

EXPLAINING POLITICAL AND CIVIC LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT. DO GROUP-BASED ACTIVITIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Terri Mannarini and Cosimo Talò
University of Salento, Italy

RESUMEN

El presente estudio, de carácter comparativo y exploratorio, investiga si los diferentes tipos de participación (la participación en la política formal, el activismo social y el compromiso cívico), se diferencian entre sí por una serie de variables psicosociales (el compromiso organizacional, percepción de apoyo social, el estrés con sus mecanismos de afrontamiento y algunas variables organizacionales). También se investiga si estas variables son capaces de predecir a largo plazo el compromiso de los involucrados en la vida política o civil, tal como la literatura sobre la acción colectiva, la participación comunitaria y el voluntariado sugiere. Se realizó una encuesta de 517 miembros de diferentes organizaciones políticas y organizaciones benéficas. Los resultados mostraron una polarización entre ambas formas de participación política y social, tanto dentro de las dos formas de participación política considerada. Por otra parte, se encontró que los factores predictivos de largo plazo difirieron significativamente entre las tres formas de participación.

ABSTRACT

This study is comparative and explanatory in nature, investigating whether different types of participation (formal political participation, legal activism, and civic engagement) are differentiated from one another by a set of psychosocial variables (organisational commitment, perceived social support, stress and coping mechanisms, and organisational variables). We also investigate whether these variables can predict the long-term engagement of those involved in political and civic organisations, as research on collective action, community participation, and volunteerism suggests. A survey was conducted on 517 members of a variety of political and volunteer organisations. The results showed a polarisation both between the political and civic forms of engagement and within the two political forms of participation considered. In addition, it was found that the factors predicting the long-term engagement of the individuals differed significantly among the three types of participation.

Key words: persistencia del activismo, compromiso organizacional, estrés, coping, apoyo social [activist persistence, organisational commitment, stress, coping, social support]

Although a considerable amount of literature on collective action has investigated the psychosocial mechanisms that lead individuals to join a variety of community groups (e.g., traditional political groups, advocacy and social action groups, protest movements, and community service groups), knowledge about the factors that sustain such engagement over time has been gathered less systematically. The social movement literature

has highlighted either the role of individual factors (e.g., changes due to life cycle; McAdam, 1988) or of interpersonal (social networks, Diani, 2005; collective identity, Klapp, 1969; Owens and Aronson, 2000; Johnston, Larana and Gusfield, 1994; Gamson, 1992; commitment to the group, Klandermans, 1997) and organisational variables (e.g., level of centralisation, routes of communication, relative influence of individuals on the organisation, amount expected of members; see, among others, Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson, 1980). A different strand of research investigating community development issues has emphasised that the stress-inducing nature of active membership in community organisations is likely to cause individuals to eventually quit (Cox, 2009; Kagan, Castile and Stewart, 2005; Kagan, 2006, 2007). Research in the psychology of volunteerism has elaborated, more than any other strand of research, predictive models of activist persistence, which take into account both the antecedents of individual engagement and the factors that sustain long-term engagement. As far as the latter are concerned, the Volunteer Process Model developed by Omoto and Snyder (1995) accounts for the number and quality of relationships that volunteers form during their service. These relationships are supposed to affect volunteers' satisfaction with and integration into the organisation. Piliavin and colleagues' role identity model (Grube and Piliavin, 2000; Piliavin and Callero, 1991) asserts that individuals engage in voluntary actions because of a strong service identity. As participants continue to volunteer, commitment to the organisation increases, leading volunteers to conform their behaviour to a volunteer's role identity. In brief, the model suggests that the best predictors of long-term volunteer activity are past levels of volunteer activity, organisational commitment and role identity. Finally, Penner's (2002) model suggests that demographic variables, dispositional variables, organisational variables, and situational factors influence sustained volunteerism through their mediation of role identity.

Drawing on this heterogeneous body of evidence, the present study aimed to determine whether the long-term engagement of individuals in different types of community groups could be predicted by the same pool of psychosocial variables. We relied on Ekman and Amnå's (2009) typology of participation to identify multiple group-based activities in which people could be involved. Following their proposal, we focused on collective (vs. individual) forms of participation. Within the collective category, Ekman and Amnå (2009) distinguished *manifest* political participation from *latent* political participation (i.e., civil participation). The former includes *formal political participation* (i.e., "organised political participation: membership in conventional political parties, trade unions and organisations", p.

