

DETERMINANTS OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG YOUTH. A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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RESUMEN

Este estudio pretende probar la hipótesis de que tres formas de participación (convencional, no convencional y social) pueden proceder de los mismos determinantes. El estudio se llevó a cabo con 705 estudiantes de la universidad que completaron un cuestionario de auto-evaluación. Las variables independientes incluidas en el análisis fueron: confianza en la institución, interés político, eficacia política, cinismo hacia la política, socialización política, variables sociodemográficas, tales como género, edad e ingresos y variables políticas. Los resultados indican que las tres formas de participación no son mutuamente excluyentes, de forma que la implicación en una no supone obligatoriamente la exclusión de las otras dos. No obstante, no pueden atribuirse a un conjunto común de antecedentes: el modelo propuesto sólo ayuda a explicar la participación política; pero la participación social permanece principalmente inexplicada.

ABSTRACT

The present study is aimed at testing the hypothesis of three forms of participation (namely political conventional, political unconventional, and social) and that they can be traced back to the same determinants. The study was carried out on 705 college students who completed a self-evaluation questionnaire. Independent variables included in the analysis were; institution trustworthiness, political interest, political efficacy, a cynicism towards politics, political socialization, socio-demographic variables such as gender, age and income, and political variables. Results show that the three forms of participation are not mutually exclusive, so that the involvement in one does not necessarily entail the exclusion of the other two. Nevertheless, they cannot be traced back to a common pool of antecedents: the model proposed can only be supported for political, and not for social participation, which remains largely unexplained.

Key words: political participation, social participation, determinants of political participation

People involved in participation undertake a variety of behaviours. Due to the multiplicity of forms in which involvement manifests itself, investigations have focused in turn on the analysis of single specific behaviours. Traditionally, the field which has been most intensively explored includes conventional participation, and many scholars have paid attention to the analysis of the determinants of voting (Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Blais,

2000; Dalton, 1996; Franklin, 1996; Kleppner, 1982; Muller and Jukam, 1983; Teixeira, 1992).

In recent years, however, different forms of active citizenship have come to the fore, questioning the line that marks the limit between the political and the social sphere, and blurring the established boundaries (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Roker and Eden, 2002; Chisholm and Kovacheva, 2002; Macháček, 2001; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2001). Despite the increasing importance assumed by civil society and its manifestations, the extended knowledge on participatory processes has not led to a full and clear understanding of the underlying factors. In particular, whereas a sufficient knowledge has been accumulated in the evaluation of political participation, the social variant of participation has been scarcely investigated. Sociological surveys of changes in youth values and behaviours have emphasized that young people have progressively distanced themselves from the traditional channels of politics, and rejected party affiliation and voting as the main modes for actively participating to social and political life (Beck, 2000; Inglehart 1977; 1997). At the same time, they have pointed out that a transformation of the ways in which people participate has occurred (Agrikoliansky, 2001; Bauman, 1999; Inglehart, 1977; Mazzoleni and Masulin, 2002).

According to this perspective, the younger generation chooses to get involved in their own country political processes through the engagement in social and civic activities, both at the local level and at the national and transnational one (Tarrow, 1998; Wenzel et al., 2001). This is not to say that party militancy is antithetical to the new emerging forms of participation; on the contrary, being embedded in civil society is often linked to political participation. As a matter of fact, citizens involved in civic and volunteerism associations have the opportunity to strengthen both their motives and competencies, thereby increasing their sense of personal and political efficacy (Verba et al., 1997).

The general tenor of these remarks suggests that youth participation is not social or political, but socio-political (Catellani, 1997). As a consequence of the blurred line separating social and political activism, the notion of social participation, regarded as a fundamental component of democracy (Hooghe, 2003; Putnam, 1993; Snyder and Omoto, 2000; Van Deth, 1997; Wollebæk and Per, 2002), has been added to the constructs of conventional and unconventional political participation. Although a clear definition of this relatively new concept is not available, a set of distinctive features can be identified: the prevalence of horizontal and peer-to-peer relationships (versus the hierarchical structure characterizing political par-

ties); the presence of pro-social motivations; a typical network structure marked by loose ties.

