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Political consequences of participative practices in an urban context : two case studies in Rome

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Résumé : Cet article présente les résultats d'une recherche portant sur deux expériences de démocratie participative à Rome, le budget participatif et les avis sur le schéma directeur de la ville. Les pratiques participatives sont comparées en regard d'une typologie reposant, d'une part, sur leur impact sur le processus politique et institutionnel (exprimé à travers un continuum entre démarche consultative et démarche décisionnelle) et, d'autre part, sur les types d'interaction sociale qu'elles génèrent. Les différences entre la nature et le contenu de ces deux démarches tiennent à plusieurs variables indépendantes comme le secteur de politique publique à l'intérieur duquel elles se développent, les cultures politiques et les stratégies des acteurs qui en sont les promoteurs. De cette comparaison, il ressort deux scénarii : les pratiques participatives peuvent soit se situer à la marge des systèmes décisionnels, affectant ainsi peu le contenu des politiques urbaines, soit constituer les matrices à partir desquelles se construit le bien commun en opposition des politiques néo-libérales qui se développent depuis une vingtaine d'années dans de nombreuses villes.

Mots clés : démocratie participative, politiques urbaines, néo-libéralisme, Italie, Rome

Summary : This article presents the results of a research on two participative practices carried out in two of Rome's municipalities, namely Participatory Budgeting and the collection of comments on the City's new master plan. Practices are compared through a typology based one hand on their impacts on the political and institutional systems (expressed by a «consultative vs. decisional» continuum) and on the other hand on the kinds of social interaction ("aggregative vs. deliberative"). Explanations of the differentiated nature of the analyzed practices are found in several independent variables, such as the specific public policy domain that hosts each practice, practice regulations, their creators' and promoters' political cultures and strategies. A final question concerns two alternative scenarios : practices of deliberative democracy may either be penned into policy niches, thus not affecting major decisions within the urban context, or be an ingredient of policies for common

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goods, alternative to the neo-liberal policies that have been prevailing in many cities' agendas over the last 20 years.

Urban governance and participation : Rome's laboratory

To promote or to encourage civil society's participation in the making of public decisions as a way to reduce the exclusive centrality of elected officials has become an «orthodox» political answer to the functional and legitimacy shortfalls of representative democracy. Within social sciences this theme is focused on from several perspectives. One of them deals with it through theoretical reflections about deliberative democracy (see for example Fishkin and Lasslett, 2003), participative democracy and the relationships between these two forms of public decision-making and the modern representative democracy, based on universal suffrage. For example, some authors think that even if these two kinds of experience are different, they could nevertheless be integrated, as participative democracy would deal with «quantitative» aspects of participation, while deliberative democracy with the «quality» of participation (Gbikpi, 2005). G. Regonini (2005, 10) proposes to carefully consider the weaknesses of deliberative democracy by treating it the same way the «public choice» approach has treated the institutions of representative democracy. Both supporters and critics often do not explain how participative processes actually work. This brings about the risk of hypostatizing the idea itself of participation, instead of critically explaining its mechanisms, considering above all the effects in terms of democratization of political processes.

A different approach focuses on the wide repertoire of methods and techniques that are available to make both deliberative and inclusive forms of policy making possible (Bobbio, 2004, 2005 ; Bonanni and Penco,2005). The use of these instruments calls forth important theoretical and practical questions. How to encourage inclusion ? Who should be included ? How to build a deliberative setting ? In this case there is a risk of reducing deliberation and participation to technical problems, not taking into account their social and political value. Without considering these aspects, any analytical effort is likely to glide into immediately normative proposals.

In order to avoid the risks embedded in both hypostatization and mainly prescriptive approaches, it is useful to explore an intermediate level of generalization, focusing on the relationship between the development of participative practices and the transformation that they can bring about in big cities' governance and policies.

Within many urban political agendas pro-growth actions such as urban marketing and the promotion of the city as a good place for innovative and strategic innovation and for investments have become more and more important, often reducing the political and financial resources for other kinds of policies, such as welfare programmes and spatial planning. In other cities solutions based on the search for compatibility between economic growth and social and environmental concerns have entered the agenda (Savitch and Kantor, 2002 ; Brenner, 2004b). Accordingly, different kinds of non-institutional actors take part in the urban policy making, giving rise to different practices – sometimes involving citizens as individuals, some other times civil society's organizations – whose consequences are not certain and even difficult to foresee. In order to explore some of the possible consequences in the

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city of Rome a research has been done1 comparing two experiences (out of the several participative practices) that have been carried out in the Italian capital city. The observed practices have been carried out in two municipalities2 : (i) the collection of comments on the City's master plan (MP) in the 5th Municipality and (ii) the two first years (2004-2005) of a participative budget (PB) experiment in the 11th Municipality3.

Rome City's leadership invests a great amount of political and administrative resources in order to carry out a number of experiences of participation in the local policy making 4. As so many of them were scientifically interesting, the two mentioned case studies were selected because they both share some aspects and have some differences. Common aspects : they are both participative opportunities offered by institutional actors (by municipalities' presidents, or by members of governing councils); in both cases the governing coalitions are centre-left oriented; the two practices fall within deeply institutionalized policy domains, such as spatial planning and budgeting, which are structural and ordinary policies, thus not innovative or additional fields of public action (such as other participative practices carried out in Rome, for example the Local Agenda 21, the «neighbourhood contracts», the Communitarian Initiative Urban, and so on).

