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The Bulwark of Citizenship

A Reflection on the Italian Schooling system in preparing citizens for Democracy

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– **Introduction**

It has been generally agreed upon the fact that countries deeply embedded with democratic values perform better in terms of citizens' personal freedom, economic endowments, equality, political representation, general life conditions and ultimately, happiness (Sen, 1999). As such, it is crucially in the democratic system's interest to support, maintain and consolidate the democratic rule of law as to ensure its survival through and across generations: after all, the defining aspect of institutions is their tendency to survive those who have created them. Beyond democracy, any society in history has attempted to perpetuate its structure and order through specific institutional arrangements, among which public or private services that instruct the younger generations on the role they will play in their society. On one hand, this function belongs naturally and traditionally to the family nucleus, yet the emergence of new institutional actors sought to complement (and at times contrast) the unilaterality of parental education (Parsons & Bales, 2014). This introduced the educational system, in its present iteration composed of complex institutions headed by elected or nominated officials within a rational, democratic and free society. However, even in the not-so-distant past, social and political circumstances were not this luminous, especially in different political regimes: what distinguishes Democracy is the great fluidity of both horizontal and vertical mobility, which allows for equal distribution of opportunities (Heckmann & Mosso, 2014). However, such an environment needs to be encouraged, and this is where the challenge lies. Moreover, the internationalizing forces of communication technologies and globalization are crucially changing the way governance itself is embodied beyond the safe confines of national territory. This entails that democratic decision-making as it has been traditionally known is now, in the interpretation of some, endangered by the alternative processes employed by global governance, lobbies, supranational organizations and so on. To further jeopardize the primacy of the role played by national institutions, the ever-growing influence of international mass medias has flooded the households of billions, providing compelling alternatives in terms of ideology and values (Manin & al., 1995). Clearly, educational institutions today need not only to ensure their traditional function, but also accommodate the pluralizing facets of the society they are programming. By no means does the introduction of these new actors represents exclusively a threat, as on the contrary, they may complement and significantly ease EI's mission; however, it is worth recalling how they have challenged the national system's primacy in this endeavor. In any case, national EIs remain the fundamental sources of formal education and critical influences on citizens' long-lasting political behavior and as such their operations deserve to be analyzed, contextualized and evaluated with regards to the societies they shape, and the effectiveness through which they provide democratic principles and embed them in individuals.

Therefore, the purpose of the following thesis spans across three main levels of inquiry, which will be mirrored by the paper's structure. To introduce modern developments of Educational Institutions, Chapter 1 will first retrace the social conditions leading to their establishment, clarify its connection with political identity and narrow the scope to the question of political participation in Italy. With this concept we refer to any action aimed at influencing policymakers in their decisions (van Deth, 2014); in practice, it should be intended both as active political involvement and passive contribution to the upholding of democratic values and principles. As a reference, official cross-sectional data will be presented and discussed. Following this considerable introduction of premises, the analysis of EIs will begin. The initial focus will be on the strategies that formal institutions have adopted in order to successfully prepare younger cohorts to democratic participation (Chapter 2). Traditionally, the establishment of courses of civic participation or civic education have been part of school-programs' planning, thus similar initiatives will be amply discussed; moreover, the structural implications of the institutional system will be analyzed in terms of Illich's concept of Hidden Curriculum, supported and enacted by those teachings that do not take place explicitly through courses, but are present within the very mechanisms through which schools operate, such as procedures, organization and dynamics. In short, the analysis will concern the institutionally *intended* curriculum. The performative adequacy of the institutional measures discussed in the previous paragraph will be challenged thereafter, as well as the structural conditions that allow for the exercise of democratic practice. Indeed, Chapter 3 will deal with the social environment in which education takes place and how it affects the outcome of institutional action. It will emphasize the importance of structural and social elements that pre-exist the role of educational directives or symptomatically arise because of them. The final objective is to portray the curriculum that is *enacted* in practice, contrasting it with its theoretically intended counterpart. As a closure, the final section of the thesis will attempt to recap insight on the proposed arguments, and propose suggestions on possible future areas of intervention.

– **Notes on Methodology**

Given the multidimensional ambition of the present paper, the methodology employed will vary consistently in each chapter. As a general notion however, within the main body both quantitative and qualitative data will be vastly employed. In addition, tables and graphs will sometimes evidence, summarize or schematize the focus point of each paragraph; some of them will be direct extrapolations from the literature on which the present thesis is based on, whereas in other circumstances the author will present its own graphical elaborations. At any rate, in both instances the original author will be appropriately credited.

The next chapter will tackle the attempts of policymakers to introduce, consolidate and update the teaching of democratic values and civic virtues. In doing so, it will comprehend the analysis of several pieces of legislation provided by the Italian government from 1958; these include, but will not be limited to, Law's decrees, Designs of Law and respective amendments. Directives, regulations and initiatives proposed at European level will be accounted for as well, given the overarching influence of European Institutions in the national processes of decision-making. By a similar rationale, some of the internal regulations devised independently by public schools will be included, as to highlight the degree of autonomy that Educational Institutions feature vis-à-vis central government's directives, as well as permit a comparison between schools of different geographic areas. In addition, to present a solid comparison between the theoretical intents of the ordained measures and their material effectiveness, the 2016 results of the International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS), a project carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Attainments (IEA) will be included; the objective of this study was to measure students' civic knowledge, their understanding of concepts and issues related to civics and citizenship, as well as their civic attitudes and engagement (Schultz & al., 2019). Notably, on the provision of this database hinges a significant portion of contemporary research on education: several, if not most, of the authors referenced in this study from the 2000s on have at least partially referenced the ICCS report, which in itself symbolic of its prestigious status among political and educational scholars. This is not without good reason: the study conducted by the IEA ambitiously features 24 countries in three continents, endowing it with an undeniably impressive scope of analysis. Naturally, given the extensive amount of data required by this study, time is of utmost necessity for the collection, elaboration and discussion of findings, leaving the reasonable expectation that after its first 2009 publication some years would pass before the proposal of a new ICCS; yet, the IEA repeated the study only seven years later, in 2016. Therefore, given the relative recency of the results (ICCS's Report was published in 2018), the presence of Italy among the selected countries and the possibility to contrast developments occurred since its first edition in 2009, it will be the main source of quantitative data. Moreover, the reliability of the publishing institution, as well as the rigid methodology employed in the elaboration of results underlines in a satisfying manner the credibility of ICCS's findings. The study was divided in modules that gather information from students, principals and teachers. Specifically, the study required the compilation of a booklet containing self and institutional descriptive items in a fixed time of 30 or 45 minutes, akin to a survey, and an additional test of civic and social knowledge for students. The involvement of school headmasters in the study fill the remarkable gap of information concerning school administrations' executive, a prominent shortcoming of conventional performance-oriented

researches. It needs to be anticipated, however, that the validity of the arguments proposed can be challenged by a major implication of ICCS's design: figures and data relate to so-called ISCED 2, Grade 8, that is to say, a level of education that coincides with late lower-secondary, so for the purposes of the study were selected 3.500 students attending the last year (13-14 years old). Therefore, equally satisfactory information on upper-secondary cohorts cannot be accounted nor included. Still, the homogeneity of institutional arrangements mitigates the impact of this complication from several perspectives. Primarily, EIs of different level enjoy equal level of autonomy from the central government in terms of formative offers, so endowments envisioned by institutional arrangements remain virtually the same; this entails that democratic teachings are organized with broadly comparable commitment. For what concern students' experience, the differential remains negligible, as the average level of civic knowledge and familiarity with democratic practices should persist, accounting for longer exposure to parental variables. In addition, unfavorable dispositions towards national governments coincides with the result of slightly older students in ISTAT's 2017 survey, suggesting a well-approximated continuity between cohorts. Another interesting characteristic of the ICCS' design is self-evaluation; a number of surveys called to assess the perception of principals, teachers or students ask respondents to express opinions on their own preparation. As such, misevaluations were certainly expected and mitigated by statistical tools. However, the real methodological threat lies in mistakes that are not involuntary: whereas certainly designed and administered in such a way to minimize a negative impact, the threat of social desirability biases jeopardizes the representativeness of extracted data. Despite only a possibility, the author's suggestion is not to discard it entirely, although the risk would reasonably be averted by ICCS' broad sample size. For what concerns other *caveats* concerning methodological implications, they will be accounted for and discussed contextually to the presentation of data in the following chapters, adjusted to personal, social and systemic characteristics of the respondents' institutional role. Another significant contribution comes jointly from the courtesy of Director of INVALSI (Italian Institute for the Educational Evaluation of Instruction and Training) Paolo Mazzoli and overseer of International coordination projects for INVALSI Laura Palmerio. Through an informal encounter with the author, their expertise has been crucial in defining some fundamental implications underlying the system, as well as clarification on ICCS's survey, of which Dr. Palmerio was direct responsible. Therefore, pertinent observation that may have arisen during the encounter will be reported and credited as needed.

1. Overview of Theoretical Framework, Historical developments and Structure of the Italian Schooling system

1.1 - The Introduction of Schools

Historically, the United Kingdom was the first modern state to introduce compulsory education, at least in primary schools, back in 1870. Thereafter, when the industrializing forces and welfare states spread across Europe, each country that has adopted similar institutional arrangements was very careful in securing its control in the hands of the national government. But what rationale was behind it? Durkheim (1893,1925) states that school systems were designed to exert influence on Economy and Professional Specialization on one hand, and Morals and Society on the other. In the former case, the historical need to mirror the sudden technological development of the XVIII century with an equally specialized workforce was prominent; an entire economy was steadily transitioning from agricultural to industrialized economy, and a skilled workforce able to operate the new tools of production was a primary necessity. The creation of schools as places of aggregation for to-be-workers significantly reduced the transaction costs of teaching occupational skills individually and economically speaking, schools were an outstanding strategy to increase human capital. However, more relevant to the present analysis is the Moral dimension of school teachings, which naturally had crucial societal implications. Beforehand, families and societies at large were the only direct providers of social norms, so that social behavior was almost completely shaped by tradition and abidance to preexistent social arrangements. Within each family, the household head represented the supreme uncontested authority who also carried ultimate responsibility over the family nucleus' doings. At that stage, individual status was chiefly ascribed, determined at birth by the class conditions of one's own family; the extremely tough class barriers made vertical mobility strongly unlikely. On the contrary, school offered an open climate in which each individual's status was achieved by an aggregate of dimensions each ruled by a different "authority": one was performative, ruled by universally standardized tests and exams, another was social, ruled by peer and authorities' relations, and others (Parsons & Bales, 2014); from the point of view of a child, school could be an alternative opportunity to experience a social setting with conditions different from those at home.

At any rate, any individual with any schooling experience will acknowledge that many life-lessons learned in school did not take place behind a desk. On the contrary, schools have to consolidate the credibility of democratic values through their implementation, which extends this exemplary prerogative even to the bureaucratic structure of the institution. Despite the previous overlook of strategies for the *active* transmission of democratic knowledge, dire limitations in their possibilities of enactment have emerged. Consequently, the current policy arrangements in Italy favors the *passive* transmission of democratic values (Losito, 2003). Indeed, citizenship should be considered mainly an implicit element of the educational curriculum (Bloomsfield, 2003) (Gearon, 2003). Decades of literature on pedagogy have connected this implicit flow of information to a notion of path-dependency widely known as the Hidden Curriculum (Bowels & Gintis, 1976).

