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Technocracy: the Impact on Society through Media and Communication and its role in the Crisis of Representative Democracy

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Introduction

This work originates from the will to deepen the knowledge of the concept of technocracy in a political and sociological perspective. Inspired by the book “Tecnocrazia e democrazia: l’egemonia al tempo della società digitale,” written by Antonelli, I decide to continue the research on technocracy in the sociological field.

Widely known and consistently implied during the last and current centuries, the technocratic tool has been the centre of many books, articles, supranational and national discussions. Technocracy is the government of technocrats, figures at the line between technicians and politicians, which are often called to govern or take part to executives in times of crisis and emergency. They represent the triumph of science where ideology and party politics fail. Technocracy is then the main subject of this thesis; the aim of my work is to study this phenomenon across two major areas of sociological interest: the media and communication sphere and the sphere of representative democracy and its ongoing crisis. The research is conducted to answer the following questions:

What impact has technocracy on society through its communicative style?

And which role does it play in the crisis of democracy?

For what concerns the methods of research, this work does not aim at adding new literature to the already existing one on the topic. Nevertheless, the reasoned collage of already existing literature confronts books, articles, statistical research, and philosophical dissertations to enhance strengths and weaknesses of studies and theories, and to answer the previous questions in the most complete and multifaceted manner. Namely, key features of this thesis are the variety of resources and points of view considered, the originality of contexts in which a topic that is usually analysed in administrative and institutional frameworks is explored, the open ending that involves a third alternative to the contemporary dichotomy technocracy-democracy. Hence, this work is articulated in an introduction, three main body chapters composed by paragraphs and subparagraphs, and a conclusion.

In Chapter 1, an historical and sociological background of technocracy and the technocratic reason is provided. A lexical explanation follows the historical part, clarifying the differences among the terms technocrat, politician, and technician, which are recurrent throughout the work. The chapter ends with the important mention of Weber’s contributions on the topic, and Putnam’s renowned empirical research on technocratic mentality.

Thereafter, Chapter 2 addresses the place of technology in technocracy, enhancing the role that media and digitalized processes play in its existence. AI, algorithms, and digitalization are the utensils of the technocratic power, which however is still in transformation and will itself have to adapt to the changes that society is likely to go through. Moreover, social media are part of the technological domain, and they constitute primary means of communication for the technocratic discourse. The elements of the technocratic communicative style are investigated, as well as the differences it shares with the democratic discourse. Particular attention is devoted to the impact that the technocratic discourse has on citizens. Technocratic

communication creates a division at social level between technocratic citizens that absorb and accept it in a positive fashion, and technopopulist movements, which see technocrats as unreliable usurpers of power. Last chapter of this research examines the relationship between technocracy and democracy, considering concepts such as output-oriented legitimation and depoliticization. The role that such a controversial friendship-enmity between technocracy and democracy plays in the crisis of representative democracy is evaluated through a variety of studies and research, which include voices like that of Habermas, Caramani and Bertso.

In a final open ending developments of alternatives to technocracy are discussed, in the light of preserving the democratic processes and alleviate the democratic crisis, while adding the efficient “technocratic” element to a new political model.

Chapter 1

Historical and sociological background of technocracy and the technocratic reason

1.1 Historical background

The relationship between the concepts of knowledge and power has deep roots. Plato's work, dating back to 400 BCE, already contemplated a technocratic mentality in which philosophers (namely people who possessed knowledge and sophisticated cognitive skills) ought to rule. According to the ancient Greek philosopher, only their expertise could provide the rest of society the kind of public services it needed. Notwithstanding the existence of requests from the people, philosophers were considered to possess a deeper knowledge of the human nature and the world such that they knew what could have been good for society better than the people themselves.

Today as in the past, the conception of knowledge is connected to the idea of reason; the era during which this link became tighter and indissoluble was the Enlightenment. Enlightened despots of the XVIII century represented the tyrannic model of technocratic mentality (Antonelli, 2019, p. 9-12). The sovereign represented the apex of the elite of a state, a privileged group of people who not only shared higher income resources or richness, but who had been able to receive the finest education and a solid cultural background. During that time, the importance of the linkage among reason, knowledge and power led to the creation of academies and national scientific institutions. The encounter between empirical knowledge and governance during the Age of Enlightenment is at the root of progressivism, a social and political movement which envisages the improvement of the lives of ordinary people through social justice and concrete political actions (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). At the heart of this movement there was the idea of progress, which disvalued the power that traditional elites and nobles had held until then. Science was starting to be recognized as the fair base for a right and just society, and thus politics was going towards the ideal of empirical reason. The progressive movement born during the Enlightenment saw technocracy as a valid tool to improve power organization (Antonelli, 2019). The cultivated elites, due to their knowledge and mastering of the use of reason, would have made the interests of the people better than anyone else. If on one side some paternalistic traits could be observed, on the other side there is an authoritarian aspect which involves the underestimation of the people's capacities in making their own interests, which prevents them from taking a real chance in the political processes. In addition, there was the risk of egoistic or self-interested decisions coming from the top managers of such an organized society. The first philosopher who considered these aspects of the industrial society was Henri de Saint-Simon.

Saint-Simon may be considered the first real theorist of (progressive) technocracy. In the XIX century he theorized the impossibility for an industrial society (the one in which he lived) to survive without the existence of scientists, engineers, managers, and technicians (Putnam, 1977). Indeed, he argued that those figures were destined to remain in the future, while nobles, ministers and clergy's roles were already on a second plan. The industrial society was substituting the old bourgeoisie with managerial figures, prepared to

handle the complexities of the industrial transition. As mentioned before, the philosopher was conscious of the risks that this type of organization could have brought. Hence, he advocated for the participation, alongside managers and engineers, of intellectuals that could have guided the former ones according to the “values of humanity” (Castellani, 2020, p. 98).

Although the concept of an elite of technicians ruling can be traced back at least to the XVIII century, the term “*technocracy*” made its first appearance in 1919 in the USA. William Henry Smyth, an engineer, published an article titled “Technocracy. Ways and Means to Gain Industrial Democracy” (CFI Team, 2022). From an historical point of view, the second industrial revolution had just made its course, showing the necessity of creating a more efficient administration to coordinate people and activities, since new technological advancements had been reached. According to Smyth, engineers and scientists were essential in the decision-making processes, since the industrial and technological advancements of society required the coordination of experts.

Technocracy finally captured the public attention in the 1930s, when a non-political movement from New York, precisely called *Technocracy*, started advocating for a government made of scientists, economists, and experts to recover from the Great Depression (CFI Team, 2022). The events taking place in Nazi Germany, Urss and the USA in those years provided evidence of an economic and political transformation that was leading to a managerial society, where capitalist and manager were two strictly distinct roles. In the post war period, state and capitalism merged. The key words were intervention and planification, inter alia in the economy. The focus was the economic recovery, the investment on technological development, the spreading of education to pave the way to a substantial democracy. Technocratic institutions such as the UN, the World Bank, the IMF, were created to organize the economic and social life of society. Progressive technocracy had become a necessity in the Western world due to postcolonialism and the threat constituted by the Soviet communism (Antonelli, 2019). At that point, the technocratic tool was implied to create cooperation among the social forces, through an interventionist state that supervised the improvements of society in terms of economy (control over prices of raw materials), education (spreading), critical thinking and therefore freedom (intended as democracy). Democracy could be preserved through mass education and the creation of intellectuals, who could then, thanks to the skills developed, recognize any oppression to democracy stemming from the technostructure (composed of leaders such as engineers, technicians and managers holding political power) and claim for their rights, setting up limits to the technostructure itself (Antonelli, 2019).

1.1.2 Sociological background

The emergence in society of a class of technicians, experts and intellectuals can be linked to the Second Industrial revolution, and more precisely to the separation of firms’ property and administration, which determined a considerable necessity of intellectuals and experts in the always more complex and interconnected productive processes. It is worth mentioning that the investment in technocracy was, and is,

often the answer to a crisis that a given society is experimenting. Its authoritarian side is here evident, as it may substitute the opinions or will of the people by rational-scientific reasoning and technology, usually considered as more efficient tools when facing delicate times (such as the Second Industrial Revolution could have been). At the basis of the technocratic choice there is the conceiving of science as a ground for a right and rational society, and thus as a solution to crises. Through its meritocratic and rational approach, technocracy does not primary aim at surpassing the democratically elected political power; conversely it constitutes an additional tool to modernize politics and keep it up to technological progress and feasible objectives. Nevertheless, its elitist social base is undeniable, as will be treated later in this chapter.

1.2 Neoliberal technocracy

After the World Wars, the very idea of progress was questioned, together with the participation of elites to the power. Technology and science had been largely implied in the conflicts; thus, a new sense of distrust surrounded them. Already in the 1930s the journalist Walter Lippmann, who had previously been on progressive positions, had reevaluated liberalism (Antonelli, 2019, p. 27-30). In his book *The Good Society* (1937), Lippmann had criticized any form of collectivism, from communism to progressivism. The theoretical base of his conception of freedom, seen as one of society's fundamental values, was the *laissez faire* doctrine. Indeed, any type of planification that a government could enact was to be eradicated. Although Lippmann argued that an open market would have autonomously led to improvement, social action was to be controlled through the existence of a common law, though only to supervise liberal freedom (Merriam, 1938). In the author's view the interventionist and technocratic state that progressivism had created was the forerunner of despotism, from here his endorsing of liberalism.