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[1] The research used a qualitative methodology. In particular, institutional documents and documentation produced by the participative practices were analysed, 41 people were interviewed (political, administrative and civil society's actors).

[2] In Rome's governance system the City, with a directly elected Mayor, is the main institutional actor. It is territorially divided into 19 municipalities, elected bodies at neighbourhood level (from 100 to 200,000 inhabitants). Each municipality has a directly elected president, who appoints the Governing council. Together with the President a municipality Council is elected.

[3] A detailed description of the two practices would be too long, so it cannot be presented here. An Italian version of a full research report is available on http://www.diesonline.it and http://www.romaeconomia.it.

[4] Also because of this reason Rome's City led the European city network «Partecipando», which focused on the issue of participation in urban contexts, producing an «European Handbook for Citizens Participation» and a «Participation Charter». See http://urbact.eu/projects/participando/home.html).

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Taking into account these common aspects, the research focused mainly on the differences between the two cases, trying to explain them. So, the central questions of the research have been neither about the «why» to promote participation, nor about the efficiency and effectiveness of the participative techniques that have been used, but on the consequences brought about by such participative offers. They have been analyzed focusing on two distinct (although interdependent) spheres : on the one hand the impact on the political institutions' functioning (the City's institutional system and its territorial sub-systems) ; on the other hand the nature of social interactions that take place within each participative processes.

As for the former, the research aimed to answer the following questions : does the summation of places and procedures of citizens' direct participation in the existing places and procedures of representative democracy produce effects in terms of redistribution of power ? And how does this process condition the functioning of municipalities' political bodies ? As for the latter, the main question was : which kinds of interactions take place within the participative arenas ? The research also aimed to shed light on the factors which decisional outputs and social interactions of such participative practices depend on.

Models of participation between society and institutions

In order to answer these questions a typology of participative practices has been formulated, based on the important role played by the concept of «practice» in the study of the public decision making processes (Wagenaar and Noam Cook, 2003 ; Laws and Rein, 2003 ; Fischer, 2003). Practices are forms of political and social action of individual or organized actors that take part directly (without any representative

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or institutional mediation) in processes concerning collective problems. In so doing, they give rise to a system of activities through which citizens-social actors choose goals and strategies, mobilize their resources, exploit their knowledge, make steady configurations of sense, promote values and shape relationships with the actors of the political and institutional system. These actions make more sense within a local community, that is a network of territorially contextualized social interactions, within which the knowledge about local communities' needs and problems becomes structured, as well as the definition of the possible solutions. The latter are obviously affected by the values and interests carried forward by the involved actors.

The specific shapes of the social interactions among the actors who get involved in the search for a solution to a common problem can make these participative practices either more deliberative, or aggregative. In the first case reasoned discussion prevails, that is a discursive logic oriented toward the common search for solutions in the name of general interest, a process during which social actors can transform their preferences in the course of the interaction. In the second case a negotiation between interests prevails, aggregating preferences, also through mediations, without trying to integrate each actor's goals into wider and shared purposes, through a process encompassing the change of actors' preferences during the action.

All these interactions are not developed in a political vacuum, as they take shape within institutional and legal frameworks that are able to mold the interaction between politics and society. From this point of view participative practices can be of either a decisional, or consultative kind. In the former case the interaction between political institutions and civil society makes it easier for a redistribution of decision power from political institution to society to happen. In the latter case, this

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reallocation process does not happen, or is far weaker and the prevailing action is that of collecting opinions and comments the elected bodies' decisions will take into account.

Thus, any participative practice may have a connotation different from others depending on both the kind of social interaction among a local community's actors and the kind of relationships existing between the same actors and the political institutions. Crossing these two dimensions it is possible to draw a typological space (see figure n.1) within which to position the different models of participation.
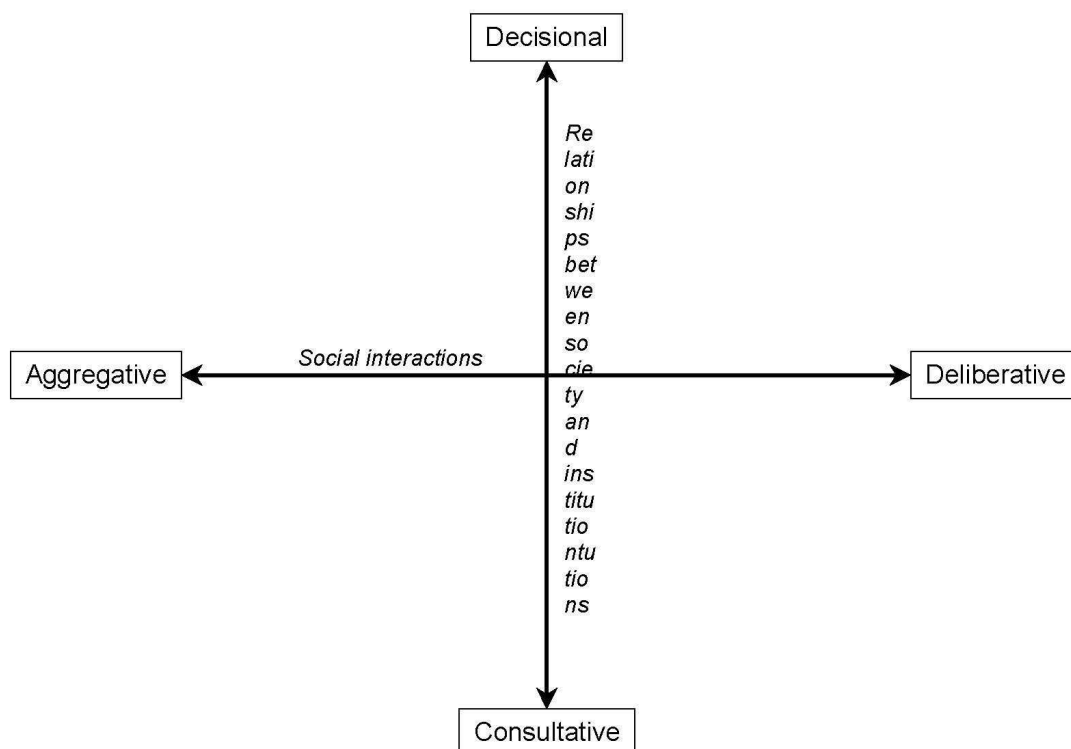
Figure 1

