Democratic Representation and Decision-making at the Time of Digital Disintermediation: A Critique of the Populist Erosion of the Role of Parliaments[a]

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Abstract

Diversi autori hanno analizzato l'ascesa dei movimenti populisti in tutto il mondo come un fenomeno che deve essere inquadrato nel contesto di una trasformazione generale della democrazia rappresentativa in una forma di democrazia del pubblico, in cui il valore dell'intermediazione è sempre più contestato a tutti i livelli della vita sociale. Nell'esaminare questo cambiamento in corso, illustriamo innanzitutto alcune implicazioni generali che i fenomeni sociali di disintermediazione hanno per la pratica della democrazia rappresentativa, assottigliando e rimodellando i confini tra la sfera pubblica formale e quella informale. In particolare, esaminiamo la crescente influenza della leadership carismatica nella politica dei partiti e la spinta alla democrazia diretta digitale come alternativa al ruolo delle assemblee elettive, per mostrare come un ideale normativo di rappresentanza politica come specchio in tempo reale dell'opinione pubblica sia alla base di entrambe queste strategie populiste. Valutiamo poi criticamente queste implicazioni pratiche e teoriche della disintermediazione. Da un punto di vista pratico, scopriamo che le leadership carismatiche e le strategie populiste di democrazia digitale diretta non soddisfano gli standard di immediatezza e trasparenza su cui si basano e non possono sostituire la funzione democratica pluralistica delle assemblee elettive. Da un punto di vista teorico, sosteniamo che la premessa concettuale su cui si basano è fondamentalmente errata: la rappresentanza politica è un processo che implica sempre un grado rilevante di interpretazione e intermediazione, e pertanto le affermazioni dei rappresentanti non possono essere interpretate come riflessi speculari dei rappresentati. Concludiamo suggerendo che i

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parlamenti dovrebbero invece adottare pratiche innovative come le audizioni pubbliche e la democrazia diretta avviata dai cittadini, che ricentrano la funzione rappresentativa dell'assemblea sull'ascolto attivo dei rappresentanti e sulla partecipazione dei rappresentati.

Parole chiave: Rappresentanza, Democrazia del pubblico, Populismo, Disintermediazione, Crisi degli esperti politici, Sfera pubblica, Audizione pubblica.

Several authors have analyzed the rise of populist movements around the world as a phenomenon that must be seen in the context of a general transformation of representative democracy into a form of audience democracy, in which the value of intermediation is increasingly contested at all levels of social life. In examining this ongoing shift, we first illustrate some general implications that social phenomena of disintermediation have for the practice of representative democracy by thinning and reshaping the boundaries between the formal and informal public spheres. Specifically, we examine the growing influence of charismatic leadership in party politics and the push for digital direct democracy as an alternative to the role of elected assemblies, to show how a normative ideal of political representation as a real-time mirroring of public opinion underpins both of these populist strategies. We then critically assess these practical and theoretical implications of disintermediation. From a practical perspective, we find that charismatic leaderships and direct digital democracy populist strategies do not meet the standards of immediacy and transparency on which they are based, and cannot replace the pluralistic democratic function of elected assemblies. From a theoretical perspective, we argue that the conceptual premise on which they rely is fundamentally flawed: political representation is a process that always involves a relevant degree of interpretation and intermediation, and therefore representative claims cannot be construed as mirror reflections of the represented. We conclude by suggesting that parliaments should instead adopt innovative practices such as public hearings and citizen-initiated direct democracy, which refocus the representative function of the assembly on the active listening of the representatives and the participation of the represented.

Keywords: Representation, Audience Democracy, Populism, Disintermediation, Crisis of Political Experts, Public Sphere, Public Hearing.

1. Introduction: the rise of populist movements and the practice of representative democracy

The rise of populist movements around the world and its connection with general trends of social disintermediation in the public sphere has been subject of widespread scrutiny in the last decade. As Nadia Urbinati has aptly pointed out, this is a phenomenon to be intended as an attempt to transform constitutional democracy from its stabilized post World War II form into a new, substantially mutated model

of representative democracy.[1] Populist movements, indeed, do not entirely reject the logic of representation, but rather disfigure it by discrediting the role of political mediations, by undermining the checks on the power of majorities, and by vilifying views and groups that do not fit into their understanding of who 'the people' are and what they want.[2]

This kind of transformation has been in the making for quite some time, prepared by a general transition from parliamentarian and party based democratic models into new forms of audience democracy[3] where the relationship between representatives and represented is focused on the personal image and initiative of individual political leaders and their constant connection with the public through multiple means of communications and opinion polls.

This direct audience relationship has gradually become predominant as the value of intermediation has also been contested at all levels of social life and the fundamental institutions of representative democracy are regarded with suspicion. Pierre Rosanvallon has spoken of this trend as a form of counter-democracy: a phenomenon which encompasses the spread of anti-political sentiments among the population, a mounting request for more control over representative institutions, a systemic mistrust for political elites and traditional forms of political decision-making, and a noticeable demand for direct democracy.[4]

In this scenario, the role of political parties and parliaments in the democratic practice is frequently marginalized, manipulated and sometimes even by-passed at the hands of populist leaders who seek their legitimation in a supposedly direct and disintermediated relationship with their public. This paper aims to illustrate how this crisis of parliamentary representation is rooted in a misleading concept of political representation that construes the representative relation as a 'mirror reflection' of the people. The populist representative claims, we suggest, are based on the assumption that it is possible to offer a political image of the people's beliefs, wishes and needs that is not the fruit of a lengthy process of interpretation, which includes elements of mediation, interaction and compromise, but is rather the result of a direct, unmediated and mechanically accurate mirroring of the represented 'as they are'. We first trace the preconditions of this conception in the general phenomena of social and political disintermediation and how they are thinning and twisting the separation between formal and informal public sphere. We then look closer at the relationship between representatives and represented to discuss how the notion of representation as a mirror reflection is affecting both the everyday practices of elected assemblies and the conceptual framework they are based on. Finally, we argue that construing political

[1] See N. Urbinati, *Democracy disfigured. Opinion, truth, and the people*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2014.
[2] See N. Urbinati, *Me the people. How populism transforms democracy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2019.
[3] See B. Manin, *The principles of representative government*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, pp. 218-235.
[4] See P. Rosanvallon, *La Contre-Démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2006.

representation as a mirror is a faulty and self-defeating path that is ultimately at odds with democratic pluralism. Political representation is an interpretive relationship, not a mirroring one, and the interpretive process involves representatives and represented together through various layers of mediation. In light of these considerations, we suggest evaluating innovative democratic practices like public hearings and citizen-initiated direct democracy practices as promising strategies to integrate the representative process of elected assemblies with the participation of citizens.

