Giovanni Allegretti's reflections for the "Democracy Summit" (3/4 June 2014)

> Participation in public choices is a manner of improving our democracy. This demands the capability to build a living process, where everyone has room and a voice, adjusting to constant changes. I believe this is the most authentic manner of making politics (Iolanda Romano, *Cosa fare come fare. Decidere insieme per praticare davvero la democrazia,* 2012)

1. A short introduction

I would like to slightly modify the question proposed, transforming it into "What, in your view, are likely to be the biggest challenges that democracy will face in the next five to ten years?". The reason of this small redefinition is that I would like to face Democracy as a privileged tool to solve problems of citizens which are already on the ground, independently from what model of political regime is been experienced in the country we are considering. Being we are discussing about democracy, I would like it to be the main "subject" of our reflection (in the given formulation it is an object of the sentence…) about what changes in its structuring could be capable of opening a "virtuous circle" which could re-intensify aspects of democracy which seem to have been gradually lost in the last century…

The soft-readdressing of the original question (which I feel better express the "ratio" and the "spirit" which was intended by organizers), possibly allows me better to answer to the second questions, focusing on local democracy as "the" privileged space where is possible to start to better understand those challenges and trying to find creative and alternative solutions, which could be gradually "scaled up" at other institutional and territorial level.

Provided the need to limit our contribution to the workshop, in this short reflection I will mainly focus on possibilities, limitations and challenges of participatory practices. These – in my view – are the most powerful tools entitled to complement and integrate representative institutions and policies, with the goal of giving back to democracy that "intensity" and "depth" which has always been important on the plan of discourse, but often "got lost in translation" while structuring and reproducing in time the concrete practices of democratic exercise.

2. Trying to answer to the two questions

2.a. What, in your view, are likely to be the biggest challenges facing democracy in the next five to ten years?

There is an important recent book who opened my mind on the future challenges of democracy, which is called "La democrazia dei moderni" (The Democracy of the Moderns: XXX" by the Italian philosopher Dino Constantini. The author gave to one chapter an attractive/provocatory title which sound like "The Right to Democracy of Committing Suicide" with the intention to stimulate the reader to reflect on two major issues: (1) on one side the fact that democratic regimes (and democracy in itself…) include a level of transformative/evolutionary possibilities which open spaces to introduce changes which can themselves dilute the level of democracy and making its quality step back; (2) on the other side the fact that "learning" in democracy (or, better, from other democracies) seems to be a complex process, being that every country and every new democratic experiment claims the right to "make mistakes" and experience its own limits, without being forced to follow the path of others which previously learnt from experience how to cope with errors and attempts to overcome their limitations.

These two intertwined reflections help to understand how difficult it is for democracy to progress in a linear way, when the democratic model (with all its sub-models, as those underlined by David Held and other authors) only becomes true trough specific experiences, and these claim their right to make mistakes, and respect their own speed to evolve without necessarily look back or emulate other already-consolidated experiences.

Under this perspective, we can also wonder "where" we can learn from and "how". I belong to a school of thought (lead by the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos) which give centrality to the "epistemologies of the South", so from the need of North-Western societies to look with open eyes to the South and to the East, trying to listen to cultures and countries whose inhabitants have been exposed (often through violence) to Euro-born or North-American-born practice of democracy, but have been capable of digesting, readapting, modifying and enriching technics of government and institution-building, as well as models of policy and territorial management, so to innovate them and – possibly – re-export with new freshness to the countries where they had been originally conceived. But I am also a realist, so I am aware of the difficulties of such an "inversion" of policy-transfers, especially for those countries which owned strong empires and are still marked by a colonialist approach towards Southern countries and cultures.