Figure 1. A typological space of participation

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This typological space makes it possible to identify four idealtypical models of participative practices, basing the classification on the characteristics of social interactions within each of them (aggregative vs. deliberative) and on the role given to each of them by the political system (consultative vs. decisional). So, the four models can be synthetically defined as (i) aggregative-decisional ; (ii) deliberative-decisional ; (iii) deliberative-consultative ; (iv) consultative-aggregative.

(i) The first model of participation describes aggregative social interactions between social actors to whom some decisional power has been assigned by the institutional regulation. In this case social preferences are mediated through negotiation strategies of the involved actors in the making of collectively relevant decisions, which are made official and legally binding by the political-institutional system. This is a suitable model of participation for the involvement of private stakeholders within public policies. In order to be effective it needs actors' bargaining skills to be pertinent to the stakes, as well as appropriate rules of the game.

(ii) The second model still is about a decisional role recognized to participating actors, but it is based on deliberative interactions. Social actors' preferences are shaped and re-shaped through discursive combination of participants' positions and the comparison of different opinions and points of view. The final decision is collectively made, usually without resorting to either bargaining or voting. The public discussion shapes collective preferences, which also in this case are eventually made official and legally binding by the political-institutional system. This is a participation model based on the involvement of citizens as individuals and aiming to develop social reflexivity, in order to make collective problems, needs and appropriate solutions emerge and meet each other.

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(iii) In the third model, although social interactions are of a deliberative kind, the output of the public discussion is a result the elected officials can either take into account or not. In this kind of participation the political system does not waive any quota of its decisional power to the social actors. Thus, the public discussion does not produce decisions but only opinions and comments that could be taken into account by political actors in the subsequent steps of the decision process.

(iv) The fourth model is about aggregative kinds of social interactions whose outputs are only recognized with a consultative role in the decision process. The mediation between actors' preferences takes place through bargaining activities that are usually based on the prevailing presence of policies' stakeholders. Similar to the third model, there is no transfer of decision power from the political to the social arena.

Public-private partnerships and market-oriented governance patterns are part of the first model. They are especially diffused in the local development strategies that use the instruments of «participative territorial planning» and in the growth-oriented forms of urban strategic planning. This also happens in the partnerships between public and no-profit organizations that take place in the field of planning and management of social services, typical of the «welfare mix» and urban regeneration experiences (in Italy). Participative practices such as the PB analyzed by this research usually give voice to marginalized interests and social needs, also because the latter lack political representation (the typical case of immigrants without political rights). Strategies and methods of «community visioning» (Shipley, 2002) are part of the third model, while the whole repertoire of consultative techniques within which the final decision is up to the institutional actors is part of the fourth model. In this research it is the case of the collection of comments to the MP.

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So, the two participative practices that have been analyzed in this research can be put within the proposed typological space according with the figure n° 2.