The different modes participation is shaped into, in the political as well as in the civic arena, are not antithetical, on the contrary they seem to be connected. According to the *direct impact model* (van Deth, 1997), social participation exerts an influence on political participation, especially on the traditional type. The *standard SES model* proposes a more complex schema, suggesting that socio-economical status has an influence on political orientation as well as on social participation, and that these two variables both increase the possibility of being politically involved (Zmerli, 2002). The afore mentioned studies, though significant, are not sufficient to affirm that political and social participation can be explained by the same determinants.

Based on the considerations set above, the present study is intended to test whether or not conventional, unconventional and social participation are affected by the same unique group of variables. Some of the variables taken into account have been investigated as correlates or predictors of political participation, but their role in explaining social participation has not been explored. If the postulate of a relationship between the two forms of participation is correct, testing the hypothesis of a set of common predictors seems a substantive issue to address.

The determinants of political participation

Socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, socio-economical status (SES) and age have been regarded as differentiating people in participatory behaviours (Nagler, 1991; Roseston and Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995).

The persistence of gender gap is one of the controversial issues addressed in the current debate. On the one hand, in several Western democracies women take part to their own country political processes to a lesser extent than men (Bishop, 2002; Conway et al., 1997; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Lovenduski, 2001; Norris et al., 2004). On the other hand, they are likely to pour, to a greater extent than men, into unconventional and social forms of participation (Inglehart and Catterborg, 2002). Also within the civil sphere, and in the access to their social capital, their behavior is different from men's (Lowndes, 2004): they enrol mainly in religious associations and in no profit organizations delivering assistance to disadvantaged groups. This data suggests that the gender gap is attributable to different participatory styles and different meanings attached to personal engagement. Lorenz (2003), among others, claims that women are more inclined

than men to choose informal modes of participation and to address practical and daily issues. According to the life-cycle theory (Butler and Stokes, 1969; Highton and Wolfinger, 2001; Kimberlee, 1998) age is a further variable discriminating between individuals: as people grow older, their interest in politics and their willingness to take an active role would increase. Several studies have also stressed the role played by SES and education in promoting the political and social engagement of people (Brady et al., 1995). Recently, however, the significance of these two variables in encouraging activists behaviours have been put into perspective (Naqshabandi and Makhadmeh, 2002); education seems to exert an influence on voting, but not on other participatory alternatives (Jarvis, 2002).

Besides socio-demographic characteristics, many psychosocial variables have been considered as antecedents of social and political activism, namely the socialization function of family, the perceived trustworthiness of institutions, the sense of political efficacy, the interest in politics and the cynical versus optimistic attitude towards politics.

As far as the socialization processes are concerned, it has been demonstrated that the opportunity to share opinions and gather information on politics and social life within one's own family, or within one's own circle of friends or peers, positively affects the likeliness to become actively involved in political and social activities (Bettin Lattes, 1999; Easton and Dennis, 1967; Flores, 2001; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Jennings et al. 2001; Liebes and Ribak, 1992; Mutz and Martin, 2001; Sherrod et al., 2004). According to Verba and colleagues (1995) both the primary and the secondary socialization agents promote the tendency to enter the public sphere; the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the political issues and accessing a great amount of information form a solid basis for the undertaking of conventional as well as unconventional participatory behaviours (Fahmy, 2003; McClurg, 2000; 2003).

Controversial outcomes have been found about the relationship between the perceived trustworthiness of institutions and the decision to play a role in politics. Some authors claim that active citizenship can only be developed on the basis of a reciprocal trust between people and institutions (Alford, 2001; Huseby, 2000; Orren, 1997; Uslaner and Brown, 2005). On the contrary, other scholars affirm that mistrust is not per se a demotivating factor, it can instead encourage people to undertake protest actions bypassing the institutional channels (Citrin and Luks 2001; Dalton, 2002; Norris, 1999). Trust would result in a tendency to adopt conventional forms of participation (e.g. voting) (Oyler et al., 2003), whereas mistrust would enhance unconventional modes such as protest (Gamson, 1968; Miller, 1974;

Pierce and Converse, 1989; Tarrow, 1994). The population's growing suspicion towards political institutions would also account for the development of active citizenship (Inglehart, 1977). To put it in different terms, distrust would not depress participation; it would rather promote community-based forms of involvement (voluntary and civic associations, no profit organizations, citizens' committees, etc.).

Studies on the determinants of political participation have also attested an interaction effect between trust and political efficacy (Craig 1996; Craig et al., 1990; Paige, 1971; Pollock, 1983; Seligson, 1980; Shingles, 1988), regarded as one of the most influential factor affecting the decision of people of engaging in the public sphere (Niemi et al., 1991; Norris et al., 2004; Zimmermann, 1989).