From an historical perspective, this notion is tightly linked to the professionalizing dimension of education as stated by Durkheim. Bowels & Gintis argue that the nurturing of values and practices propaedeutic to the working environment directly opposes the democratizing intent of citizenship education. Indeed, the role structures provided by modern school systems maintain a strongly hierarchical system, in which each student answers directly to the instructions of the teacher's authority, and is required to meet its expectations by means of standardized tests and other forms of evaluation: the unilateral limitations of such a relationship is evident. It is quite clear that by definition and by tradition, the transmission of values, practices and notions inevitably trickles from a *teaching figure* to a *learning figure*, and the maintenance of this relationship functionally serves the purpose of education. This is not necessarily a downside, as it can be argued that such a relationship hinges significantly on the perception of responsibility of students, one that, if appropriately embedded, may positively affect individual engagement, resulting in adequate incentives for democratic formation. Nonetheless, answering to superior authorities from early ages approximates importantly life-long subordinating practices that reflect a number of qualities regarded valuable in the jobs market. Following instructions, meeting established deadlines and abiding to performative benchmarks are only a few of the capitalist market tendencies that the schooling experience mirrors. In addition, a crucial difference in structure should be accounted for: whereas working performance has tangible reward in terms of proportionate wages, democratic engagement often does not result in direct gains, appealing predominantly to a citizen's morals rather than his/her own subsistence. As a result, the predominance of non-openly democratic structures within the educational system not only clashes with its democratizing premises, but also fosters uncritical acceptance of the existing social order (Illich, 1971). Given its overarching implications, the concept of hidden curriculum will recur frequently in the following argumentations.

The main object of inquiry will be the Education system devised by the Italian Government's Ministry of Education, University and Research, hereon abbreviated as MIUR. Several assumptions underlie this decision; firstly, the undeniable predominance of public schools vis-à-vis private institutes: indeed, not only does the public sector enroll more than 93,32% of students in age of compulsory education (ISTAT, 2014), but also offers, even if negligibly so, better quality of teachings (Bertola & Cecchi, 2013; Bendinelli & Martini 2018). Therefore, it stands to reason that the main vehicle for the delivery of democratic education is represented by public schools. Secondly, statistics and data reports from international organizations have at times put in question the adequateness of the national schooling system (Schultz & al., 2009; OECD, 2017), and the public opinion seems to partially share this view. Thirdly, Italy and schools have a long-standing political tradition: from late 60s onwards, schools became central platforms for the opposition of far right and far left groups; indeed, the political cleavage was so strong that its remnants are still embedded in institutes' identities. To conclude, the academic tradition of global research on educational policy, attainment and psychology has surrendered the idea of clear-cut prescriptions for policymakers, recognizing the highly contextualized nature of educational environment (Cooley & Lohnes, 1976; Cronbach, 1975; Kerdeman & Phillips, 1993). In light of these conclusions, a complete comparative analysis of different national school systems would prove somewhat problematic, and would not be deservingly addressed here; as an exception, quantitative comparisons will still act as reference points, as they allow to put in perspective national results vis-à-vis the international stage. Attempts at considering policies effective elsewhere would similarly yield unpredictable results in foreign social and educational contexts. In a healthy recognition of the papers' and author's academic limitations, the narrower scope of analysis seemed the better option.

The Italian system features a strongly decentralized structure for schools (but not universities), where each Regional School Office (RSO) is called to enact central directives autonomously; involvement of the ministry is limited to the provision of a general educational framework, as to ensure a degree of homogeneity between sparse EIs. The selection of general objectives, common compulsory subjects, school hours, quality standards and evaluation frameworks lie in the hands of central administration; while certainly crucial elements, the wording of Eurydice's summary on the system leaves little space to contestation, reading: *"regions have a joint legislative role along with the State on issues related to education. Conversely, they are solely responsible for the planning, management and provision of vocational education and training"* (2014). RSOs' prerogatives consist of ensuring that central provisions are appropriately enacted, minimum performance requirements and compliance with ministerial standards are met, operating through small subordinated bodies. In fact, Local Offices close the institutional gap relating directly with

individual schools: they advise on administrative and financial matters, oversee directives' implementation at local level, promote integration and attendance, planning with municipalities; finally, they report to regional offices. By extent, individual institutes have remarkable independence in the organization of didactics and educational plans (*Projects of Formative Offer*), as long as there is compliance with the broader national framework. The issue at hand is double-edged; on one hand, largely autonomous schools can diversify their formative offers, adjust teachings to local dimensions and correct peripheral inefficacies of the system. On the other, they may consolidate social and performative differentials in education due to social conditions that pre-exist EIs; the main danger is a greater divide between intended and enacted curriculum, as well as patterns of social repetition in which lower social contexts are burdened by unequal institutional endowments. However, foregoing literature has underlined other unintended effects; as stated by Poggi, the empowerment of regions envisioned by 2001's constitutional review aimed to transfer educational decision-making from central to local institutions. However, its realization occurred through the simple devolution of bureaucratic competences to regions, doing little to accommodate the transition to a true system of regional autonomies (2008). The systemic inefficiencies deriving by inadequate distribution of competences problematically affect the quality of provided services. Mazzoli and Palmerio underline the role of principals in this regard, as the executive of individual Institutes embodies the link between central-institutional and local levels. Cross-institute differences in PFOs, they argue, would depend on the hindrances that headmasters face in front of an incomplete framework of institutional autonomy, as well as weak RSOs' indications on objectives of improvement (2019). Therefore, an issue of principals' incentives to innovation of educational plans arises, one that too is burdened by inappropriate institutional arrangements.

The curricular structure of the system encompasses three main stages of compulsory education: 5 years of primary school, widely referred to as *Elementary School*, for kids aged between 6 and 11; then, follow 3 years of lower-secondary school, or *Middle School*, for kids aged between 11 and 14. After that begins upper-secondary education, which splinters in different vocational segments. Students seeking to further their formal education may continue on the path set by High-Schools (commonly named *Superiors* or *Lycées*), and will have to choose among a number of specialization branches that encompass separate fields: mathematics and science (scientific lycée), classical studies and literature (classical lycée), linguistics and foreign languages (linguistic lycée), plastic and figurative arts (artistic lycée), music and composition (music lycée), IT and technology (technological lycée), tourism and accommodation management (hoteling lycée), psychology, humanities and educational sciences (psycho-pedagogic lycée) and others (Losito, 2003), at the end of which they usually receive a diploma allowing for enrolment in Universities or other providers of

higher-education. Alternatively, students may pursue more work-oriented education and professionalization at Institutes for technical and professional formation (*ITFs*), in which they are taught jobs, hard skills and technical expertise in the field of their choice; at the end of the curriculum, the institutions issue certificates validating the operative skills of the pupil, allowing for the entrance into the jobs market. Ultimately, it is fundamental to point out that students may abandon their education anytime past the age of 16, and seek employment immediately after their dropout. As a summary, Figure 1 below schematizes educational periods and intended age of attendance.

Table 1.1: MIUR's official site scheme of Structure of the Italian Schooling system by age;
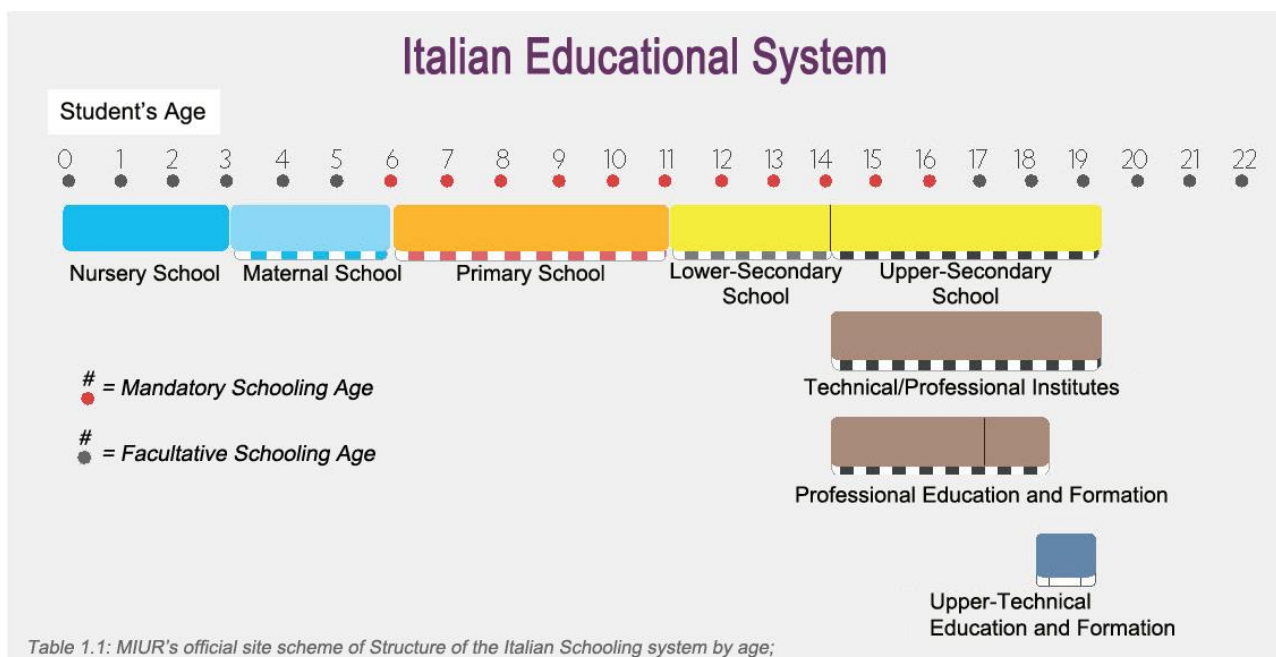
Figure 1 - MIUR's Official site Scheme of the Italian Schooling system by Age

1.2 – Links with Political Participation

Academic literature has vehemently upheld that EIs induce the development of cognitive skills and the provision of information relevant to politics (Campbell et al. 1980; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993; Rosenberg, 1988), encourage the cultivation of political interest (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980) and develop civic skills that facilitate engagement (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), to the point that the long-running tradition of empirical association between political participation and level of education has significantly inspired the present inquiry. However, the long-standing tradition that embraced such relation as a given has been challenged by recent academic developments. Inevitably, the complexity of the issue calls for the mention of a

number of theoretical caveats. Firstly, the causal dynamics underlying such a mechanism are not clear nor direct (Berinsky & Lenz, 2011) which further complicates the contemporary understanding of the relationship between the two factors. Secondly, the vast differences in institutional arrangements between countries prevent the discovery of cohesive conclusions, or at least generally valid. Moreover, the same argument can be applied to socio-economic variables, and their inevitable entanglement with history, culture and tradition of each country: again, SES variables establish a stronger relationship with political participation as a whole, as compared with educational variables only. Thirdly, the focus of this study lies predominantly in projective behavior rather than objective; it ought to be kept in mind that future participation is only a proxy of actual participation, and should therefore be conceived as no more than a general predisposition to become politically involved (Castillo, 2013). Regardless, the concepts of Political Participation and Civic Culture are still of peremptory relevance for both descriptive and explanatory research. They will recur consistently in this study and are to be intended as explained below.