Figure 2
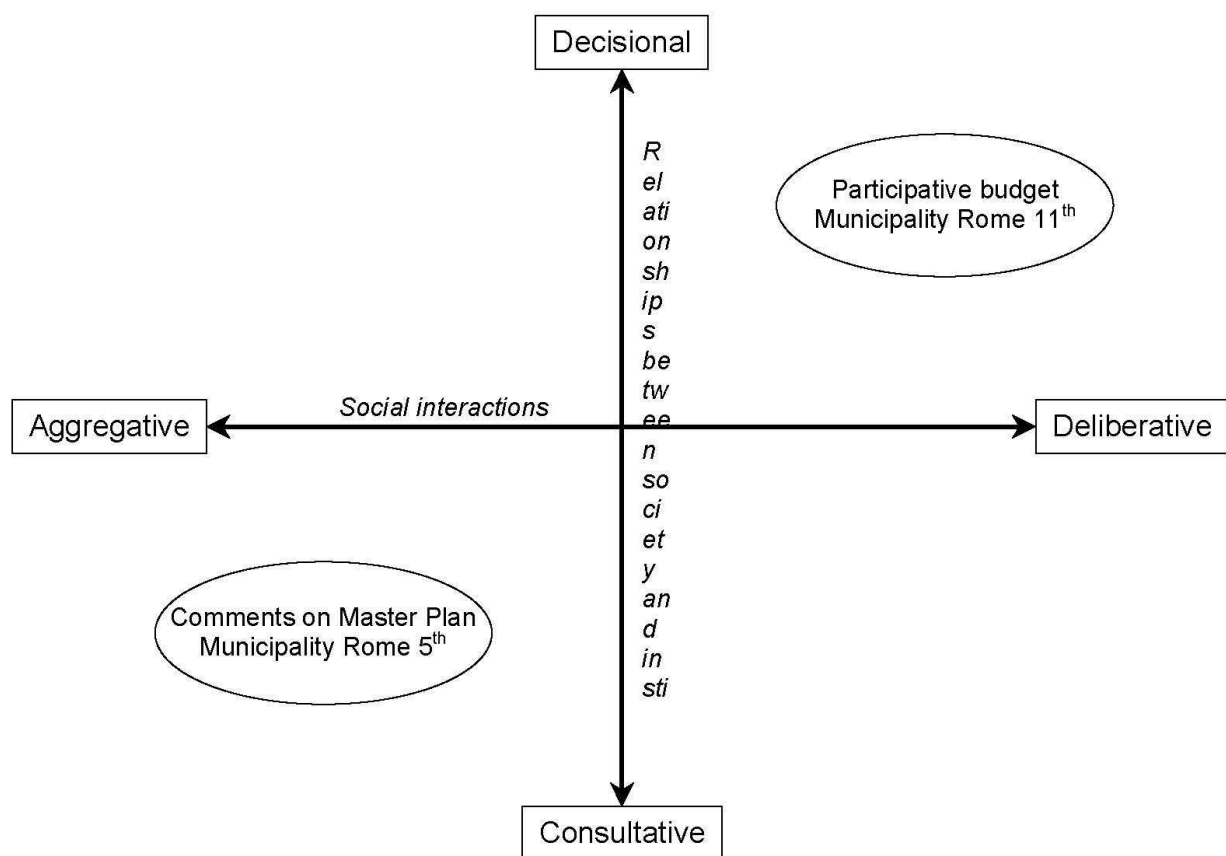
Figure 2. The typification of the analyzed cases

In the case of PB the participative practice is characterized by a more significant redistribution of decision power from the elected officials to the social actors and by prevailingly deliberative social interactions, although the procedure provides final voting. The collection of comments to the MP is a practice characterized by a low

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redistribution of decision power and by aggregative social interactions. Decision power remains institutionally concentrated (in this case, the Municipality's power to formulate comments on the MP draft proposed by Rome's City) within the elected bodies, which make the final decision, taking into account people's opinions, often formulated through bargaining relations between territorial associations. The influence of this participative practice is weak not only considering the City's MP, but also the narrower spatial policy of the 5th Municipality. As the president of the DS (Left-Democrats) party in the Municipal Council said «… through this (participative) process we partially intercepted citizens' and retailers' interests, but the dialogue with real estate firms, the most important economic interest concerned by spatial planning, takes place at central (City) and not at municipal level».

The weak impact of participation on the municipal decision making is due not only to the Municipality's limited institutional role in the MP approval, but also to the mechanism of informal bargaining with the «stronger» interests that is typical of spatial planning policies. This also emerged from an interview with a citizens' association spokesperson, who stated «… our role is that of participating, but we are not the ones who make decisions».

In the PB case, the «transfer of sovereignty» toward the citizens' direct participation was an evident promise coming from the then Municipality's President, who defined this decision process as a «concert» between the citizens, the Governing Council and the Council of the Municipality (Smeriglio, 2004). The appropriateness of this kind of consequences on representative institutions and sovereignty were only partially agreed on by local political system's actors, as even within the governing coalition of parties there were different interpretations.

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The final (and legally binding) approval of expenditure decisions in the PB's territorial assemblies depends on the will and on the unity of Council's political majority. So, the latter could theoretically play a mediation role between the participative and the representative arenas, selecting from the expenditure priorities decided by citizens5. The fact that such an appropriation or manipulation of citizens' preferences does not happen does not depend on institutional or legal mechanisms, but on what an interviewed executive councillor called a «pact of honour», through which the Governing Council and the elected Council commit themselves to approve the PB' assemblies' priorities, at the moment of passing the municipal budget. This means that there is a real transfer of decision power from institutional actors to the civil society's actors who take part in the territorial assemblies.

As has been mentioned above, the two participative practices analyzed in this research are also different as concerns the nature of social relations that are activated by the offer of such participative opportunities. What are the main differences ?

The production of comments on the MP did not make it possible to build sound public spaces within which citizens and institutions, as well as citizens among themselves, interact and debate. When consultative assemblies took place maps and graphics representing the interventions that had been planned in the MP proposal for all the interested neighbourhoods were always available, as well as the Municipality's architects and planners were present to explain and clarify them. Participants asked questions and clarifications about the different measures, without a real discussion concerning the proposals and the alternative comments that had to

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5 The «expenditure priorities» are the output of the PB process. They are proposed, deliberated, and eventually agreed on and voted for by citizens' assemblies.

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be produced. Although they were called «working boards», they were rather public assemblies within which the proposals were neither debated nor collectively built.