There is large consensus on a two-component model of political efficacy, composed by an *internal* dimension -equivalent to self-efficacy, the feeling of being able to exert an influence in the political area- and an *external* dimension -the perception of the political institutions' responsiveness, that is to say their willingness to meet the needs and to satisfy the requests of citizens (Converse, 1972; Craig and Maggiotto, 1982; Morrel, 2003; Niemi et al., 1991). More recently a third component has been proposed by Yeich and Levine (1994): the *collective* political efficacy, considered as the feeling of being able to affect the political debate through collective action. Internal and external political efficacy has shown significant correlations with participatory behaviours (Catt, 2005). It seems that low levels of self-efficacy discourages people from assuming active roles, instead encouraging them to withdraw in the private sphere, both as individuals and as member of social action groups (Balch, 1974; Finkel, 1985; Norris et al., 2004; Shaffer, 1981). In addition, from the combination of different levels of internal and external efficacy, different forms of participation emerge (Bandura, 1999; Madsen, 1987; Pollock, 1983; Shingles, 1988), as Zimmerman (1989) pointed out. According to his perspective (but this opinion was shared also by Finkel, 1985; Pollock, 1983), individuals who show high internal and external efficacy scores are inclined to become the most active citizens in the conventional mode; on the contrary, individuals who show high internal but low external efficacy, are prone to choose unconventional forms of participation. Those who lack self-efficacy but think that institutions react in the correct way to the requests of people, tend to show attitudes of acquiescence and subordination. And finally, low perceived both internal and external efficacy results in alienation, apathy and indifference to politics.

Although the definition of the concept itself is far from clear, cynicism has been considered one of the causes of the lack of support for government and officials (Van Praag and Van der Brug, 2006). Cynicism has been regarded as the opposite of the institution trustworthiness (Dekker, 2006), and as the tendency to avoid to rely on the competencies of political representatives (Krouwel and Abts, 2006). Eisinger (2000), on the contrary, claims that cynics are not simply indifferent to politics, they intentionally distance themselves from it. As a consequence of the multiplicity of definitions available, instruments used to measure cynicism also vary (Adriaansen and Van Spanje, 2003; Banks et al. 1992; Dekker, 2006; Krouwel and Abts 2006).

Finally, studies focusing on the role of political interest indicate that the motivation of young people to be informed and involved in politics has declined over the last decades, thereby confirming that political interest is a significant antecedent of participation at different levels (Bean, 1989; Crotty, 1991; Park, 1999; Plutzer, 2002), and that a sort of virtuous cycle link the two constructs (Mulberger, 2004).

Research Goals and Hypotheses

The variables above mentioned have been investigated as predicting political participation, whereas to the best of our knowledge only few studies have tried to identify factors promoting social participation. On the basis of the theory that the two forms of active citizenship are connected (Hooghe, 2003; Putnam, 1993; Snyder and Omoto, 2000; van Deth et al., 1997; Wollebaek and Per, 2002), the present study hypothesizes that despite the differences characterizing political conventional, unconventional and social participation, a group of common antecedents can account for all of them. Specifically, it is expected that: a) the three forms of participation are positively correlated, with no trade-off processes channeling people into just one of them; b) political interest, political efficacy, political socialization and optimistic attitudes towards politics positively influence the political as well as the social versions of participatory behaviours; c) high levels of perceived institution trustworthiness promote conventional political participation, whereas low levels enhance unconventional and social participation. In addition, since the perceived trustworthiness varies according to the type of institutions considered, it is expected that the trustworthiness associated to specific groups of institutions has a different impact on the three forms of participation.

Method

Sample and Procedures

The study was carried out on 705 university students, 330 of which were males and 375 female; the average age was 22.8 yr (S.D. = 2.93). Of the participants, 39.1% were affiliated to political groups (parties, trade-unions, and politicized students associations). As far as the political orientation is concerned, 54.3% defined themselves progressive, 18.4% as conservative, and 18.4% chose none of the two alternatives. Participants were contacted during classes and recreational activities, partly with the collaboration of the students association. Data was gathered by means of a self-evaluation questionnaire.