But, despite this difficulties, I think it's growingly necessary to expand the scope and the range of contexts under observation, in order to avoid loosing important examples which can tell us how to "intensify and further democratize democracy". In fact, democratic regimes face all around the world a common paradox: i.e. that in the moment in which electoral/representative procedures expand worldwide (see, for example, the list of "democratic countries" annually provided by the Freedom House), they are diluting their nature and shrinking their level of quality and intensity. This is mainly due to measures undertaken in the name of "governability" 8as threshold limits in elections, majority rewards, indirect election methods, etc.) or – as Dino Constantini puts it – in the name of that "demofobia" (fear of the people) which has always been a central element in the theoretical discussions on Democracy since the origin of the United States electoral system, whose "funding fathers" preferred to talk about being in a "republic" than in a "democracy", due to an elitist conception of the governing tasks.

Now, many concrete experiences spread around the planet, especially at local or regional level (as emerges clearly from the sequence of UCLG Gold Reports on Decentralization, biennially updated and reshaped) show to have been able to "refill democracy of meaning", but they often are badly known, or under-estimated because of their scale or their path-dependent and place-dependent features. Under this perspective is very important to change the approach to "democratic mutual learning", going beyond the traditional geographies of developed, developing and underdeveloped country, which is often more linked to other factors of categorization than the development of political/administrative institutions and the system of guarantees for individual and collective rights.

If participatory practices can provide a unique opportunity for enrooting new, improved models of representative democracy in a territory, for the countries which are in "democratic transition" could be worth starting to structure hypotheses of governance based on dialogue between participation and representation, instead of following a path which states the supremacy of representation and then is forced to reintroduce the direct involvement of citizens to correct the crises of legitimacy of elected institutions, as already happened all over the western world. This is somehow the innovative track followed by some countries (certainly Bolivia, Ecuador and South Africa, and partially Dominican Republic, Peru and Colombia) which – in the last decade – tried to "refund" the State through new processes of constitutionalization which could recognize the rights and the cultural contribution of a plural range of "cultures" and "nations" present within the borders of their National State. But many other countries have lost such an opportunity: this is, for example, the case of many eastern European States soon after the fall of Berlin Wall, which preferred to imitate the "western way" and concentrated their efforts of State-building on the forging of representative institutions. Today, that some of these countries (as in the case of Poland or Slovakia) are structuring a variated range of participatory institutes

to accompany and complement representative organisms to try to rebuild the citizens' trust in political/administrative institutions, an interesting debates could take place. And it would have to concentrate on the explicit question whether - or not - a unique time-sequential logic in conceiving the relationship between representative democratic institutions and spaces of participatory decision-making exists, for which the latter are only introduced when the decaying of the first starts. Such a debate could also raises doubts on the fact that some countries need participatory practices as a pivotal and indispensable tool for making their representative institutions function, while others can afford to think of participation as a mere "added value", which could be either ignored or underestimated because the "minimum functionality" of institutions is already granted.

If the theoretical debate on such issues warms-up, it is mainly for the undeniable existence of a "double disease of liberal democracies" (DDD), as defined by Santos e Avritzer (2004), which is spread all over the planet. This urges us to rethink governance frameworks so to create "hybrid models" of institutions and public policies, which could involve a tight dialogue between delegated decision-making and direct participation of citizens in the framing of government acts, especially in the management of local and regional levels of policies. As a matter of fact, the so-called "DDD" describes a twin phenomenon. On the one hand, the *pathology of representation* concerns the way how citizens are increasingly distant from political life and the elected, which they often even do not want to know, cause they appear distant from the citizens' interested they formally committed to serve. On the other hand, obviously related to the former, the *pathology of participation* is related to the increasingly common idea that "there is no point in participating", as citizens feel far too small to confront large interest groups and the political and economic dynamics that dominate society (Santos, 2008). As shown in the book *"El círculo virtuoso de la democracia: los presupuestos participativos a debate"* written by Ernesto Ganuza and Francisco Francés. such a perspective seems to underline that only the implementation of a tight dialogue between participatory arenas and institutions could activate a "virtuous circle" able to bring an end to the DDD and restore a constructive dialogue which could bridge the existing gap between *those governing* and *those just governed*.