Traditionally, Political Participation refers to two well-distinct categories of political action: those that can be considered conventional, those that employ formal or institutionalized enactment, and those considered unconventional, which take place strictly outside of institutional boundaries and do not recur to specific channels. Among the former we may list voting, letter writing or formal contact with representatives, contributing to campaigns, joining groups or parties, running for office, whereas for the latter, action associated to and violence typically comes to mind: sit-ins, boycotts, manifestations and marches, strikes and demonstrations. However, we cannot simply ignore the fact that sometimes political participation is mediated by extreme and violent action, as in the case of chaotic protests and acts of terrorism; in the following analysis these forms of participation will not be included nor accounted, for the rationale that such specific forms of action counteract the collective nature of democratic procedures, antagonize the legitimation of the rule of law and in general defy the peaceful setup envisioned by democratic principles. Nonetheless, it is useful to keep in mind that similar instances of unconventional participation can provide substantial understanding of deep social cleavages, as well as be symptomatic of a popular or minoritarian dissatisfaction with the democratic apparatus: consequentially, due to the inability to appeal to formal procedures, marginalized groups may employ the use of force as the last and only resort to make their voices heard, in a dysfunctional system inclusive only on the surface (Inglehart, 1997). While this can be a harsh reality for many countries, the ones analyzed here will feature relatively stable and productive democratic systems, even if by no means does this imply that violent protests or acts of terrorism have entirely disappeared from their recent history. Quite telling is the fact that there have been cases in which the very same Educational Institutions and their personnel have

encouraged students to take part in unconventional forms of participation in place of regularly attending their courses. A striking example was the recent demonstration for the environment held in Rome inspired by Greta Thunberg, in which students were the main participants; in that occasion, a number of teachers openly defied the Minister of Education's statement, encouraging pupils to manifest instead. Again, this occasion further highlights how the various entities capable of shaping youths' education to citizenship do not float in separate dimensions, but instead coexist in an interconnected and interdependent social environment.

On the other hand, Civic Culture or Civic participation relates to a set of everyday attitudes that relate more closely to the personal sphere, yet still in close relationship with political matters. Among this set of behaviors, we may list informative actions (informing oneself on current events through any kind of media), discursive actions (sharing individual opinions with others in non-institutionalized occasions) and transitionary actions (translating personal opinions in a set of possible political options), as well as proactive participation in day-to-day social environments. While parallel to direct political participation, intuition may suggest that Civic Culture affects it consistently. In fact, it has been also defined as latent political participation, for the reasoning that personal characteristics such as interest, attentiveness and proactive dispositions towards public matters influence significantly political behavior (Eckman & Amna, 2012). Indeed, while some evidence indicates that broad SES variables are still considered the strongest correlates of civic knowledge (M.M. Isac et al., 2013), first-hand action and mobilization are still largely dependent on their interest in political and social issues, and in particular their sense of citizenship self-efficacy (Ainley & Schulz, 2011). Therefore, it could be argued that Civic Culture may precede actual political action, as the former constitutes the individual requirement for the latter's transformation in collective behavior; such preposition may agree, at least theoretically, with the initial assumption of growing tendencies of political passivity. Again, young people may nurture a sense of detachment from governmental institutions, perceived as too distant and unconcerned with their demands (Amna & Eckman, 2014). Possibly, this may very well represent the opposite side of the coin of political discontent: if systemic ostracization or ineffective inclusive institutions have the power to trigger violent political actions, it may equally well induce political alienation, especially to those social sectors whose livelihood is not immediately threatened by political decisions. Therefore, a conceptual distinction should be made between unengaged citizens, whose commitment can be kindled by specific political conditions, and disillusioned citizens, whose lack of trust in the system's arrangement prevents any form of motivation leading to civic participation.

1.3 – Participation and Citizenship in Italy

As stated above, the claim that younger cohorts are gradually marching towards political apathy has been a pervasive and diffused tendency in recent developments of political research, and Italy is no exception. Naturally, all countries have their own fundamental historic, cultural, social and economic traditions and variables, translating in greatly divisive political attitudes, yet an adequate analysis of current or recent data may allow for interesting suggestions on future developments. For what concerns informative behaviors, the Italian population as a whole demonstrates acceptably positive dispositions in the act of seeking political information: almost half of the total affirms to do so at least weekly, through an array of available medias largely dependent on age. Auspiciously, a quarter declares of doing so daily; however, nearly the same amount signaled complete disregard for political issues and the respective mediatic coverage, with a relatively minute minority doing so seldom (ISTAT, 2017). The preferred mediatic channels are television (50,5%), newspapers (24,1%) and internet sources (27,8%) (AGCOM, 2017). However, the most interesting piece of evidence is that provided by political disengagement and its explanatory variables. Among the reasons provided, lack of interest resulted the most diffused; whereas unsurprising in the case of the youngest cohort, the fact that more than two thirds of respondents of older ranges explained their disengagement with lack of interest can be worrying.

A positive observation can be proposed for what concerns political knowledge and understanding as measured by ISTAT. The decreasing rate of disengagement due to the excessive sophistication of political discussions may indeed point to a process of gradual understanding of politics, the political system and political issues; whereas difficult to measure, this can be likely reconciled with an effective delivery of teachings by EIs, if we exclude parental education. Data from the ICCS seems to uphold this view, as students self-report elevate levels of civic knowledge, Again, the relative weight of educational competences, those developed by schools in particular, remains difficult to operationalize. Ultimately, the penultimate column of the table provides fundamental evidence of a significant social phenomenon. Increasing rates of distrust are a pivotal alarm, further strengthened by contemporary political developments in Italy, European states and many other countries (European Commission, 2018; OECD, 2017). Indeed, figures hint that steady growth of lack of trust in each range manages to absorb the positive effects of the increase in political interest and understanding caused by temporal developments. It is nonetheless necessary to make some considerations about the research's methodological design. First of all, we argued that lack of trust has a relevant effect on the development of youth's political identity; if we assume a rational causal link, only informed citizens with a definite understanding of normative and constative values could

reasonably grow dissatisfaction with the system and become detached as a consequence. This reasoning would imply that all politically detached individuals were, at some point in time, committed and then deluded. Were we to embrace this interpretation, would political participation be destined to decline? This does not necessarily seem to be the case, and may instead be linked with a portion of the population that never sought engagement on one hand, and the increasing demand for new instruments of democratic participation on the other. The point here is that the options provided by the survey are conceptually interdependent: lack of interest is a variable that may affect lack of trust as much as the other way around, and the same principle applies in different extents to all items of the survey. To an extent, the multi-choice design of the survey allowed respondents to be more specific with their motivations if they so desired, but the conceptual dynamics that tie civic knowledge, political interest and institutional trust are still largely entangled. Nonetheless, the survey's items managed to effectively highlight the respondents' perception of his/her own underlying motivations.

At first glance, Italians appear as quite diligent political units in terms of traditional indicators of participation, especially if compared to its European counterparts. For instance, a quick glance to voter turnout in parliamentary elections would have Italy more involved than Germany, France, Spain and UK (IDEA, 2018); in addition, such a tendency as appeared systematically along the span of almost 50 years, which extends high participatory levels to almost 3 entire school-generations indifferently. Given such a preposition, it would appear that not only is the study's first hypothesis defeated, that Italians are poorly committed to the political sphere, but also the second, that EIs directed by MIUR cannot introduce adequate opportunities for democratic teachings. However, such impression can be easily dissipated for two main reasons; on one hand, despite remaining higher than the mentioned countries, parliamentary voter turnout is experiencing a marginal but steady decrease: since 2001, turnout per election diminishes by circa 2.15% (ISTAT, 2018). In addition, voting is a necessary mechanism of political selection in representative systems, possibly the only thing citizens are explicitly asked to do; until more efficient electoral alternatives are introduced, voting will remain the main democratic tool. On the other, Dinesen has suggested that voter turnout is rarely a good approximate of actual political participation, pointing out the fact that casting a ballot is too inexpensive of an action to signal incisive commitment (2018); moreover, only 18 or more years old can vote, obviously reducing the involvement in this activity to a trifling portion of youth. In line with Dinesen's argument, involvement in more demanding forms of participation constitutes a better signal of political activation, requiring higher levels of commitment and more expensive tradeoffs. Whereas relevant for older social strata, other forms of conventional participation, such as voluntary activities and official financing of political parties remain quite infrequent due to natural faults in social

endowments, mainly constraints in resources (time and money) and relatively insignificant exposure or connections to political parties. As a consequence, the opportunities presented by unconventional forms should appear more feasible to students wishing to approach politics. To a degree however, technology has softened the tradeoffs implied by political activation; that explains the higher prevalence of the items such as "watch a political debate": TV, radios and smartphones are widespread enough to make access to political information rather undemanding. Through ICT development, direct contact with public officials has become extremely accessible: instantaneous messaging services, social networks and digital communication have closed the gap between representatives and voters, erasing the material barriers that formal encounters entailed: conceptually, distinctions between conventional and unconventional participation have been thinned by technology. By extent, the prevalence of digital literacy among young cohorts further enlarges exposure to political and civic issues, logically enhancing opportunities for mobilization. Again, it could be argued that those practices traditionally used to measure political commitment are becoming obsolete, slowly replaced by newer forms of digital participation. It can be expected from electoral research to adapt quickly to these recent introductions; on the contrary, one could question a process of commodification of political activity due to the broadening of political platforms, and the way it would affect incentives for entrance in the political stage. It could be argued that including indicators like voting or other forms of conventional participation is inconsequential to the purposes of this study: the units of analysis are students who are still seeking democratic formation, not those who can already access political platforms. To that preposition, the notion of path-dependency might suggest that growing tendencies of disengagement could provide substantial momentum in their repetition in the near future. After all, schools are not the only influence on to be-citizens; when unconcerned, adults, parents and society at large may nourish diffused political apathy.

Table 1 below schematizes in depths the main results of the surveys conducted by ISTAT in 2017, providing information on both Latent and Manifest participatory behaviors of three age ranges in schooling (14-17; possibly 18-19) and post-schooling age (20-24; possibly 18-19) in comparison with the average of the total population (Total).

In conclusion, the report sheds light on significant facets of participative reality. Generally, there is a strong gap between direct action and indirect action, with the latter being consistently more diffused. Moreover, albeit not graphically included, geography is a critical variable in explaining differentials: in fact, a significant portion of politically unengaged citizens dwells in the southern regions. This geographical discrepancy is well known by both Governmental Institutions and the public, yet attempts to equalize socio-economic conditions have proved failing, to some degree. By

extent, geographical variables affect equality in education, as not only do students in southern regions perform poorly compared to the North, but also greater internal disparities separate classes and local schools (INVALSI, 2018). In addition, regional disparities are already present during primary education and increase through upper levels.

Table 1- ISTAT's 2017 Data on Civic and Political Engagement of Italian Youth

= Political Participation
= Civic Culture
= Informative Actions
= Discursive Actions
= Transitional Actions

% of 14+ **taking part** in any of the following **Political Activities** in the last 12 months;

Age Range	Attend Rallies	Partake in demonstration	Watch a political debate	Free activity for a party	Give money to a party
14 - 17	1.7	8.6	6.9	0.4	0.4
18 - 19	3.3	7.8	14.0	0.3	0.2
20 - 24	3.9	5.1	13.4	1.0	1.2
Total	3.8	3.5	16.3	0.7	1.2

% of 14+ by **frequency** of **Seeking information** on political matters;

Age Range	Daily	+1/week	1/ week	+1/month	+1/year	Never
14 - 17	5.5	13.2	4.1	11.3	10.8	52.8
18 - 19	10.5	21.5	6.4	16.0	12.6	31.8
20 - 24	11.6	23.0	5.1	14.3	11.1	32.6
Total	27.4	22.2	4.5	9.9	7.9	26.8

% of 14+ by **frequency** of **Discussing** politics with others;

Age Range	Daily	+1/week	1/ week	+1/month	+1/year	Never
14 - 17	2.0	10.0	4.7	11.5	12.2	57.6
18 - 19	4.7	16.2	5.6	16.6	16.7	38.6
20 - 24	4.2	16.7	5.4	17.1	17.4	36.9
Total	7.5	20.8	5.1	15.8	14.8	34.6

% of 14+ **Never informing** themselves about politics and main **reason** for **disengagement**;

Age Range	Not informing	Lack of interest	Lack of Time	Complicated topic	Lack of Trust	Other reasons
14 - 17	52.8	77.8	4.0	16.7	11.0	2.8
18 - 19	31.8	74.2	4.7	13.3	23.4	0.8
20 - 24	32.6	67.0	5.7	10.3	30.3	2.1
Total	26.8	62.9	5.6	11.1	31.3	3.4