The real watershed between progressive and neoliberal technocracy was the crisis of the 1970s. The political and economic crisis was felt as generated by an inefficient political class, incapable of making effective and ethical decisions. Yet, the crisis of technocracy generated another kind of technocracy, for the need of experts proved as crucial for once again.

In those years, namely in 1969, two important definitions of technocracy of the post-industrial society were provided. One attributed to Meynaud reported it as "the rise to power of those who possess technical knowledge or ability, to the detriment of the traditional type of politician" (Putnam, 1977, p. 384). In his book *Technocracy* (1969), Meynaud illustrated how the complete technocratic seizure of power in the French government was close, supported by the relevance that French bureaucrats from the *Ecole National d'Administration* and the *Ecole Polytechnique* had always had (Frederickson, 1970). Nonetheless, he enhanced that "Technicians are not conspiring to seize power, but technical skill has increased its standing" (Putnam, 1977, p. 385). Another definition of technocracy provided by Roszak revealed somehow more skeptical, "that society in which those who govern justify themselves by appeal to technical experts who, in turn, justify themselves by appeal to scientific forms of knowledge" (Putnam, 1977, p. 384). These authors

described the technocratic phenomenon while it was experiencing a transition in its shape, passing from a progressive to a neoliberal form.

Neoliberal technocracy is the form that reached the current historical period. Its features are tailored on neoclassical economics. Neoliberal technocracy supports freedom of markets intended as freedom from the political power; hence the neoliberal and technocratic approach sees the depoliticization of economy as a way to preserve liberty on the market. This way the market, by developing autonomously, reaches its highest improvements. Differently from classical liberalism, neoliberalism is willing to limit democracy in favour of economic freedom. Classical liberalism instead admits limitations to democracy exclusively to preserve democracy itself. In other words, granted individual rights cannot be limited even if the majority of society agrees on it (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2020). In a neoliberal view instead, freedom is associated with the competitiveness of the market economy, which comes even before the democratic process; competitiveness is on a par with fundamental rights and cannot be at the mercy of individuals' choices. These elements can indeed be found in the conservative politics of President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher in the 1980s-1990s.

So that neoliberal technocracy can achieve its aims, it takes advantage of two institutional devices: constitutionalization and delegation (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2020). The majority of countries in the world have introduced, especially after having faced an economic crisis, a constitutional legislation that defines and limits budgets, deficit, and debt. During the 2008 crisis, European countries were requested to introduce provisions regarding their monetary budget in their constitutions; similarly, in order to enter international organizations, always more developing countries constitutionalize their economic policy. Similarly, delegation constitutes an essential tool to neoliberal technocracy to practically exert control over the market economy. The delegation process involves the passage of power from governments to technocratic institutions, which in the economic and monetary case tend to be central banks. While on one side the delegation of monetary decisions tends to ensure a more stable economic policy, since it diverts market choice from policymakers' campaigning, on the other side the delegated area loses most of its democratic characteristics. As previously mentioned, economy tends to be the hub of our society, and thus it can wield influence on many other fields, generating a cascade effect. As a result, technocracy ends up impacting more than only market economy and monetary policies, thus creating tensions with democracy.

Concluding the insight on neoliberal technocracy, it might be interesting to call back the reason for why it claims an independency of the monetary sector and of the competitive market economy. According to the paper of Barro and Gordon, Rules, discretion, and reputation in a model of monetary policy (1983), policymakers may be attracted by short run economic solutions in order to increase their popularity and reputation. For instance, a supply shock provides immediate benefits to the population. It may be an immediate way to increase the politician's reputation, however such a decision generates inflation, and it is destined to exhaust, if not compromise, its benefits in the long run. Albeit the politician may want to preserve their credibility on the long-run, and thus follow some kind of rule rather than personal discretion,

the economists maintain that the independence of monetary policy is to be preserved through the delegation to an expert (Gordon & Barro, 1983, p. 1-2). Indeed, this grants markets with consistency throughout time and preserves market economy's freedom from individual choices.

1.3 Technocrats, technicians, and politicians

Briefly, a technocratic government is a government composed by technocrats. Technocrats are experts who may have an academic background of diverse kinds, from economics to political science and law.

Nevertheless, of utmost importance is the absence of a political career behind them. These figures may come from international organizations, in which they fill roles of expertise, thus far away from election campaign and political offices (Tucker, 2011). A technocratic government can either be completely formed by technocrats or be headed by a Prime Minister who is a politician, therefore elected.

1.3.2 Technocrats and technicians

Jean Meynaud provided a distinction between the two terms. He associated technicians, and therefore the technique, with the quest for efficiency. Technicians have knowledge, they are the experts of a sector and apply their specific notions in their quest for efficiency. They remain somehow limited to their sector and their knowledge. The difference with technocrats consists in the more generic approach that the latter demonstrate. Indeed, the technocrats that Meynaud describes have general skills and knowledge that allow them to manage a wider variety of situations (Severini, 2021, p. 45). Technocrats master not only their discipline of competence, but also a mind trained for the solution of managerial problems. Therefore, technocrats base their decisions on technique, which however needs to be molded and adapted to be applied to a social context (since it comes from an academic one). Here, the skills of the technocrats are essential for the organization of notions into policies. Finally, while both master some use of technique and knowledge, the technician remains somehow subjected to politics, while the technocrat aims at partaking in the decision-making process. When a technician has a word in politics, that technician is a technocrat (Severini, 2021, p. 46). A third figure, different from both technicians and technocrats, is that of bureaucrats. Bureaucrats manage, rather than propose, policies and represent a restriction to technocrats' power (Campbell, 2019, p. 6).

1.3.3 Technocrats and politicians

According to Larousse dictionary, a technocrat is a "politician or senior official who values technical and economic data over human factors"; for the Oxford English Dictionary instead, a technocrat is "a member of a skilled, technical elite" (Campbell, 2019, p. 5).

In the academic literature, the subtle difference between a technocrat and a politician was supported by Merilee Grindle as an opposition between technical and human factors (Campbell, 2019, p. 5). The American professor has characterized that of the technocrat as a figure of power and neutrality. Every action must be connoted by the search of efficiency, in an apolitical and rational way.

Consequently, the field of human relations connected to politics remains the realm of the politician. The latter has a deeper knowledge of the local context and may be driven by cultural empathy in his decisions. In addition, politicians possess an aura of democratic legitimacy that may lack when a technocrat is asked to take office. As a result, technocracy is not immune to criticism. Notably in the year of the Eurozone crisis (2008), when technocrats in Italy and Greece had to take the reins of governments, their rationality and efficiency was perceived by some as less pragmatic, and thus less effective in terms of concreteness (Campbell, 2019, p. 6).

“If decisions cannot be taken before studies have been carried out or other relevant information collected, concrete action to solve problems may be put off indefinitely” (Grindle, 1977, p. 424).

1.3.3.2 What happens when *técnicos* are politicians? Outline of a Mexican Case Study

Despite the desirable neutrality that technocrats rather than politicians may provide in complex political situations, their apolitical character has often been questioned. When technique meets the political realm, besides bringing well-calculated proposals, it faces a political and social apparatus. What happens when technicians are politicians?

An interesting insight is provided by Merilee Grindle in her publication *Power, Expertise and the Técnico: Suggestions from a Mexican Case Study* (1977). In her work the author underlined that in Latin America, and notably in Mexico, starting from the 1970s highly skilled individuals had achieved political power. The reason was to be found in the growing economic complexity and external interconnections that globalization imposed. Technicians (*técnicos*) had to possess great political skills that would allow them to rise to positions of influence. However, due to the career mobility typical of the country, *técnico-politicians* remained linked to the person that had put them in that position. From her study, loyalty and commitment showed to affect rational and scientific evaluations, which were based on technical knowledge but designed to the benefit of specific groups. Their apolitical character would not prevent them from pressure of clientele groups (in the case of technocrats, requests came from professional's reference groups). Corruption was then justified by the technical correctness of the decisions taken, motivated from a false (rather than the real) motivation. In corrupted contexts, even expertise is not immune to manipulation.

Moreover, the tight linkage between *técnico-politicians* and information worried the author of the journal article, who made a consideration extendable also to Western countries. Grindle claimed that the need of collecting information that the technocrat has to elaborate a decision might enlarge the times of bureaucracy, eliminating any possibility of rapid or intuitive decision.

Notwithstanding the previous points, the figure of the technocrat was considered a positive presence in the article in relation to political parties' manipulation. Indeed, the technocrat might feel as more independent in case of offers and alliances with political parties, being able to refuse when in discord.