While this debate starts to take place, in the daily practice of several political/administrative institutions around the world, the opening of "solid" spaces for citizen participation in the shaping of public policies is getting a consolidated reality. The reason is that it is becoming increasingly clear that such experiments could simultaneously help to increase the legitimacy of institutions, as well as the efficacy of governing and managing and redistributing resources. It could also allow for a better fulfilment of inhabitants' needs and provide a key stimulus towards enrooting decentralization processes in common culture where this is still not a habit, or were trends towards recentralization are taking place. Such a "convergence of effects", which the opening of spaces of participatory democracy can offer to representative institutions and their political-administrative tasks, explains a "convergence of interests" that is often regarded as "suspicious" by some authors (Dagnino, 2004; Dagnino e Tatagiba, 2007; Ganuza e Baiocchi, 2012). This concerns the way how citizens' participation is central both within the discourse of social grassroots movements (especially those which share a common "alter-globalist" perspective, recognising themselves in the Charter of the World Social Forum and/or in the World Charter for the Right to the City) and the champions of the "neoliberal consensus", such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund or even some National Cooperation Agencies.

As a matter of fact, citizen participation can be observed and evaluated through several different perspectives and points of interest, emphasizing different features and results, and using the ambiguity of the concept's intensity to stress its merely "informational" dimensions or to valorise its "co-decisional", "co-managerial" or even "revolutionary" potential. The latter is the case when the emphasis is put mainly on the pedagogical process of "cumulative and progressive appraisal" which it can open, and whose final results cannot be imagined from the beginning. Even the concept of "citizen" can be read in various ways, either in terms of a customer, a user, an individual who could be empowered by the participatory process (thus enhancing his/her rights of accessing services and power-sharing) or in mere terms of "aggregated groups", which can exert pressures on institutions and express public choices, passing from a condition of "stakeholders" to that of "shareholders" of decisional powers.

According to the above-mentioned panorama, to be regarded as in permanent evolution, it is possible to underline some of the main challenges that Democracy faces for the next decades, which are strictly linked to the "unfulfilled promises of Democracy" already listed by Norberto Bobbio more than three decades ago. Namely, I would like to underline three intertwined macro-families of issues, which I think could better be addresses trough innovations, which can have a central anchoring to local territories.

1) **The first regards growing inequalities and the need to favor new ways of redistributing power and resources**, especially to the sake of territories and social groups which have always been at the margin of decision-making systems. Especially today, when the world financial crisis hits central or semiperiphic countries with consolidated democratic regimes raising issues related to the provision and distribution of resources, this issue becomes important. In fact, with the shrinking of welfare state, inequalities tend to grow and the need to find innovative strategies to redistribute resources is especially felt regarding local administrative institutions, affected by diminishing State transfers and self-funding opportunities.

2) **The second regards other crises which interact with the economical/financial one, as for example the legitimacy crisis of representative institutions, and a "civilizational shift"** which indicates a widespread loss of communitarian values which the analyses of authors like Bauman (1998) or Beck (2003) clearly identify, relating it to "liquid modernity" and the individualist trends of present society. Such crises require a strong commitment, to "recentre" the ethical issues (both in relation to politics and to society organization). So, on one side, they require the capacity to address solidarity, social and a strengthening of social bonds in the political/administrative management of territories and public policies and projects for them; on the other, a different way of fostering "mutual trust" between citizens and representative institutions become necessary, which could resemantize concept as transparency, accountability or responsiveness, which have been gradually reduce to sort of "buzzwords", over-used in the political discourse as far as ignored in the concrete implementation of public policies.