16) and *activism* (or *extra-parliamentary participation*), which can be either legal (“loosely organised forms or network-based political participation: new social movements, demonstrations, strikes, and protests”, p. 16) or illegal (“illegal and violent activities and protests: demonstrations, riots, squatting buildings, damaging property, confrontations with the police or political opponents”, p.16). Latent political participation includes *involvement* (“a sense of belonging to a group or a collective with a distinct political profile or agenda and/or life-style related politics”, p. 16) and *civic engagement* (“voluntary work to improve conditions in the local community, for charity, or to help others outside their own family and circle of friends”, p. 16). In this study, we focused on and compared *formal political participation*, *legal activism* and *civic engagement*.

To narrow down the factors that are supposed to explain participants’ long-term engagement in the three types of group-based activities indicated above, this study drew on the findings of a qualitative study (Mannarini and Fedi, in press) of protest movement participants. The findings of this qualitative investigation showed that, while engagement could be underpinned by personal commitment and satisfaction for the organisation’s role structure, it could also be eroded by the stress and strain of long-term engagement. This was especially the case when such stress was not compensated for by supportive relationships among members. In this study, we decided to explore the effects of the following variables on the long-term engagement of individuals involved in political or civic group-based activities.

Affective, continuance and normative commitment

Although commitment has a behavioural dimension (e.g., behavioural persistence), researchers have primarily focused on two factors: 1) the psychological state that characterises members’ relationships with their group/organisation and 2) the consequences of their decisions to stay or leave.

Following Meyer and Allen (1991) and Klandermans (1997), three types of commitment can be distinguished; these commitments are related to the desire, need and obligation to maintain involvement, respectively. Affective commitment is the “partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values, and to the organisation for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental work” (Buchanan, 1974, p. 533). High levels of affective commitment make people *feel* that they want to continue being involved in the group/organisation. Continuance commitment refers to the perceived costs associated with leaving the organisation. The deeper a person’s involvement in the organisation is the less visible and attractive they find the

alternatives to staying with the organisation and the stronger their commitment. An individual whose primary link to a group/organisation is based on continuance commitment experiences a *need* to remain. Normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to maintain engagement in a group/organisation (Wiener, 1982). It is the result of both long-term socialisation processes and the internalisation of normative pressures. Individuals with a high level of normative commitment continue their involvement because they feel they *ought to*.

For each kind of commitment, Meyer and Allen (1991) identified antecedents and consequences related to both personal and organisational variables and to past experiences. However, Klandermans (1997) has defined commitment itself as both antecedent and consequent to on-going participation, arguing that the more committed to a group a person is, the more likely it is that he/she will continue to participate; the longer someone participates, the more committed he or she will become.

Stress appraisal and coping strategies

Community psychologists have highlighted that intensely committed participation, such as that displayed by community activists, can be overloading and exhausting and therefore result in burnout and disruptive relations (Kagan, Castile and Stewart, 2005; Kagan, 2006, 2007). They have argued that such participation not only consumes time and energy but is psychologically demanding and requires both internal and external resources. For these reasons, while civic or political engagement can be a source of gratification for participants, the risk of discontinued involvement is real. Cox (2009) has proposed the concept of emotional sustainability to refer to the resources people use to cope with the stresses experienced in their civic or political engagement. These resources include a strong religious culture, class or political ethics, a supportive group culture, and emotional management skills (Cox, 2009; Nepstad, 2004).

In a similar vein, Downton and Wehr (1991; 1998) have noted that coping strategies are typical of persistent activists who have the ability to address issues that could disrupt their own participation. According to a cognitive approach to stress and coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), participants make appraisals to determine their stress levels and the coping strategies they should use to reduce the negative impacts of stress on their wellbeing. A primary appraisal is made when individuals evaluate the matter at hand. A secondary appraisal occurs when they try to manage an event or situation that they have perceived as threatening or harmful by evaluating the personal and environmental coping resources to which they can

turn. The most common typology of coping styles (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) includes problem-focused coping (such as information seeking and problem solving) and emotion-focused coping (such as expressing emotion and regulating emotions). Other coping styles include avoidance coping (Moos and Billings, 1982) and social coping (Greenglass, 1993).

Social support

Individuals experiencing stress rely on social support when they draw on the resources of their social network. The idea that social support is a resource that can protect persons against the adverse impact of a stressful event is at the core of the so-called buffering hypothesis (Cohen and Wills, 1985). This hypothesis predicts that people who have little social support will have negative reactions when they experience intensely difficult life events. Moreover, this hypothesis predicts that people who have high levels of social support will experience a less intense negative reaction to difficult life events. However, Cohen and Wills (1985) suggest that the buffering effects of social support may be limited by particular individual responses to stress and by peculiar features and processes associated with changing environments. Scholars such as Greenglass (2002) have also suggested that social support can be viewed as a form of proactive coping; indeed, several scales of coping include items that measure the search for social support (e.g., Coping Strategy Indicator, Amirkhan, 1990; Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations, Endler and Parker, 1994).

