomy, which sees ties as nothing but a symptom of weakness, and suggests instead that we should think and build creative bonds of solidarity.

So the tangle of paper clips that assembled itself randomly in my pocket is a powerfully evocative image of this idea of "creative bonds of solidarity", which are random and unexpected and hence even more astonishing. Innovation does not necessarily overwhelm and overturn things, but it can start with a new way of organizing the things we have at our disposal. It is an attitude more than an action. I myself, in my impatience, have not always accepted the idea that change can happen gradually and incrementally rather than radically. And yet it is through small acts of care and attention that people notice, without fear, that things can change and that they themselves can do what they did not imagine was possible. It's all about training patience along with imagination and aspirations. And as Appadurai reminds us, aspirations are what feed deep democracy, in other words that collective capacity that is expressed in the everyday practices of sharing information, problems and solutions, doing things together and exercising trust: all of which are processes that take time, but that lead to shared policies and choices that are sustainable in the long term.

Minimum bibliography for changing things

The bibliographies appear in the same order as the contributions to the publication

Fabrizio Barca

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- **Francesca Moccia**, Cittadinanzattiva e partecipazione, 2024 > VIDEO CONTENT
- **Andrea Morniroli**, Cooperazione, 2024 > VIDEO CONTENT

Liborio Sacheli

- **Art. 6(1) of Regional Law 5/2014 of the Region of Sicily on participatory democracy.**

  Art. 6. Provisions on financial allocations to municipalities 1. In implementation of the statutory prerogatives covering financial matters, with effect from 2014, a share of the regional tax revenue generated by personal income tax (IRPEF) shall be allocated to municipalities. The resources to be allocated to the municipalities shall be calculated each year by applying an allocation rate to the tax revenue generated by the income tax, formerly IRPEF, collected in Sicily in the last year preceding the reference year. The allocation rate for the three-year period 2014-2016 shall be equal to the ratio of 350,000 thousand euros and the amount of IRPEF collected in 2013. The revenues thus determined shall be distributed between the individual municipalities in proportion to the IRPEF tax base used to calculate the municipal tax added to IRPEF. Municipalities are obliged to spend at least 2% of the sums transferred to them on forms of participatory democracy, using tools that involve citizens in choosing actions of common interest. With effect from 2014, furthermore, the current-account fund for local self-government established in Article 45 of Regional Law No. 6 of 7 March 1997 shall also be abolished and all legal provisions providing for reserves to be drawn from the same fund have been repealed.
  This law requires all Sicilian municipalities to spend at least 2% of the funds they receive each year from the Region on forms of participatory democracy, by asking people and associations to propose projects and to then choose which ones to finance. If the municipalities do not do this, they must return the funds they have at their disposal. The Spendiamoli Insieme (let's spend it together) project, designed to encourage good use of participatory democracy funds in Sicily is an interesting initiative.

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- **Marta Mainieri**, Community economy, Egea, 2020
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Biographies

Le biografie sono riportate seguendo l'ordine degli interventi della pubblicazione

Alberto Anfossi

Degree and PhD in Theoretical Physics. Having taken a Masters in Economics, Alberto worked on supporting research groups in attracting and managing competitive funding at EU level. He also worked for the National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes and as an Innovation Manager.
He has many years of experience in the non-profit sector, particularly in the Fair Trade movement. He joined Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo in 2013 and currently holds the role of Secretary General, to which he was appointed on 27 July 2018. He sits on the Board of Directors of Fondazione Collegio Carlo Alberto, REAM sgr, Fondo Repubblica Digitale I.S., EASSH, Ithaca srl, and Magic Mind Accelerator s.r.l. and is also a Member of the Board of the European Commission's Climate-Neutral Smart Cities Mission.