3) **The third family of challenges regards the complexification of society, as well as the fragmentation of needs of different individuals and social groups, as well as the international mobility of people** which (despite of being much less favored by public policies in comparison with the circulation of goods) is having important effects in the growth of *demodiversity* and *cultural diversity* in our cities. Today, many theorists and a large range of social movements (as well as networks of local authorities around the world) have been facing such challenges referring to an horizon named as "The Right to The City", which represent a series of struggles to put in dialogue a wide set of individual and collective rights referred not to "citizens" as carriers of formal rights (recognized by a legal system based on the centrality of the National-State), but to "inhabitants" as "producers" of the culture and the economy of specific territories. Under this perspective, non-electoral tools linked to the construction and implementation of public policies must be conceived as tools specifically devote to expand the system of rights of individuals in local territories, based on strategies of affirmative actions which could expand social inclusion, to the sake especially of those inhabitants that have been excluded since long time from decision-making. This family of challenges refers to a perspective centered on improving the access to policies, services and decision-making **through the empowerment of inhabitants, i.e. strategies of capacity-building and diffusion and expansion of plural knowledges** among very different and cooperating actors, whose different points of view can converge in the multiplication and consolidation of problem-solving approaches.

In my view, not facing these three macro-families of challenges at the same time could contribute to strengthen the "Double Disease of Democracy" (DDD), activating a vicious circle of progressive downgrading of democracy, which will deepen the legitimacy crisis of representative institutions (because of their incapacity of facing and solving the citizens' problems) and will further push inhabitants in their private and self-referential sphere.

If participatory practices could play a pivotal role in the activation of a "virtuous circle" which can affect in a positive way the destiny of our democracy, it is because they could contribute to give (or – in some cases – devolve) to representative institutions some important element, which the democratic discourse continue to present as the "*raison d'être*" of representative democracy, although they often belong to the domain of "unfulfilled promises" of Democracy. Here it could be worth to recall the influential "Views of Representation" exposed (in 1967) by Hanna Fenichel Pitkin as pillars of the concept of political representation, despite the often "contradictory character" of some of these elements underlined by the author through the adoption of a provocative Wittgensteinian approach to language. The five main components underlined by Pitkin were: (1) the Authorization (the means by which a representative obtains his or her standing, status, position or office); (2) the Accountability (i.e. mainly centered on the means through which constituents could sanction/punish their representative for failing to act in accordance with their wishes) and the responsiveness of the representative to the constituents; (3) Symbolic Representation (the meaning that a representative has for those being represented); (4) Descriptive Representation (which is the extent to which a representative resembles those being represented); (5) Substantive Representation (intended as the concrete activity of representatives and the actions taken on the behalf of, in the interest of, as an agent of, and as a substitute for the represented).

The oversized emphasis given to elections mechanisms (presented as a way of 1) establishing the legitimacy of democratic institutions and 2) creating institutional incentives for governments to be responsive to citizens) has often made discussions about the concept of political representation collapse into discussions of democracy "tout court". Several authors, in last two decades, have been devoting theoretical attention to the proper design of representative institutions and the establishing of fair procedures for reconciling conflicts and addressing solutions, and many others (as did Benjamin Barber in several books) have been underlying the role that "letting people decide" can have in solving disputes about what representatives should be doing and how to reactivate some of the neglected but fundamental dimensions of political representation underlined by Pitkin .

Today, I see the risk that our understandings of representation could be inextricably shaped by the manner in which people are currently being represented, so an effort to imagine new ways of obtaining "substantive results", and "different and hybrid formats" of representation (and a tight dialogue with other not-representative means to develop decision making) has to be done, in order to devolve to representation the legitimacy (or, at least, the perceived legitimacy) that it needs, in order to make the authorization mechanism itself work.

For many cities of different sizes, in different geographical contexts, both in the South as well as in the North of the world, this represents a crucial "bet" on which to invest human energies and creativity as well as intellectual and financial resources. So, this challenge has been addressed worldwide by innovations in public policies, seeking to develop participatory mechanisms allowing citizens to share public actors' responsibilities in decision making and so reestablishing a dialogue based on mutual trust.

Many of the participatory practices experienced in the last decade with the aim to revitalize democratic institutions can today be defined (as in the definition of Appadurai, 1991) as "ideoscapes", signifying a political models which travel globally but exist only through local appropriation. This is the case, for example, of Participatory Budgeting (Sintomer et alii 2013) and other "devices" which have been spreading throughout the planet in the last 20 years. Nowadays, a common trend worldwide is that several of such devices are rarely found alone. Instead, the majority of experiences mix them, trying to create complementary environments for a "healthy development" of participatory practices allowing for an equal access to different groups or types of citizens with diverse political cultures, social activism and degree of educational backgrounds.