The role of social support in fostering and sustaining collective action has not been directly investigated. However, indirect indications of its influence on civic and political engagement have been shown in several studies. These studies have emphasised that embeddedness in social networks not only provides a symbolic and material opportunity for mobilisation (see Diani, 2005; Mannarini, Roccato, Fedi and Rovere, 2009) but also contributes to reducing the costs associated with engagement (Benson and Rochon, 2004). Nepstad (2004) more explicitly argued that some community groups intentionally provide cognitive and emotional support during the uncertainties of activism by implementing practices (collective rituals, for instance) that reinforce members' commitments.

Individual-group/organisation interface

Among the factors that sustain civic and political engagement, the relationships that individuals establish with the group/organisation should also be mentioned. In general, we can agree that groups that create and maintain strong ties among group members through interaction increase their ability

to keep individuals participating in their group or strengthen participants' commitment to the group over time (Corrigan-Brown, 2007). Although engagement in a community group cannot be equated to an ordinary work activity, when involvement persists over a long period of time, similarities among community groups and work organisations increase. We can therefore assume that, as in a workplace, role and activity satisfaction and a positive evaluation of the organisational structure and processes result in positive feelings about one's situation (Robbins and Judge, 2007). It is reasonable to assume that such conditions would make individuals more willing to stay in their group/organisation.

Study goals

The scope of this study is both comparative and explanatory. The first goal is to discover whether different types of participation (i.e., formal political participation, legal activism and civic engagement) can be differentiated from one another by the behaviour of a set of psychosocial variables that are supposed to affect the long-term engagement of political or civic organisation participants. In other words, the study intended to answer the following research question: Can the three forms of participation investigated in this study be regarded as variations that can be traced back to a single theoretical continuum, or are they different in nature? The three forms of participation were supposed to be distinguished through the psychological relationship that the individuals established with the organisation they belonged to. Such a psychological relationship was articulated in the study in terms of commitment, perceived social support from the organisation, stressful perceived events in the life of the organisation and related coping strategies, quality of member-to-member relationships, satisfaction with the role assumed in the organisation, and the evaluation of organisational functioning. The study's second goal was to determine whether members of different political and civic organisations establish their long-term engagement on the same grounds. In other words, do members of traditional political organisations (conventional political parties and trade unions), political network-based activists and volunteers devoted to improving conditions in the local community base their persistent engagement on the same factors? Based on previous literature indicating that different types of participation require different resources and imply different meanings for the individuals involved (Dalton, 2008; Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, 2003), we hypothesised that, for both research questions, the differences would outweigh the similarities among the three groups. More specifically, we expected that the most significant differences would emerge between

the manifest forms of participation (formal political participation and activism) and the latent form of political participation (civic engagement).

Method

Participants

Participants (N = 517; 47.2% female) were recruited among active members of a variety of political and civic community groups/organisations. The average age was 42.7 years old (S.D. = 14.5). The majority of participants were high school graduates (47.6%), followed by college graduates (30.4%). Of the 517 participants, 21.7% were active in conventional political parties (formal political participation), 13% in loosely organised or network-based political participation (legal activism), and 65.4% in voluntary associations focused on improving conditions in the local community (civic engagement).

Procedures

Participants were contacted either via email (18%) or via the group/organisation to which they were committed (82%) and asked to take part in a survey of civic engagement behaviours. Those contacted via email were asked to fill out an online version of a questionnaire. Those contacted through their organisation were asked to complete a paper version of the same questionnaire. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes to complete.

Measures

The data were gathered using a self-report questionnaire that included several measures.

To measure the strength of organisational commitment, an adapted version of the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) was used. The scale included three components: *affective*, *normative* and *continuance commitment*. Sample items intended to measure the three components included “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation”, “I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organisation”, and “I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organisation”, respectively. All 24 items of the scale were rated on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = very little, 7 = very much).

Stress was measured using an adapted version of the Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ) developed by Levenstein, Prantera, Varvo, et al. (1993). We excluded the items that described a feeling or an emotional state without reference to a specific domain/situation/environment and kept

those items that were phrased to include either a reference to *organisational demands* (e.g., “You feel that too many demands are being made on you”) or to *relationships with co-members* (e.g., “You are under pressure from other people”). Items were measured on a 4-point scale (1 = almost never, 4 = usually).

Coping was measured using the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) developed by Endler and Parker (1994). Items were rated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much). CISS is a four-factor model of human coping with adversity that differentiates three types of coping: *emotion-oriented*, *task oriented*, and *avoidant*. The avoidant style includes two dimensions: distraction and social diversion. The 5 items of *avoidant social coping* (i.e., search for social support) were dropped because a separate measure for social support was used.