Measures

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire including the following sections:

a) Cynicism/Optimism Scale (Banks et al., 1992), in the 9-item Italian version by Rubini and Palmonari (1995) (e.g. "Political representatives are more inclined to pursue personal benefits rather than collective goods"; "No political party would do something for me"), intended to measure the cynical attitude towards politics ($\alpha = .61$);

b) Participation Scale, composed by 10 items measuring conventional political participation ($\alpha = .89$) (e.g. "Discussing political issues with friends or acquaintances"; "Being involved in electoral campaigns"); 8 items measuring unconventional political participation ($\alpha = .89$) (e.g. "Taking part to collective protest demonstrations"; "Complying to boycott campaigns") (Buzzi et al., 2002); 7 items measuring social participation ($\alpha = .72$) (e.g. "Being part of a citizen committee"; "Acting as volunteer in no-profit organizations");

c) Perceived Institution Trustworthiness Scale (Buzzi et al., 1997), a 13 item scale aimed at measuring the perception of trustworthiness of local, national and transnational institutions ($\alpha = .76$) (e.g. "I trust political parties"; "I trust local administration"; "I trust the army");

d) Political Efficacy Scale (Yeich and Levine, 1994) measuring internal political efficacy (e.g. "Sometimes politics and government are so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on"), external political efficacy ($\alpha = .77$) ("There are plenty of ways for people like me to have say in what our government does") and collective political efficacy ($\alpha = .84$) (es.: "Organized groups of citizens can have much impact on the political policies in this country").

e) Political Socialization: 5 items were formulated to survey the influence exerted by family, school, university, media and friends (e.g. "Friends and acquaintances provide me with the opportunity to discuss and form an opinion about the political issues");

f) Political Interest was measured by 3 items focusing on the subjective interest shown towards local, national and transnational political issues ($\alpha = .74$);

e) Socio-demographic form, including gender, age, income, political orientation, and affiliation to a political party.

Data Analysis

In order to test the hypothesis that social and political (conventional and unconventional) participation are explained by the same set of antecedents, a comparison of multiple regression models was performed.

Dependent variables considered were conventional political participation, unconventional political participation, and social participation. Independent variables included in the analysis were: institution trustworthiness, political interest, political efficacy, cynicism towards politics, political socialization, socio-demographic variables such as gender, age and income, and political variables (political orientation, and affiliation to a political party). As far as the psychosocial variables are concerned, total scores were used, except for the socialization measure, which was reduced into factors.

The explorative factor analysis conducted on the socialization items resulted in two factors (explaining respectively 37.5 and 23.8% of variance), labelled, the first, as *informal socialization* (family and friends), and the second as *formal socialization* (school and university). The item measuring the influence of media was removed due to its low factor loading on both factors. The following analysis were performed: (a) a correlation analysis of the three forms of participation taken into account; (b) confirmatory factor analysis on the Political Efficacy Scale, aimed at validating the three-component structure proposed by Yeich and Levine (1994); (c) hierarchical regression analysis intended at testing the hypothesis of common antecedents accounting for different forms of participation; (c1) further regression analysis aimed at verifying the impact of the perceived trustworthiness of different types of institutions on the three modes of participation.

Results

Relationship between conventional, unconventional and social participation

All the three forms of participation show positive significant correlations (Table 1). Table 2 displays the distribution of participants in the dif-

ferent participatory modes; in order to aggregate the data available, respondents were grouped according to their high versus low score in the Participation Scale (respectively higher and lower than 50° percentile). About one-third of the participants reports low scores on the three types of participation, thereby proving their scant activism, whereas a second one-third reports high scores, which witness a massive engagement in the public sphere.

Table 1
Pearsons's Correlations:
Conventional, Unconventional and Social Participation

	Social Participation	Unconventional Political Participation
Conventional Political Participation	0.667*	0.691*
Social participation		0.609*

* $p < .001$; $n = 705$

Table 2
Distribution of participants in the three modes of participation.

				Unconventional Political Participation	
				Low	High
Social Participation	Low	Conventional Political Participation	Low	34,9%	6,1%
			High	7,9%	9,0%
	High	Conventional Political Participation	Low	6,2%	3,9%
			High	4,2%	27,8%

The determinants of political conventional, unconventional and social participation

Preliminary to the regression analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) aimed at validating the three-component structure of political efficacy (Craig and Maggiotto, 1982; Niemi et al., 1991; Yeich and Levine, 1994) was performed. Findings support the theoretical model, attesting that political efficacy can be conceptualised as composed of an internal, an external and a collective dimension (χ^2 [157, N=705] = 473.2; $p=.000$. CFI = .960; TLI = .952; RMSEA = .053 [.048; .059]).