The final output was above all made up of «particularistic» demands. As a representative of the political opposition within the municipal Council told us, it often happened that «citizens came to claim or protest for a specific problem in the streets where they live, or for a new parking area». Thus, in this case there is no social construction of preferences within the participants' interactions, but the aggregative addition of specific interests and preferences that are exogenous to the process. After this participative step, the political actors of the 5th Municipality tried to partially use its outputs when drawing the official Municipality's Council resolution on Rome's MP proposal.

In the 11th Municipality's case among the BP creators' aims there was the realization of a participative process within which it was possible to transform the individual preferences through discursive practices. In theory, the cognitive premises of social actors who take part in the process, which in turn affect the way they shape their preferences, may be transformed. The regulation and the continuous maintenance of PB's process, which a number of professional «facilitators» took care of, helped social interactions to actually be characterised by a discursive construction of preferences, as well as by the sharing of social needs. As a PB's spokesperson said, this gave rise to situations in which «it happened to start from a proposal and to end with another, similar but wider. For example, in the 'culture board'6 we started from the idea of a centre for the elderly, and the final proposal was a 'culture marquee', which was for all».

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[6] Four «sectoral» boards of the PB were established, each one working on a different expenditure item, such as culture, public works, interventions for the environment and road conditions.

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The explaining factors : policies, regulation, actors' strategies and cultures

What do the different outcomes that are synthesized in the figure n° 2 depend on ? The research focused on three main causal factors :

- the context of public policies within which participative practices took place. Both of them – the budget for the 11th Municipality and the spatial planning policy for the 5th – were specific «institutional containers», with their own rules and stakes ;

- the strategies and the political cultures of the actors who promoted these participative experiences in the two municipalities, as such practices were a product of a discussion within the territorial systems of political relations, which was not only of a political but also of a cultural kind ;

- participative processes' regulations. In both cases participation followed some (more or less formal) rules, which set important premises of the process development, as well as of their outputs.

The policy context

As happens in other cities, the making of a MP decision in Rome takes place within an institutionalized fabric of political and administrative relations between municipalities and the City that first of all concerns the spatial planning process. In our case the policy sector was run at both the Municipality and the City level by politicians that were members of the same political party.

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The high economic and political salience and the high technical complexity of such issues made local councillors and administrative technicians play a fundamental role, leaving to the elected assemblies and citizens a residual role. In the spatial planning policy the stakes are high, as they concern the physical and economic development of the urban space (both in the city as a whole and at the neighbourhood level). Thus the urban regime (Harding, 1997) made up of the relationships between political actors and economic interests (particularly real estate entrepreneurs and landed property) has an important function. Within the MP decision different interests and ideas must be settled over a wide area, coinciding with the whole (and very large) urban area of the City of Rome. This explains why municipalities only have a small amount of autonomy, facing a network composed of the City's political and administrative actors, negotiating with the mentioned territorial vested interests. At the municipality level it is not possible to play bargaining games, as such kind of stakes usually concerns the city as a whole urban area. There was awareness of this both amongst the interviewed political actors – one of them said that «interest groups are provided with other bargaining boards» – and neighbourhood association representatives, according to whom «the important decisions are made elsewhere, and not in the Municipality».

To this must be added an evident contradiction between the present denotation of intergovernmental relations in the MP process and the expectations for a new institutional arrangement of the relationships between the City and the municipalities. The MP is portrayed as the decision through which to define «the most important invariants of the urban organization, to which the smaller scale urban regeneration policies must be connected, and which dictates rules and procedure in order to make it possible for the municipalities – which will be entitled

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with new competences in this field – to work within a common framework»
(Comune di Roma, 2003, 6). But a forthcoming arrangement is expected, in which the
municipalities' new institutional role «will eventually have to be defined after the
forthcoming Act on metropolitan government» (Comune di Roma, 2003, 7).

Considering this scalar aspect, it is possible to argue that the higher the stakes'
economic and political salience is, the lower the possibility is to redistribute decision
power between elected officials and citizens through participative practices.
Therefore, it is not surprising that the analyzed participative practice had a
consultative feature.

Let us turn to the PB case. Since the 1980s the budget policy has undergone a deep
transformation at every level (state, regional, local) : from an incremental decision
process within which the solution of appropriation conflicts was made easier by
adjunctive financial resources, principally through new debts, to an instrument for
limiting deficit spending. Because of this reason to bring participative practices into
this policy, which is more and more characterised by expenditure cuts, does not
make it easy to reproduce the consensual games that were typical of the
incrementalist style of allocation conflicts solution. To this it must be added that in
Rome the available resources for the municipal PB decision are submitted to a
specific kind of exogenous regulation, which is due to both the municipalities' lack of
autonomy and to the expenditure cuts to which the whole City budget has
undergone. For example, the budget estimate for 2004 had to face an overall
curtailment of 10% compared with the previous accounting period.