Social support was measured using an adapted version of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988). Items were adapted to refer to the support received by the group/organisation or by co-members (e.g., “I get the emotional help and support I need from my group” and “My group is a real source of comfort to me”). Items were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

To investigate the individual/organisation interface (IOI), the participants were asked to respond to 9 *ad hoc* items that could be rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Three of the items were formulated to measure the *quality of personal relationships* (e.g., “The climate within the group/organisation is collaborative”), 3 to assess the *organisational functioning* (e.g., “The group/organisation has an efficient structure”), and 3 to measure *role satisfaction* (e.g., “I am satisfied with my role within this group/organisation”).

Activists’ persistence was operationalised as a behaviour and measured through two *ad hoc* items: “How long have you been associated with this group/organisation?” and “How many hours per week do you usually devote to the activities of your group/organisation?”

Finally, the participants were asked to provide demographic information (age, gender, education, professional position, and place of residence).

Analyses

To investigate the differences among the three forms of participation under scrutiny, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a discriminant analysis (DA) were performed. The ANOVA was used to detect significant variations in the measures’ scores among groups; the DA was used to investi-

gate the differences among the groups in terms of their attributes and indicated which attributes contributed most to group differentiation. DA identifies the linear combination of attributes known as canonical discriminant functions, which contribute maximally to group differentiation. To verify whether members belonging to different political and civic organisations based their long-term engagement on the same factors, linear regression models were used.

Results

In a preliminary step, the reliability of the measures was tested, resulting in good indexes for all the scales used (Cronbach's alpha: OCQ = .80; PSQ = .86; CISS = .87; MSPSS = .94; IOI = .84).

Table 1
Correlations between measures of commitment, stress, coping, social support, individual-organization interface, persistence, and demographics

	Gender	Age	OCQ	PSQ	CISS	MSPSS	IOI	Persi.ce
Age	.11	-						
OCQ	-.06	.07	-					
PSQ	.14	.07	-.09	-				
CISS	.14	.01	.10	.37	-			
MSPSS	.02	.12	.32	-.11	.09	-		
IOI	-.06	.07	.40	-.27	-.02	.54	-	
Persistence	.09	.05	.15	.13	.10	.10	.08	-
mean	.53	42.73	116.44	19.47	120.31	44.11	34.81	14.71
std.dev	.50	14.55	18.77	5.86	19.62	9.24	5.25	8.43

Note: Bold-face values indicate correlations significant at the .05 level.

A correlation table (Table 1) was also produced to explore the relationships among the variables examined in the study. The most significant correlations were found between commitment to the organisation and perceived social support ($r = .32$) and the individual-organisation interface ($r = .40$). Stress was correlated with coping ($r = .37$) and was negatively correlated with the individual-organisation interface ($r = -.27$), which in turn was strongly associated with social support ($r = .54$). The relationships of all the variables mentioned with the activists' persistence in the organisation appeared almost weak, with Pearson's index values ranging from $r = .09$ to $r = .15$.

Table 2
Analysis of Variance and post hoc tests between formal political participation (FPL), legal activism (LA), and civic engagement (CE).

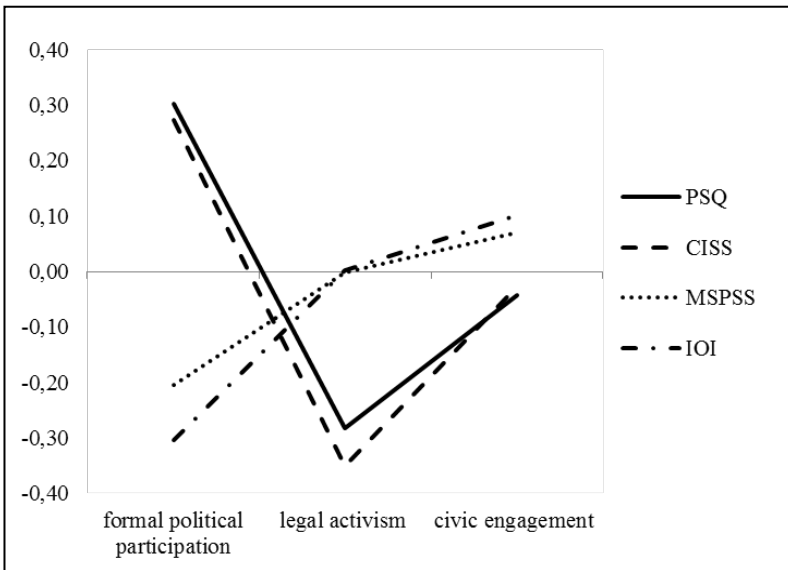
		ANOVA		Bonferoni		
		df	F	Group	MD	
OCQ	Between Groups	2	.64	FPL	LA	2.70
	Within Groups	455			CE	2.26
	Total	457		LA	FPL	-2.70
					CE	-.44
PSQ	Between Groups	2	8.04	FPL	LA	3.42
	Within Groups	499			CE	2.02
	Total	501		LA	FPL	-3.42
					CE	-1.40
CISS	Between Groups	2	7.19	FPL	LA	12.26
	Within Groups	413			CE	5.89
	Total	415		LA	FPL	-12.26
					CE	-6.37
MSPSS	Between Groups	2	3.12	FPL	LA	-1.87
	Within Groups	497			CE	-2.54
	Total	499		LA	FPL	1.87
					CE	-6.66
IOI	Between Groups	2	6.87	FPL	LA	-1.61
	Within Groups	501			CE	-2.13
	Total	503		LA	FPL	1.61
					CE	-.52