2. Political disintermediation in the public sphere

To understand the push towards disintermediation and the consequent transformations of political representation we need to consider the impact that media innovation and the digital revolution are having on the public sphere and, specifically, on the practices of political communication. These transformations, initiated by the Modern individualization and horizontalization of social relations and accelerated by contemporary technological advancements, have notably found public justification based on the appeal to the ethical-political value of transparency.

The call for transparency as a condition for political participation dates back at least to the Enlightenment and its formulation of the ideal of 'publicity', according to which the free circulation of information and the fight against the secrecy and opacity of power have an essential emancipatory political function. This ideal has been crucial to develop the concept of the bourgeois public sphere as a space where knowledge and reasons can be freely exchanged, a genuine 'sphere of criticism'[5] where the processes of discursive mediation are fundamental not only to the articulation of ideas but also to the direct agency in the political field.[6] In this context, the mediation of experts is important not only because of the role played by journalist and intellectuals, but also because of the function of elected representatives during a time that Bernard Manin has designated as the age of parliamentarianism, whose origins can be traced back to the XVIII century.

This situation starts shifting with the advent of mass media, which undermines traditional forms of political representation and participation. The increasing influence of the media gradually weakens the Enlightenment idea according to which there would be a direct proportionality between publicity and emancipation.[7] Radio and television bring about a more democratic access to political information, but also tend to transform the public into a consumer audience and to create a context that favors the impact of media manipulation over the discursive exchange of reasons. In

[5] See R. Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1973.

[6] See J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1989.

[7] See S. Baume, *Publicity and Transparency: The Itinerary of a Subtle Distinction,* in E. Alloa, D. Thomä (dir.)*, Transparency, Society and Subjectivity. Critical Perspectives,* Palgrave Macmillan, Londra 2022, pp. 203-224.

Manin's reconstruction of the transformations of representative government,[8] this is the time of party democracy, where the core representative relation shifts from the individual trust between representative and represented to the ideological identification between the masses and the political parties. During this time, the processes of intermediation and the role of experts are still central, even though they are gradually transformed. The rise of mass parties is supported by party activists and bureaucracies that are crucial not only to direct the electoral choices of the general public, but more widely to nurture and shape the political discussion on all matters of public concern. Journalists also retain a prominent role in choosing and framing the news that reach the wider audiences.

The third stage of Manin's account, which encompasses the late XX century, when the mass media reach the peak of their influence, sees the rise of the audience democracy model, in which the relation of ideological identification is progressively weakened and substituted by a new direct bond between political leaders on one side and passive audiences of media consumers on the other.[9] The arrival of digital media, however, pushed this ongoing transformation in new and radical directions that Manin, at the end of the 1990s, could not entirely appreciate. With the possibilities opened by the Web 2.0, the citizens become 'prosumers': they aren't now limited to the consumption of news, as they can also actively contribute to their production, thus further undermining some of the most consolidated forms of political intermediation and communication. In this new framework, where everyone can be a source of information for the general public and everybody can join a political debate from home, the role of expert intermediators is not only widely delegitimized, but it is even perceived as an obstacle to the free circulation of ideas and the direct expression of the people's political will. As Byung-Chul Han's noted, mediation and representation are now merely "viewed as a lack of transparency and inefficiency – as temporal and informational congestion".[10] This push towards disintermediation profoundly affects the political sphere and directly hits the principle of representation in a preexisting context of severe crisis of the mass parties that originated in the 1980s and has, since then, gravely wounded the legitimacy of the political elites.

Social and technological transformations are certainly offering to the citizens a widespread horizontal access to an open sphere of public representations: every individual can formulate representative claims addressed to a wide audience with a chance of visibility that does not depend on traditional forms of intermediation (i.e.: old media, labour unions, political parties, churches, etc.). In many countries this new condition is positively fostering bottom-up processes of anti-authoritarian resistance and democratization, but its enduring impact on democratic institutions is still uncertain. In this fashion, the impact of technology on public discourse has effectively opened a new layer of horizontal transparency and direct exchange not just

[8] See B. Manin, *The principles of Representative Government*, cit.

[9] On the crisis of party politics and the rise of audience democracy, see also P. Mancini, *Il post partito. La fine delle grandi narrazioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2015, p. 48.

[10] See B.-Ch. Han, *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2017, p. 15.

among citizens who belong to the same political community, but also among individuals all over the world. Social and civil rights movements have taken advantage of this new opportunity to defy existing power structures and enduring injustices on the global stage that the new media offer.

However, there is something fundamentally flawed in the assumption that, as expected by the emancipatory ideal of publicity, the ongoing extension of horizontal transparency will also inevitably result in a substantial increase of vertical transparency, by rendering obsolete old structures of political intermediation and granting the citizens equal access to information and decision-making on public issues. Previous forms of vertical intermediation have indeed been weakened, but they have been soon replaced by new ones, which reshaped the internal workings of the public sphere and had important repercussion on the institutionalized forms of political representation.[11]

The exponential growth of the digital public sphere has been not only fostered but also internally structured by the diffusion of social networks. These platforms operate as technologies of attention and constitute effectively "new media": new forms of vertical intermediation that are less centralized and evident compared to old media, but not less influential. The overabundant and pervasive flow of images and beliefs that fills the internet has, in fact, rendered almost irrelevant the impact of the individual claims that are constantly made on public issues, as they tend to be lost in the iconic ocean of the new media. What counts is now not the ability to fabricate representations, which is abundantly available to almost anyone, bur rather the capacity to orient the public's attention towards certain selected representations as the relevant representative claims. Internet social networks are, in this sense, great technologies of attention, built to train the attention of a vast public and then resell it for commercial or political purposes. Data about users are collected and sold, users are profiled and nourished specific forms of content and advertisement, echo chambers are formed where only like-minded individuals interact with one another.[12] The promise of 'transparent immediacy'[13] that comes with these digital platforms obscures the fact that they are not neutral, but 'programmed' environments that

[11] On the distinction between horizontal and vertical transparency see G. Lingua, *Transparence numérique et frontières de la désintermédiation politique*, in J. Bodini, M. Carbone, G. Lingua, G. Serrano (a cura di), *L'avenir des écrans*, Éditions Mimésis, Parigi 2020, pp. 193-205 and M. Carbone, G. Lingua, *Toward an Anthropology of Screen. Showing and Hiding, Exposing and Protecting*, Palgrave Mcmillam, London 2023, pp. 113-118.