2.b. What impact do you think these challenges will have on local government and local democracy?

Undoubtedly, if we want to revitalize the capacity of formal democratic systems to produce substantive effects which are in line with the fragmentation and diversification of inhabitants' needs, participatory processes could be of much help, provided that we are not talking about "any" participatory process, but we need to guarantee instrument which explicitly challenge – one by one – the main limitations that Democracy faces in the specific context in which we are intervening. This output can possibly be reached when goals are very clear and specific "tools" are put into being for trying to address coherently those specific goals. And, especially, when the experienced participatory device is capable of opening room for "voice" and "vote" for citizens, so creating a substantive space of innovation opened to a redistribution of decisional powers in addressing public resources (even if limited to specific projects or sectors, or to some slices of public investments).

Obviously, not all participatory practices tend to address specific goals, according to which they measure their outputs and impact. Taking into account this perspective, we could adapt the pragmatic proposal made by Fung (2011), thus imagining two differentiated "macro- categories" of participatory practices, according to a sort of "reading standpoint" of the implementers: (1) the "deontological" and the (2) "consequentialist".

The (1) "deontological" would represent experiences in which the innovations are valued because "they help to create right relationships among citizens and between citizens and the state", thinking that "democracy worth having simply requires greater citizen participation (participatory innovation), deliberation (deliberative experiments), and rights to information and knowledge (transparency) quite apart from any other effects that these innovations have". As Fung suspects, it is possible that this "deontological perspective" could be imagined as the main strong driver of the worldwide explosion of many different participatory experiments, which look to participation as "a norm of institutional appropriateness" in itself.

On the other side, the (2) "consequentialist" perspective would entail those experiences in which democratic innovation is considered more or less valuable "according to the extent to which it secures other values that we care about — policies that are responsive to citizens' interests, social justice, state accountability, wiser policies, and so on". Such experiences reify their main objectives through specific tools and techniques, which guarantee consequentiality and coherence between motivations, aims and results of each specific experiment.

Given such a definition, it is imaginable that "consequentialist" experiences will be able to better pursue the three main macro-families of challenges listed in the previous paragraph. Undoubtedly, the growing widespread interest for some specific typologies of participatory practices as a pivotal tool for promoting innovation in local (and in some rare cases even supra-local) governing bodies is partially path-dependent, given that it relays on the existence of articulated and more radical experiments. Let's take as an example the cases of several Brazilian cities (namely Porto Alegre, Canoas, Belo Horizonte, Recife or Fortaleza) which became the main reference of the tool known as Participatory Budgeting. In several of the quoted cases, specific features, outputs and impacts of participatory budgeting have been wider and more remarkable than elsewhere. Often, this happened because they had explicit and clear goals in dialogue with some of those that I defined, in my view, as the most important challenges of democracy. For example that of "inverting priorities" (i.e. struggling for obtaining effects of social justice and redistribution of resources through the use of specific tools capable of promoting solidarity among different parts of the city and diverse social groups). The positive side of deriving the spread-around confidence in a specific participatory device from the most radical and in-depth experiences is that they are able to enlighten on the high potential of that participatory tool when it is experimented with political courage and coherence, by relating tools to specific and explicit goals. The latter could be such the accountability and responsiveness of public institution, the struggle against corruption, the growth of spatial and social justice, the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, the strengthening of social solidarity, the increase of the effectiveness of public policies and the efficiency of the municipal "machine", to name a few.

In recent history, there have been several attempts of proposing "normative" and "essentialist" definitions of specific participatory devices, but they have a dangerous aspect, as they "freeze" single experiments, sometimes reducing the "evolutionary", "incremental" and "adaptive" potential that any participatory device needs to have in order to be "resilient" in front of the changes that can frequently happen in the external conditions (political. legal or financial framework, organization of actors, etc.).