Note: Bold-face values indicate comparisons significant at the .05 level.

Successively, ANOVA and Bonferroni post hoc tests were performed on three groups of participants according to their involvement in traditional political organisations (formal political participation), network-based political groups (legal activism), or voluntary community associations (civic engagement). As shown in Table 2, significant differences emerged between at least two out of three groups for all the variables considered except organisational commitment. In detail, the formal political participation group obtained significantly higher stress and coping scores than either of the other two groups, between which the variations were not substantial (though the legal activism group scored lowest). The civic engagement group showed the highest scores on the social support and the individual-organisation interface measures; this value was significantly higher than the

mean score accrued by the formal political participation group, while the gap between the civic engagement group's mean score and the mean score of the legal activism group was narrower. Figure 1 shows the graph of the standardised group means.

Figure 1
Standardized PSQ, CISS, MSPSS and IOI group means for formal political participation, legal activism, and civic engagement



Because the ANOVA revealed significant differences between the groups for almost all of the independent variables, we proceeded further with a discriminant analysis (DA). The two discriminant functions produced by three groups under consideration (1 = formal political participation, 2 = legal activism, and 3 = civic engagement) were both significant. The first function (Wilks' $\lambda = .92$; $\chi^2 [10, 517] = 40.93$, sig. = .00) explained most of the variation in the grouping variables (69.5% of variance), while the second (Wilks' $\lambda = .98$; $\chi^2 [4, 517] = 13.34$, sig. = .03) explained the remaining 30.5%. As shown by the structure matrix in Table 3 (in which variables are ordered by the absolute correlation value within each function), the first discriminant function was related to stress, coping processes and organisational commitment, and the second function was related to social support and the individual/organisation interface.

Table 3
Structure Matrix

	Function	
	1	2
PSQ	.64	.03
CISS	.53	-.04
OCQ	.34	-.02
MSPSS	-.10	.62
IOI	-.38	.59

As can be seen in Table 4, which displays the functions at group centroids (the unstandardised canonical discriminant functions evaluated at group means), the first function primarily distinguishes between formal participation and legal activism in terms of levels of stress, coping, and commitment to the organisation. The second function differentiates the political forms of participation from civic engagement in terms of perceived social support and the individual-organisation relationship.

Table 4
Functions at group centroids

	Function	
	1	2
Formal political participation	.37	.28
Legal activism	-.78	.25
Civic engagement	.01	-.19

Finally, to test whether the variables used to discriminate between the groups were also good predictors of the long-term engagement of the individuals in the three types of organisations, four linear regression models applied. The first was applied to all of the participants, irrespective of their group membership. The second was performed on the formal political participation group, the third was performed on the legal activism group, and the last was performed on the civic engagement group.

Table 5 shows the indices of the four regression models, whose explanatory power was globally modest. The results showed that, in the total sample, commitment to the organisation ($\beta = .12$), effective coping strategies ($\beta = .20$), and a satisfying individual/organisation interface ($\beta = .08$) increase the probability of long-term engagement, whereas high levels of stress ($\beta = -.15$) are likely to reduce this probability. A similar pattern was found for the civic engagement group, with commitment ($\beta = .20$), coping ($\beta = .21$),

and stress ($\beta = -.15$) influencing the likelihood of members' persistence. However, stress only exerted a negative influence on members' engagement ($\beta = -.32$) in traditional political organisations, whereas the individual/organisation interface ($\beta = .42$) was the only variable affecting the probability of long-term engagement in legal activism. Perceived social support from the organisation and its members proved to be uninformative in all the models.