[12] Among many others, see Y. Benkler, R. Faris and H. Roberts, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018; J.A.G.M. van Dijk, K.L. Hacker, *Internet and Democracy in the Network Society*, Routledge, London and New York 2018; J.P. Wihbey, *The Social Fact: News and Knowledge in a Networked World*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2019; S. Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism. The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, Profile Books, London 2019; A. Jungherr, G. Rivero and D. Gayo-Avello, *Retooling Politics: How Digital Media Are Shaping Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020.

[13] See J.D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1999, pp. 21-31.

respond to a series of choices that determine their structure and influence their usage. These choices are dictated by economic interests, commercial strategies, national policies, and technological options that end up governing from the inside the online landscape. The public is often scarcely aware of this internal opacity of the new media, while the logic behind their everyday functioning is in fact governed by narrow elites and subject to different sorts of manipulation and regulation.[14]

These new diffused forms of organization of the public sphere heavily impact the political practice and determine the emergence of new phenomena: institutional sources of information that are increasingly marginalized, political leaders that constantly and directly address their base, movements who advocate forms of real time digital consultation as the new frontier of democracy. Some of these phenomena are particularly worrying, such as in the case of authoritarian regimes that effectively transform the online social networks in systems of control over their population or use them to influence the democratic process in other countries. In this multifaceted transformation of political practice, social media emerge as crucial intermediaries for building and highlighting relevant representative claims in the new digitally oriented public sphere.

As a result of this combined process of horizontal disintermediation and vertical re-intermediation, the distinction between formal and informal public sphere has been not only effectively weakened, but specifically contested, often at the hands of populist movements. The normative value of this distinction relies on the assumption that a thick layer of intermediation is fundamental for proper democratic decision-making to happen. In this perspective, the formal public sphere needs to be separated from the informal one for rational deliberation to happen according to principles of fairness and reciprocity but needs also to be connected with it by a nurturing relation, for political representation to feed the decision-making process with the actual beliefs and wants of the citizenry. The increasing horizontal disintermediation, however, has led to the contestation of the separation between the two: the gap between formal and informal public discourse has become narrow and the political polarization is colonizing the space of informal public discourse. In this sense, the attention of the public opinion is increasingly directed to a political debate that develops on social media and outside of its institutional sites. At the same time, even political discourse articulated in institutional sites is often modeled after informal discussion, thus rendering effectively obsolete traditional concerns about the appeal to carefully defined boundaries of public reason or the exclusion of confessional religious language. New forms of re-intermediation favor also new models of political leadership: the populist leader borrows codes and rhetoric from the informal public sphere and relies on the delegitimization of traditional intermediators like institutional figures and intellectual elites.[15]

[14] See M. Flyverbom, *The digital prism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK 2019. pp. 1-24.
[15] M. Barberis, G. Giacomini, *La neo-intermediazione populista. Popolo, istituzioni, media*, in «Teoria politica», n. 10, 2020, pp. 317-340.

In the end, getting radically away from all forms of intermediation in politics is a highly problematic utopian project that aims at bypassing established forms of power imbalance but in practice ends up exchanging old forms of intermediation and power with new ones.

3. The impact of political disintermediation on the representative function of parliaments

This transformation of the political landscape under the pressure of disintermediating ideologies and practices is having important consequences on the inner workings of representative democracy and specifically on the role of parliaments as its central institutions. From the crisis of political parties and other representative bodies, comes a destabilization and liberalization of representative claims that as been labelled as 'hyper-representation': a political phenomenon that sees the flourishing of social actors that occupy the public sphere, claim an immediate relationship with important parts of society and adopt strategies of plebiscitary leadership and direct democracy.[16] We can appreciate the impact of this phenomenon on institutionalized political representation by examining the rise of a twofold practical and conceptual shift: (i) emerging practices of political representation that increasingly marginalize the representative function of parliamentary assemblies in favor of forms of direct relation with the public; (ii) a new normative understanding of political representation as a mirror reflection that is the premise upon which these new practices are established. Let us consider in turn these two interconnected aspects of the ongoing transformation.

(i) The populist quest for a disintermediated direct relation between "the people" and the sites of political decision-making takes forms that partially differ from movement to movement, also depending on to the components that shape the ideology of each specific group. Among these strategies, we consider most notably two: (a) The charismatic leader strategy, focused on the increased role of a prominent national figure that directly address 'the people' at the expenses of locally elected representatives that interact with their specific constituency;[17] (b) The technopopulist strategy, focused on digital direct democracy and consultation presented as an

[16] See A. Mastropaolo, *I partiti, la rappresentanza e la loro pretesa crisi*, in «EticaEconomia», n. 15, 2015; A. Mastropaolo, *Rappresentanza, partiti, governance*, in R. Sau (ed.) *La Politica. Categorie in questione*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2016, pp. 209–219.

[17] It is interesting to note that social media platforms play a decisive role in re-structuring the public conversation away from the local relationship between representative and constituency: "Social media platforms make it easier for the like-minded to socialize from their home environments and over great distances because digital technology facilitates geographically spread niche networks based on interest rather than location. So where mass media consumption to a larger extent is bound to geographically defined communities, social media platforms are bound to communities of peers and like-minded others" in U. Klinger, J. Svensson, *The emergence of network media logic in political communication: A theoretical approach*, in «New Media & Society», n. 17, 2015, pp. 1249-1250.

alternative form of political decision-making that can, in the long run, severely limit or even entirely by-pass the need for elected assemblies.