Sandra Aloia

Currently Head of the Culture Goal's Encouraging Active Participation Mission at Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, until 2019 Sandra was Programme Manager of the Cultural Innovation Area, where she dealt mainly with actions relating to cultural participation and inclusion, increasing cultural demand generally and the relationship between culture and civic innovation. She was also Head of the Polo del '900 start-up programme, she has collaborated for many years with the Chair of Economics of Culture at the University of Turin and she has taught Cultural Heritage Policy. She has also collaborated with the Cultural Heritage Education sector of the Municipality of Turin on visitor studies, with particular reference to learning processes in museums and non-public entities.

Bertram M. Niessen

is a researcher, designer, lecturer, author, and advisor on how culture transforms the state of things. He was one of the founders of the *che*Fare award (2012-2014). In 2014 he oversaw its transformation into an agency for cultural change, and now – as Scientific Director and Head of Research & Development – he deals with its various branches: cultural design, curation of live meetings, online and offline collaborative processes, bottom-up empowerment of cultural organizations and advisory services for the institutions. Since 2003, he has taught on degree courses, masters courses and doctorate programmes at universities and academies throughout Italy. He was a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Milan and obtained a PhD in Urban European Studies at the University of Miano-Bicocca. He collaborates with online and offline publications and radio broadcasts. He has dozens of publications to his name, including books he has curated, chapters in collective works, articles in specialist journals and prefaces. He is a member of various cultural councils, juries, boards, and technical and scientific committees for the evaluation of cultural projects. His latest book is *Abitare il Vortice* (UTET, 2023).

Fabrizio Barca

is a statistician and economist, now Co-coordinator of the Inequalities and Diversity Forum. He has been a Research Director at the Bank of Italy, Head of the Department of Public Policy for Development at the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, Chairman of the OECD Committee for Local Policy and an advisor to the European Commission. On the strength of this experience, he was appointed Minister for Local Cohesion in the Monti government of national emergency.
He put forward a proposal for the reform of political party organisation under the title "Luoghi ideali". He has taught at universities in Italy and France and is the author of many essays and volumes including: *Cambiare rotta. Più giustizia sociale per il rilancio dell'Italia* (Laterza, 2019); *Un futuro più giusto. Rabbia, conflitto e giustizia sociale*, co-edited with Patrizia Luongo (Il Mulino, 2020); *Disuguaglianze Conflitto Sviluppo. La pandemia, la sinistra e il partito che non c'è* (Donzelli, 2021); *Disuguaglianze e Conflitto, un anno dopo. Dialogo con Fulvio Lorefice* (Donzelli, 2023).

Liborio Sacheli

holds a degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures from the University of Turin, and submitted a thesis on the representation of the Mediterranean in the work of the Uranian Poets.
He has served as a Community Fund-raiser at ACMOS and Head of Fund-raising at Visionary APS, two youth associations founded in Turin and operating throughout Italy. He is currently a lecturer and a fund-raising and communication consultant for third-sector bodies, and he collaborates with Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo's Encouraging Active Participation Mission within the "SparkZ - Giovani che attivano", (young catalysts) call for proposals, for which he coordinates the incubation of project ideas.
In Canicattì, he founded "Dunaccura", a collective that deals with urban regeneration based on culture, and was Head of Communication and Active Participation for the "BRUalinu - Benessere e Rigenerazione Urbana" project. He is also a winner of the 5th edition of Creative Living Lab.

Ivana Pais

is Professor of Economic Sociology in the Faculty of Economics at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, where she directs the research centre TRAILab - Transformative Actions Interdisciplinary Laboratory. Alongside David Stark and Elena Esposito, she is editor-in-chief of *Sociologica. International Journal for Sociological Debate*. Her research focuses on the organization of work in the platform economy. She is currently principal investigator on the project ORIGAMI – Home Care Digital Platforms and Industrial Relations, funded by the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2023-2025). Since 2023 she has been an Expert Councillor at CNEL (Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro).