Table 5
Linear Regression. Dependent variable: Persistence

	General model		Formal political participation		Legal activism		Civic engagement	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
OCQ	.12	2.09	-.09	-.71	.17	1.07	.20	2.66
PSQ	-.15	-2.61	-.32	-2.91	.08	.34	-.15	-2.02
CISS	.20	3.54	.17	1.48	-.17	-.93	.21	2.89
MSPSS	.05	.78	.07	.52	-.02	-.13	.04	.52
IOI	.08	1.11	.05	.34	.42	2.15	.046	.54
Adjusted R ²	.048		.058		.138		.049	

Note: Bold-face values indicate regression significant at the .05 level.

Discussion

The main findings of the study can be recapitulated and discussed as follows. First, the results support the hypothesis that formal political participation, legal activism and civic engagement could be differentiated from one another by the behaviour of a set of psychosocial variables. Specifically, the two political forms of participation seemed to require different levels of commitment for the individuals engaged in conventional political organisations and loose political networks and to entail different levels of stress that led participants to resort to different coping mechanisms. Members of traditional political parties were more committed but also less satisfied with their roles, their relationships with co-members and with the general functioning of the organisation. At the same time, they had to manage higher levels of stress associated with their participation while perceiving that they were receiving less support from the organisation. In contrast, participants active in loose political groups were less committed and had to cope less with stressors; they felt better supported by and integrated with the organi-

sation. The comparison between the political and the civic forms of participation highlighted that volunteers were much more satisfied with their relationships with co-members and the general functioning of the organisation and their roles. More than the other two categories, civic volunteers felt that they were surrounded by a supportive organisational environment. Hence, the findings showed a polarisation both between political and civic forms of engagement and within the two political forms of participation considered. Such a polarisation sets engagement in traditional political organisations and engagement in loose and movement-like political groups in opposition.

Figure 2
Positioning of the three forms of participation in a theoretical bi-dimensional space

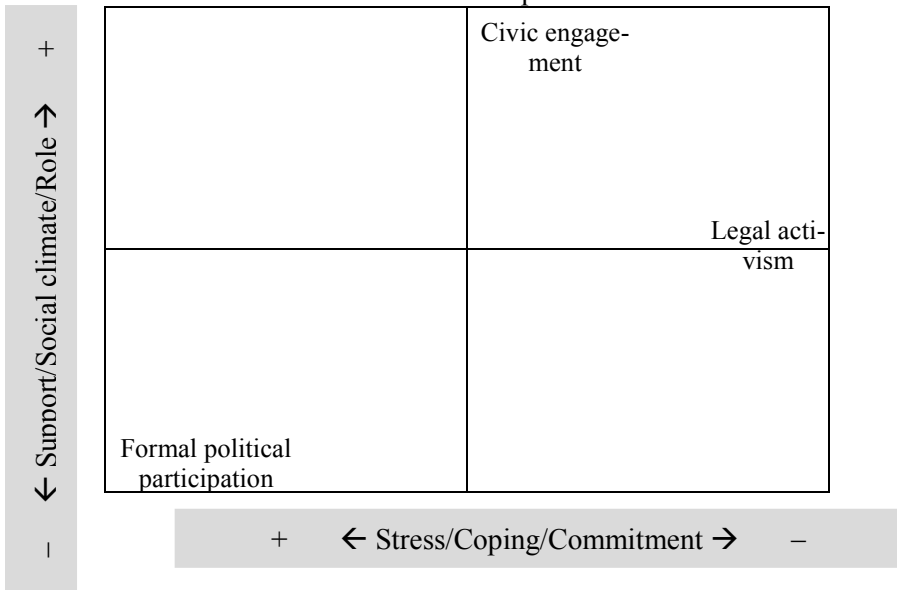


Figure 2 visually displays in a theoretical bi-dimensional space the two dimensions along which the three forms of participation can be positioned. The first dimension (corresponding to the horizontal axis in the figure) distinguishes between formal participation and legal activism in terms of levels of stress, coping, and commitment to the organisation. These three variables describe how individuals approach organisational life, events, and activities. The second dimension (i.e., the vertical axis) differentiates the political forms of participation from civic engagement in terms of per-

ceived social support and the individual-organisation relationship. These two variables describe how individuals perceive the relationships they establish with co-members and with the organisation. However, and interestingly, we also found several similarities. Indeed, overall, the most substantial distance appeared to be between formal political participation and both legal activism and civic engagement. These results met our general expectation that differences would outweigh similarities among the three groups and are in line with the arguments of authors who have emphasised the need to distinguish and separately analyse the participatory behaviours of individuals involved in a variety of organisational settings (Dalton, 2006; Norris, 1997). Though from a conceptual perspective both political and civic participation (i.e., volunteerism) are forms of social action, defined as the wide range of activities that address societal issues (Snyder and Omoto, 2007), and though they are both planned, voluntary, and mostly long-term behaviours, our study suggests that political engagement cannot be considered a sub-category of volunteerism.