1.3.4 Ideal types of technocrats

Technocratic political institutions are composed of different figures. Considering the roles' diversity, there may be identified four ideal types of technocrats (Antonelli, 2019, p. 69-91): counselors, managers, governors, and custodians. Counselors enjoy particular trust from decision-makers, thus they may be consulted in policymaking deliberations. Managers are in charge of managerial functions, they are deputed to control tasks. As Antonelli widely described in his literature, they exert a control oriented to efficacy and efficiency, which echoes the logics of the firm and the market. Technocratic governors are the most intuitive ideal type, namely technocrats and experts that take active part in a technocratic government. Yet, the most peculiar figure that the author outlines is the custodian. Custodians protect the truth, hence their competence is sacralised. As a result, they are the most independent ideal type among the four previously mentioned. In order to protect the truth, namely the political or economic system from any crisis or threat, custodians have the power to bypass established rules (the example provided is the behaviour of the European Central Bank in the crisis of 2008) (Antonelli, 2019, p. 87-88).

1.4 The technocratic reason

From a political and ethical perspective, technocracy claims to always be on the right side. The absence of doubts stems from the scientific, rational, and objective basis it presumes to rest on.

1.4.2 Technocratic rationality: a reversal of Weber's thought

Max Weber in *Science as a Vocation* (1919) alleged that social action could be either instrumentally rational or value rational. When a social action was guided by instrumental rationality, it aimed at locating the most efficient means to achieve the cherished objective. Value rationality instead was described as moved by beliefs and values, which oriented the goal for which to take action. Even though the author claimed they were often correlated and combines at different levels, they were independent in theory. Consequently, science should not enter the domain of value-oriented actions, nor politics should enter the domain of instrumental rationality (Yemelyanov & Bedny, 2020).

Technocracy challenged this distinction, building a system in which instrumental and value rationality tend to be aligned. Given the scientific and rational basis of technocratic actions, means and ends are guided by objective truths and are the most desirable. From the union between rationality of means and ends, a certain similarity with the Satyagraha movement ensues (Antonelli, 2019, p. 150). Technocratic rationality considers the ends as a conditioning for the means. The tools employed to achieve a result should not (and cannot, since both are rationally and scientifically thought) contradict the outcome itself. As in Gandhi's Satyagraha, if the goal is peace, it must be achieved in a peaceful way.

1.4.3 Technocratic ideology and mentality

The technocratic approach presents some specific traits that have insofar been described or mentioned. Politics and democracy are seen as too weak when it comes to the management of monetary or economic

policies, as well as in times of crisis. People are somehow devalued of their capacities. Reliance on technical data is indisputable, as well as a blind and absolute faith in the inerrancy of science.

1.4.3.2 A closed society?

Fallibility of human knowledge is however the prerequisite for a society to be open (Antiseri, n.d., p. 46). Hence, the technocratic approach presents some of the features of the closed society that Popper illustrated in *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945). In an open and democratic society, characterized by conflict and discussion, no one can assume to possess an objective and absolute truth, that everybody else should follow and agree with. Even if technocracy exhibits some antidemocratic traits, it could still not be considered a closed society, since it lacks the immutable character that closed societies feature. Anyway, it aims at flattening conflict and discussion, which are “the soul of democracy” (Antiseri, n.d., p. 47), since this may offer an easier way out of crises or complex times.

1.4.3.3 Technocratic ideology and Weber’s considerations

In technocrats’ view, their ideology consists in the absence of ideological constraints. Their aim is the pursuit of efficiency, which is depicted as an objective and neutral process, far away from any set of political or social beliefs. Max Weber considered this aim as contradictory with their task. He claimed that even if the final decisions ought to be based on scientific demonstrations, the setting of goals and needs still had to follow a subjective criterion (Centeno, 1993, p. 311). Even the very same choice of which scientific method to use or the order of dealing with equally important situations involve some subjective view of society. After all, they are human beings immersed in a context which, even if slightly, may happen to influence the direction of their data-based choices. Indeed, ideological differences within a technocratic team stem from different theoretical preferences or different professional training. Notwithstanding ideological differences, technocrats share the same mentality intended as a same “form of analyzing the means or instruments utilized in attaining social ends and an implicit set of criteria for evaluating political success” (Centeno, 1993, p. 312).

1.4.3.4 Putnam on technocratic mentality

According to a famous study conducted by Putnam, which laid on previous theories of technocracy, technocratic mentality laid on five pillars (Campbell, 2019, p. 5):

1. Confidence that social problems could be solved by scientific or technological means.
2. Scepticism or hostility toward politicians and political institutions.
3. Little sympathy for the openness and equality of democracy.
4. A preference for pragmatic over ideological or moral assessments of policy alternatives.
5. Strong commitment to technological progress in the form of material productivity, without concern for questions of distributive or social justice.

In his study on technocratic mentality, Putnam conducted a research on a sample of 100 high-ranking national civil servants in Britain, Germany, and Italy in 1970-1971. The element he was looking for was the possible existence of a correlation between the training and expertise of a policymaker and his political outlook and behavior (Putnam, 1977).

Putnam identified technical training as the independent variable of his study, which according to the theorists of technocratic mentality he mentioned was what primarily characterized a technocrat. The education received by the bureaucratic elites taken as example varied among the countries. Engineers, physicians, and hard scientists in general (who he named natural scientists and technologists throughout his research) included one in six of these elites; social scientists included one in five, while humanists (like lawyers) constituted the majority (Putnam, 1977, p. 390). Those trained in natural sciences and those who had a degree in social sciences could be considered as technicians, though Putnam wanted to assess the existence of a connection with a technocratic mindset. In the following lines, an outline of the six hypotheses he analysed is provided (they refer to the previous five pillars mentioned).

1. The first step consisted in an evaluation of whether bureaucrats working at prominent levels in ministries found their role connected to politics, and if they enjoyed this connection. Officials with a natural science and technology background were more likely to consider their job apolitical, or even antipolitical. Conversely, social scientists were less sure about a possible neutrality of their job, which they considered as political. Therefore, the apolitical technocratic mentality only affected the natural science officers, while technocrats with a background in social sciences recognised the implication of political factors in their work (Putnam, 1977, pp. 389-396).
2. From a second hypothesis concerning the attitude towards politicians and political institutions, Putnam verified that natural scientists and technologists had a skeptical view of the politics' field, confirming again an apolitical technocratic mentality. Social scientists instead showed almost everywhere (Italy came as an outlier) a more open and welcoming approach, distant from the theorised technocratic one (Putnam, 1977, p. 397).

TABLE 7
Tolerance for Politics by Type of Training

	Britain			Germany			Italy		
	Nat Sci	Law Hum	Soc Sci	Nat Sci	Law Hum	Soc Sci	Nat Sci	Law Hum	Soc Sci
Index of Tolerance for Politics									
High	42%	71%	91%	46%	60%	93%	0%	11%	0%
Medium	58%	29%	9%	46%	35%	7%	29%	55%	56%
Low	0%	0%	0%	8%	5%	0%	71%	34%	44%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

(Table 7: Putnam, 1977, p. 399).

3. Theorists of technocratic mentality claimed that technocrats sustained political elitism when it came to popular participation in politics. Putnam conducted a survey through a questionnaire. The items that composed the survey were then combined into an Elitism Index, which again confirmed the

technocratic mentality of natural scientists against that of social scientists (Putnam, 1977, pp. 388-389).

TABLE 8
Elitism by Type of Training

Elitism Index	Britain			Germany			Italy		
	Nat	Law	Soc	Nat	Law	Soc	Nat	Law	Soc
High	54%	37%	9%	62%	35%	21%	71%	59%	81%
Medium	25	32	36	23	24	29	14	13	4
Low	21	32	55	15	40	50	14	28	15
	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%	99%	100%	100%

(Table 8: Putnam, 1977, p.

401).

4. Analysing perspectives on social conflict, once again natural scientists proved to have a technocratic mentality, while social scientists did not. Indeed, while the first affirmed that social conflict is an artificial invention, the second conceived it as a major element of political and social life (Putnam, 1977, p. 400).
5. Not surprisingly, social scientists (except for Italy) happened to be more inclined to use a political style of policy analysis, while hard science experts tended to remain on an administrative approach (Putnam, 1977, p. 401).
6. A last hypothesis on whether the educational background could influence social values proved again the technocratic mindset of natural scientists, who resulted as more concerned with economic progress rather than distributive justice. The opposite was true for social scientists (Putnam, 1977, p. 403).

From this empirical study Putnam deduced that decision makers trained in natural sciences clearly met the ideal type of technocratic mentality. They conducted their role in the most apolitical way possible, far from any social justice or political influence. Conversely, technocrats who were social scientists (in Germany and Britain) did not show a technocratic mentality, but rather one of a combination of technique and politics.

Putnam then asserted that educational training did have an influence on the attitude towards the political sphere, and therefore the political outlook.

Chapter 2

Technocracy: media, communication, and public opinion

Being part of technical governments or holding positions of power inevitably make technocrats part of the media and communication sphere. Technocrats have developed their own style of communication, together with a well-defined language. The connection between technology and technocracy is the starting point of the ensuing discussion, being technology a crucial element in the structure of technocratic mentality.

Throughout the following chapter, these elements are investigated, with a peculiar focus on the impact that the technocratic communicative approach exerts on society, both in a positive and a negative fashion.