In the first case, (a) the leader is presented as an outsider, opposed to the established political elites and acting as the embodiment of the demands of "the people", to which they claim to have clear and unmediated access.[18] Usually men, these leaders supposedly act and speak like the people they represent, contest the authority of experts, and maintain that they are bringing the voice of the people inside political institutions that are otherwise close, unclear, opaque. The representations offered by the populist leaders are importantly self-representations as honest and simple persons that identify themselves with a homogenous people in order to contrast the unduly influence of the elites. The direct, apparently un-sophisticated and un-mediated manners of this self-representation are crucial to differentiate the populist leader from his adversaries: much of this strategy relies on the "populists' exposure of one particular aspect of mainstream politicians' behaviour that elites would wish to keep invisible: the constructed nature of their visible performance".[19] The leader is not just in a political relationship with the people as their representative: he embodies the people he represents and his legitimacy draws from his ability to constantly reshape his own image to reflect the represented, to show himself in tune with the sentiments of the population to mobilize their support.[20] The alleged authenticity of the leader's claim is supported by the corresponding reactions of the audience[21] and is presented in stark contrast with the manufactured and stale communication of the adversary.[22] Within this strategy, the role of representatives in

[18] See H. Kriesi, *The Populist Challenge*, in «West European Politics», 37, (2014), pp. 361-378; B. Krämer, *Populist online practices: the function of the Internet in right-wing populism*, in «Information, Communication & Society», n. 20, 2017, pp. 1293-1309.

[19] L. Sorensen, *Populist communication in the new media environment: a cross-regional comparative perspective*, in «Palgrave Communications», n. 4, 2018.

[20] R.R. Barr, *Populism as a political strategy*, in C. de la Torre (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*, Routledge, New York, 2019, pp. 44-56. Significant evidence supports the efficacy of this strategy and shows a correlation between the constant presence of the leader's messaging on old and new media and his approval levels, see G.J. Love and L.C. Windsor, *Populism and Popular Support: Vertical Accountability, Exogenous Events, and Leader Discourse in Venezuela*, in «Political Research Quarterly», n. 71, 2018, pp. 532-545; G. Bobba, *Social media populism: features and 'likeability' of Lega Nord communication on Facebook*, in «European Political Science», n. 18, 2019, pp. 11-23.

[21] "Arguably, social media contribute to dramatising populist communication because they are platforms suited to producing emotional, controversial, even violent contents typical of much populist activism, and to stimulating a 'remix' activity, a creative collage of video clips, sound bites, clickbaits, graffiti, parodies, memes, and many other contents, including insults and fake-news, that can prove crucial in boosting the popularity of the leader, of his/her creed, of his/her movement" in G. Mazzoleni, R. Bracciale, *Socially mediated populism: the communicative strategies of political leaders on Facebook*, in «Palgrave Communications», n. 4, 2018.

[22] In this sense, "[p]opulism is related to a destabilisation of the norms of mainstream politics, not least when it comes to language use. To violate the norms and conventions in the language of politics is a way to perform being anti-establishment" M. Ekström, A. Morton, *The Performances of Right-Wing Populism: Populist Discourse, Embodied Styles and Forms of News Reporting*, in M. Ekström, J. Firmstone

parliaments is only marginal: the assembly serves as an audience for the leader's claims, which are legitimate because of the alleged direct endorsement of 'the people' and need only to be procedurally translated into the legislative process.[23] At its core, the charismatic leader strategy introduces a mutation of the representative relation between representatives and represented, thus sidelining the role of those who still operate within the 'previous' logic of party politics and elected assemblies. As insightfully noted by Camil Ungureanu and Alexandra Popartan, in this sense populism can be examined as a specific political narrative that borrows from mythical and religious repertoires to present the leader as a messianic figure that defies ordinary political logic:

> Although the leader can be elected according to democratic procedures, the relationship with the electorate pertains not to the logic of representation through deliberation and general rules but to that of emanation. According to this logic, the leader as 'natural' emanation of the people has a privileged and immediate access to their interests and needs; the leader is the incarnation of the voice of the people. As such, the leader is not bound by general rules, but is a 'trickster' who transcends them. He places himself above democratic procedures and the basic moral norms of the interaction in the public sphere. As a corollary, the political party becomes a tool or an accessory at the service of the leader who has direct access to the masses through Twitter, Facebook or TV.[24]

In the second strategy, (b) the implementation of digital democracy tools aims at using information technologies to produce a real-time showcase of the genuine will of "the people": according to this view, the institutions of representative democracies are increasingly obsolete, and they are to be substituted by pervasive practices of direct democracy and citizens' consultation. In this perspective, the open and always accessible technological platform is the ultimate promise of getting away from the need of political intermediation, as every citizen will soon be able to directly express their own will on all matters. The role of representatives in parliaments in this process is only secondary and temporary: insofar as digital democracy is realized, the elected parliamentarians are at best conduits for the will expressed online by the people to be

(eds), *The Mediated Politics of Europe: A Comparative Study of Discourse*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2017, p. 293.

[23] For an interesting analysis of how the rise to prominence of populist movements in Italy determined a further marginalization of the parliamentary institution, see: C. Fasone, *Is There a Populist Turn in the Italian Parliament? Continuity and Discontinuity in the Non-legislative Procedures*, in G. Delledonne, G. Martinico, M. Monti and F. Pacini (eds), *Italian Populism and Constitutional Law. Strategies, Conflicts and Dilemmas*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020, pp. 41-74. Among several elements that concurred to that end, it is worth noting: the attack to the principle of free mandate, the erosion of parliamentary procedures and immunities, the use of social media to sabotage ongoing political negotiations or to direct the attention of the public away from parliamentary discussions, the use of committees of enquiry and parliamentary questions outside of their institutional boundaries as part of the populist communication strategy.