% of 14+ **taking part** in any of the following **Civic Activities** in the last 12 months;

Age Range	Ecologist Associations	Cultural associations	Voluntary activity	Non-voluntary activity	Activity for trade union	Give money to a civic association
14-17	2.3	7.6	13.0	3.4	0.4	4.4
18-19	1.9	9.0	13.2	5.1	0.3	6.4
20-24	2.5	10.3	13.6	4.7	0.5	9.0
Total	1.7	8.8	10.4	3.6	1.0	14.3

2. Discussing Attempts at Policymaking and Institutional Arrangements

National Governments and Ministries of democratized societies are not strangers to the idea of including education to civic values within their institutional objectives: in fact, explicit reference to the values of equity, social justice, integrity, responsibility and respect of human rights appears in the ministerial curriculum of countries such as Australia, South-Africa, New Zealand and Italy (Banade, 2014). Naturally, each of these curricula tasks its educational institutions to provide satisfying vehicles for the transmission of democratizing values, and the initiatives enacted by importantly different schools within vastly dissimilar societies worldwide (*quote needed)* seem to point out that governmental arrangements can indeed produce creative and effective solutions; a traditional example can be posed by the inclusion, in several states, of an additional subject in the national school program, usually assigned to upper-primary and secondary school. Overlooking specific nomenclature traditions, this courses frequently take the name of "Civics", "Citizenship Education" and others, but in general all share common premises, including (but not limited to) the analysis of general sources of law, such as the state's constitution, as well as basic knowledge of political institutions, democratic procedures and historical traditions; more regarding the enactment of Civic courses will follow below. Furthermore, in recent years non-governmental organizations and IOs have been steadily complementing democratizing role of schools through the offer of additional, voluntary-based activities, like the Model of United nations. However, the crucial weakness of similar initiatives may induce the opposite effect, as will be discussed further.

2.1 - Civics, Civic Education, Education for Democratic Citizenship

Education to citizenship is among the fundamental objectives that formal education seeks to achieve. References to the concepts of tolerance, equality and respect for democracy and human rights (Keating, 2014) are extensively included in the general aims and specific objectives established in both primary and secondary school curricula. However, the pivotal question lied in what measures to implement in order to offer effective teachings; as a matter of fact, the tradition of westernized EIs points to both the establishment of an ad-hoc course and the rigorous inclusion of democratic practices in the method of teaching. Therefore, the responsibility of democratic transmission befalls didactically on the Civics' teacher, yet should be methodologically shared by all members of the teaching staff.

Thus, the channels through which those teachings are to be administered are both direct and indirect, and different models of Civics have been devised. Traditionally citizenship was addressed directly by means of courses that greatly emphasized the attainment of civic knowledge in theoretical terms: in other words, democratic education consisted in the study of the nation's history, traditions, culture and moderate familiarity with national constitutions and sources of law for human rights (Kerr, 1999). Yet, a pivotal implication jeopardizes the purposes of this approach, as the construction of civic identity hinged on the provision of a common, national *mythos*; one that in certain instances may overshadow the pluralist intents of the teachings and glorify a national pride vis-à-vis minorities and other cultures, which stands in sparking contrast with growing multicultural tendencies. Moreover, its methodology relied too heavily on content-based lessons, without providing pupils with spaces to exercise their knowledge other than mere recollections of facts, crystallizing the notion of citizenship as one of fixed social norms (Leek, 2018); moreover, additional research has underlined that, even if it does enhance political knowledge, Civic education on its own does not facilitate democratic values (Perliger & al., 2007). In conclusion, democratic education required the introduction of newer, more flexible and more effective instruments, and the supra-national level obliged. Accordingly, European Institutions have demonstrated significant interest on citizenship education in the last two decades, devising measures to support the existing tools for democratic citizenship, as well as defining the relationship between citizenship and education (EU CoM of Education, 2004), providing measures and indexes to assess civic engagement (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009). These introductions have sustained the change in European countries' educational approaches, now more focused on the operational side of teaching. Greater emphasis on active learning has been given, as well as critical thinking and exchange of opinions. Indeed, recent developments have transformed teachings *on* democracy in teachings *for* democracy.

*"Civic education is essentially characterized as education for democracy, for the exercising (*sic*) of citizen's rights and duties, and for democratic living together, with full respect for social and cultural differences* (Losito, 2003)."

Italy is no different in this regard and has unquestionably evolved according to the same European tendencies. The main source of law currently in place is Legislative Decree 169 from 2008, establishing in its first article the inclusion of Citizenship and Constitution (C&C) in the didactic curricula. However, the main characteristics of the measures put in place by this law are staggeringly vague, as the following quote from Art.1 may suggest.

(…) as such, actions of sensibilization and personnel training shall be introduced to the purpose of the (students') acquisition of knowledge and competences regarding "Citizenship and Constitution"; this is to occur in the context of historic-geographic or socio-historic fields, and within their provided amount of class hours. (…) the implementation of these measures must conform with current human, instrumental and financial resources.

This is the first and only mention of C&C in the body of LD 169, and should be quite telling of the feeble mechanisms put in place by the MIUR in terms of *active* teaching. Ultimately, there is no other directive that establishes either compulsory class-hours destined to C&C, nor subsequent curricular evaluation for students (Losito, 1999). On the contrary, teachers have strongly embraced the *passive* approach in place of direct lessons on current political or social issues. In practical terms, this translates in the partial integration of participatory activities, like debates, within the class-time allocated for other curricular subjects; therefore, it is usually teachers of history, geography or language and literature that sacrifice part of their class time to include these experiences. It is quite evident that teachers enjoy an important degree of autonomy (and trust, I would humbly add) in this particular professional obligation. However, given the soft directives provided by higher-level decisionmakers and the possible negligence of other subjects' teachers to share the burden of democratic teachings, this fact seems a reasonably predictable consequence. Yet, the considerable budgetary limitations that Italian EIs often face prevent the fostering of adequate solutions; indeed, it is likely that given better allocation of resources, both active and passive teachings could be significantly enhanced. Nonetheless, it is worth recalling that despite the increasing efforts of contemporary research, attempts at evaluating the effectiveness of different forms of citizenship education are still unsatisfactory (Geboers et al., 2013).

As anticipated, the mechanisms of then Hidden Curriculum indicate that anything that is taught in an institution should be, allegedly, representative of the reality in which it takes place. Intuitively, there must be coherence with what is taught and how the teaching is carried out: it appears quite implausible that a particularly authoritative and rigid teacher will satisfactorily transmit values of understanding and kindness; an apathetic and unengaged professor will be just as ineffective in depicting rule of law and personal involvement as fundamental pillars of civil life, as an overly-friendly or soft mentor will dissuade pupils to believe in meritocracy and equality. Despite the exaggerated banality of the aforementioned examples, it permits to detect easily the profound disruptive influence that structural imperfections can exert on the intended outcome: in fact, the same rationale of an imperfect student-mentor relationship can be applied to any relationship

between actors in the school system; in addition, it may be necessary to remind that the same rationale applies indifferently to students, teachers, administrative personnel and principals.

This has given great emphasis on the role of teachers, and it may come as unsurprising: they are the ones that functionally provide the services that school offers, both in terms of teaching and surveillance of pupils. Indeed, they are certainly the authority that most interfaces with students, who responds to scholarly performance by means of formal evaluation and decides the teaching agenda given Institutional constraints (Illich, 1971). Moreover, according to both normative and empirical evidence, teachers have the greatest degree of responsibility over the curricular integration of democratic practices as required by law (LD 2008/169). It is curious to point out the fact that Italian teachers are significantly aware of this fact, listing as one of the main motivational factors for their professional vocation (Asquini & Salerni, 1992; Schultz & al, 2018). Losito argued that substantial improvement of democratic education could be achieved if institutions devise incentive structures capable of capitalizing on teachers' own motivation (2003).

Current political developments seem to be moving towards this direction. On the 2nd of May 2019, the Italian chamber of Deputies (lower chamber) has almost unanimously approved a significant institutional overhaul for C&C: the current aim is a conversion from cross-sectional to independent subject, with according separate curricular evaluation. The upper chamber has not yet revealed its judgement, which means that amendments, modification or rejection are all possible developments; regardless, the currently approved legislative draft presents interesting features that shed light on the aims of decisionmakers. First of all, Civics will substitute current C&C as enabled by LD 169; the former source of law will thus be abrogated. Crucially, the teaching will be converted from extracurricular modes to traditional methods, within independent time-tables, teachers, and evaluation common to primary, lower and upper secondary education; a minimum of 33 hours per school year has been proposed, for a total of 439 hours for the 13 years long complete education cycle and at least 330 for early leavers, an extremely conspicuous increase if we consider that in some cases previous arrangements did not ensure any. The issues covered by the subject's program mirror previous tendencies, ranging from traditional study of the Constitution to environmental issues, migration, labor market and cultural heritage. Given the dedication of sufficient resources and time, the reformed Civics might achieve a prominent status in school curricula, and the assignment of a self-standing mark indicates a crucial step forward in the provision of effective frameworks for democratic education, as is the consideration of including the subject in the final exam (Castrovilli, 2019). The interference of systemic inefficacies, however, will predictably diverge the actual implementation from the normative directives. Despite its treatment as

independent subject, the training and recruiting of specialized teachers remains unlikely by reason of financial burden; instead, the legislative draft seeks to extend didactic prerogatives to teachers of history or literature and language, as it has been the case previously. Regrettably, the same inefficacies mentioned in the discussion of existing C&C arrangements above, in particular those regarding unequal shares of didactic burdens, would apply in the upcoming reform, unless new regulation manages to address this aspect. Similarly, the reform does not tackle OECD's recommendations on the improvement of financial and economic literacy, a decision that undermines the efficacy and completeness of future developments. It is interesting to point out that hints of both traditional and progressive approaches to democratic education permeated into current discussion; on one hand, the establishment of a new course, consisting of notional teachings clearly and subject to independent evaluation recalls the rigid approaches before the 2000s. On the other, the idea of maintaining operational teachings and direct embodiment of values into didactic methodology seeps from the later, passive-implicit approach. In an educate guess of the effective outcome of the reform, it stands to reason that a more rigid framework could substantially improve the democratic baggage offered by EIs, as long as headmasters remain obliged to the socializing purposes of educational curricula. Necessarily, centralized institutions should ground proportionate incentive structures to motivate local compliance to reform's introductions; besides, this returns us to the issue of regional inequalities in education, a challenge that systematically haunts MIUR's efforts and will likely infiltrate upcoming decisions. Ultimately, the issue remains purely matter of speculation until official arrangements are confirmed.

2.2 - Councils, Assemblies and Representatives

EIs often consider direct involvement of the main institutional stakeholders in decision-making; the vast majority of democratic educational systems has put in place a system in which elected representatives are called to embody the will of their respective group. The inclusion of students in school assemblies on par-status to teachers, parents and administration has marked a significant advancement in institutional democratization and opportunities for political activation; a prospect somewhat equally endorsed by all 25 ICCS countries, save for Italy. In fact, the absence of a ministerial directive establishing representatives' system in lower-secondary education characterizes the country, although such a system is rather affirmed in upper-secondary institutes. Early attempts to politically engage young people can be determinant in building the civic and social identity, as exposure to democratic environments would logically be expected to instill according values and encourage the assimilation of certain behaviors. Italian education however

opted for the later introduction of direct political platforms, as is in the general case. Nonetheless, the decentralizing autonomy of EIs contemplates the possibility for independent establishment of internal representatives' bodies, whereas the local executive decides to pursue such initiative; a number of schools, even primaries, have in fact moved in this direction, albeit sparsely (Mazzoli & Palmerio, 2019). Regardless, prevailingly scarce demand for political platforms has prevented the invigoration of normative trends pursuing the engagement of students in decision-making processes. This is quite curious in contrast to ICCS's findings, according to which 87% of middle-schoolers would likely participate in a school parliament, and 63% would partake in discussions in a student assembly. Moreover, these proportions present no significant increase from 2009's results (2018), which could be arguably interpreted as signal of potential participation that remains ultimately anchored down by absent policy frameworks. On another page is, however, the approach devolved to high-school institutions.