Moreover, within the municipalities the budget policy is only weakly connected with
other programmes aiming to promote and transform specific parts of Rome's urban

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territory, such as the «City Support Framework», the «Neighbourhood Contracts», the «Urban» projects, the «Renewal Plans» and the «Territorial Workshops». For all these reasons in the PB the stakes are not so high, even in financial terms. All these elements made it easier for the creators of PB in the 11th Municipality to pursue their goal to transform potentially diffuse and fixed costs (as municipalities have no taxation power) and concentrated benefits games (as they result from bargaining practices ruled through interests representation and the territorial division in specific sub-municipal areas) into both diffuse costs and benefits games, according to J.Q. Wilsons' (1974) model. As it was witnessed by the information collected through many research interviews, this shift could have happened because of the discursive dimension of the participative process, which also helped in pursuing the common good basing on socially shared priorities. So, especially considering the relationships between political and social actors (and arenas) at neighbourhood level, in the PB practice the redistributive process affecting political power and sovereignty was pronounced, as the stakes on which citizens' decision power was exerted were the same as the expenditure initiatives that the Municipality's Governing Council and the Council majority are usually entitled to pass. Therefore these can be considered «micro-issues» if compared to the entire City budget, but they are at the same time ordinary expenditure issues within the budget of the Municipality.

Strategies and political cultures

The research showed that participation can be differently interpreted as far as the involved actors' political cultures are dissimilar. Such a difference is one of the factors that shapes the nature of a participative offer as well as of its actual outcomes. For example, a participation process can be regarded by its promoters principally as a means or, on the contrary, as an end in itself. In the first case the participative

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practices are expected to bring about legitimation of specific choices and programmes, as well as of institutions and governmental actors. Within the existing arrangement of the relationships between politics and society this is as much needed as the elected assemblies are hollowed out of functions, because of power's concentration within local government's executive bodies. When participation is regarded as an end in itself the result can turn out to be a (at least partial) transformation of such kind of relationships.

Offering participative opportunities to citizens and organizations living and working within a territorial area may have different meanings also because the offers may correspond to different political strategies. Even if the Italian reforms of the 1990s concentrated the local institutional leadership in directly elected, quasi-monocratic figures (such as mayors and municipality presidents), their strategies can rarely not take into account the existing restraints and needs for mediation within their own institutional collegial contexts (such as a Governing Council, a party coalition or a Councils' political majority). For example, in the cases of Rome's 5th and 11th municipalities it is possible to make a distinction between four different figures and roles :

- the practice «creators» (coinciding with the Municipality's political and institutional leadership) ;

- the practice «promoters» (in both the analyzed cases there was an ensemble of practice's «promoters» wider than that of «creators». These actors coincided with each Municipality (elected) Council's political majority and gave their acceptance to the development of such practices, often attributing to them different meanings ;

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- the different kinds of associations that work in the area, regardless of the specific analyzed participative practice.

In this article we deal only with the first two kinds of actors, observing the differences between the two case studies.

In the 5th Municipality the practice creators were the Municipality's President and his «Delegate for participation». The President regarded participation as an instrument to make it possible for the Municipality to play a central role in the intermediation of the interests existing in its territorial area. In such a circumstance the political leadership itself may become a sort of pivot within bargaining mechanisms affecting various programmes and policies. From this perspective to promote participative practices means trying to make it easier for problems, solutions and actors who back them to meet each other. In other words, to perform what network management's theorists call a «brokerage» function (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997). According to the «Delegate for participation» opinion, participation is rather a tool for «promoting the building of territorial communities», through «neighbourhood workshops» within which citizens directly decide how to use the urban space and which should be the strategies for its development. Although these are two different concepts of participative practices, in the analyzed case they lived together without being incompatible. On the contrary, so far they appear to have been complementary and susceptible of integrating each other. Thus, the consultative nature of the participative practice observed in Rome's 5th Municipality depended on the search for a possible mediation point between the different concepts of participation, having different degrees of radicality, carried by the various Municipality's political actors.

In the case of PB the meaning of the practice was less affected by interpretative tensions generated in the territorial political system and in the local society. Practice creators' interpretations are to be considered part of a «possible democracy» perspective that was diffused in Italy through the Italian «New Municipality Network» and the world wide «Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion and Participative Democracy»7. Basing on such an assumption the creators of BP in Rome's 11th Municipality connected their idea of participation to a wider movement of social, cultural and political transformation, which puts its proposals concerning the «democratization of democracy» within a context of criticism against the neo-liberal globalization and the localization of global and competitive policies that goes with an urban governance primarily based on the partnership with the economic interests.

Therefore there was no trace in creators' political culture of an interpretation of participation as a duplicate of the representative structures of delegated democracy. This conception prevailed within the 11th Municipality because of the PB creators' (the Municipality's President and his delegate for participation) high capacity of theoretical elaboration and critical reflexivity. As the President of the 11th Municipality wrote, they were promoting a vision of participation as a resource for integrating citizens «into a non-traditional public space, which could strengthen citizenship rights and build forms of active citizenship» (Smeriglio, 2004). According to the mentioned delegate for participation (our interview), participation through PB should foster «the regeneration of a public space of self-government, able to build both sharing of power and transfer of sovereignty». Within the same Municipality this vision was only partially agreed on by other political actors, even belonging to

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[7] See http://www.nuovomunicipio.org and http://redfal.org/en/node/28.

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the promoters group, because of their different, less radical political cultures. According to the interviews, many of them considered participation through the PB as an adjunctive representative process, competitive with the electoral representation, thus menacing for the elected councillors.