[24] C. Ungureanu, A. Popartan, *Populism as narrative, myth making, and the 'logic' of political emotions*, in «Journal of the British Academy», n. 8, 2020, p. 43.

translated into their vote in the legislative assembly. In this sense, the technopopulist strategy develops a meta-discourse where the specific contents of the digital consultations are flexible and generic, to mobilize disillusioned citizens coming from different ideological backgrounds: the main theme is not the specific issue at stake, but the general promise of giving them direct control over the political decisions.[25] Like the charismatic leader seeks his own legitimization through the opposition to the cold and distant elites, similarly the legitimization of the technopopulist strategy is achieved through a parallel delegitimization of the traditional forms of political representation.[26] In this sense, the technopopulist forms of citizens' involvement fundamentally differ from the deliberative ones, which aim at the participation of citizens into inclusive processes where the focus is on collective discussion and the eventual mediation among different claims. Here, instead, "[t]he myth of online direct democracy is an outcome of direct democracy […] It is considered an opportunity (mainly arising from democratic participation platforms) to develop 'real' direct democracy (online) at a low cost and without party interference".[27] For the most part this strategy is incarnated by practices of quite limited scope, as in the case of local referendums on specific questions or as internal consultations among the members of the populist movement to support or decline a proposal whose terms have been previously framed and formulated by the leadership. The relevance of these practices within the strategy is mostly symbolic, as a utopian anticipation of a future when these practices could entirely substitute the logic of representation, and rhetorical, to confirm the cohesive identification of the base with the leadership.

(ii) These emergent strategies are consistent with a conceptual understanding of political representation as a mirror of the public and tend to decisively sideline the role of elected assemblies, whose functioning and procedures fail to approximate the standards of immediacy and transparency dictated by the ideal of a perfect mirror reflection. The representative claims raised within these populist strategies are formulated so as to translate this understanding into a political practice. By borrowing some basic elements from Michael Saward's analysis of the representative claim,[28] we can characterize the populist claims as conflating the claim-maker with both the

[25] L. Manucci, M. Amsler, *Where the wind blows: Five Star Movement's populism, direct democracy and ideological flexibility*, in «Italian Political Science Review», n. 48, 2018, pp. 109-132.
[26] If digital disintermediation and the transparency it brings about are the main political message, the natural antagonist are all those traditional forms of intermediation (including parliamentarians and all elected representatives) who still belong to a previous political order that, because of its opaqueness, is now superfluous if not outright damaging. See G. Bobba, G. Legnante, *Italy. A Breeding Ground for Populist Political Communication*, in T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, and C.H. de Vreese, *Populist Political Communication in Europe*, Routledge, New York, 2016.
[27] E. De Blasio, M. Sorice, *Populisms among technology, e-democracy and the depoliticisation process*, in «Revista Internacional de Sociología», n. 76, 2018, p. 10.
[28] M. Saward, *The Representative Claim*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010.

audience and the object of the representation.[29] While the specific subject that is put forth, as we have noted earlier, may be quite elusive when it comes to its contents (from taxation and immigration, to welfare policies and international relations), what lies at the core of the claim is that the entire audience is construed as a homogenous whole ('the people') that is perfectly reflected by the claim-maker (the charismatic leader or the digital democracy platform) and this disintermediated identification is the actual object of the claim itself. The claim is really about the mirroring correspondence between 'the people' and the leader or the digital platform, which is qualitatively different from the representative relation attributed to other claim-makers, like traditional political parties and even elected representatives. The subject that is put forth is just an occasion to highlight this correspondence.[30]

More specifically, in the case of (a) the populist leader, he looks and talks like his audience, 'the people', and in turn the core content of the claims he makes is, again, 'the people' as opposed to 'the elites'. The specific subject of each claim may change, but the impact of the claim does not depend on it. The internal logic of the charismatic leader strategy is that of an oxymoronic 'direct representation':[31] the leader represents the people by embodying the people with his demeanor and rhetoric and by making the people the central object of what he claims, through a strategy of continuous communication with his audience to prove their mutual identification. In this sense, the legitimacy of the leader is not rooted in democratic procedures, but in his ability to embody a mirror reflection of the people, in contrast with 'the establishment'.[32]

In the case of (b) digital direct democracy practices, the identification of claim-maker, audience and content of the claim is made through the real time technological mirror. 'The people' can finally take the decision in its own hands instead of waiting for someone else to represent it in the decision-making process, and this is also the main content of the claim that is made: the fact that disintermediation is achieved through a platform that merely reflects the will of the people, so that it can then be procedurally applied to the policy- and law-making process.

In the light of this mirror-like understanding of representation, the notion that elected assemblies serve as intermediate political expressions of a certain society, and thus formulate representative claims at a highest degree of legitimacy, appears outdated. Even if one accepts that the electoral system provides a procedurally made

[29] Saward's complete formula for the 'general form of the representative claim' goes as follows: "[a] maker of representations ("M") puts forth a subject ("S") which stand for an object ("O") that is related to a referent ("R") and is offered to an audience ("A")" Saward, *The Representative Claim*, cit., p. 36.

[30] For an interesting analysis that highlights this functioning of populist representative claims on the subject of taxation in the United States and Canada, see D. Laycock, *Tax revolts, direct democracy and representation: populist politics in the US and Canada*, in «Journal of Political Ideologies», n. 24, 2019, pp. 158-181

[31] N. Urbinati, *Political Theory of Populism*, in «Annual Review of Political Science», n. 22, 2019, p. 120.

[32] One of the most influential recent accounts of representation in terms of hegemony and embodiment is offered in E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London and New York 2005.

'photograph' of the constituency at a certain point in time, its validity will still be derivative if compared to the promise of a real time mirror, especially within a digital public sphere that is constantly filled, in the minute-by-minute experience of the public, by an everchanging flow of images and bits of information. Therefore, the ideal of disintermediated representation is the mirror: if the represented can see their own image constantly reflected in overabundant visibility of the leader or in the promise of real time digital voting, the gap of intermediation is closed.[33]

The idea of representation as a mirror reflection is consistent with the logic of the Schmittian principle of identity, of which it essentially offers an updated application within the contemporary political space. In his *Constitutional Theory*, Carl Schmitt states:

> […] the people can achieve and hold the condition of political unity in two different ways. It can already be factually and directly capable of political action by virtue of a strong and conscious similarity, as a result of firm natural boundaries, or due to some other reason. In this case, a political unity is a genuinely present entity in its unmediated self-identity. This principle of the self-identity of the then present people as political unity rests on the fact that there is no state without people and that a people, therefore, must always actually be existing as an entity present at hand. The opposing principle proceeds from the idea that the political unity of the people as such can never be present in actual identity and, consequently, must always be represented by men personally.[34]