The Representatives' System of upper-secondary school exhibits a complex democratic mechanism involving three main actors. If we are to consider the Educational System as a general market for the provision of educational attainment, it is possible to assign an economic role to each of those actors; indeed, the supply side consists of the didactic personnel, comprised of teachers, members of the administration, supporting personnel and the principal; parents in opposition represent the demand side for their children's education; and finally students, whose economic role lies, in spirit of approximation, betwixt supply and demand. Notably, each of these sections (or parties) has its own institutional arrangements and democratic platforms, as will be listed below, but MIUR directives envision more than that. In fact, the three-party assembly system (*Decreto Legislativo 16 aprile 1994, n. 297 - Testo Unico delle disposizioni legislative vigenti in materia di istruzione, relative alle scuole di ogni ordine e grado*) allows students, parents and teachers to meet and discuss internally (among themselves) and externally (between each other). This translates in a number of intersecting institutions of increasing scope that allow students in particular to partake in the decision-making processes according to their own level of engagement: indeed, it is possible to draw a scale of increasing political commitment within an EI system similar to that proposed by Milbrath (1965) as shown in Table 2.

| Running for HR |
| Running for CR |
| Assisting in a candidate's electoral campaign |
| Persuading peers to vote a specific candidate |
| Contacting a representative |
| Partaking in Students' Institute Assemblies (SIA) |
| Informing one-self on School issues |
| Partaking in Student's Class Councils (SCC) |
| Voting for HR |
| Voting for CR |

Table 2
Author's reinterpretation of Milbrath (1965)
• Red: Gladiatorial Activities
• Orange: Transitional Activities
• Yellow: Engaged Spectatorial activities
• White: Spectatorial activities

Table 2 - Author's reinterpretation of Milbrath (1965)

Therefore, we shall analyze the main institutions of the three-party-system following the order presented in the LD 1994/297. Some of the bodies envisioned by the law will not be thoroughly analyzed, as their function may be strictly procedural, administrative or not sufficiently incisive on the student's political experience; nonetheless, in those instances in which the implications of structural deficiencies (e.g. Hidden Curriculum) may play a significant role, it will be appropriately noted.

In Art. 5, the first institutions presented for the upper-secondary education is the Class Council (CC), composed by a board of every teacher (BoT) assigned to a class for the duration of the school-year, two Class Representatives (CRs), elected from the students in the class, and two representatives of the parents (PRs), elected among the parents of the students in the class. All representative's mandates are one-year-long in term, and new elections are held at the beginning of every school year. Class Councils assemble monthly to discuss teaching methods, party-to-party relationships, organization of class initiatives and evaluation of the collective educational performance. Given the aims and purposes of this institutions, it could seem that the BoT has a dominant role in the council, but this instance also allows for the monitoring and evaluation of their professional performance. Moreover, the institute's principal must preside the councils, or can delegate a teacher from the board to exercise this function and report the outcomes of each session. Notably, CCs embody the most intersectional platform of the system, since they involve every stakeholder category for what concerns didactic delivery. In fact, while the legislative structure of LD 297 could introduce the different institutions in order of scope, it instead presents a mid-scope

council as its first platform, possibly seeking to underline the inclusive nature of the three-party system and the primacy of educational attaining.

Art. 7 establishes the regulatory body for teachers and principals, the Teacher's Collegiate. Didactic programs, interdisciplinary coordination, organization of initiatives and procedures are among its fundamental prerogatives. Evidently, as the council is open exclusively to members of the teaching personnel, its main function is to ordain the delivery of the Institute's formative offer and to ensure equal provision of services to pupils in different sections. Notably, teachers can actively participate in the council, and autonomously propose ideas, initiatives or other forms of intellectual contributions to subject to colleagues and principal;

The Institute's High Council (IHC), presented by Art. 8, functionally and symbolically embodies the school's highest authority and deals with the most significant organizational aspects of the EI. Mirroring the collective and public conception of democratic institutions, it is presided by the elected representatives of every department: principals, teachers, parents, students, assisting and administrative personnel. The high inclusivity of this institution is due to its primary concern: as stated by art. 10, the establishment of the Institute's finance plan for the year. In a stretch of imagination, this act broadly mirrors the procedures of approval of governmental budget plans featured in most representative democracies; it is noteworthy that all parties are called to approve, contest or reject the financial plan, embedding it with a strong legitimizing mechanism. Additionally, the High-Council addresses the feasibility and implementation of each service provided by the Institute, from teacher employment to curricular activities to surveillance policy, deliberates on the acquirement of infrastructures and capital, establishes internal rules and administrative procedures.

For what concerns formal relationships between students, Article 13 and 14 provide the main framework for Students' Class Councils (hereby SCC), Student's Institute Committee (hereby SIC) and Students' Institute Assemblies, or General Assembly (hereby SIA).

- **SCC**: this council formally embodies the will of the class, exercising two main function: electing Class Representatives, namely delegates who speak for the class in multiple instances, as well as discussing internal didactic or organizational issues. Each class elects two representatives among the students to represent the class during three-party Councils with parents and professors, as well as in the SIC with other classes' representatives and the High-Representatives of Students. The election of the representatives occurs by a simple majority voting with a term lasting the school year.

- **SIC**: two official representatives from each class and the High-Representatives of Students meet twice a month: before the SIA to formulate the agenda and manage organizational matters, and few days after for a debriefing. However, it also addresses common issues at Institute's level, can discuss the formulation of reforms for submission to the IC, propose projects and elaborate on general students' feedback, generally preparing for the broader discussion of such issues contextually to the SIA.

- **SIA**: general monthly assembly of students. It takes place the whole duration of the day's class-time and does not require mandatory participation. The agenda is established by High-Representatives of Students jointly with Class Representatives and requires approval by the IC. Usually it involves lectures or debates from special guests, experts or influential communicators, as well as discussions concerning school policy, decision-making, relations with other students, teachers and principals, Institute's projects and other initiatives. Moreover, at the beginning of the year candidatures for High-Representatives of Students are issued during the general assembly.

"Students are allowed to assemble once a month in the Students' Institute Assembly and in a Students' Class Council. The former will take place for the duration of a school day, whereas the latter will assemble for a maximum of two hours; moreover, SCCs cannot take place during the same weekly periods. (…) the involvement of a maximum of four experts in social, cultural, scientific or artistic fields is allowed, given previous inclusion in the SIA's daily-agenda and authorization from the Institute's Council."

Figure 2 below recaps the main relationships between intersectional institutions, as well as their relative scope and assigned representatives.
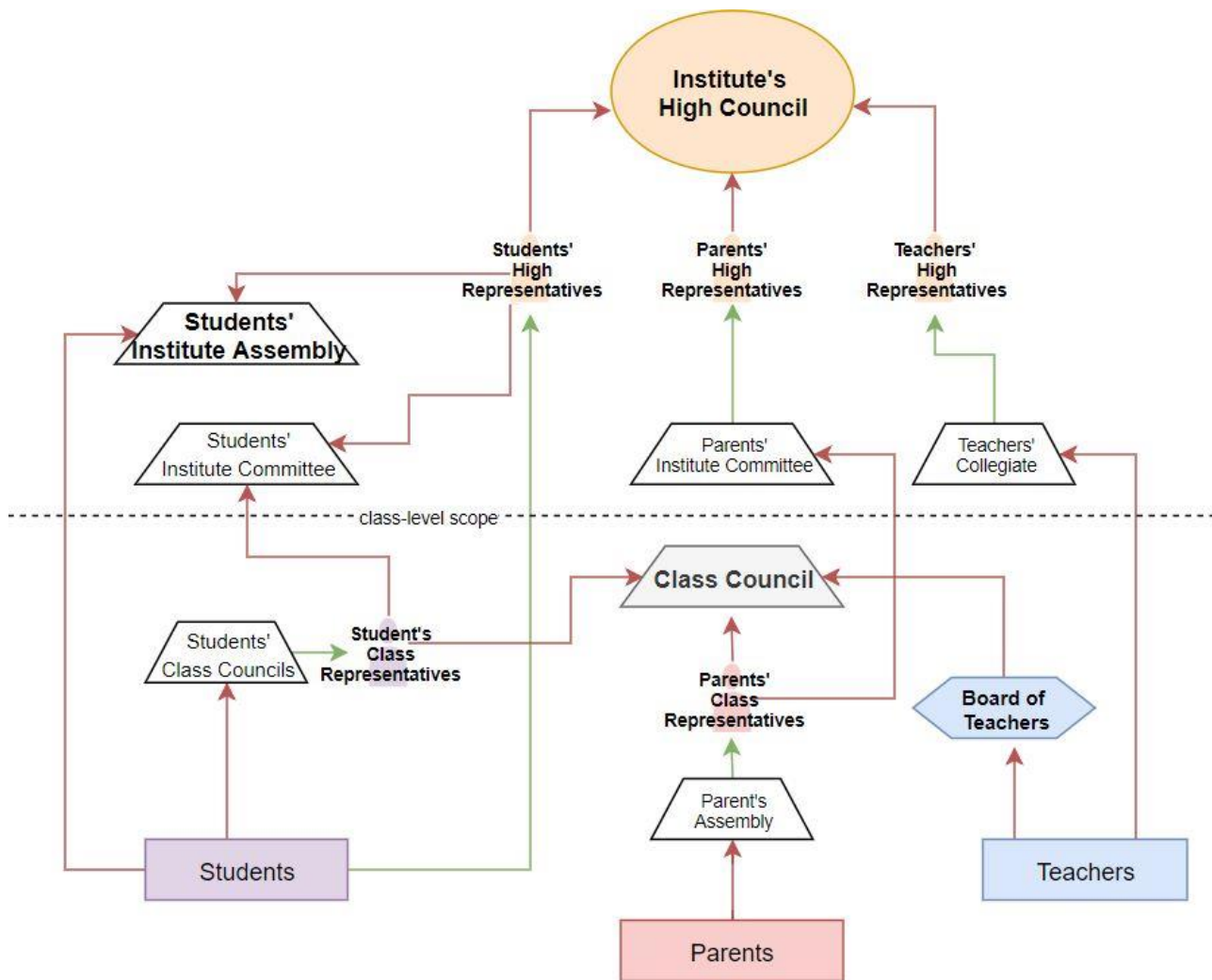
Figure 2 - Author's interpretation of School System's intersectional institutions

Nonetheless, the rigorous enactment of such democratic mechanism requires an effort of solid implementation to deliver. The crucial role played by officials, personnel and principals in abiding to the aforementioned procedures is sometimes ambiguous. In part, this is due to the relative insignificance of directives provided in LD 196. Indeed, the measures presented in its articles instate only a general framework, and that is the only element common to every school; then, each EI formulates independently the procedures through which the Right of Assembly can be exercised within the Institute, occasionally resulting in teachers and principals arranging regulations according to their own circumstantial needs. In addition, the *de-facto* absence of an enforcing mechanism maintains the execution of democratic practices in a vulnerable position. If we consider the assumption that administrative personnel acts in its own interest instead of that of society at large, it appears evident that the protection of student's representation can only be upheld by pupils themselves at the potential cost of their educational attainments or evaluations. Yet, the incidence of gross violations of Right of Assembly to students remains largely infrequent (if not unreported), as

it would be safe to assume that such occurrence would meet the outrage of public opinion and the Ministry of Education.