2.1 Technology: how the technocratic power works

The types of technocrats above mentioned (Chapter 1) perform their activities in a strive to achieve efficiency. Technocracy is a tool through which discretion and autonomy of social actors are substituted by expert and technical knowledge (Antonelli, 2019, p. 93-94). The inerrancy of science and his neutrality towards value-oriented decisions guide the technocratic mentality. However, how does the technocratic power work? Antonelli in his book *Technocracy and democracy* (2019) refers to the technocratic power as “the power that enables by limiting”. Indeed, due to their character of scientific rationality, technocratic decisions are inescapable, limiting any further interpretation or alternative to a given situation. An aura of infallibility surrounds technocratic figures in governments, also kept high by society’s expectations. However, human beings happen to fail, and so technocrats do.

2.1.2 Artificial intelligence, algorithms, and digitalization

Artificial intelligence has then been integrated into technocrats’ work, as a support to the fallibility of humanity. Nevertheless, an indiscriminate use of technology such as a total reliance on algorithms to take decisions carries the risk of exempting human intelligence from fulfilling its responsibilities.

In the contemporary globalized era, procedures become automatic, and they develop through algorithms, thus leaving to machines the organisation of many aspects of the bureaucratic and productive areas.

Therefore, algorithms end up controlling and limiting even the decisions of the most expert (Antonelli, 2019, p. 118). The entire society indeed, after the digitalization of information and data, has been experiencing a constant control from network algorithms, which are in direct contact with governments. The way in which in this case technology may be implied goes from the collection of statistical data to the possibility of influencing the public opinion (AI can create misleading information and enact visible or discrete interactions with internet users to shape their knowledge).

Due to its faith in technology and science, technocratic power widely relies on algorithms, whose side-effects include accidental errors (being machines created by humans) and immutability over time, accurately reproducing the procedure they were designed for (thus replaying errors or obsolete, non-ideal procedures) (Antonelli, 2019, p. 113-116).

2.1.3 The “technological truth”

Globalization has brought a sense of familiarity around technology. The daily use of technological devices and platforms in any life sector overshadows some of its uses. On one side, technology helps us collecting, storing, and working with large sets of data; on the other side, recent advances in the technological field allow AI to extrapolate conclusions from the analysis of such data sets.

The encounter of technology and technocracy then generates an “algorithmic aletheia” (Cappelletti, 2021), a result that claims to be true because of its algorithmic technological basis. As before mentioned, algorithms are designed to perfectionate human behaviour, performing the same activities a person could do, though in less time and with a significant lower number of errors. However, phenomena such as internet bots, manipulation of news, or interactive artificial intelligence display the possibility of distortions that media may go through, which become particularly relevant (and carry their risks) when taking the “algorithmic aletheia” perspective. In fact, algorithms both shape reality and are modified by the real world.

Through the widespread use of social networks and mass media, people are not only users, but they produce information themselves. We are becoming a society of *prosumers* (Antonelli, 2019), and politics is not immune to the push that public opinion exerts through mediatic means. Indeed, social networks like Facebook constitute a vast pool of information for those governing, who can shape their political offer according to the Facebook trends (i.e., permanent campaigns exploit this procedure).

The technocratic power is meant to take advantage of technology when it provides information on the financial and economic sectors. Technocrats believe in the religion of efficiency, thus democratic consent or online ideological debates are not essential for their decision-making. However, media and social networks also hide perils for the supranational expert technocracy, mainly embodied by the diffusion of populist sentiments through the mediatization and fast democracy (Castellani, 2020) (as seen later in the chapter).

2.1.4 The network state and future developments of technocratic power

Contemporary technocracy is experiencing the transition to a network state, significantly different from the nation-state that saw the rise of industrial technocracy. What characterises the network state is not only a peculiar organization, but also a new relationship with democracy. Indeed, the creation of the network state goes together with the transformation of government in governance (Esmark, 2020). The network state may be analysed from a variety of perspectives. Nonetheless, for the sake of this study, the focus is devoted to the relation between state and media.

The state has always used media for the purpose of political communication. If during the industrial era, the aim was to organize the flow of information that passed through a limited number of defined mass media, the network era has challenged that condition of predictability, opening new informational channels and flows. From here, the state necessity to approach new strategies and techniques of political communication, defining the features of communicative governance (Esmark, 2020) in an optic of omnipresent informational logic. E-governance embodies this development, nowadays covering many of the public sectors of the state.

The fusion of technical e-governance and debate on public governance and management flow into the concept of digital era governance (DEG) (Esmark, 2020). From this perspective, ICT and digitalization processes constitute a key to improve public sectors' management, as well as automatized office procedures. The passage to the network state requires the ability of communicative governance of managing communication in a context of hybrid media. Hybrid media is here intended as an umbrella term for both technological media (thus old and modern technological devices and platforms) and media logic, so to say the relationship and rules that surround the user and the service they use (protocols of action). In a network state, political communication strives to be as intersectional as possible, thus generating, besides a mediatization of politics, a mediatization of public policy.

“Even if the new technocracy is still living with the apparent persistence of bureaucratic organizations, it is now guided by the idea of a deep and fundamental conflict between the demands of network society and the bureaucratic model of organization” writes Esmark (2020, p. 140), leaving an open ending on the modifications that technocracy could go through in the next years. The network state is based on technological means, though requires openness, inclusion, communication. Technocracy will then need to reshape some of its traits to fully embrace this new form.

2.2 Technocratic language and style of communication

Throughout technocracy's rise and development, it has been possible to isolate some of its traits and patterns. The reason why technocratic communication constitutes an interesting subject does not only stem from an already cited interest in the functioning of the technocratic mentality, but also from the sociological response that the technocratic language triggers inside the society.

Taking a technocratic perspective, the technocratic discourse can be defined as “a discursive set of ideals for governance, which emphasise the virtues of depoliticization, harmonisation, rationalisation and objectification of policymaking and evaluation, and which promotes the role of technical experts in policy-making over substantively “political” or “democratic” public actors” (Meislová, 2021, p. 170). Rational problem solving is then prioritized over value-based solutions. Society is persuaded that political and social issues can better be solved with a solid administrative basis. Technocratic communication resembles to a managerial one. Moreover, a general ideal of social harmony guides the technocratic work, enhancing the linear and balanced path of a society led by rational knowledge over one where democratic debate and conflicts generate, at least sometimes, moments of chaos.

In addition, the technocratic narrative inevitably needs data and proofs of factuality when providing its plans, which constitute its true strength. Consequently, it puts the figure of the merit-based expert before any other, at times generating a societal sentiment of reliability that, without entering in any specific example, could be resumed through this quotation, “I would vote for the experts every day of the week and twice on a Sunday” (Meislová, 2021, p. 175).

A last, deducible general feature of the technocratic narrative concerns the economic dimension of the discourses. A typical example of the case concerns the comments that the UK received before the decision of leaving the EU: the main arguments were Brexit impact on economic success, specific industries, and international trade relations (Meislová, 2021, pp. 175-176). Being the economic dimension extremely connected to the job employment sphere, and thus directly to the living standards of the population, the technocratic and expert communication can have a significant impact on the choices and behaviours of the people (voters, in the case above).

2.2.2 The technocratic discourse

Political leaders can cite experts, parties can provide data, citizens can formulate ideas based on statistical analyses. The technocratic discourse is not only a prerogative of technocrats and experts (Caramani, 2020), therefore even non-technocratic actors can communicate technocratically. Especially, if the analysis is conducted at the level of the single statement, everyone can make a technocratic or expert statement, exactly as even non-populist political actors can borrow some populist discourse features. In order to interpret the technocratic elements of a discourse a variety of fields are to be employed, starting from semiotics, to linguistics, to the analysis of the communicative style and the construction of sentences.

In the Introduction to the technocratic challenge, Caramani singles out a list of dimensions that are normally detectable in the technocratic discourse (Caramani, 2020, p. 17):

- 1) Elitism. It recalls the elitist nature of the expertise and merit.
- 2) Scientific approach. Policies and decisions are guided by rationality, scientific evidence, and necessity, without any ado about personal interpretation and choices.
- 3) Output-oriented: whole society and long term. They refer to the design of policies.
- 4) Goal orientation. The main target is efficiency, followed by a good control of finances and costs.
- 5) Anti-political. It is enhanced as a positive dimension. The non-elective character of technocrats should guarantee their neutrality, commitment to science and development, and abolish political polarization and factions.
- 6) Style. This dimension includes the implication of a clear separation between elites and masses and the use of technical jargon accompanied by statistical data. Conversely from the populist discourse, the tone is neutral and flat. Words are not deputed to inflame people's emotions.

Starting from the dimensions just enlisted, Caramani and Bertou create a codebook to measure how technocratic a given text is (an excerpt of the codebook from their book *The technocratic challenge to democracy* is provided below). For every dimension considered, the higher a characteristic scores as positive, the more technocratic the discourse is. The dimensions that can be considered are several; some discourse strategies may be deduced in opposition to populist discourses. The most immediate example may be the presence of statistical and empirical data in lieu of common sense-based statements. Nonetheless, technocratic discourse shares some views even with its populist opposite, such as the conception of the

people as one single entity. It is however important to mention that the elite in the case of the technocratic discourse has a positive allure (conversely to the populist rhetoric), and that the people's will remains almost unheard, prevailed by the economic rhetoric (Caramani, 2020, p. 96-102).