The disintermediated digital public sphere now seems to offer a chance to drastically reduce the distance between the "unmediated self-identity" of the people and its embodied presence in the forms of political representation. In a political setting where old and new media ensure a space of ubiquitous public visibility, the populist promise is that self-identity can be made present in the form of a mirror image of 'the people' that is reflected back to the audience in real time; the gap between the principles of identity and representation has never been so narrow. However, as Nadia Urbinati has appropriately pointed out, this contemporary Schmittian revival is as much at odds with a genuinely pluralist representative democracy as its original version was:

> Clearly, since Schmitt thought of representation as a synthesis of identity and the presence of the sovereign, party pluralism and parliamentary competition were anathema to him. […] In similar manner, populism uses representation to constitute the political order above the society and through the expulsion of pluralism. As per Schmitt, who thus gave populism an important argument, representation is political insofar as it repels the liberal calls of advocacy, control, monitoring, and a constant dialogue between society and politics, and narrows the distance between the elected leader and the electors so as to incorporate society within the state.[35]

[33] See, M. Carbone, G. Lingua, *Toward an Anthropology of Screen*, cit., pp. 120-121.
[34] C. Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory*, translated and edited by J. Seitzer, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2008, p. 239.
[35] Urbinati, *Democracy disfigured*, cit., p. 137.

Before we move to a more comprehensive critical assessment of this populist understanding of representation as a mirror image, it is useful to note that the practices we examined, and their underlying conceptual premises, stem out of a justified awareness of the increasing difficulties of institutionalized representation is a rapidly changing landscape. An apt example is the long running debate on deliberative democracy and its prospects as a model to reform stale party-based systems of representation. In this sense, in political theory, discontent with the state of representative democracy and the excessive distance between representatives and represented has found abundant theoretical articulation in the past few decades, with a prominent focus on the notion of deliberative democracy and the conditions of the participation of citizens to political decision-making.[36] According to deliberative democracy theorists, the intrinsic limitations of representative democracy have been further aggravated by the rise of technocratic approaches to public management, the growing gap between elites and the general public, and the loss of sovereignty due to the increasing influence that international institutions and global markets have on national societies. To contrast the citizens' apathy and the delegitimization of democratic rule spurred by these factors, the answer would be to recover the dimension of direct participation to the political decision-making by rendering available deliberative practices and open forums. In this perspective, both the formal and the informal public spheres are essentially argumentative and deliberative spaces that need to be re-connected by establishing appropriate discursive practices.

The recent push towards disintermediation, however, seems to by-pass this strategy rather than support it. Citizens' participation and collective deliberation ideally aim to address the same gap between representatives and represented that populists focus on, but as practices of bottom-up political engagement they still entail, in important ways, complex and sometimes taxing forms of intermediation. The push towards disintermediation has thus shifted the focus from the open process of argumentation and deliberation to a more immediate ideal of political representation: the real time mirroring reflection of the public, as it supposedly is, with its own needs and wants. In this perspective, the prospect of a fruitful connection between the deliberative interaction among citizens and the deliberative function of parliaments is marginalized. The representative function remains alone at the center of the political stage, and it seems to be better served outside of elected assemblies and their procedures rather than inside.

[36] Among others, see: J.S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000; M. Saward (ed.), *Democratic Innovation: Deliberation, Representation and Association*, Routledge, London and New York 2003); A. Gutmann, D.F. Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2004; S. Besson and J.L. Martí (eds), *Deliberative Democracy and Its Discontents*, Ashgate, Burlington VT 2006.

4. *Critical assessment of the impact of political disintermediation on the representative function of parliaments*

Both the deliberative and populist critiques we considered, although fundamentally different, highlight important difficulties that institutionalized forms of political intermediation have been recently facing in a landscape of increasing social disintermediation. However, both the (i) emerging populist practices of political representation and the (ii) normative understanding of political representation that underpins them can be subject, in turn, to a profound scrutiny that underlines their fundamental weaknesses. Let us address them in turn.

(i) Populist representative strategies rely on a radical pretense of political disintermediation that they cannot in fact realize. As we have seen, populist representative claims conflate the claim-maker with both the audience and the object of the representation, but this identification of the three elements is fictious and ultimately incompatible with the pluralism of claims that is typical of democratic systems.

In the case of (a) charismatic leaders, far from simply mirroring their average constituent, they constantly shape and resell themselves as a representation of the beliefs and wants of society, thus actively fabricating the collective identification with such a representation. This 'shape-shifting representation' is, to some extent, a structural component of representative democracy, especially in settings that have the prevalent traits of an audience democracy.[37] But the artificial nature of this identification of the leader with 'the people' is fundamentally incompatible with the alleged disintermediated and direct nature of their relationship, upon which the validity of the leader's claim is grounded. As Lone Sorensen has observed by thoroughly examining the representative strategies of UKIP in the United Kingdom and the EFF in South Africa:

> Despite denying that they adapt their practices to the media, these movements engage in disruption of political norms that catches the media's attention and lends them control of both their own and the elite's visibility. The two populist cases thus address the challenges of the paradigm of visibility through entrepreneurial forms of meta-performance, designing their own performances to expose the crafted and crafty nature of elite visibility management.[38]

The widespread use of social media, often portrayed as the epitome of direct interaction and communication between leaders and people, is in fact fabricated to provide an illusion of immediacy in both content and practice. In terms of content, the thin ideology of populist message is kept simple, ambiguous and malleable, to

[37] M. Saward, *Shape-Shifting Representation*, in «American Political Science Review», n. 108, 2014, pp. 723-736.
[38] L. Sorensen, *Populist communication in the new media environment*, cit.

render easy for a large audience to identify with.[39] The very public performance of the leader is not even his own, for the most part: social media interactions are documented to be heavily performed by parliamentary assistants and communication teams rather than by elected representatives and leaders themselves.[40] The disintermediated identification of the leader with his audience and object of the representation is, thus, for the most part, a fiction built upon the actual mechanics of how the populist claim is formulated and diffused.