In my view, when local authorities are confronted with the above mentioned challenges posed to the future of democracy, they would have to pay attention to guarantee that the tools of social dialogue put in practice under their jurisdiction could be shaped in order to become at the same time:

1) **Pedagogic spaces where all participants** (although eventually motivated to participate by individualistic reasons) **engage in a mutual learning exercise** devoted to teach how to carefully listen to each-other, to provide capacity-building opportunities to better understand the complexity of planning and budgeting for shaping public institutions and local services
2) **Spaces to provide alternative and careful information** on urban-related issues which usually are ignored by mainstream media, thus preventing misunderstandings among actors that usually clash when information are hidden for long periods, and then suddenly released in the form of a storm of over-detailed and un-understandable documents, whose only justification seems to defend the political choices of the local administration.
3) Spaces **carefully designed so to reflect, value and multiply the "demodiversity" that marks the local territory** (in social, economic and cultural terms), **allowing participants to overcome the cultural/linguistic and educational barriers** that could prevent their active engagement, and feel at ease (and attracted) to take part and even mobilize other persons.
4) Spaces **that promote values of solidarity, tolerance and mutual support**, through the use of specific measures (like indicators, social criteria etc.) which could reduce the competitive approach which generally exists in every social dialogue which explores and negotiates conflicts of interest between diversified actors.
5) Spaces which **are able to communicate how much they value the participating citizens**, putting them at the center of decision-making moments, in different stages of the policy-making process.

The latter becomes a very important feature when the reconstruction of institutional legitimacy through the creation of "trust" in its performance is at stake. For this to happen, it is important to avoid to build participatory processes based on a high level of technicality which is strategically presented as a sort of *technical neutrality.* In my view, it is not important to state the total "absence" of partisan visions (which always operate, even if in a hidden manner where they are not explicitly faced by the process) but to clarify different positions, give voice to tensions and space for rationalizing arguments and propose alternative visions, as well as foster the expression of all interests at stake, including minority positions. This means the participatory processes must have the capacity to "repoliticize" a series of issues/themes (as for example public budgets, technical norms, etc.) that in the past had been "depoliticized" and presented as monopolies of a small elite of carriers of expert knowledge. Such a need, undoubtedly suggest to avoid complete "outsourcing" of participatory processes, remarking the importance of political commitment in granting (at least) an answer (if not a full implementation) to all the proposals presented by participants.

Under this perspective, it will be very important to distinguish participatory devices where the dialogue with political authorities is an important moment, from those processes lacking of any real contact with public institutions . The difference could be exemplified comparing Participatory Budgeting with mechanisms of "neighborhood funds" (where citizens can decide upon a concrete amount of money without having any influence on broader scale issues) and with those devices that international multilateral cooperation agencies call as "community driven development" (CDD), which tend to discuss pots of money with their direct beneficiaries, but try to maintain a "healthy distance" from any public representative institution. In fact, such common experiments – usually taking place in highly corrupted countries or in contexts with ongoing civil wars – tend to keep administrative bodies and elected

officials at a distance, so implicitly undermine the mutual recognition and the reconstruction of trust between citizens and their political representative institutions. Conversely, PB explicitly seeks to bring people closer to institutions, promoting opportunity for their reform that could reduce the distance between a "supply-side" and a "demand-side" approach. Such participatory devices – intended to foster a reorganization of institutional functioning in order to grant a better effectiveness of the process itself – have the positive effect to act as "enabling environments" where the institutions are stimulated to undertake other innovative measures, which seem indispensable to activate a "virtuous circle" in the relations between municipality and inhabitants and their social movement…