Table 5.3 Codebook for the analysis of technocratic discourse (excerpt)

Dimension 1: Elitism	Positive: Praise knowledge elite, critical of ordinary citizens and politicians. Implicit or explicit higher value attached to this group, as people "who know best" and as those who can and should guide the society. Negative: Praise of ordinary citizens, politicians or representatives of the people, critical of unaccountable elites, experts.	Dimension 4: Output-oriented	Positive: Praise of efficiency, output, growth for the entire society and reference to what works, what provides optimal outcomes. Disregard for criticism that refer to the importance of procedural questions and non-output-related values. Negative: Reference to procedures and non-output-related "achievements", criticism of principles of efficiency, output, and optimization.
Dimension 2: Anti-pluralism	Positive: Reference to the welfare of society as a whole, criticism of ideological and partisan interests, special interest groups and societal struggle between different groups. Negative: Reference to interests of specific groups, sectoral (ex. workers in heavy industry), ethnic groups, social class, and reference to struggle between social groups, criticism of the "illusion" of what is the best solution for society.	Dimension 5: Technical style	Positive: Use of technical jargon, facts, figures, sources (many legitimate sources), dry language, speech that does not stir an emotional response. Clean, precise and sophisticated language. Negative: Use of layman's terms, inconsistent use of sources or misrepresentation of figures, emotive and value-laden speech that promotes and gives agency to the speaker (active voice, reference to "I" or "We").
Dimension 3: Scientific approach	Positive: Reference to objective, neutral, non-compromised decision making, evidence-based policymaking and critical of voices that question facts or the scientific method. Negative: Denigration or doubt of factual evidence, reference to subjective or compromised decision- and policymakers, doubt of the complexity of social problems.		

Source: Codebook developed by Bertson and Caramani.

(Caramani, 2020, p. 99)

2.2.2.2 A grammatical insight of the technocratic language

"Technocratic discourse is most clearly characterised by the way it represents itself: although it has a clearly hegemonic function, it consciously presents itself as "above the fray", as a supplier of "facts", neutral and objective, free of all interests and values except truth, which all parties must take into account in deciding policy" (McKenna & Graham, n.d.). Due to its solid scientific base, the technocratic discourse is difficult to dismantle. A hegemonic trait can be seen as stemming from this characteristic, also because it is composed and thought by a restricted number of people that could, in a conspiratorial interpretation, make their own interests. The impossibility for the common sense to disprove the expertise can be considered at the bottom of this thought. However, the technocratic discourse is not only irrefutable from the point of view of its arguments and style; we can identify a lexical and grammatical structure that characterises the expert and technocratic communication, probably reinforcing its shade of hegemony.

To begin with, a feature of the scientific written language is the nominalisation. Clauses are nominalised, thus verbs such as "oxidise" become nouns, "oxidations" (McKenna & Graham, n.d.). Nouns are harder to discuss than larger sentences, because they entail the existence and acceptance of a meaning or a fact.

According to professors McKenna and Graham, nominalisation eliminates the reasoning process behind a sentence and thus the actual possibility to disprove it for the reader, which could be a reason why the technocratic discourse is sometimes perceived as hegemonic and unquestionable. In addition, sentences generally present an absence of explicit human agency. No "I," "you" or "we" appear, thus conferring the

discussion an authoritative character, with no space for personal intervention (McKenna & Graham, n.d.). Personal pronouns are substituted by passive constructions; also, the agency of the actions (those who perform them) may result unclear.

2.2.3 The democratic discourse

The democratic discourse in modern societies is constituted by three main elements: political will formation, fundamental principles of political morality, and governance (Behr, 2021).

Governance relates to the necessity of modern states to deal with issues of organization, security, and efficient implementation. It recalls the professionalism of political figures that are elected to run politics in a proper and organized way. Instead, the idea of popular sovereignty that guides the democratic discourse stems from the element of popular will, thus from the continuous dichotomous encounter of the population with their needs and desires. The democratic will is composed by the will of each citizen, giving an idea of pluralist dialogue, compared to the unequivocal technocratic one. The third element is constituted by political morality, intended as the duties and principles that any democratic community must observe to be considered as such. It imposes limits to democracy in order to preserve its own democratic values. In other words, a democratic majority cannot undertake undemocratic decisions, even if they would constitute the will of the people, because the democratic discourse preserves and restates a series of fundamental rights and values.

The three elements above mentioned form the democratic triangle, collocating each one on a different triangle tip. In modern societies technocratic elements find their place in the democratic discourse. However, the major risk concerning this encounter regards the overemphasis of technocratic processes (Behr, 2021). Indeed, in order to maintain a democratic dialectic, political will formation and political morality need to remain at the centre of the debate and cannot be completely overshadowed by a technical and neutral approach.

2.3 Technocratic citizens: why technocracy has so much appeal in society

As our discussion has proved above, technocratic language and style of communication have an impact on society, which stems from their peculiar characteristics. Undoubtedly, technocracy is a tool that applies to democratic contexts, for example in case of national crises or to manage supranational affairs. That having been said, the perception from the citizens of the technocratic communicative approach varies, and it is possible to identify both positive and negative feedbacks.

Technocratic attitudes among people are to be identified in the preference to be governed by experts, at times disdaining the democratic popular political will formation. Technocratic citizens are anti-political, they not only believe in a better managing of political situations by experts, but also see in their supposed neutrality a long-term genuine interest for the correct functioning of society. Indeed, political leaders and party politics are permeated by the rhetoric of permanent campaigns, and technocratic citizens perceive them too focused

on organizing their elections rather than working on politics. Moreover, the technocratic communicative approach, relying on big data rather than on factional ideology speaks to the citizens the language of peace rather than of conflict. The technocratic centrist approach, free of strong ideologies (or if having any, strongly supported by social sciences' data), embodies a way of avoiding ideological conflict, in an optic of certainty that science is extremely able to provide (Freeland, 2013). These views go in the direction of the crisis of representative liberal institutions and party politics that has been taking place since last century. Nonetheless, there are few studies on the technocratic attitude of citizens. One of the most recent ones was conducted by Bertou and Pastorella in 2017 over the attitudes of European citizens prior the euro crisis. This study highlights that "citizens are more inclined to show support for the technocratic mode of governance when they have weaker democratic attitudes and are distrustful of their politicians and representative institutions, either in themselves, or because of structural factors such as corruption or political culture" (Bertou & Pastorella, 2017, p. 447). A technocratic attitude is more common in citizens who do not relate to politics in their daily life, thus do not really support a political side. The technocratic figure is then seen as an above-parts solution, that would end conflicts in the name of efficiency and order. The technocratic sentiment results even in this case to be strictly connected with the crisis of representative democracy, being stronger where people see that party politics fails to meet their needs. Parties become distrusted and people place their trust in alternative figures. However, in Bertou and Pastorella's study, the technocratic citizens' attitude resulted also to be linked to the countries historical experiences. Citizens then prefer technocratic governments if their country has experienced an authoritarian rule at least once in their institutional history.

Reading the Introduction to the technocratic challenge by Caramani, citizens generally show a positive consideration of technocracy when they have high education levels and low trust in political parties (Caramani, 2020). Aside from this, there seems to be a departure from what the above-mentioned study supports. Indeed, Caramani appeals to a new survey and affirms that a positive opinion of technocratic governments also exists among citizens committed to the political and social sphere. Furthermore, at the individual level no left-right preference seems to guide people towards a technocratic attitude, highlighting the supposed neutrality of technocracy and the potential it possesses to distance people from the political commitment. The absence of political sentiment then not only nourishes the crisis of representative democracy, but also challenges its roots and legitimacy (Caramani, 2020, p. 19).

Following Bertou, Pastorella and Caramani's studies, it remains clear that technocracy embraces a wide audience, with no limits of wing-ideology nor political participation. The common factor is however the lack of trust in political and non-technical governments, especially if having experienced their incompetence. At the supranational level, an interesting insight on the support of technocracy by citizens is that provided by Costa Lobo and McManus on the acceptance of technocratic governments in Europe between 2009 and 2014. Trust in EU institutions and a positive acceptance of technocracy resulted as positively correlated. Likewise, low trust in national governments meant for many countries the passage to temporarily

technocratic governments (well accepted by the population). Deviation from the general finding do not lack, such as the Greek trust in national democracy more than in technocratic appointed governments notwithstanding the critical economic crisis the country went through during the euro crisis (Lobo & McManus, 2020).

2.3.2 Personality and technocracy acceptance

Stealth democracy is a democratic approach that involves less citizens' partisanship, as well as the delegation of decision-making processes to experts who, without the need of debating over ideological differences, conduct policymaking. People that sustain stealth democracy present a strong technocratic attitude, and little sympathy for representative democracy.

In M. Ackermann *et al.* study on the five personality traits that shape a stealth democratic attitude, some traits of the technocratic citizen are isolated. We are taking into consideration only the two traits that may lead the stealth democratic citizen to have a technocratic attitude.