The rules of the participative game

The regulation of participative processes influences their nature and outcomes, affecting both the institutional dimension (legitimation and institutionalization) and that of social relationships (the kind of involved actors and the distinction between admitted and non-admitted behaviours in the participative process). The most important regulation variables are : the participative practice's (high vs. low) degree of formalization; the role played by the administrative structure; the way people who can or cannot take part in the process are selected; who sets the rules themselves of the process.

The degree of formalization and the role of administration

In the case of collection of comments on the MP in the 5th Municipality, formal structuration concerned the temporal development of the participative dynamic (which was submitted to the due date established by the City) and the organization of meetings in which the MP was presented, which were all similarly orchestrated. There was no real formal organization of this process, while the decision extent was precisely predefined. Being only informal, the regulation of participation did not permit the establishment of a certain and precise coupling between participative processes' outputs and the final decisions made by the institutional actors. So, the latter had a wide autonomy in taking in the preferences coming from neighbourhood assemblies. Besides, decision field boundaries were rigidly defined in advance and

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limited to comments referred to already prepared choices within the MP. The lack of a formal regulation and the predetermined field of decision weakened the impacts of this practice that, as a consequence, had a merely consultative nature.

In the case of PB in the 11th Municipality the practice rules show an intermediate level of formal structuration. The two observed PB periods were based on written rules, although they did not have a formal juridical status, even if they turned out to be effective in regulating the access to this participative opportunity, the sequence of phases, as well as the admissible procedures and behaviours within each phase. Even if these normative elements are not binding from the legal point of view, as they do not bring about any automatic relationship between the participative outputs and Municipality Council's final decisions, they actually strengthened the «pact of honour» through which the Municipality Governing Council and its Council majority committed themselves to bring in the official budget proposal the expenditure priorities voted by the PB assemblies. In this way they also supported its dimension of social value.

As far as the 5th Municipality's practice (comments to MP) is concerned, it is important to note that the regulation of participation was indirect, as it was determined by the institutional mechanism of the MP (as a whole) decision. This complex procedure initiates processes based on a summational aggregation of preferences, for example when the City consults Municipalities and on bargaining relations among political actors and between them and the economic interests in the phase of the final decision (at the City level). In this context the 5th Municipality's administration had only the role of providing technical support in order to make it easier for non-skilled people to understand the technicalities of the MP documents.

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In the PB process the regulation established a sequence of phases, through different moments that can be considered to be something like the PB's «bodies». They were modified between the two cycles of 2004 and 2005. In order to prevent the interpretation of the PB's social and political dynamics under a «representative» key and a social elite to take place exploiting their role's functional features, the PB's (initial) «delegates» were transformed into «spokespersons». Unlike the case of comments on the MP, the PB procedure received strong support from the Municipality's administration. There was an ad hoc office for PB, which played an important role as a reference point and brought about constant communication between the participants in PB assemblies and working boards and the institutional actors. According to a PB spokesperson this was «a fundamental ingredient of the PB process». Such a role of the bureaucratic structure was made easier by the sharing of values and goals concerning participation between the political leadership and the personnel of the mentioned administrative office.

The access to the participative arenas

In the case of the 5th Municipality the practice regulation was informal, as there was no written document about the access and procedures of participation. The regulation was based on previously experimented «working boards» routines, in fields such as mobility and welfare planning at the neighbourhood level. There was no formal obstruction to the participation of associations to the collection of comments on the MP, even if the implicit rule of the process was «one person, one vote». The involvement of associations and neighbourhood committees was promoted through direct invitation from the Municipality and this made the establishment easier of aggregative and bargaining relations among the actors who got involved in the participative practice, as they were principally associations.

On the contrary, in the case of PB only individual citizens (and not organizations) were admitted into the participative process. This did not completely prevent some attempts of «appropriation» of the participative practice by associations, such as neighbourhood committees and even some local organizations of political parties. But the rules, subsequently tweaked in order to avoid such behaviours, turned out to be an effective resource for counteracting them. Some people were excluded from the process and some energies were channelled in directions that were more compatible with the creators' attitude towards the practice. The prevailing role of individuals rather than of organizations made the development of social interactions of a deliberative kind easier.

Who decides on the rules

In the case of the 5th Municipality (collection of comments on the MP) the above mentioned unwritten «macro» rules concerning the object of participation were not negotiable, as they had been defined in advance and exogenously. But there were also «micro» rules, which regulated the form of the participative process. The former were established by political actors; the latter were produced during the action itself and were the object of actors' reflexivity, even of the institutional promoters of this participative practice. In particular, the President and the members of the «Territory Organization Committee» of the Municipality Council tried to discipline the forms of participation through two kinds of behaviour, respectively of a political and an organizational kind. According to the Committee's President «if the City's policy direction in the field of mobility is to incentivize the use of public transportation, the City will not be keen to approve citizens' proposals to build new roads for private mobility. Participation is good in order to add other viewpoints, but only administrators can have a general view». In other words, proposals that were not

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consistent with either the Municipality's or the Mayor's strategies were considered useless, so they were discarded through a political selection process. Concerning the second aspect, the Director of the Municipality's Office for Urban Development explained how the «working boards» were organized : «six working boards were constituted, one for each neighbourhood (…). Participants had been told by us about the MP philosophy and the expected urban transformations. After this, they had the possibility to propose their comments…». Both these (political and organizational) elements narrowed down the possibility for the comments to have a decisional, rather than only consultative effect.