Catterina Seia

is a pioneer in cultural cross-overs. Since the beginning of her career in large companies, during which she was appointed to top management positions, she has been involved in empowerment of people, organizations and communities as a resource for individual and collective welfare. Since 2010, she has chosen to focus on culture-based social innovation in highly complex settings and infrastructures, supporting public institutions and philanthropic bodies in the design of policies and strategies for the most vulnerable population groups. She works with organisations of which she is co-founder in a cycle spanning research, capacity building, advocacy and dissemination to promote the role of culture as an axis that cuts across multiple policy areas. In 2009 she co-founded Fondazione Medicina a Misura di Donna – an organization for the humanization of healthcare and healthcare settings, with which she launched the first national platform on "Culture, Health and Social change". Since 2013 she has worked at Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, and is Vice-Chair of both organizations. She is a member of national and European advisory boards. She is a member of the order of Journalists of Piedmont and founded and directed "Giornale delle Fondazioni" and "Arte Imprese" for Giornale dell'Arte. She has been Scientific Director of the monthly AG Letture lente since 2019. In 2020, alongside several nationally leading figures in cultural cross-overs from various disciplines, she co-founded CCW-Cultural Welfare Center ETS, which she chairs, to promote cultural participation and expression as a resource for health. In 2025, the Academy of Fine Arts of Urbino awarded her the title of Academician of Honour.

Massimo Cuono

is an associate professor in the Department of Culture, Politics and Society at the University of Turin, where he teaches political philosophy. He studies the forms, means and arguments of political legitimacy, political representation and political mediation, the arbitrary and discretionary nature of power, and the rationality and reasonableness of the law. He has published essays on these subjects in Italian, English, French and Spanish. He is Scientific Editor of *Biennale Democrazia*, Director of the journal *Teoria Politica*, and a member of the Board of Directors of *Unione Culturale Franco Antonicelli*. His publications include *L'emergenza Covid-19. Un laboratorio per le scienze sociali*, edited with Filippo Barbera and Manuela Ceretta (Carocci, Rome 2021) and *Decidere caso per caso. Figure del potere arbitrario* (Marcial Pons, Madrid 2013).

Claudio Paolucci

is full professor of Philosophy and Theory of Languages at the University of Bologna, where he teaches Semiotics and Philosophy of Language. He is also Chair of the Italian Society of Philosophy of Language, coordinator of the doctoral programme in Philosophy, Science, Cognition and Semiotics at the University of Bologna, scientific coordinator of the "Umberto Eco" International Center of Humanistic Studies and a member of the board of the doctorate of national interest "Image, Language, Figure. Forms and Modes of Mediation". Author of four monographs and over a hundred publications in international fora, he has been Principal Investigator of two research projects of national interest and two European projects: NeMo, on a semiotics of autism spectrum disorders relating to early diagnosis and the school system, and Fakespotting, on online information and disinformation. He is Head of Unibo's Brand New Inclusion project on digital technologies in multicultural and multilingual contexts, and he previously directed another European project on the media representation of disability. He was a pupil of Umberto Eco, to whom he dedicated a monograph published in 2017. His two latest books are *Persona. Soggettività nel linguaggio e semiotica dell'enunciazione* (Bompiani, 2020) and *Cognitive Semiotics. Integrating Signs, Minds, Meaning and Cognition* (Springer, 2021). His best-known work is *Strutturalismo e interpretazione* (Bompiani, 2010). He won the Pegasus Prize for Culture in 2021 and the Mouton d'Or for Best Scientific Article in 2024.

Gabriele Magro

is a writer, journalist and cultural designer. He has worked at festivals and exhibitions in the fields of literature and contemporary art for Fondazione Arte CRT, Goethe-Institut and OGR. His fictional stories have been published in Open Sewers, Vitamine and Il Rifugio dell'Ircocervo. As a journalist, he has covered urban planning, minority rights and the Balkans and Mitteleuropa for Il Manifesto, Il Post, Valigia Blu, Il Tascabile and Lucy - Sulla Cultura. He was a member of the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo Young Advisory Board during the 2021-2024 tenure, for which he dealt mainly with supporting cultural and journalistic work. Since January 2025 he has been working in the publishing area of the Franco-German cultural channel Arte.tv and he collaborates with *che*Fare.