Conscientiousness is the first one, linked to the desire for efficiency and reliability. Conscientious citizens look for an efficient organization that technocratic governments claim to be able to provide, thus attracting their interest. A technocratic preference can however also be linked to neuroticism. Neurotic personalities suffer from anxiety and high stress levels. The technocratic way of reducing social conflict and providing scientific findings for supporting a decision attracts these personalities, also fixing the problem of low levels of trust they usually present towards traditional politics. Conscientious and neurotic people seem to prefer efficiency to deliberation (Ackermann, Ackermann, & Freitag, 2019). By contrast, agreeable people, and those with extraverted traits and personalities open to experiences, with the due exceptions, do not reveal elevated levels of appeal to stealth democracy, and thus low technocratic attitudes.

Therefore, the technocratic communicative approach has a certain appeal to citizens, converting them in technocratic citizens when having a positive impact; nonetheless, part of the phenomenon involves the personality of the individual involved, who may have a stronger or weaker inclination to the acceptance of a technocratic government.

2.3.3 The COVID-19 pandemic, technocratic policy process and perception from society

In the case of pandemics, as well as of natural catastrophes, decision makers' policies both shape and are shaped by the public opinion. The COVID-19 pandemic of the last two years has challenged national and supranational governments, putting in place a long-term situation of emergency.

An exceptional event can awake portions of citizens that usually do not participate into politics, who suddenly feel the need of playing a role in the perceived emergency. "Disasters draw scrutiny from a wide range of citizens, not just those normally interested in news and politics (...) As a result, catastrophes create opportunities for citizens from every segment of society to observe and evaluate government in action" (Goetz & Sindbjerg Martinsen, 2021, p. 1010). Emergencies then create an opportunity for people to

evaluate the current political situation, and thus introduce changes. Crises highlight the limits of a system that do not lead to the best possible efficiency. As said before, they push citizens towards the preference for a technocratic rule. A study on emergency politics in Europe conducted by Jonathan White (Goetz & Sindbjerg Martinsen, 2021) focuses exactly on the innovations that emergency generates in the political realm, notably in the shift to technocracy and the introduction of scientific expertise in government. The COVID-19 pandemic enhanced a deep reliance on experts from the public opinion side: virologists and scientists were invested of the decision-making power on the basis of their technocratic expertise, seen as the only ones that could deal with the emergency, pursuing the goal everyone would have agreed on: finding a solution to stop the diffusion of the disease. Technocratic attitudes then are also shaped by the recurrence to emergency politics. The restrictions put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic were however the result of a complete trust of the public opinion in science, otherwise limitations such as that regarding the freedom of movement in the Schengen area would not have been possible.

Nevertheless, technocratic communication does not always conduct to positive acceptance and a great degree of technocratic attitude among people. Especially the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced how portions of society had their doubts on the validity of scientific considerations over public consensus and popular will, considered as the pillar of democracy and freedom. If on one side the (mainly) technocratic management of the pandemic resulted in an acceleration of the process of de-politicization and affirmation of technocracy, on the other it saw the rise of populist groups that had a negative response to the technocratic approach (Foster, Brusenbauch Meislova, & Grzymiski, 2021).

2.4 When technocracy is perceived as hegemony: a push towards populism (and technopopulism)

Society can also perceive technocracy as a negative factor. Where technocracy is felt as a hegemonic power, populist sentiments may rise and give birth to a division. Indeed, the historical left-right political opposition has left space to the cleavage between technocracy and populism (Freeland, 2010). Populist and technocratic political styles present opposite key characteristics, which are at the basis of the creation of the cleavage.

The table below highlights the differences that elapse between the two.

	Populist political style	Technocratic political style
Logic of argumentation	'Of and for the people'	'Rational problem solving'
Manner of communication	'Low appeal' style, impassioned and language	'High appeal' style, technical, disimpassioned and unemotive language
Central narrative and discursive framing	Crisis, rupture, threat	Stability, continuity, progress

(Farrand & Carrapico, 2021, p. 153)

The absence of discussion typical of the technocratic approach, summed with a general indifference for the public opinion or the opinion of the politicians, who in many systems are spokespeople of voters, can

generate a sharp response under the populist form. People feel dispossessed of their sovereignty, and unable to express their popular will, in the name of an approach based on expertise, on data, on the knowledge that only an elite can manage. Populists have the perception of being undervalued by the political system, they advocate for a government for the people, but also by the people.

“Technocracy holds that there is only one correct policy solution; populism holds that there is only one authentic will of the people” (Müller, 2017, from De Blasio & Sorice, *Populism between direct democracy and the technological myth*, 2018). Therefore, the legitimacy of populism comes from its interest in making the voice of people heard, against that of the technocratic, far, corrupted elites. It can be inferred that there are portions of society which conceive the rational, scientific base of the decisions that technocrats take as a limitation to their free will expression.

People in the lower socio-cultural layers of society detect the populist approach as closer to their reality. Populist speeches tend to include common language, slang, and even offensive words. The slice of population who is not able to understand technocratic data, nor the representative democratic process, is emotionally dragged by the passion of the populist discourses (Farrand & Carrapico, 2021). The neutral, proof-based, and technical language that technocracy speaks can be an impenetrable cage, a hegemonic imposition, where the opinions of the folks do not find place nor rational sense.

What however remains common to both political styles is their development in contrast to party politics (Bickerton & Invernizzi Accetti, 2015), their apolitical vein, thus their development as a reaction to the crisis of representative democracy.

The correlation of populism, technocracy, and digital communication, gives birth to a specific type of populism: technopopulism. Exactly like technocracy, technopopulism develops in the sphere of technology. The technological element constitutes an essential framework, the real root of this kind of populism, and not a simple tool (De Blasio & Sorice, *Populism between direct democracy and the technological myth*, 2018). According to Deseriis, technopopulism can be split in two categories. If one variant sees the charismatic populist leader conferring unity to the people against the corrupted elites, the other variant presents some technocratic elements, asking for meritocratic forms of democratic participation (De Blasio & Sorice, *Populisms among technology, e-democracy and the depoliticisation process*, 2018). Both variants may remind us of the aforementioned link between technocracy and populism, stemming from the hostility that both political styles have towards the acceptance of the democratic representative processes. Populists tend to advocate for direct democracy, besides the absence of experts taking decisions instead of the people. Technopopulists instead, advocate for online direct democracy, thus the creation of platform-parties (De Blasio & Sorice, *Populisms among technology, e-democracy and the depoliticisation process*, 2018). Even though online tools such as e-democracy were conceived to reinforce representative democracy, the technopopulist use of communication media pushes towards the depoliticization of the democratic process. Therefore, even if from an opposite perspective, technopopulism contributes with technocracy to the crisis of representative democracy.

Chapter 3

Technocratic impact on representative democracy

Through its political and communicative style, technocracy has an impact on society which declines in positive and negative variants. As discussed in Chapter 2, when citizens present a technocratic attitude, they openly accept, or even prefer, technocrats to handle positions of power. Such a positive stance towards expertise and managerial capacities, rather than towards political ideologies and democratic election constitutes a menace for the integrity of representative democratic systems. Referring to the analysis conducted in Chapter 2, we can infer that even a negative approach to the technocratic rule does not grant safety to representative democracy, since it can push citizens towards populist ideals, and thus to a request for a more direct kind of democracy. Either way, technocracy plays a role in the crisis of representative democracy, having the power to accelerate the depoliticization process from the inside.

Technocracy is a tool that democracies adopt to better cope with critical or technical events; more than a choice, it may seem an obligation, especially when supranational affairs of economic and financial nature are involved. Therefore, technocracy is not an external threat to representative democracy, but rather an internal element. It reinforces governments from the point of view of efficiency, at times collaborating with elected politicians, nonetheless its compatibility with democracy is sometimes questioned.

Although technocracy can seem the only mean to make things right when trust in politics (and its functioning) vacillates, it is interesting to evaluate possible alternatives to the allegedly unavoidable expertise, looking for a way to link efficiency to participation, though trying to leave untouched those elements considered as fundamental in the democratic discourse.

3.1 Where technocracy positions itself in the crisis of representation: technocracy and legitimacy

The end of the twentieth century has brought about contrasting sentiments towards party democracies, notably a sense of disenchantment and distrust in politics established on political parties. The crisis of democracy is due to the fact that parties fail to supply an adequate governing function and embodiment of citizens' requests. The political parties' format of politics is ineffective, and the dissatisfaction spreads among the people, leading to a minor participation and engagement (De Blasio & Sorice, 2016). If party democracy is declining, on the other side other forms are taking shapes. "Participatory practices such as deliberative polls, participatory budgeting, the different types of mini-publics and so on, have the potential to respond to the deficits of the representative democratic system and thus contribute to its legitimacy," De Blasio and Sorice write (2016, p. 16).

Democratic innovations acquire legitimacy in the framework of representative democracy because public opinion welcomes and makes use of them. They can be seen as the modern ambassadors of traditional democracy, restating the right of the last one to be in place through a widespread sentiment of acceptance. If a democratic government needs to legitimately hold its power to rule, we may wonder where the

technocratic instrument locates itself in the crisis of representative democracy. In effect, the absence of a (declared, at least) political background and its implication in times of crises, saves technocracy from being fully involved in the crisis. The legitimacy of the technocratic tool remains firm notably because of its appeal to scientific knowledge, and for its propensity to care for the general interest, seen as far from serving the interests of individuals, or categories of them, in return for votes (as politicians could do).