In the case of 11th Municipality's PB participative practice rules pre-existed its development. Nevertheless, during the two observed years they were modified, through a decision process that was different from the participative one. This also depended on the fact that the so-called «Council» (which took the name of «Forum» in 2004) of PB although provided, was not summoned. This body, composed of the spokespersons of all the neighbourhood assemblies should have been not only the place where to comparatively assess the expenditure priorities approved by the assemblies and decide their order at the municipal level. It should have also provided an opportunity and a place where to assess the process criticalities and to decide how to change its regulations. Without this specific participative moment the reflexivity the changes were based on was only produced by the practice creators and political promoters, who tried to reinforce the decisional impacts of PB and its deliberative nature.

Participative practices and the policies of common goods : some open problems

The research has permitted us to focus on the main aspects of two specific participative practices, which are territorially, socially and institutionally situated within Rome's specific context. So, the starting questions have received answers that are territorially situated as well, therefore not immediately subject to generalization.

Although each one is different from the other, the two examined practices share among themselves and with other similar experiences (see for example those analyzed in Jouve and Booth 2004) the risk to be confined within narrow sectoral or territorial niches of the urban policy-making, dealing only with micro-local issues (Sintomer and de Maillard 2007). For this reason they could be substantially unable to influence the processes within which the most important decisions are made, such as those affecting resources allocation and the definition of spatial development of Rome's metropolis. This risk primarily depends on factors of political and institutional (mostly scalar) kind.

The former consists of the practices' dependency on political creators' and promoters' will. Let us think about Rome's PB experience : any change in governmental actors' political cultures may either increase or dramatically reduce the space for such a participative practice, or even open new space for other practices, more consistent with the governance forms within which economic interests are the main characters, as happens in the «aggregative-decisional» type of participation (see figure n.2). In the case of Rome, the institutional factors primarily are of a scalar dimension, as they concern the nature of political, institutional and administrative incomplete rescaling process of Rome's government. While the issue of metropolitan

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government reform is still open (d'Albergo 2002) the issues on which citizens' participation can be exerted are narrowed by the existing distribution of power and administrative competences between Rome's City and its 19 municipalities. The latter are formally allowed to perform essentially the typical «neighbourhood» interventions and not to take part in «high politics», concerning the most important policy domains that fall under the City competences8.

Some other open problems obviously concern the case of Rome, although they can be proposed as object of a forthcoming and wider research agenda. As previously mentioned, being socially situated systems of action, participative practices can foster the capability of dialogical interaction in both social and institutional actors. Thus, to represent participation as a social practice does imply recognizing its capacity to transform policy solutions and bring about new cognitive formulation of problems, for example putting on the agenda issues defined in new ways. But this also has to be considered a potential, and not to be taken for granted. So, a more specific question concerning their innovation potential can be expressed as follows : can the participative practices that are based on the mobilization of individuals (and not of organizations) and are of a deliberative kind (based on discursive social interaction and not on stakeholders' bargaining relations) help to promote and realize common goods policies, alternative to the neo-liberal trend of urban policies that have been prevalent since the 1980s (Brenner 2004a) ?9 In this research such a question emerged more about the «decisional and deliberative» PB practice than the «consultative and aggregative» collection of comments on the MP.

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8 Especially in the 11th Municipality this constraining aspect was revealed by many interviews.
9 These policies have been characterised by the predominance of concerns for effectiveness and efficiency in sectoral policies, the managerialization of public administrations, according to the New Public Management paradigm, outsourcing and market arrangements even in social and health services provision, such as happens with the workfare strategies (Jessop 1993).

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According to some authors common goods policies can find in deliberative practices a more appropriate form of relations among social actors and between them and public institutions, making these relations a sound resource for alternative policy decisions (Donolo, 2005). This can resemble the role that «networked» practices can possibly play in the search for more democratic governance (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003, 5). As such practices imply both action and knowledge about the concrete territorial situation, this may foster their reflexive and transformative impact. Besides, they imply the involvement of actors who are well-rooted in territorially and socially defined communities.

But the participation of citizens as individuals – which seems to be a corollary of participative settings of a deliberative kind, and at least it is what happened in the analyzed PB case – may not be enough, especially when facing issues and stakes that are more important than micro-local ones. This brings about the role that an «organized» civil society could play within participative spaces. As recent facts (at least) in Italy demonstrate (the 2006 mobilizations against a high velocity railway in Piemonte, the previous mobilization against the bridge between Sicily and the continent are only the most recent and evident) there is a kind of «local» civil society that can be neither reduced to a sum of stakeholders, nor interpreted through the NIMBY syndrome idealtype. Such civil society actors ask to take part in the public decision-making and can be active in participative processes not only through individuals, but also (and probably more) through associations and more or less radical social movements[10]. Considering the other variables analyzed in this research, this possible role raises further questions about the institutional aspects of

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[10] Further research has been done by this article's authors on the impacts on policies and governance of the involvement of this specific kind of civil society (social movements) in other participative practices in Rome. So far, the results are only available in Italian (d'Albergo and Moini 2007).

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participation, that is the institutional conditions within which such social actors' pressure and reflexivity, which is also frequently characterized by conflictual features, can be accepted and channelled.

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