Even more pertinent to the concerns of this thesis is the issue of direct students' participation. If democratic education is to be considered an approximate for political participation in adulthood, participatory behavior in democratic non-compulsory practices should be a particularly telling aspect for political forecasts. Sadly, 2016's ICCS report on School Contexts for Civic and Citizenship Education revealed important shortcomings in student's engagement for school-related practices. According to the reports of school principals, only 22% of Italian schools have the majority of their students electing CRs, far behind Sweden's 92% and Netherlands' 46%, the second worst on the board. Even more worrying are the statistics on voting turnouts in school councils, with only 1% of principals reporting acceptable turnouts, whereas Sweden and Netherlands report respectively 78% and 34%. With due consideration of possible methodological errors in the process in extracting or elaborating data, the conclusions to which the ICCS points to cannot be neglected and are symptomatic of deep structural shortcomings. On one hand, a partial explanation could be the lack of an effective incentive-structure. Indeed, there is no direct nor tangible reward for participation in any sphere of Schools' Representative Systems, save for inconsequential externalities enjoyed by elected representatives. It could be certainly argued that the reward for such instance are the first-hand experiences and teachings that students can make out of their participation, but the argument of self-selection seems short-sighted here. This in turn creates great disincentives for students' participation, so that institutional opportunities for democratic discussions are met with broad absenteeism and political detachment, culminating in free-riding habits that have jeopardized the reputation of Students' Assembly and questioned their effectiveness. Interestingly, article 14, subsection 2, seems to envision such developments, as it states that *"the Student's Institute Assembly can be requested by the simple majority of the Student's Institute Committee or by at least 10% of the students"*. The figures suggest that the demands advanced by more than half of formally elected representatives (thus by virtue of delegation, more than 50% of the total students) would equal that furthered by only 10% of the total students, which is remarkably peculiar in quantitative terms. Alternatively, it is possible that low participation rates were expected by lawmakers, and such provision was included to permit interested students in pursuing their citizenship's formation, or to easily allow students to outbalance the excessive concentration of powers in the hands of their representatives. However, this latter preposition would maintain credible weight only under the assumption that student's opinions, or that of their representatives, matter substantially during decision making processes;

once again, ICCS's results indicate the contrary, as only in 7% of cases their opinions are adequately accounted for (far worse than Sweden's 35% but better than Netherlands' 6%).

2.3 - Extra-Curricular & Voluntary Activities, Community Projects

Publicly funded schools can propose and encourage a number of extra-curricular activities that students can enroll in out of their own volition; these will usually take place after regular classes and not necessarily in the Institute's locales. The nature of the proposed initiatives can vary a great deal, as each independent High Council of the Institute is tasked with selecting the available options through public competition, usually sponsored by the MIUR. Regardless, schools can support local civic groups as well as non-profit organizations, voluntary associations and so on: financial constraints aside, institutes are extensively free to support any civic organization by promoting it to students, whereas envisioned by the self-financing plan approved by the HIC. Obviously, the non-compulsory nature of similar opportunities does not create significant incentives to participation, even if Principals, in accordance with the High Council, can award *formative credits* to participants. These are accounted for during the final evaluation of students, taking place at the end of the fifth year of high-school; the impact that formative credits exert on the final evaluation is however discretional, meaning that no fixed weight is assigned to supplementary activities, which further undermines their appeal to the young. Nonetheless, the absence of a reliable rewarding mechanism does not preclude students' interest, motivation or simple curiosity, and a wide array of opportunities offers unquestionable benefits to personal growth and education. Given the variety of possible opportunities and their heterogeneity on national territory, providing an adequately specific list of supplementary activities would prove an insurmountable task; therefore, approximation will need to suffice. In general, extracurricular activities are organized through:

- Arts Laboratories;
- Sporting Events;
- Simulations/Models;
- Voluntary Activities for non-profit organizations;
- Voluntary Activities for the Institute;
- Local community projects;

It appears clear that not all of the opportunities above strictly relate to civic or political spheres; voluntary experiences, however, are significant indicators of civic involvement, and a system that remains open and actively appeals to students may have a long-lasting impact on civic identity.

After all, similar opportunities are the main close-to-official platforms that students below voting age can engage with. Despite remaining below average, ICCS respondents in Italy indicated voluntary activities for the community as the most frequent kind of civic activation, with a remarkable increase from 2009 (from 23 to 32%); this strongly signals a preference for civic initiatives at local level if contrasted with affiliation to political youth organizations (6%) or issue campaigning (22%).

A number of projects features a partnership between EIs and external organizations or networks. The fact that other actors are involved in the provision of additional opportunities needs to be underlined, as it permits that certain structural features may extend to schooling-related experiences, to some degree. These kinds of actors fall outside of the scope of formal institutions and their arrangements. Therefore, whereas the RSOs have a direct ability to provide instructions, regulations and requirements to local EIs, external actors are ruled chiefly by rules of the market, constituting the space for possible important distortions and coordination failures.

Moreover, the simple voluntary and extra-curricular connotations given to initiatives seemingly dedicated to democratic education may paradoxically reinforce inequalities and status-quo. Rarely do public schools establish restrictive enrolment features; on the contrary, they usually employ a very inclusive basis, allowing for ease of access and homogeneous delivery of didactic services. Private initiatives, despite falling outside of the scope of compulsory education, can still defy the egalitarian premises of the EIs sponsoring them. Indeed, they can require costly enrolment fees which are not subsidized by income-based tax policies. Similar financial barriers can preclude educational (and democratic education) opportunities to those social strata that may benefit most out of them; consequentially, such a system not only fails to reach part of the population, but is also perpetrates an active ostracization of selected social sectors which crucially defies democratic notions, that of equal opportunities in particular. Social repetition is a possible far-reaching outcome of current arrangements for these activities.

3. Analyzing Endogenous Variables of Educational Environments

In Chapter 3 we have examined some the measures put in place by EIs to favor democratic learning by listing policymaking attempts, such as curricular arrangements or democratizing subjects. In addition, a brief overview of the hidden curriculum and its implications has been presented; yet, the

structural nature of such variable musters overarching consequences with equal strength in every democratic Educational system, being an integral part of both the learning and teaching experience. Therefore, to the general purposes of the research, the hidden curriculum is worthy of an entire section *per se*, where its multiple facets can be interpreted. With this intent in mind, conceptual frameworks rent from additional academic research will be presented as complementary elements; The notion of **School Environment** will be addressed first; foregoing academic literature has in fact stressed that environmental aspects, both physical and theoretical, significantly affect participatory dispositions, and as mentioned before, it is crucial for a democratically set-up institution to establish, coherently, an inclusive atmosphere that is strongly perceived by mentors and pupils alike (Anderson, 1982). Secondly, as an extension to the environmental argument, **Class Climate** will deal more specifically in everyday interactions, such as social confrontation between peers and teachers, freedom of discussion, inclusive opinion-sharing and engaging activities. The sixth chapter of ICCS underlines the deep significance of the microscopic variables that take place during classes, recognizing they constitute the focal point of the educational experience and where hidden curriculum's dynamics loom larger on students. In this attempt, the framework provided by the ICCS report will again constitute the primary data source and reference point for comparison with other systems.

3.1 - School Environment

With school Environment we refer to the look, feel and sensations students can perceive in the EIs they are enrolled in; foregoing empirical research confidently highlighted educational environment's strong association with positive learning performance, and would be safe to assume that this relation extends to the sector of democratic education (Higgins et al., 2005). Notably, scholarly efforts have interpreted educational environments through different lenses, discovering that, indeed, the concept suggests numerous areas of intervention for policymakers, principals and teachers alike. Schools are environments in physical terms: students attend classes in distinguishable buildings, have lessons in their own class and will likely spend their break time in a number of different locations within the confines of the Institute. It is evident that each of these places expresses its functional destination through symbols, and is pivotal that these places offer adequate standard of livelihood in terms of basic physical well-being (Young et al, 2003; Buckley et al, 2004); interestingly, a number of scholars have attempted to find solid evidence of a relation between architectural environment and cognitive attainment, encouraging the analysis of a plethora of aspects: from ceiling height, air quality and lighting, to color, furnishing and noise; oftentimes,

however, this pursuit of evidence has led to contrasting conclusions among scholars. On one hand, it has been difficult to measure the relative impact of each element, and even more difficult it is to evaluate their outcome; reviewers seem to accept that interactions of different elements are as important as the consideration of single elements (Higgins et al., 2005). On the other, the very existence of such a link has been questioned due to insufficient and conflicting literature. Nonetheless, consistent results have demonstrated the empirical relation of attainment to air quality (Earthman, 2004), temperature (Khattar et al, 2003) and noise (Schneider, 2002). Moreover, aesthetic pleasantness can also instill proactive dispositions: research sustained that a renovated room, designed to be more friendly and attractive, seemed to increase student participation as far as three times more than during classes held in traditional rooms (Sommer & Olsen, 1980). To most analysists, these notions may seem trivial, but by the same logic that has been applied to core of the present studies, a degree of dissonance between normative provisions and actual realization is ever present. However, Rutter suggested that the environmental effects on performance marginally decrease once the minimum standard is surpassed (1979). Despite being based on developed countries, Rutter's discovery may hint to the fact that in the case of Italy the frequency of below-standard school environments is too low to exert appreciable effects in educational attainment. Finally, while it can be criticized that these studies have concerned themselves mainly with performance of hard skills, such as calculus, literary analysis and other activities requiring fixed operational inputs, they have not explicitly detached passive learning from environmental variables. On the contrary, it is likely that schools' locales affect indifferently both kinds of activities; nonetheless, a strong mechanism relating environmental factors still needs to be identified by architectural inquiries (Higgins & al., 2005).

3.2 - Class Climate

Research has relentlessly challenged the significance of school climate as an approximate for empirical evaluation, deeming its large scope unsatisfactory for making inference on educational experiences. Students spend most of their time in a classroom, which in itself changes the pupils' perception of learning and their sense of belonging, thus should be considered the basic unit of the educational system (Talton & Simpson, 1987). Such preposition could be very well-founded in a discourse concerning Italian schools, which classes have quite rigidly fixed structures for what concerns location and companions; this marks a striking difference with regards to Anglo-Saxon EIs' flexible arrangements. As a matter of fact, excluding the possibility of class reassignment, school transfer or dropout, pupils will maintain the same peers for the duration of the entirety of that educational level; as an example, a student from lower secondary schools will be learning

invariably with the same companions for three years, whereas for five in high-school. Classrooms are similarly fixed: teachers move out of the class when their lesson is over, not students, and they can expect to inhabit that space for the duration of the school year. Surely, there are degrees of flexibility for both variables: for the former, some students may leave or be introduced in a class at the beginning of each of the 3 or 5 school years, and for the latter, rooms can be reassigned quite easily due to organizational constraints. However, whereas a relocation of classroom can have minimal effect on students' learning experience, changing their peers, and by extent their social affections, can have a massive impact. It could be argued that the maintenance of inelastic class-members arrangements can, on one side, facilitate or contribute to the social development of students, allowing them to establish long-lasting relationship with ease; on the other, it may create barriers for the integration of new-entrants, limit endogenous diversity and solidify internal power-relationships. This may develop an underlying perception of structural inertia that consolidates ascribed social arrangements (Rivlin & Wolfe, 1985), very much in contrast with flexible features of pluralist societies. Through a stretch of imagination, one could subject the implications of desk-companionship to the same rationale; unfortunately, solid literature or research on the subject has yet to be delivered. On the contrary, the experience of change could foster student's openness to highly mutable social environments, stimulate cognitive versatility and significantly weaken uncritical perceptions of change as a disruptive event (Gump, 1987). Be it as it may, empirical results need to confirm and measure the intensity of these existing internal arrangements, but the greater responsivity of students to class vis-à-vis school experience has emerged in previous literature (Ainley & Schulz, 2011; Quintelier, 2010).