The legitimacy of technocracy is unquestionable in moments of crisis. The reason is usually explained to lie in considerations of performance criteria. When countries face challenges that destabilize the institutional apparatus, the concern of performing the best way possible even in the worst conditions, makes the choice of technocrats legitimate. It is indeed a political choice that legitimates technocracy, in the aftermath of a growing distrust in politics.

Farrand and Carrapico (2021) classify in a table the sources of legitimacy of the technocratic political style, comparing them with those of populism. Following in their classification, a section is devoted to the sources that these two political styles consider as illegitimate, while the last aspect includes the attitude that both styles have towards the role of law.

	Populist political style	Technocratic political style
Source of legitimacy	The people, and thus 'input democracy'	Rational and effective decision making, and thus 'through and output legitimacy'
Perception of illegitimacy	Checks and balances on popular/sovereign will; laws, rules or procedures that 'subvert' will of the people	Demagoguery, flouting of laws, rules or procedures
Role of law	To give effect to the will of the majority	To provide structures, certainty and coherence insulated from political interference

(Farrand & Carrapico, 2021, p. 154)

Therefore, it could be said that in the crisis of representation technocracy positions itself as a consequence of the process. Indeed, technocracy's legitimacy is not an "input legitimacy," coming from clear representation procedures, but rather a legitimacy that stems from the efficient outcomes it is supposed to achieve and the meticulous following of the rules in force it puts in place. As could be inferred from the previous table, its source of legitimacy completely opposes that of populism, where any rule limiting the will of the people is seen as illegitimate. This last feature, as Farrand and Carrapico also underline, constitutes the real divide between the two political styles, impeding any kind of constructive communication.

3.1.2 Centeno: technocracy's legitimacy and capitalism

Once technocratic governments achieve the goal they were appointed for, a general tendency to prefer politicians may rise again. As Centeno reports in his article of 1993 "The New Leviathan", this trend is

observable mostly in capitalist countries. The common element that capitalist countries share in relation to technocracy is the basis on which their governments are considered legitimate. Economic efficiency is what public opinion in capitalist states asks for, while responsiveness to demands of people and support to political ideologies occupy the second stage (Centeno, 1993). Once the economic or fiscal crisis is solved, the technocratic team has no point in keep being in charge, and we can imagine that governments tend to go back to their original configuration. Nevertheless, the utmost importance granted to the economic sector, together with the belief of obtaining better results from non-political management, encourages the substitution of technocratic experts in the field, adding up to the crisis of representation.

3.1.3 Output-oriented legitimization

Framing politics in the functionalist paradigm “leads to an understanding of democracy (...) as procedural outcome (...), resulting in the uncoupling of democracy from people’s will formation and political agency (popular sovereignty) but rather viewing democratic legitimacy as the effectiveness of governance through expertocracy” (Behr, 2021, p. 229).

Technocracy gains legitimacy through a subversion of representative democracy, at the same time defacing and supporting the concept of a legitimacy coming from the popular choice. Indeed, if on one side effectiveness becomes a shortcut to govern, on the other side this is legitimately accepted by the people as a rational solution.

According to Scharpf, legitimacy through effectivity fits the democratic processes. Intending the scope of experts as that of solving critical situations and contribute to the wellbeing of the people, the political scientist affirms that technocratic governments act for the people, which is a solid base of legitimacy (Behr, 2021). Scharpf does not consider technocracy to be a threat to democracy, but simply a variant coming from an alternative legitimizing belief. The difference stems from the position from which legitimacy comes. Input-based legitimacy comes from the people and their votes; output-based legitimacy stems from effectivity, which is however still for the benefit of the people (Scharpf, 2011).

Considering only the input-oriented perspective as valid, EU institutions would concretize an example of democratic deficit, thus nurturing the above-mentioned crisis of representative democracy, trespassing in a more general crisis of democracy itself. Scharpf supports the impossibility for EU institutions’ legitimacy to stem from popular sovereignty and representative democracy, providing insights about how technocrats are not only necessary, but also legitimized in their role, by output-oriented legitimacy. Such legitimizing belief comes from a common end and shared interests, making compromise at the EU level possible and gathering people from diverse backgrounds and with different problems to solve.

In this functionalist framework however, the crisis of representative democracy seems somehow tackled by output-oriented legitimacy. If the arguments of Scharpf are strong at a supranational level, in national democracies the impact could be more evident.

People can feel to be considered as an end, though not as the participants of a process. Conversely to Scharpf, Behr (2021) is less convinced about the real acceptance of an output-oriented legitimacy, claiming that a people's sentiment of exclusion from political decisions can both escalate in distrust towards authority (i.e., populism) or disenchantment and indifference towards politics.

In both cases, output-oriented legitimacy ends up feeding the crisis of representative democracy, at least as we traditionally know it.

3.2 The impact of EU technocratic institutions

The institutions which form the European Union's legal and economic backbone present clear technocratic traits, ostracizing representative democracy to a bare number of processes. The EU structure was thought, since the beginning, to be centered on high-performance expertise and management. At present, the technocratic character of such institutions has raised some concerns of legitimacy among the European countries, especially regarding the lack of democratic disposition in the decision-making processes. The impact of technocracy is then evident on both representative democracy and citizens, suggesting an ongoing crisis on the EU, which will inevitably, as Habermas affirms, lead to changes in the asset of the institution to grant its survival. Brexit is an example of it.

EU institutions have gained legitimacy through the results achieved, following an output-oriented legitimacy process. The citizens' response has however mostly been encouraging, with a widespread acceptance of interventions that have no clear democratic input, except for a weak popular representation coming from the European Parliament (Habermas, 2015).

During and after the Eurocrisis, Habermas observes that the gap between people's will and expert policymaking in the EU institutions' framework has created consistent Eurosceptical thoughts, reaching both supporters and opponents of the Union. While nationalists and right-wing populists consolidate their positions on the necessity of strengthening the nation-state, liberals and technocrats push in the direction of a deeper integrated supranational institution. Technocrats in specific support a reinforcement of the executive. Moreover, deeper integration would entail a revision of the Treaties and of the internal structure, which according to the EU democrats could be a step towards solving the democratic deficit the Union presents in the policy making processes. Conversely, European pragmatists fear a possible revision of the legal basis of the Union, claiming that a further inclusion of the citizenry would affect the essence of expertise of the international institution. Indeed, every European political group holds a position on the integration matter. In this variegated panorama, Habermas provides an interesting insight on how a critical deficit of democracy could threaten the legitimacy of technocratic EU institutions. He states that "a technocracy without democratic roots would have neither the power nor the motivation to accord sufficient weight to the demands of the electorate for social justice, status security, public services and collective goods, in the event of a conflict with the systemic demands for competitiveness and economic growth" (Habermas, 2015, p. 11-12). We might then ask why, if EU institutions have such an impact on society, the principle of democracy has

not been fully introduced until now. One of the proposals the author advances is the lack of mutual trust between European citizens from different countries, which blocks reforms and the actual formation of a democratic superstate. The reasons for this attachment to the old democratic nation-states lies in the European history of sovereign states, that developed on strong principles of autonomy and self-determination. For Habermas, the path towards a supranational and democratic political community would require, among other things, a harmonization of social policy, which would occur only with the abandonment of the rigid concept of sovereignty in a range of fields.

3.2.2 Democratic deficit or better efficiency?

In response to what we have claimed until now, some others support the democratic deficit of the EU, affirming that it plays a positive role in enhancing the overall democratic rule.

In his article “In Defense of the Democratic Deficit”, Moravcsik provides three arguments for the separation of the technocratic and democratic power based on the field of action, claiming that it is for the benefit of the EU that some areas ought to remain under non-contested decisions (Bickerton & Invernizzi Accetti, 2020). First, Moravcsik affirms that ordinary citizens are rationally ignorant over issues that would require too much time and effort to get informed about. Hence, it is better for them to delegate such decisions to experts on those issues. Second, he claims that technocratic rule over issues of justice and safeguard of rights is necessary to protect minorities from an eventual tyranny of the majority. Last, technocratic management in some areas protects democracy, annulling the possibility of actions based on special interests. Moravcsik’s view is on the same page of Majone (Bickerton & Invernizzi Accetti, 2020). He argues that the technocratic character of EU institutions in some specific areas creates no democratic deficit, but rather has an impact of improvement on EU policymaking. However, both authors seem to not take into consideration the possibility of disagreement over which areas should be of democratic competence and which under technocratic rule. Indeed, they believe, in compliance with Mario Monti’s affirmations, that the areas that should be under expert competence can be selected objectively, rationally separating the two powers (Bickerton & Invernizzi Accetti, 2020).

3.2.3 Focus on technocracy in Eastern Europe and its impact on democratization

In the context of technocracy, democratization and democratic deficit, there are contrasting voices from vastly different directions. An example of a study that includes technocracy in the crisis of democracy, thus not attributing to it a leading role is provided below.