Second, our study showed that the three types of participation examined differ in terms of the factors predicting the long-term engagement of involved individuals. Different variables proved to affect the persistence of individuals in their organisations. Organisational commitment, stress and coping mechanisms played a role in sustaining civic engagement over time. In addition, while long-term legal activism was fostered by a good individual-organisation fit (i.e., the combination of personal relationships, organisational functioning, and role satisfaction), continued engagement in traditional political organisations was threatened by the excessive stress loads experienced by members. These findings both agree and disagree with the results of previous research on a variety of organisational settings. These studies found that commitment fosters long-term engagement in political groups (Klandermans, 1997) and the ability to overcome obstacles (i.e., coping strategies) relevant to long-term activism in social movements (Downtown and Wehr, 1998); that stress management processes can threaten sustained involvement in groups operating at the community level (Kagan, 2007); that organisational experience (Omoto and Snyder, 1995), especially satisfaction and integration with the group (Barbaranelli, Caprara, Capanna and Imbimbo, 2003), can strengthen volunteers' persistence; and that emotional and material support increase continuance commitment in peace movement members (Nepstad, 2004). Despite the controversial nature of these findings, it must be acknowledged that while the variables considered in this study could be used to distinguish between different group-based activities, they were globally weak predictors of members'

persistence in all the three types of participation and of the persistence of the participants as a whole. This observation suggests that more complex models are required to explain sustained political and civic engagement in which mediating and moderating actions must be carried out and further suggests that additional variables should be considered (e.g., motivation and identity; see Marta and Pozzi 2008 on sustained volunteerism). Notwithstanding, this study clearly showed that an explanatory pattern of sustained engagement in which political group-based activities are conflated with civic engagement activities can be misleading and lead to inappropriate generalisations. The primary message of this study, therefore, is the call for a specific and contextual predictive model of sustained engagement.

References

- Allen, N.J. and Meyer, J.P. (1990), The Measurement and Antecedents of Affective, Continuance and Normative Commitment to the Organization, *The Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63, 1-18.
- Amirkhan, J. H. (1990). A factor analytically derived measure of coping: The Coping Strategy Indicator. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5, 1066-1074.
- Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., Capanna, C., and Imbimbo, A. (2003). Le ragioni del volontariato: un contributo empirico. (Reasons to volunteer: An empirical contribution). *Giornale Italiano di Psicologia*, 30, 369-387.
- Benson, M., and Rochon, T. (2004). Interpersonal trust and the magnitude of protest. A micro and macro level approach. *Comparative Political Studies*, 4, 435-457.
- Buchanan, B. (1974). Building organizational commitment: The socialization of managers in work organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 19, 533-546.
- Cohen, S., and Wills, T.A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98, 310-357.
- Corrigall-Brown, C. (2007). *After the protest: trajectories of participation in social movements*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Irvine.
- Cox, L. (2009). "Hearts with one purpose alone"? Thinking personal sustainability in social movements. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2, 52-61.
- Dalton, R. J. (2006). The two faces of citizenship. *Democracy and Society*, 3, 21-29.
- Dalton, R. J. (2008). Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation. *Political Studies*, 56, 76-98.
- Diani, M. (2005). Networks and participation. In D.A. Snow, S.A. Soule and H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (pp. 339-359). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Downton, J., and Wehr, P. (1991). Peace movements: The role of commitment and community in sustaining member participation. In M. Spencer (ed.), *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change* (pp. 113-134). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Downton, J. and Wehr, P. (1998). Persistent pacifism: How activist commitment is developed and sustained. *Journal of Peace Research*, 35, 531-550.
- Ekman, J. and Amnå, E. (2009). Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology. Youth and Society (YeS) Working Paper, 2. Retrieved at