With the aim of evaluating the separate contribution of the socio-demographic and political variables on the one side, and the contribution of the psychosocial variables on the other, a hierarchical regression model was chosen. At the first step, gender, age, income, political orientation and party affiliation were included, subsequently institution trustworthiness, political interest, political efficacy, cynicism towards politics, and political socialization were added (Table 3).

Table 3
Hierarchical regression models
Antecedents of conventional, unconventional, and social participation

	Conventional Political Participation	Unconventional Political Participation	Social Participation
Model	Adjusted R ²	Adjusted R ²	Adjusted R ²
Model 1 Socio-demographic and Political Variables	0.245	0.195	0.095
Model 2 Psychosocial Variables	0.553	0.404	0.178
Predictors	β	β	B
Age	0.04	0.03	0.04
Sex (Male=0; Female=1)	-0.06	0.01	0.00
Party Affiliation	0.26*	0.24*	0.20*
Income (Low=0; High=1)	0.00	0.00	-0.29
Political Orientation (Conservative=0; Progressive=1)	0.11**	0.20*	0.11**
Institutions' Trustworthiness	-0.17*	-0.23*	-0.04
Political Interest	0.31*	0.29*	0.17**
Internal Political Efficacy	0.18*	0.11***	0.10

External Political Efficacy	0.12**	0.02	0.09
Collective Political Efficacy	0.15*	0.14**	0.09
Informal Socialization	0.15*	0.08	0.07
Formal Socialization	0.07***	0.08	0.00
Cynicism	0.00	0.09***	0.06

* $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .05$

The remarkable change of adjusted R^2 suggests that the two groups of variables have a different weight in predicting the criterion; in fact the percentage of variance explained increases significantly with the inclusion of the psychosocial variables. Due to this increase and to the absence of significant coefficients, socio-demographic characteristics seem insufficient to account alone for participation. On a global level, the model better accounts for political participation rather than for social one. Conventional political participation is mostly affected by a clear political interest, the affiliation to a party, and the progressive orientation. Both the three components of political efficacy (internal, external, and collective) and the socialization contexts (family and friends, and school and university) exert a weaker influence. A negative effect is generated by the institution trustworthiness (global index). As far as unconventional political participation is concerned, a similar trend emerges. The most pronounced differences involve the role of external efficacy and of the socialization contexts, whose coefficients are not significant. On the contrary, cynicism seems to have an impact: the higher the score participants collected on the Cynicism/Optimism Scale, the more they are likely to be involved in unconventional forms of engagement. Social participation is the dependent variable which is worst explained by the antecedents considered, as the only significant variables are the political interest, the progressive orientation and the party affiliation.

The impact of the perceived trustworthiness of different types of institutions on the three modes of participation

Based on the assumption that perceived trustworthiness varies according to the type of institutions considered, firstly an explorative factor analysis of the Perceived Institution Trustworthiness Scale was carried out, and secondly the impact of the factors on participation was measured by means of a regression analysis. The 11 initial items of the scale were factor-analyzed using the principal components method and orthogonal rotation (Varimax with Kaiser Normalization). For the correlation matrix, the Bartlett sphericity test was 1464.7 ($p < .01$). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure

of sampling adequacy was .74, which provided additional evidence that the correlation matrix was appropriate for the factor analysis. Four factors emerged, explaining 62.9% of total variance; *Education and Health Care System* (18.8%), *Political Institutions* (17.8%), *Religious Institutions and Army* (13.4%) e *Mass media* (12.8%) (Table 4). The impact of factors on the three forms of participation is displayed in Table 5.

Table 4
Institution Trustworthiness Scale: Items, Factor Loadings, and Alphas

<i>Item</i>	<i>Factor Loading</i>
Religious Institutions and Army	
Army	.764
Church	.808
	Cronbach's Alpha = .52
Political Institutions	
Political Parties	.874
Political Representatives	.840
European Union	.459
Local Administrations	.458
	Cronbach's Alpha = .68
Mass media	
Internet	.858
Media (tv, newspapers, etc.)	.733
	Cronbach's Alpha = .52
Education and Health Care System	
School	.836
Health Care system	.732
University	.761
	Cronbach's Alpha = .71

Results indicate that the perceived trustworthiness of the education and health system negatively affects conventional political participation, whe-

reas the belief that people can rely on the political institutions promotes it, as well as the other two types of participation. On the contrary, trust in religious institutions and the army, which can be regarded as exemplars of total institutions (Goffman, 1961) where all parts of life of individuals are subordinated to and dependent upon the authorities of the organization, shows a systematic negative impact. Finally, no influence is exerted by the perceived trustworthiness of media.