Chiara Faggiolani

is professor of Library and Information Science in the Department of Modern Literature and Culture at the University of Rome Sapienza, where she directs the BIBLAB laboratory of Social Library and Information Science and Applied Library Research and the Masters in Publishing, Journalism and Cultural Management. She is Chair of the Forum del Libro. She is the author of numerous publications, the latest of which include *Libri insieme. Viaggio nelle nuove comunità della conoscenza* (Laterza, 2025) and *Il problema del tempo umano, Le biblioteche di Adriano Olivetti: storia di un'idea rivoluzionaria* (Edizioni di Comunità. 2024)

Elena Granata

is a lecturer in Urban Planning at the Polytechnic University of Milan and is Vice-Chair of the School of Civil Economics. She was a member of the Sherpa staff for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, G7/G20 (2020-21). She has been a Member of the Board of Directors of Ambrosianeum since 2021.
She is also the founder of PlanetB, a research group specialising in urban regeneration, the environment and civil economics.
Her articles and research papers on cities, the environment and local geographies can be found at www.planetB.it. Her recent books include: *La città gratuita* (Einaudi, 2025); *Il senso delle donne per la città* (Einaudi, 2023); *Ecolove. Perchè i nuovi ambientalisti non sanno ancora di esserlo* (ed. Ambiente, 2022), with Fiore de Lettera; *Placemaker. Gli inventori dei luoghi che abiteremo* (Einaudi, 2021); *Biodivercity. Città aperte, creative e sostenibili che cambiano il mondo* (Giunti, 2019).

Tecla Livi

a senior policy analyst, analyses, monitors and evaluates public policies for the strategic formulation and planning of local development and cohesion policies. She has experience in university teaching and socio-economic research, and is a senior consultant for public administrations. She conducts research on social and urban innovation policies, and she designs and oversees processes of social innovation, urban regeneration and community-based local development. From 2016 to 2023 she was a member of the Evaluation and Analysis Unit for Planning (Department for Cohesion Policy, Presidency of the Council of Ministers). Previously, she worked for over 15 years as a Project Manager in complex regeneration and urban development programmes for the Municipality of Turin.

Teresa Pedretti

holds masters degrees in Theoretical Philosophy from Ca' Foscari and Sociology of Organization from the University of Trento. She gained a diploma in piano at the Conservatory of Verona and is a PMP® certified project manager. She divides her time between the general management of Irecoop Alto Adige Südtirol and Campomarzio, a company she founded with five other architects and engineers. In 2022, she was the author, with Carlo Andorlini and Vincenza Pellegrino, of *Margini di convivenza. Progetti culturali di coesione sociale* (Fondazione Feltrinelli). In 2024, she edited, with Carlo Andorlini, the volume *Apprendere, crescere, partecipare. Politiche giovanili territoriali in Italia e il caso dell'Alto Adige* (Fondazione Feltrinelli). Since November 2024 she has been following a PhD programme in the Faculty of Design at the Free University of Bolzano.

Valentina Porcellana

holds a PhD in Anthropology of Complexity, and is Associate Professor in the Department of Human and Social Sciences at the University of Valle d'Aosta. She focuses on anthropology applied to social and health systems, participatory and community activation processes in urban and mountain contexts and qualitative evaluation of social and educational services. Her publications include: *Dal bisogno al desiderio. Antropologia dei servizi per adulti in difficoltà e senza dimora a Torino* (2016); *Costruire bellezza. Antropologia di un progetto partecipativo* (2019); *Antropologia del welfare. La cultura dei diritti sociali in Italia* (2022); *In montagna non ci sono alberi. Esperienze di antropologia alpina* (2023).

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