Although deliberation is not majoritarianly conceived as something that must necessarily lead to shared decision-making by non-elected participants, in my view the "cherry-picking" of proposals (presented by citizens) by part of political authorities must be avoided, because it demonstrated incapacity of proving a real change in political culture. It is not by chance if, in the last five years, entire countries active in the promotion of Participatory Budgeting – as is recently happening in the United States, Poland or Portugal (Alves and Allegretti, 2012; Sintomer et alii, 2013) – are today abolishing the presence of consultative processes, also thanks to a clear refusal of many external consultants and university researchers to support such processes. Behind this refusal there is the wide-spread awareness that only Participatory Budgets that share decision-making power with their participants are able to attract people disenchanted by representative politics, to create real "learning by doing environments" and challenge a traditional political culture in which the role of representative institutions in the setting of public policies is overemphasized and". If these condition are granted, is more likely to raise feelings of "co-responsibilization" and "ownership" among citizens (and a balanced structure of duties and rights). Such a reflection is supported by numerous comparative studies that – throughout the last 12 years – have tried to point out which are the main factors for success in participatory budgeting experiments, usually concluding that positive outcomes depend on a balanced mix of (a) political will of institutions that decide to open part of their budgets to public discussion, (b) self-organizing capacities of the social actors, (c) proper organizational design of the participatory device and (d) the level of financial commitment (and autonomy) of the institutions experimenting. Usually, participatory budgets incapable of establishing and communicating to a large audience their "raison d'être" appear more fragile and "lack soul", thus limiting themselves to the "copy-paste" of experiences conducted elsewhere.

Today it is obvious that the distrust in the ability of democracy to fulfil its promises can not be solely attributed to the political class, given that (as Pippa Norris stressed out in her book *Democratic Deficit*, of 2011) the distance between the citizens' expectations and the results that the government institutional systems are able to produce tend to worsen due to competition phenomena, thus determining "vicious circles" of negativity. Just to give an example: part of the perception of the growing distance between citizens and their political representatives is due to the sounding board role of the media, and also the higher dissemination of culture and access to school, that made people more demanding, and have contributed to widen the gap between the expectations the citizens have towards democracy and its actual performance.

This perspective calls our attention for a central factor that each participatory process should take into account: the existence of "social construction of reality" phenomena, in which continuous short circuits are determined between the operation of institutions and the perceptions that the different inhabitants have of them.

In this sense, I would like to conclude this discussion focussing on three guiding principles that seem to be crucial to ensure the continuous evolution of a participatory process without mischaracterizing the values and horizons structuring it. These are the following:

a) Keeping a firm will to characterize the process as a set of rules and instruments intrinsically evolutionary, that is, able to continuously renovate themselves, in an incremental and attentive manner to all that emerges from past monitoring actions.

b) Structuring all the necessary transformations to assure the participatory process the possibility to mature, becoming more attractive and effective, and increasing its deliberative quality without forgetting the need that the introduced changes do not affect the "centrality" of the citizens in the process. This does not mean that every introduced change has to be negotiated in detail with the participants, but it is certain that all transformations of the decision model and the relations of power between the players should not be changed without previous consent of the citizens when they risk being perceived by the latter as "threats" to their gradual acquisition of power within the decision mechanism. In fact, if in the origin of the participatory process there is the will to recover trust relationships between inhabitants and institutional representatives in a time of diffuse distrust in the role, the spirit of service and the integrity of the politicians, it is obvious that each change in the power relationships conveyed by the changes in procedural architecture can be faced as a "betrayal" of the founding spirit of the PB and, therefore, a *regression* towards the "power of politicians", able to generate some stiffening in the relationships between the players and a waste of the social capital created in the previous process.

c) Moreover it will be necessary that each introduced change is gradual and is not excessively "scaring" for the institutional players (whether politicians or members of the technical board). In fact, it is extremely important to be able to explain, defend and show with evidence and appropriate indicators the benefits that the transformation is able to bring to the process as a whole, and its capability of self-probation to citizens.

Finally, in the framework of the above-mentioned issues, is worth to underline the important potential of having regional/provincial authorities interested in favouring the "scaling up" of local experiments, in order to create a "chain" of innovations that, starting from bottom-up, could reach the central heart of the State.

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