Table 5
Regression model – Influence of Institution Trustworthiness Scale factors on conventional, unconventional, and social participation

	Conventional Political Participation	Unconventional Political Participation	Social Participation
Model	Adjusted R ²	Adjusted R ²	Adjusted R ²
	0.250	0.186	0.053
Predictors	β	β	B
Education and Health Care System	-0.11**	-0.02	-0.06
Political Institutions	0.32*	0.13*	0.19*
Religious Institutions an Army	-0.37*	-0.42*	-0.12*
Mass Media	-0.06	-0.03	0.02

* $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationships between three different forms of participation, and testing the validity of a group of political, socio-demographic and psychosocial antecedents on political (conventional and unconventional) and social participation.

The comparison between the three modes of participation shows that political militancy can be accompanied by social forms of activism, and that individuals engaged in political activities tend to extend their commitment also to the social sphere.

This result questions the thesis according to which a trade-off characterizes the relationship between the two areas, thereby encouraging the youth to channel their activism in civil society but not in politics (Bettin Lattes, 1999; Putnam, 2000). On the whole, Inglehart's (1977) claim was confirmed: no evidence of a diffuse civic disengagement has been found, on the contrary what comes to the fore is a transformation of the forms through which people decide to participate. It is worth remarking that, as

far the participants of the study are concerned, their political commitment is an hybrid in which conventional and unconventional forms are mixed. In addition, a considerable part of them is engaged in both the political and the social sphere. Nevertheless, the inclination to participate appears to vary according to the political orientation of the individuals: those who hold a progressive position are more likely to adopt participatory behaviours than those who share a conservative vision, and this is true for both the political and the social activism.

According to the results achieved, conventional and unconventional participation appear contiguous: not only are they positively correlated, but they can be traced back to the same antecedents. It seems therefore reasonable to assume that they are predicted by an analogous pool of explicating factors. In the light of the recent literature, this outcome is controversial; according to Uslaner (2004), for instance, conventional and unconventional participation are alternatives paths, with the latter distinctively oriented to protest.

As far as the main hypothesis is concerned, the conclusion that can be drawn is that social and political participation are definitely explained by different variables; since only political interest, party affiliation, and political orientation have a crosswise impact, the search for factors promoting the social engagement of citizens is open.

A secondary indication emerging from the study concerns the role of the perceived trustworthiness of the institutions. Whereas a general trust measure seems to show a negative impact on the political commitment (especially in the unconventional version), considering trust in specific types of institutions, grouped according to their nature and function, makes a more articulated scenario emerge: Findings support the hypothesis that active citizenship develops on the basis of a reciprocal trust between people and political institutions, and that this type of relationship applies to all the modes citizens choose to engage themselves.

As mentioned above, this thesis has both supporters (e.g. Alford, 2001; Huseby, 2000; Orren, 1997; Uslaner and Brown, 2005) and opponents (Citrin and Luks 2001; Dalton, 2002; Norris, 1999; Gamson, 1968; Miller, 1974; Pierce and Converse, 1989; Tarrow, 1994), with the latter claiming that whereas trust would result in a tendency to adopt conventional forms of participation, mistrust would enhance unconventional modes such as protest and community-based forms of involvement (voluntary and civic associations, no profit organizations, citizens' committees, etc.). According to this perspective, the perception that institutions are scarcely reliable would not unequivocally result in withdrawal and alienation, it would

rather function as a stimulus, a sort of invitation to take action. On the contrary, the results of the study confirm that trust in the political institutions (at a local, national and transnational level) plays a key role in enhancing political participation and also in promoting the citizens' commitment in the organized civil society. Nevertheless, this outcome is to some extent compensated by the relationship found between cynicism and unconventional participation: the tendency to avoid to rely on the competencies of political representatives would result in an orientation towards non traditional repertoires of actions. The display of cynical attitudes would therefore be consistent with a general sense of distrust towards the institutions per se, irrespectively of their specific functions.