In an attempt to schematize the processes and effects that the aforementioned elements exert on classroom climate, Moos has drawn a rather simple, yet clear model as shown in figure 3 (1979).
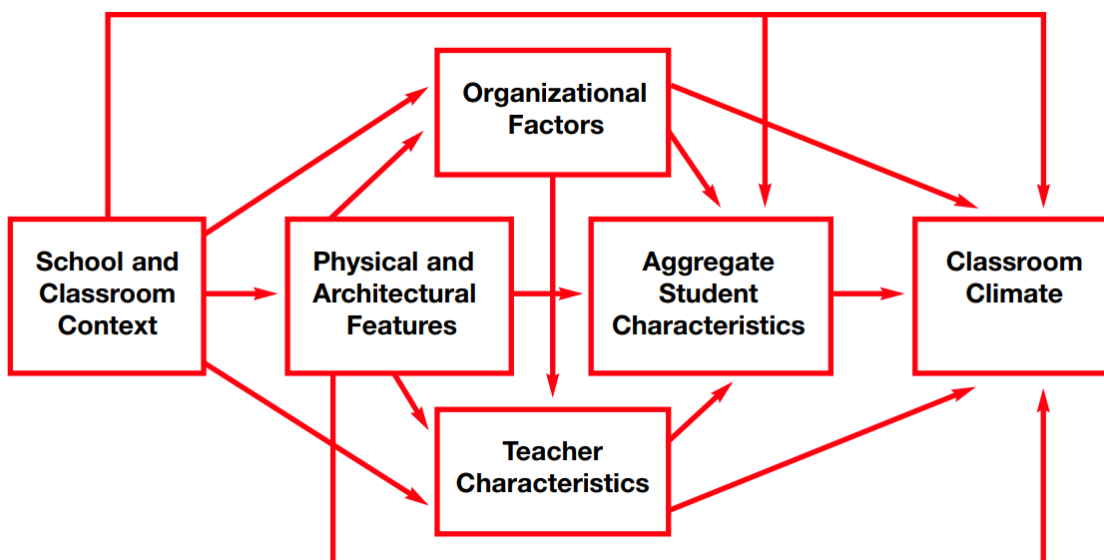

Figure 3 - Moos' model of the determinants of Classroom climate (1979)

A modicum of criticism has challenged the representativeness of this model, with arguable reason. First of all, the author himself noted the unidirectional flow of the model, stating that for the sake of simplicity relationship between elements are to an extent incomplete. Indeed, not only is it reasonable to assume that classroom climate does affect its correlates in return, but also that virtually all variables influence another to some extent, which inevitably redirects to the conclusion that environmental dynamics exist but are still largely unexplained. Secondly, the model rules out external variables entirely, both in terms of socio-political events that may be occurring outside of the confines of the Institute (but still loom importantly in day-to-day school behaviors and sensations) and decisional pressures deriving by higher institutional levels, mostly regional but also, central ministerial directives, to which principals need to comply with.

Nonetheless, the social-relational aspect addressed by foregoing research is what echoes primarily in referring to the concept Class Climate. While the arrangements of class formation and location can be questioned according to contextual differences, empirical contradictions and scholarly disagreement, academic literature agrees invariably on the importance of a positive social climate, comprised of peer-to-peer, student to teacher and teacher to class relationships. Repeated studies conducted by the IEA have solidly established the correspondence between receptive classroom climates and positive civic outcomes (IEA, 1971; Schulz et al., 2010), which later secondary analyses have confirmed. In fact, researchers have reported general association between teacher-to-student relationship and a vast array of engagement indicators (Quin, 2017), whereas a more detail-oriented analysis showed how students' perception of classroom climate may contribute to their understanding of practical and moral advantages offered by democratic attitudes (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). Therefore, the results of surveys administered to principals, students and teachers through the ICCS will constitute the main empirical evidence.

The international study focused in particular on three main aspects: openness of discussion in class, student-to-teacher relations and instances of bullying. For the former two, Italy scores average results, meaning that sampled students gave largely positive responses to items considering teachers' encouraging students to make up their own mind, to freely express their opinion and discuss them even if not largely shared by peers, discussing current events and social issues, presenting multiple sides of addressed problems. Ultimately, a rather healthy relationship with teaching personnel emerges from the survey, which positively associates with students' interest in political and civic issues (Schultz & al, 2018). For what concerns students' reports of physical or verbal abuse from peers, occurrences of bullying are scarcer than in other European countries and slightly below ICCS average. However, when the same questionnaire was administered to teachers,

almost no situations of bullying were identified; also, looking at contextual data gathered from headmasters, there were similarly very few instances of official reporting of abusive behaviors to school authorities; this establishes a quite strong discrepancy between school authorities' and students' reports, possibly hinting at widespread "culture of silence", in which victims refuse to bring abusive episodes to the authorities' attention, due to fear of marginalization, sense of inconsequentiality, distrust of institutions among other reasons (Smith & Shu, 2000). This prospect is one that social research systematically needs to face when addressing experiences of mistreatment, thus cannot be casually dismissed. In practice, nothing precludes the possibility that EIs and parental background managed to avert these occurrences; however, an educate guess would consider both scenarios as part of this phenomenon.

Chapter 3 underlined the fundamental role played by teachers in enacting democratic values. It was stated that Italian teachers have deliberately embraced such function due to the perception of responsibility deriving by their role as educators. Pertinently, the INVALSI is tasked with the verification of teachers' preparedness in C&C topics; the ICCS shows that Italian teachers are extremely confident in their preparation for teaching civic and citizenship, as they self-reported scores significantly above average for topics such as emigration and immigration (94%, 18 points above ICCS average), constitution and political system (98%, 17 points above ICCS average) and global community and international organizations (81%, 14 points above ICCS average). However, when compared to self-reports of participation in training courses, Italian teacher's attendance scores at least 10% points below ICCS averages in nearly all civic-related topics. The occurrence is quite puzzling, leaving actual clarifications to imagination. A possibility could be the teachers' overestimation of their own preparation in subjects such as European Union, voting and elections or citizens' rights and responsibilities. However, civic knowledge of Italian 8th graders feebly contrasts this preposition, as long as the impact of parental background is not accounted for. Indeed, scores were slightly above the upper median (Netherlands), with 71% of students evenly distributed among the two upper levels of ICCS civic knowledge. While sorely outperformed by Danish, Swedish, and Finnish students (50 points above), Italian students fall quite close to Estonians (+22), Flemish Belgians (+17), Slovenians (+8) and Croatians pupils (+7).

4. Conclusions: Designing the future of Democratic Education

In the above analysis of the system of transmission of democratic and civic values offered by Italian EIs, we can draw a number of conclusions that will allow to project future developments of youth's

participation in political life. In the first place, while traditional forms of participation are undergoing a moderate decline, quantitative data suggests that Italian schools' institutional arrangements have little influence on individual behavior. Analyzing students, teachers and principals' responses from 2009 and 2016, results have been subject to minimal changes, as indicators such as likelihood to vote presented no changes. In the same period, general decline in electoral turnout continued. By this token, EIs can be expected to influence political detachment negligibly at best. Nonetheless, ministerial directives have failed in the delivery of an adequate framework for the enactment of practices favoring the transmission of democratic values, despite listing it as one of its core objectives. Again, the introduction of substantial reforms of citizenship's teachings can enhance the role of formal institutions in shaping future generations' political identity. Current educational paradigms in Italy leaves broad spaces of intervention; acting on each of the involved actors can contribute to both the improvement of pupils' educational attainment and development of political identity. Drawing from Moos' Model, the author has assigned a potential objective to every major stakeholder involved, as to underline the collective effort needed to address the situation and to guide policymakers in designing innovative measures.

As stated above, the issue of imperfect decentralization and repartition of competences between regions and ministry is a profoundly influent variable; its implications transcend the problems presented in this paper, and extends them to larger questions of scarce social mobility, educational inertia and deep regional inequalities; policymakers should prioritize the establishment of truly autonomous regions, in which local school governance finally manages to surpass a logic of strict abidance to central directives which averts the development of spontaneous initiatives. As long as EIs do not escape this rationale, the entire Educational system will fail its central purpose of providing equitable education. In order to bring forth such and advancement, principals must be enticed to enrich their Institute's formative offers. In this regard, bottom-up networks and initiatives can be the key to fuel participation curricular and extra-curricular practices commonly enacted by EIs on same territory. Were they successful in this intent, it could be reasonable to predict a greater inter-institute uniformity in educational attainment and civic knowledge. Not only would inequalities between and within regions be reduced, but also active participation generally increased. Another fundamental advancement may be that of the introduction of Student Assemblies at lower-secondary level. First of all, it would put Italy on par with all other ICCS countries in terms of democratic opportunities offered. By extent, students would have access to forms of elective representation rather early, achieving greater familiarization with unofficial political entities and experiences; this could in turn facilitate access to current upper-secondary Student Assemblies. Coherently, students should receive tangible incentives to pursue civic or

political activation. Whereas the currently debated reform of Civics constitutes a substantial step in this direction, the active involvement of students in school's decision-making processes needs to be reinforced in a way that inputs are manifestly transformed in measurable outcomes; not only would it instill a sense of social purpose and personal impact, but also raise pupils' consideration of institutions, portraying them as truly inclusive, accessible and transparent. The role of existing platforms like Student Assemblies could become prominent in this regard: strengthening the representative function would captivate the interest of students and consolidate Institutes' autonomy in relation to the demands of school services' major recipients.

Despite apparently adequate civic preparation, teachers need to improve their productivity and effectiveness. In light of longer school hours and inferior students' attainments, the improvement of didactics, methodologies and passive practices would entail a betterment of democratic transmission, as well as an all-around educational improvement. In this area, institutions need to offer incentives to individual workers' productivity by means of standardized evaluation of teachers and encouragement in pursuing professional updating courses. Alternatively, providing meritocratic compensations in terms of additional wages to overperforming teachers has been proposed, even if a corresponding system of central institutional control would be needed to avoid moral hazards.

The final appeal is directed to scholars and researchers; relatively scarce literature on the topic highlights a serious shortcoming of Italian academy (Grasso, 2013). If the underlying reason is exiguity of interest or saliency of the topic, the author begs to differ from such misguided prepositions. Primarily, because the national government has repeatedly attempted with no avail to tackle the issue of regional discrepancies in economic, social and political endowments. While it is obvious that such a change cannot occur overnight, there is little reason not to identify in future generations the seed of change. Addressing the issue at the source would constitute a promising break from the past, albeit results would become clear in a longer-term perspective. Obviously, educational reform cannot be expected to solve these issues independently: many unrelated variables need to be addressed in different policy fields. Secondly, further research needs to be devolved to the reality of Italian civic education, and the task befalls upon either scholars or central government; ground-breaking discoveries can captivate the interest of policymakers, as well as open decisive opportunities for future development. Regardless, effort and investments are needed to trigger such a process: as central institutions have scorned this approach, the first move befalls on academics. Ultimately, the ongoing parliamentary discussion for the reform of Education to Citizenship clearly points out to politics' growing interest towards the matter. As repeatedly stated above, the outcomes of this policy will become clear only once it is approved and its modes of

implementation clarified. Once again, the Ministry crucially needs to provide a rigid framework of enforcement, otherwise the differences between *intended* and *enacted* Curriculum will persist.

