Participatory, Deliberative, and Associative Democracy

Participatory democracy has been defined as one of the latest achievements on the “long journey of democracy”.¹ This statement acknowledges the current challenge of reorganizing power over and within the boundaries of the Nation State, a situation that has been rightly compared to the task faced by the American citizens of the late eighteenth century, when they had to “invent” democracy.² In view of the growing discontent of many citizens and their disaffection with politics, and considering the crisis of the traditional intermediary bodies (i.e. political parties and trade unions), recent decades have witnessed the search for solutions to fill this void of consent and legitimation. The aim has been to strengthen the relationship between private subjects and institutions, i.e. the link between State-community and State-apparatus.

The Italian doctrine³ traces the origins of the models of participatory democracy to South American experiences in the field of participatory budgeting, established in the 1990s in Latin America and especially in Porto Alegre in Brazil.⁴ From there the phenomenon spread to Europe and was hailed as the “return of the caravels”,⁵ even though the import obviously did not entail

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³ See the contribution by Umberto Allegretti in this volume.


⁵ Ibid. at 9.
total adoption of the original model due to the different socio-political context. Luigi Bobbio\(^6\) is credited with making the distinction between models of participatory democracy drawn from the experiences of South America and patterns of deliberative democracy from the English-speaking world. According to this interpretation, deliberative democracy is considered a theoretical foundation, on which concrete forms of participatory democracy of a more applicative character were developed.\(^7\) In brief, participatory democracy is considered a practical manifestation of the deliberative democracy model.

Even as regards geographic location, deliberative democracy is placed in a context different from that of participatory democracy, i.e. mainly in the Anglo-American world. This model has been described as the “normative ideal of democracy.”\(^8\) It is rooted in the utmost inclusiveness and exchange of information. The concept of “démocratie technique” was coined to define such deliberative processes aimed at enhancing not so much the know-how of experts and professionals as the knowledge and experience of individual citizens.\(^9\) The concept of deliberative democracy is largely based on a process of consultation and negotiation that takes place before the decision-making phase. The deliberative phenomenon is a rational moment, aimed at informing and raising awareness on a specific topic. It promotes a culture of dialogue through broad debate at political level. Deliberative democracy is therefore especially a process of discourse, but does not have the effect of transferring the final decision, which remains with the representatives of the representative democracy, to other parties. Models of participatory democracy differ in mainly being aimed at effectively influencing public decisions after a complex process of mediation of interests.\(^10\)

In this regard, there is a further distinction between two ideal types of participatory democracy.\(^11\) The first category refers to cases where the distribution