Finally, the role of collective political efficacy stands out as a key-motive for participation, with a stronger effect compared to that produced by self-efficacy alone. Thus it seems that the feeling of being able to achieve a goal by undertaking collective actions is more powerful than the awareness of an established link between one's own personal skills and the outcomes of the action. The inclusion of the collective dimension in the conceptualization of political efficacy encourages to revise the typology of citizens proposed by Zimmerman (1989) and to elaborate a new and more complex one (Figure 1), which identify eight categories based on the combination of the three components' different levels: uninvolved, dependant, collectivist, follower, solitary activist, individualist, unconventional activist and optimistic.

Figure 1
Theoretical typology of citizens based on political efficacy levels

				<i>Internal Political Efficacy</i>	
				Low	High
Collective Political Efficacy	Low	External Political Efficacy	Low	Uninvolved	Solitary Activist
			High	Dependant	Individualist
	High	External Political Efficacy	Low	Collectivist	Unconventional Activist
			High	Follower	Optimistic

The feeling of being unable to exert any kind of political influence and the belief that institutions will meet nor the individuals or the collective needs, would result in alienation and refusal of politics (*uninvolved* type).

When the awareness of one's personal potential is accompanied by a perceived discouraging political environment, isolated participatory actions would take place (*solitary activist* type).

A dependency attitude would occur when individuals perceive that, despite their own inefficacy, the political system is willing to support them as single citizens, especially if they face disadvantaged conditions (*dependent* type).

Based on the same assumptions, but characterized by a greater confidence in the personal abilities, is the *individualist* type; self-efficacy and trust in the possibility of one-to-one dialogue with the institutions would encourage people to take action to satisfy their single needs.

Peculiar to the *collectivistic* type is the combination of low levels of perceived self-efficacy and high levels of perceived collective efficacy. This type would believe that the status quo can undergo a change only if groups of citizens take action, and thus overcome the resistance of the political institutions.

The *unconventional activist* type, drawn from Zimmerman's typology, would catch the tendency to choose non traditional forms of participation, involving the community rather than the single individuals. Citizens of this kind would be self-confident but at the same time aware that the political system will dialogue with ordinary people only if they organize themselves in groups.

The *follower* type, considered by Zimmerman too, would characterize those individuals who rely on the potential of the group and on the willingness of the institutions to respond to the claims of citizens. Finally, the *optimistic* type would fit to persons who believe that political goals can be achieved both by the individual and the group efforts, and that a dialogue with institutions can be fruitful.

Conclusion

The major aim of the present study was to compare the influence exerted by a pool of variables on three forms of participation, namely political conventional, political unconventional, and social participation. A preliminary conclusion is that not all of them affect to the same extent the different types of participation. Socio-demographic variables, regarded as influential in many studies (see among others, Nagler, 1991; Roseston and Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995), appear to have a global weak impact, whereas

psychosocial variables show a stronger explicative power. In any case, the model proposed can be supported only for political, and not for social participation, which remains largely unexplained. In addition, the psychosocial variables, drawn from the political literature, account more for the traditional form of political participation, and less for the unconventional one.

The three forms of participation are not mutually exclusive, so that the engagement in one does not entail the rejection of the other two. It is then reasonable to affirm continuity between them, which nevertheless cannot be traced back to a common pool of antecedents.

Despite the diminished centrality of the traditional socialization agents, family and friends persist as the most significant context enabling people to participate; comparatively, the educational institutions seem to play a marginal role. The organized dimension of social action emerges as an important consequence of the collective dimension of political efficacy. The integration of Zimmerman's taxonomy tentatively aims at updating the conceptual categories through which participation can be analysed; it is also intended to account for the multiplication of participatory behaviours and attitudes which characterizes the current social scenario.

To conclude, the present study raises two main issues, which have to be addressed in further evaluations. Firstly, the necessity of pursuing a common shared definition of social participation, a construct which has been scarcely explored at the theoretical level. The authors are aware that a limit of the study lies in the operational definition of social participation, and are persuaded that a clarification effort on its distinctive features and the identification of the corresponding activities and behaviours would enable to clarify also the relationships, the overlaps and the differences between a variety of participatory forms. Secondly, the study highlights a difficulty in classifying the modes of participation according to the established taxonomies. Although the strive for classification appears an inevitable task to be accomplished at the theoretical level, the fluidity of human behaviour at the empirical level challenge the possibility to fix it for a long time in predefined categories.

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