In the case of (b) digital direct democracy platforms, they are presented within a promise of absolute transparency, immediacy and self-rule, but are in fact often governed by less accountable forms of intermediation than traditional electoral processes. Therefore, barriers of access to the consultation and tight control over the timing, narrative and information provided to the participants play a decisive role in determining the outcome of these voting and consultation practices. Multilevel analyses of citizens' orientations in direct democracy votes show that political elites still play a decisive role in providing the citizens with signals and information that are crucial to the formation of their ability to make a competent choice.[41] Moreover, significant evidence indicates that in direct votes on specific issues, voters' factual beliefs on policy issues can become systematically distorted to align with their pre-existing cultural and political orientations[42] and that voters tend to align their arguments with their preferred party's position.[43] In this sense, instances of digital direct democracy, especially when restricted to consultations among movement and party members, do not provide a disintermediated image of 'the will of the people', as if it emerged in a vacuum to be reflected by the technological platform. On the contrary, they rather register an orientation that has been inevitably and profoundly affected by a long history of interactions with the intermediation of political elites, media infrastructures, cultural leaders, and religious authorities, which all played a significant part in creating the conditions of the citizens' choice. Proponents of digital direct democracy suggest that some of these shortcomings are only due to the limited nature and diffusion of these early practices, however it is also questionable that the project of rendering such practices pervasive would actually result in an improvement of the citizens' participation: a purely direct democratic regime, in fact, "requires that

[39] See N. Ernst, S. Engesser, F. Büchel, S. Blassnig and F. Esser, *Extreme parties and populism: an analysis of Facebook and Twitter across six countries*, in «Information, Communication & Society», n. 20, 2017, p. 1359.

[40] See C.S. Ben-Porat, S. Lehman-Wilzig, *Electoral system influence on social network usage patterns of parliamentary assistants as their legislators' stand-in: The United States, Germany, and Israel*, in «New Media & Society», n. 5, 2020, pp. 1022-1044.

[41] See C. Colombo, *Justifications and Citizen Competence in Direct Democracy: A Multilevel Analysis*, in «British Journal of Political Science», n. 48, 2018, pp. 787-806.

[42] See J. Gastil, J. Reedy, and C. Wells, *Knowledge Distortion in Direct Democracy: A Longitudinal Study of Biased Empirical Beliefs on Statewide Ballot Measures*, in «International Journal of Public Opinion Research», n. 30, 2017, pp. 540–560.

[43] See C. Colombo, H. Kriesi, *Party, policy – or both? Partisan-biased processing of policy arguments in direct democracy*, «Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties», n. 27, 2017, pp. 235-253.

the public agenda be broken down into discrete issues that are voted on separately. This further undermines reasonable democratic deliberation"[44] as it prevents each time the specific issue at stake to be considered, debated and decided upon within a general framework that also includes other relevant issues that are systemically connected with it.

By looking closer at the (ii) conceptual underpinnings of these populist representative strategies, we argue that construing political representation as a real time mirror of the public is a misleading premise that is also at the basis of the practical faults we just illustrated.

Because of their common conceptual foundations, both the (a) charismatic leadership and (b) technopopulist strategies have in fact strong anti-pluralistic implications. The underlying logic of the populist representative claim is conflating the claim-maker with their audience and the object of the claim, but this effectively excludes the legitimacy of other representative claims: if the maker of the populist claim is identical with the audience and their correspondence is the actual object of the representative claim, anyone who makes a different claim is necessarily an impostor. If the leader is a direct representation of 'the people', it means he speaks like 'the people', on behalf of 'the people' and in doing so he re-instates the people in its legitimate position of sovereignty. Should this be true, different claims are by default to be considered illegitimate, as anything the people is and wants has been already mirrored. Similarly, if the digital platform allows 'the people' to speak as they want, directly on behalf of themselves, thus effectively re-instating themselves in their position of sovereignty, any different claim, even made by legally elected representatives, becomes secondary if not outright meaningless.

This mirroring framework "plays into the populist ideology that there is a single collective will that can be represented in its entirety, and is therefore fundamentally at odds with the view of representative democracy as pluralistic".[45] The irreducible plurality of people's beliefs, wishes, and needs cannot be reflected in any single mirror image, but has to be articulated through a multitude of competing representative claims that rather operate like portraits that differ substantially according to the author and with which the represented are engaged in an active process of recognition and critique, identification and rejection.

In the public sphere, mechanisms of vertical re-intermediation manage the flow of attention and thus render certain portraits more likely to be successful, certain representations more prone to become culturally and political hegemonic. Populist leaders and movements capitalize on this aspect of contemporary public sphere,

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[44] A.J. McGann, *The Logic of Democracy: Reconciling Equality, Deliberation, and Minority Protection*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2006, p. 128.

[45] R. Van Crombrugge, *Are referendums necessarily populist? Countering the populist Interpretation of referendums through institutional design*, in «Representation», n. 1, 2020, p. 110. This critique has also important consequences on the understanding and design of referendums, which, like populist claims, may be erroneously construed as a perfect mirror image of the will of the people at a certain point in time.

sometimes even substantially by-passing and antagonizing institutionalized procedures and forms of political representation.[46]

Elected assemblies, on the other hand, fully enact their representative function by embracing the pluralist and portrait-like nature of political representation through their internally diverse composition and the free mandate of their members. Parliamentary representative practices are to be assessed based on how they establish and constantly enact this kind of interpretive relationship, rather than to how closely they 'mirror' an alleged image of their constituency. Political representation, in this sense, is a process that always includes some relevant degree of interplay between representatives and represented. This mutual interpretive relation remains healthy insofar as all parties involved accept that the gap between the representation and what is represented cannot be entirely dissolved into the immediacy of a perfect reflection, but it is rather the space of difference and change.