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Abstract

Decenni di tradizione accademica sociologica hanno evidenziato l'influenza che il livello di Istruzione esercita su numerose variabili sociali, come reddito, schieramento politico, livello di salute e altri (Parsons, 1970; Weber, 1958). Particolare attenzione è stata rivolta alla relazione tra istruzione formale e partecipazione politica, quest' ultima intesa generalmente come l'aggregato di attività svolte dai cittadini al fine di interagire con la classe politica e di manipolare le sue attività (van Deth, 2014). Pur in secondo piano nei confronti di correlati più significativi, come il background parentale (Castillo & al., 2015), i sistemi d'istruzione agiscono direttamente sulla formazione politica dell'individuo: da un punto di vista educativo infatti, le scuole rappresentano la principale arena sociale in cui i giovani possono interagire in una comunità con ruoli non necessariamente ascritti come invece è il caso all' interno dei nuclei famigliari. Pertanto, l'esperienza scolastica costituisce per i cittadini del domani il primo vero accesso alla democrazia e rispettive dinamiche, meccanismi e ruoli. Da lungo tempo, amministrazione ed organizzazione dei principali sistemi educativi giace tra le prerogative dei governi nazionali nella gran parte degli stati moderni, pertanto il ruolo dei governi è di primaria importanza per la formazione culturale, politica e personale degli studenti. Tuttavia, la diffusa percezione di un calo nella partecipazione politica tradizionale, così come nel coinvolgimento di attività di cittadinanza destinate alla collettività, ha aperto ampio dibattito tra studiosi e ricercatori. Questa marcata diminuzione intergenerazionale è una visione che sembra aver ampiamente preso piede tra gli obiettivi dell'accademia politica. Basandosi su questa supposizione, è dunque lecito chiedersi come e quanto le istituzioni saranno in grado di far fronte ad un crescente distacco dal panorama politico.

In primo luogo, la presente tesi ripercorre i principali sviluppi che hanno condotto allo stabilimento del sistema scolastico, con rispettivi obiettivi e procedure. Inoltre, la corrente struttura dell'ordinamento scolastico consente l'insorgere di importanti inefficienze nella offerta di servizi educativi democratizzanti; queste implicazioni verranno introdotte nel contesto del primo capitolo. Dopodiché, lo studio sarà circoscritto alla realtà italiana; saranno quindi analizzati i pattern di attivazione politica dei giovani dagli 11 ai 24 anni, con particolare concentrazione sul ciclo di educazione secondaria di primo e secondo grado (Scuole medie e Licei). Attraverso dati di natura qualitativa e quantitativa, è possibile identificare delle nuove tendenze politiche, abitudini e forme di partecipazione poco diffuse tra le generazioni precedenti, caratterizzate soprattutto dall' introduzione di nuove tecnologie che riducono il costo di accesso al mercato politico.

Il secondo capitolo ambisce a determinare il ruolo dell'educazione alla cittadinanza all' interno delle priorità ministeriali. Le principali politiche disposte dal Ministero dell'Istruzione (MIUR)

saranno elencate, analizzate e discusse nei loro termini di attuazione. Il rilevamento più significativo è costituito dalla notevole distanza che intercorre tra il *curriculum inteso* dalle direttive centrali, e quello che viene *messo in atto* dai singoli Istituti. Per molteplici ragioni, pochissime risorse vengono dedicate alla educazione alla cittadinanza: in primo luogo, l'approccio eccessivamente tradizionale che ha per lungo tempo caratterizzato questo insegnamento demarcava una certa distanza tra il contenuto della materia, i rispettivi obiettivi e la messa in atto. Solo a seguito di tendenze internazionali comuni la didattica dell'educazione civica ha subito un processo di ammodernamento, abbracciando un approccio multidisciplinare al posto della rigidità dell'insegnamento contenutistico e nozionistico tradizionale. Ciononostante, questa riforma non è stata sufficiente a garantire la transizione ad una didattica pienamente soddisfacente. Ad oggi, la relativa irrilevanza dell'educazione alla cittadinanza nei confronti delle materie tradizionali è determinata dal suo status di materia trasversale; ciò implica che le istanze di insegnamento della materia sono state integrate nella didattica delle discipline curricolari, in particolar modo quelle relative a lingua, letteratura e storia. La influenza del curricolo nascosto in questo contesto è cruciale, poiché gli insegnanti sono chiamati non solo ad informarsi sugli argomenti che esporranno agli studenti, ma anche che a curare che il proprio metodo di insegnamento sia in linea con questi principi; come menzionato sopra, questo intento risulta difficilmente realizzabile in luce di direttive estremamente flessibili nella pratica. In secondo luogo, il corpo studentesco prende parte marginalmente alle piattaforme democratiche predisposte dal sistema nazionale, giacché non vi è alcun beneficio tangibile che possa motivare l'attivazione personale; la messa in atto che ne consegue è seriamente lesa da inefficienze organizzative e da incentivi inadeguati agli studenti. È possibile dibattere la preposizione che questo tipo di occorrenza possa favorire lo sviluppo di una narrativa politica ben precisa, vale a dire quella della percezione di inutilità e irrilevanza della partecipazione politica di fronte ad un sistema di rappresentazione incapace di rispondere alle richieste degli elettori; può difatti apparire plausibile che l'insorgere di un distacco istituzionale durante l'esperienza scolastica possa nel futuro tradursi in pattern di indifferenza politica. Tuttavia, la esiguità della ricerca accademica in materia non è stata in grado di evidenziare questa relazione all'interno del contesto italiano; anche i dati estratti dall' ICCS non costituiscono una base attendibile, poiché lo studio è stato condotto nelle fasce d'età della scuola secondaria di primo grado, che in Italia non dispone di un sistema di rappresentanza studentesca se non nell'ultimo ciclo d'istruzione; è necessario sottolineare ulteriormente che questo costituisce un primato tra i paesi coinvolti nello studio, i quali, fatta eccezione solo per l'Italia, hanno provveduto alla creazione di una piattaforma partecipativa per gli studenti anche nei cicli d'istruzione inferiore. In terzo luogo, il notevole livello di autonomia di cui godono i singoli istituti permette la creazione di importanti

divari nella offerta formativa, e di conseguenza nella performance scolastica; nello specifico, il problema della disuguaglianza tra regioni e singole scuole emerge nel rapporto INVALSI del 2018, in cui si evidenzia che questo distacco cresce nelle regioni meridionali soprattutto a livello inter-scolastico. Ciononostante, nei casi in cui l'esecutivo scolastico decidesse di proporre iniziative dall'evidente valore formativo, siano esse incentrate sull'insegnamento democratico o su altri ambiti curricolari, il sistema permetterebbe a ciascuna scuola di introdurre progetti autonomamente e con relativa facilità; pertanto, la formazione di una dirigenza scolastica propositiva potrebbe costituire un fondamentale miglioramento delle offerte formative. Similmente, la adesione a progetti e network extrascolastici avrebbe il potenziale di motivare la partecipazione reciproca di altre scuole.

Infine, il terzo capitolo concerne l'influenza di una serie di variabili ambientali delle istituzioni scolastiche. Nello specifico, si analizzano le caratteristiche fisiche e architettoniche degli ambienti scolastici, così come le variabili relative al clima delle relazioni interpersonali tra studenti, corpo docenti e dirigenza. Sebbene l'impatto dovuto ad infrastrutture scolastiche adeguate e di gradimento alle parti coinvolte sia difficile da operazionalizzare, come riportato dalla ricerca accademica nell'ambito (Higgins & al., 2005), quello esercitato dal clima di classe è stato fortemente associato a performance didattiche positive e pattern di partecipazione più estesi (Schulz et al., 2010). I punteggi ottenuti in questo ambito sono incoraggianti: gli studenti hanno segnalato livelli di apertura alla discussione in classe in linea con la media ICCS, e lo stesso vale per il rapporto con il corpo docente. Inoltre, nel questionario sulle istanze di bullismo subite o testimoniate, la frequenza di tali casi tra gli studenti italiani rimane sotto la media. Professori e dirigenti tuttavia hanno segnalato pochissime istanze simili, lasciando aperta la possibilità che ci sia un'importante asimmetria di informazione tra alunni e autorità scolastiche; se così fosse, è possibile che ci sia un moderato livello di riluttanza a riferirsi alle istituzioni, che potrebbe in seguito alimentare la percezione di autorità ufficiali come inappellabili o incapaci di gestire queste situazioni.

Per concludere, l'autore indica cinque possibili aree di intervento al fine di migliorare l'educazione alla cittadinanza offerta dagli istituti scolastici. A livello governativo/ministeriale, è necessario un meccanismo di distribuzione di competenze più rigido, poiché livelli eccessivi di autonomia regionale e locale favoriscono lo sviluppo incontrollato di rilevanti differenziali educativi. Il consolidamento delle direttive ministeriali, d'altra parte, permetterebbe di monitorare, gestire e parificare la qualità della offerta educativa; in un simile prospetto, sarebbe ragionevole aspettarsi maggiori livelli di mobilità sociale e d'istruzione, già molto bassi in Italia, con effetti indubbiamente positivi sul capitale umano e lo status economico e sociale del paese. Seppur

strettamente collegato, il discorso che si applica alla dirigenza dei singoli istituti è diverso: poiché il sistema corrente assegna prerogative manageriali e di osservanza delle direttive regionali (e per estensione, centrali) ai presidi, vi sono pochi incentivi ad incoraggiare un ampliamento indipendente dell'offerta formativa tramite l'introduzione di progetti extracurricolari, lo stabilimento di network interscolastici o ulteriori iniziative didattiche. Laddove sono presenti, è molto spesso merito della intraprendenza del singolo dirigente. Nonostante livelli già accettabili di preparazione all'insegnamento democratico, le Istituzioni Educative dovrebbero capitalizzare sull'aspetto vocazionale del corpo docente. La grande motivazione professionale riportata dagli insegnanti è dovuta ad un riconoscimento della propria responsabilità sulla formazione degli alunni; intuitivamente, conferire ulteriori strumenti alla docenza, così come migliori opportunità di formazione professionale e corsi di aggiornamento aumenterebbe la produttività (e la gratificazione professionale) dei professori italiani, molto inferiore alla media Europea. Anche gli studenti necessitano sia di ulteriori piattaforme partecipative che di incentivi a prendere parte a queste attività. Da una parte, l'introduzione di un sistema di rappresentanza studentesca obbligatorio anche nelle Scuole Medie avvicinerebbe gli studenti alla realtà democratica già in tenera età, facilitandone il graduale accesso alla sfera politica. Dall'altra, per rendere il prospetto partecipativo più accattivante, conferire un *modicum* di potere decisionale alla rappresentanza studentesca nel contesto dei Consigli d'Istituto avrebbe non solo l'effetto di mobilitare un maggior numero di alunni, ma anche quello di chiudere le distanze tra elettori e istituzioni; incoraggerebbe la percezione delle istituzioni democratiche come trasparenti, eque e sensibili alle richieste dei soggetti coinvolti. L'ultimo appello è infine rivolto alla comunità accademica, in particolare quella Italiana, data l'esiguità di fonti letterarie, dati empirici e ricerca in questo contesto. La natura a lungo termine degli investimenti nell' Educazione fa sì che i governi centrali siano spesso riluttanti ad allocare risorse sostanziali in questo settore, perseguendo piuttosto politiche atte a rispondere alle esigenze nel medio-breve termine; in un contesto simile, mobilitare risorse con scarse garanzie di esiti immediati risulta poco appetibile. L'innovazione del sistema d'istruzione può scongiurare queste incertezze, ma la scoperta di riforme all'avanguardia è determinata dagli sforzi della ricerca in questa materia; fintantoché l'argomento resterà marginale alla comunità accademica, vi saranno scarsi prospetti di catturare l'attenzione dei responsabili politici.

Come nota conclusiva, bisogna ricordare che gli sviluppi contemporanei della riforma sull' Educazione Civica come materia indipendente possono riqualificare l'effetto dell'istruzione formale sulla partecipazione politica in Italia. Per quanto la riforma sia ancora in discussione e ancora lontana dall'attuazione, il fatto che la politica si sia mossa in questa direzione è un segno chiaro ed incoraggiante per i futuri sviluppi del settore.