- <http://www.oru.se/PageFiles/14371/Ekman%20and%20Amn%C3%A5%202009-1.pdf>
- Endler N.S. and Parker J.D.A. (1994). Assessment of multidimensional coping: task, emotion and avoidance strategies. *Psychological Assessment*, 6, 50-60.
- Gamson, W. (1992). The Social Psychology of Collective Action. In A.D. Morris, and C. Mueller (Eds.), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (pp. 53-76). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Greenglass, E.R. (1993). The contribution of social support to coping strategies. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 42, 323-340.
- Greenglass, E.R. (2002). Proactive coping. In E. Frydenberg (Ed.), *Beyond coping: Meeting goals, vision, and challenges* (pp. 37-62). London: Oxford University Press.
- Grube, J., and Piliavin, J. A. (2000). Role identity, organizational experience and volunteer experience. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 1108–1119.
- Johnston, H., Larana, E., and Gusfield, J.R. (1994). Identities, grievances, and new social movements. In E. Larana, H. Johnston, and J.R. Gusfield (Eds.), *New social movements: From ideology to identity* (pp. 3- 35). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kagan, C. (2006). *Making a difference: Participation and well-being*. Liverpool: New Start Publishing.
- Kagan, C. (2007). Pillars of support for well-being in the community: The role of the public sector. Paper presented at the Wellbeing and Sustainable Living Seminar, Manchester Metropolitan University, 24th May.
- Kagan, C., Castile, S., and Stewart, A. (2005). Participation: Are some more equal than others? *Clinical Psychology*, 153, 30-34.
- Klandermans, B. (1997). *The social psychology of protest*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- Klapp, O.E. (1969). *Collective search for identity*. New York: Holt, Rinehart.
- Lazarus, R. S., and Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Levenstein S., Prantera C., Varvo V. and al. (1993). Development of the perceived stress questionnaire: a new tool for psychosomatic research. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 37, 19-32.
- Mannarini, T. and Fedi, A. (in press). Persisting or withdrawing? An insight into the psychosocial processes underlying sustained engagement. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*. DOI: 10.1002/casp.1113.
- Mannarini, T., Legittimo, M., and Talò, C. (2008). Determinants of social and political participation among youth: A preliminary study. *Psicologia Politica*, 36, 95-117.
- Mannarini, T., Roccato, M., Fedi, A., and Rovere, A. (2009). Six factors fostering political protest: Predicting participation in locally unwanted land uses movements. *Political Psychology*, 30, 895-917.
- Marta, E., and Pozzi, M. (2008). Young people and volunteerism: A model of sustained volunteerism during the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Adult Development*, 15, 35-46.
- McAdam, D. (1988). *Freedom Summer*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Meyer, J.P., and Allen, N.J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resources Management Review*, 1, 61-89.

- Moos, R.H. and Billings, A.G.(1982). Conceptualizing and measuring coping resources and processes. In L. Goldberger and S. Breznitz (Eds.), *Handbook of stress: Theoretical and clinical aspects* (pp. 212-230). New York: Free Press.
- Nepstad, S.E. (2004). Persistent resistance: Commitment and community in the plowshares movement. *Social Problems, 51*, 43-60.
- Norris, P. (1997). *Passages to Power: Legislative Recruitment in Advanced Democracies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press,
- Omoto, A. M., and Snyder, M. (1995). Sustained helping without obligation: Motivation, longevity of service, and perceived attitude change among AIDS volunteers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68*, 671-686.
- Owens, T.J., and Aronson, P.J. (2000). Self-Concept as a force in social movement involvement. In S. Stryker, T.J. Owens, and R.W. White (Eds.), *Self, identity, and social movements* (pp. 191-214). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Pattie, C., Seyd, P., and Whiteley, P. (2003). Citizenship and civic engagement: attitudes and behavior in Britain. *Political Studies, 51*, 443-468.
- Penner, L. A. (2002). *Dispositional and organizational influences on sustained volunteerism: An interactionist perspective*. Tampa: University of South Florida Press.
- Piliavin, J. A., and Callero, P. (1991). *Giving blood: The development of an altruistic identity*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Robbins, S. P. and Judge, T. A. (2007). *Organizational behavior* (12th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Snow, D.A., Zurcher, L.A., and Eklund-Olson, S. (1980). Social networks and social movements: A microstructural approach to differential recruitment. *American Sociological Review, 45*, 787-801.
- Snyder, M., and Omoto, A. M. (2007). Social action. In A. W. Kruglanski and E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Social psychology: A handbook of basic principles*, 2nd ed. (pp. 940-961), New York: Guilford.
- Wiener, Y. (1982). Commitment in organizations: A normative view. *Academy of Management Review, 7*, 418-428.
- Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., and Farley, G. K. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 52*, 30-41.

Terri Mannarini is Associate Professor of Social Psychology in University of Salento, Italy. terri.mannarini@unisalento.it

Cosimo Talò is Ph.D. in Community Psychology. They are membership of Department of History, Society and Human Studies, University of Salento, Italy. They are co-authors of different studies on determinants of political participation, and one of its main research fields. In this year include their publications: "Evaluating public participation: Instruments and implications for citizen involvement" and "How identification processes and inter-community relationships affect sense of community".

Address: Terri Mannarini, Department of History, Society and Human Studies, University of Salento, via Stampacchia 45, 73100 Lecce, Italy.