To sum up, the ideal of representation as a mirror is a promise of radical disintermediation that covers new forms of hidden intermediation and unjustifiably delegitimizes the democratic pluralism of representative claims.[47] If the representation is a reflection in a mirror identical with the object itself, then there is no room for other representations: what counts is the mirror – the leader or the digital platform – which at different times may show different images – various claims, elusive and sometimes even in conflict with each other – whose validity is exclusively granted by the mirror itself. The representative relation as a mirror reflection, however, is a mere

[46] The relationship between populist communication and the attention economy of social media is twofold: on one side, the social networks are convenient to the populist movements, as they present an apparently direct medium that is in tune with their political message of disintermediation, but in turn the populist communication is convenient to the inner workings of the social networks: "In terms of online opportunity structures, the concept of attention economy implies that attention is a scarce resource over which information providers have to compete. On the Internet, this competition is particularly fierce due to the abundance of content. Therefore, the Internet favors content that 'maximizes attention'. The populist style of simplification, emotionalization, and negativity increases our attention by addressing fundamental perceptual patterns and news values. Therefore, populism is particularly well-suited to be communicated online" in S. Engesser, N. Fawzi & A.O. Larsson, *Populist online communication: introduction to the special issue*, «Information, Communication & Society», n. 20, 2017, pp. 1285-6.

[47] It is worth mentioning that not all calls for disintermediation or critiques to the role of established elites are necessarily anti-pluralistic or un-democratic: "On the one hand, populist support for direct democracy is found to reflect confidence in the virtuous character of ordinary people (in contrast to politicians), which is usually associated with more participatory democracy. On the other hand, citizens with populist attitudes are portrayed as preferring to play an 'essentially passive' role and favouring a 'responsive government, i.e. a government that implements policies that are in line with their wishes', rather than more participatory forms of democracy. We argue that this ambiguous description of populist preferences in studies of populism is due to a conflation of populist and stealth-democratic attitudes. While citizens sharing either political-ideological orientation reject elite rule and would prefer (more) direct democracy, their motivation differs fundamentally" in S. Mohrenberg, R.A Huber, T. Freyburg, *Love at first sight? Populist attitudes and support for direct democracy*, in «Party Politics», n. 3, 2021, p. 529.

fiction. Political representation always comes with some normative limits based on which we can assess and compare the validity of representative claims or distinguish which acts of political person are legitimately representative and which are not. Representation as a mirror reflection is an attempt to get away from these limits, based on the assumption that the mirror – the charismatic leader or the digital platform – can only reflect, because of its intrinsic properties, a perfect image of what has to be represented. Without limits, though, the representative claims become non-pluralist and unaccountable, as there are no external standards based on which the claims can be assessed and compared with others. As Howard Schweber has argued:

> Political representation names a relationship among actors who have the capacity to engage in relationship of authorization in accordance with the norms of a representative map. The activities of a representative may include advocacy, deliberation, mechanisms of accountability, or mediation, and they may take place in the context of formal or informal institutional settings. The limits of political representation, however, exclude activities or relationships that go beyond the limits of political representation. Representation in its political conception is inherently normative, implicating standards for both legitimation and legitimacy as the basis for contestation, critique, or analysis. A substantive political conception of representation is a necessity for either normative or empirical analysis of representative claims and practices.[48]

In this sense, in political representation there are no real time mirror reflections, but only multiple representative interpretations. The representative claim-maker is not identical with the object or the audience of the claim: these elements are distinct and are variously connected by different possible interpretations that lead to different claims. Because of this irreducibility of the representative claim to a single element, the democratic pluralism of claims is always possible and different representative claims are legitimate. The representative process enacted by elected assemblies is such a form of active interpretation of society, both in the cognitive and performative sense: this interpretive nature of parliaments should not be hidden or sidelined, but rather rendered more visible, open and accessible.

5. Conclusion: beyond mirrors, back to the bond between representatives and represented

Social disintermediation is indeed seriously questioning the traditional understanding and practice of institutionalized representative democracy. These social transformations are deeply intertwined with technological innovations and are unlikely to be reverted in the foreseeable future. In this sense, it is imperative for institutional sites of democratic representation to take on a path of reflection and reform that takes the ongoing tectonic shifts into account. However, in the light of the two lines of critical assessment we presented, practical and conceptual, we

[48] H. Schweber, *The Limits of Political Representation*, in «American Political Science Review», n. 110, 2016, pp. 394-395.

maintain that the populist strategies of radical disintermediation of the constitutional democratic representative system are fundamentally flawed answers to a justified call for renovation.

Instead of following a misleading infatuation with a self-defeating ideal of total disintermediation, we suggest to rather look at how innovative forms of political intermediation, through means of popular accountability and direct participation, can help the responsiveness of our existing model of political representation through elected assemblies.[49] Experiences like public hearings[50] and citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy[51] seek not to sideline or eliminate the role of elected representatives, but rather to reshape the way elected assemblies operate with the integration of new procedurally regulated avenues through which the public can directly participate in articulating the relevant questions, formulating their own representative claims, contributing to the deliberative exchange among the representatives, and eventually directly intervene in the policy-making process on the most important issues. Public hearings open-up the deliberative role of elected assemblies to include the voice citizens inside their own workings, thus translating into fair institutional practices the ongoing thinning of the boundaries between formal and informal public sphere.[52] On the other hand, citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy substantiate the possibility for the citizens to directly formulate their own representative claims and bring them into the democratic system through appropriate practices that allow all voices to be heard instead of taking plebiscitarian shortcuts.

These kinds of emerging democratic practices embrace the inevitably interpretive and intermediated nature of representative claims but try to re-focus the interpretive process around the ongoing active listening of the representative and the participation of the represented rather than on the discrete mechanism of periodic delegation or the fictious disintermediation of the populist mirror.

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[49] See G. Katsambekis, *The Populist Surge in Post-Democratic Times: Theoretical and Political Challenges*, in «The Political Quarterly», n. 88, 2017, p. 208.

[50] See R. Eising, F. Spohr, *The More, the Merrier? Interest Groups and Legislative Change in the Public Hearings of the German Parliamentary Committees*, in «German Politics», n. 26, 2016, pp. 314-333; C. Moreira de Castro, *Public hearings as a tool to improve participation in regulatory policies: case study of the National Agency of Electric Energy*, in «Revista de Administração Pública», n. 47, 2013, pp. 1069-1087.

[51] See D. Altman, *Citizenship and Contemporary Direct Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019.

[52] K.P. Hunt, N. Paliewiscz and D. Endres, 'The Radical Potential of Public Hearings: A Rhetorical Assessment of Resistance and Indecorous Voice in Public Participation Processes', in J. Goodwin (ed.), *Confronting the Challenges of Public Participation: Issues in Environmental, Planning and Health Decision-Making*, (Charleston SC, 2016), pp. 65-79.