According to Tucker and Zilinsky, many reasons concur to people’s detachment from representative democracy, and technocracy could be one of them, thus not the main one (Tucker & Zilinsky, 2020). To verify whether technocratic governments instill a sense of distrust towards democratic processes in the public opinion, they named the technocratic penalty theory. However, the acceptance of temporary

technocracy theory revealed to be more in tune with reality after their study, predicting that technocratic parentheses do not significantly affect citizens' attachment to democracy.

Analyzing individual-level data from 34 countries in Central, but especially Eastern Europe, the authors admit that the impact of temporary technocratic governments pushes citizens to assess more negatively their elected representatives. Nevertheless, they do not consider the crisis of democracy to be the result of the impact of technocracy on the public opinion, but they rather blame governments for how they treat issues dear to the population. In Eastern European countries, the fight to corruption is seen as a pillar of a political program, and so a way to catch citizens' interest. Indeed, technocratic institutions have an impact on the public opinion (they are the preferred ones) until central issues for the country, such as corruption, are addressed. This study opens then to a different vision of the impact that technocracy has on democracy, not denying its influence on it, but rather enhancing that such relationship is not easily traceable.

“Satisfaction with one's life, perceived upward intergenerational mobility and, above all, beliefs about how the government is addressing corruption, are all better predictors of government approval than living in a country with a technocratic legacy”, they write (Tucker & Zilinsky, 2020, p. 243).

3.3 Depoliticization

Since the end of the twentieth century, representative democracy based on the political parties' model has been experiencing a real crisis. In Kaase and Newton words, the situation that democracy is living can be described as “the disenchantment of citizens with political parties, the emergence of anti-party attitudes, and the growing incidence of more general dissatisfaction and anti-establishment attitudes” (De Blasio & Sorice, 2016, p. 15). Failing in their role of representation, parties are progressively losing their place, being substituted by different forms of representation that link citizens and politics. The mediatisation of politics plays a role on this stage, together with the growing importance of the personalization of politics, thus concurring to the shift from party politics to one person-based politics. However, thoughts about the quality of a political realm based on personalized politics claim for an investigation on its quality, sometimes still enhancing the importance that collective parties have in a context of democratic and plural representation (De Blasio & Sorice, 2016).

Contemporary to the crisis at national level, the establishment in recent years of agencies and entities in Western Europe aimed at depoliticising some areas in favor of EU governance action have contributed to a wide introduction of technocratic and unelected bodies (Iusmen & Boswell, 2017). Citing a few lines by Scicluna and Auer (2019, p. 1420), “in the absence of opportunities for democratic contestation, EU emergency governance oscillates between moments of heightened politicisation, in which ad hoc decisions are justified as necessary, and the (sometimes coercive) appeal to the depoliticised rule of rules”.

Notwithstanding Tucker & Zilinsky's study, according to which technocracy is not the main cause of citizens' distrust in representative democracy, it is undeniable that technocratic governments and actors have an impact on the crisis of representative democracy. By subtracting areas of competence to representative

democratic processes, the EU unelected governance expands the depoliticisation phenomenon, already launched by the general sense of distrust and apathy towards party politics of the current era.

Furthermore, Mair underlines the fact that the depoliticisation at the national level is not compensated by any repoliticisation at a supranational level (Scicluna & Auer, 2019), as it was largely discussed in the previous paragraph. Indeed, technocracy at the national level pulls the trigger to a spiral of technocratic institutions at the supranational level, where politics intended as a democratic confrontation hardly finds a spot. And all these depoliticisation inputs coming from technocracy can be considered has largely impactful on the crisis of representative democracy, as well as a trigger for the approval of populisms, which bring about a sort of repoliticisation, stressing concepts such as popular will, sense of community, injustices, technocracy's conspiracies and simple political solutions to everyday problems. However, even the rise of populisms constitutes a menace for representative democracy.

Pier Domenico Tortola in his writing on *Technocracy and depoliticization* (2020) provides an extended explanation on the concept of technocracy, considering it first as a decision-making method, then as an informal regime, last as a type of government. Perhaps the most interesting part of his discussion includes how technocracy can be political and depoliticized at the same time, depending on the dimensions of politicization or depoliticization we are analysing (Tortola, 2020).

The (de)politicization can happen in different ways, depending on the form of technocracy taken into consideration. Using some examples of the author, when technocracy is intended as a decision-making method, the depoliticization follows a methodological channel, hence decisions are based on expertise, excluding any political influence. If technocracy is used to indicate a type of regime, depoliticization happens through dispossessing politicians of their power. In this case, politicians remain victims of such depoliticization, since experts who are not in government impose themselves as impartial and neutral figures, hiding to the public opinion the partisan nature that pushes them to take the power. Last, technocratic governments have a depoliticizing influence due to their composition. Their personnel is usually composed of technicians rather than political parties' constituents, thus it is depoliticized at a personal/individual level. Moreover, this last form of technocracy constitutes the most powerful framework for technocrats, allowing them to affect the principles of representation and accountability of democratic regimes while acting in accordance with the rule of law (being legitimately in charge in government). The table below provides a schematization of the dimensions of depoliticization that technocracy enables in its different forms.

Table 3.1 Technocracy and depoliticization: a unified conceptual framework

	<i>Technocracy as a...</i>		
	<i>Decision-making method</i>	<i>Type of informal regime</i>	<i>Type of government</i>
Dimensions of depoliticization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal/professional • Institutional/discursive • Methodological 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal/professional • Institutional/discursive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal/professional
Main policy object	Means	Ends and means	Ends
Relationship with democracy	Compatible	Distortive	Compatible to ambivalent
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent regulatory agencies • Independent central banks • Ministries' technical units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • France (e.g. <i>grand corps</i>) • European Union (e.g. Commission, ECB, independent agencies) • United States (e.g. policy advisers, federal agencies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dini government (Italy, 1995–96) • Fischer government (Czech Republic 2009–10) • Papademos government (Greece, 2011–12) • Monti government (Italy, 2011–13)

(Tortola, 2020, p. 73)

3.4 Final confront: are technocracy and democracy compatible?

It can be said that the technocratic tool is usually introduced to power by the democratic rule, hence the underlying idea that democracy has of technocracy is, at least at the beginning, positive and somehow auxiliary. Indeed, when democratic governments imply technocrats, their objective is to achieve higher standards in the economic and financial fields. An efficient and neutral instrument can seem the best way to not only raise the living standards of a country, but also its level of democratization in the long run, as a consequence of a stronger economy and education system.

However, neither the strengthening of democracy nor the absence of it are the sure way to economic development, introducing then the importance of the technocratic element. “In the 1980s only those regimes that were able to limit popular participation could impose economic adjustment programs”, writes Centeno in his article *The New Leviathan* (1993). The author refers to the approach of the Asian Pacific policymakers, who were able to distance their decisions from political and market requests, to concentrate on the development of the states. After observing a similar trend in Latin America, Centeno advances that in the case of developing countries, it is likely that democracy comes in a later stage with respect to technocracy, being the economic and living background too poor for a democratization process. However, once democracy is installed, it may be difficult to maintain a democratic technocracy, and the author explains why through a series of points, displaying the necessary conditions for technocracy and democracy to be compatible: a) A wide social consensus regarding the objectives of state policy and the means through which

these could be achieved; b) A willingness on the part of the population to endure individual sacrifices for the long term good of the collective; and c) Relatively quick success in its policies (Centeno, 1993, p. 326).

If a democracy and technocracy coexistence can be achieved, we must mention the problems it could face on its path to creation. Centeno even states that “while advanced degrees may help our modern Leviathans - technocrats - construct societies in which our lives will be longer and less nasty, there is no reason to suspect that such expertise will keep them from making our existence even more brutish” (Centeno, 1993, p. 330).

First, the absence of a real and legitimate opposition. Any opposition to an expert and technical rule could be considered as irrational and pointless, undermining the democratic process at its core, thus not permitting the existence of a democratic technocracy. Besides, the collective sacrifice of resources Centeno mentions among its points may be extremely difficult to attain, especially in those countries where the living standards are already low, and the population is not willing to undertake long term compromises. Last, the premise for a technocratic tool to be in place is its merit, thus its achievements. Democratic states are not fully in control of experts, not even if run by technocrats, and failures in any field are possible. However, no technocrat could keep ruling with the burden of failure on his back, due to the very idea that technocracy wants to provide, one of infallibility and expertise. This could then compromise the formation of a democratic technocracy.

3.4.2 Democratic deficit or better efficiency?

Liberal democratic systems often shall use technocratic figures to limit the popular will. The reasons for such a choice involve the will to avoid the tyranny of the majority and that of improving areas of action under the careful control of experts of the sector. Some may argue that this way democracy is sacrificed in favour of better efficiency. Indeed, technocracy is a power that does not go through the electoral vote nor comes from the people, but draws its legitimacy from being a government for the people. In addition, the democratic deficit is enlarged by the depoliticization technocracy brings about, approaching politics in a rational and scientific way, rejecting ties with ideologies and political parties. On the other hand, others may argue that the presence of the technocratic tool in a democratic government can diminish political conflict around certain issues or resources, thus revealing a good trait of depoliticization in favor of efficiency, and in favor of democracy, since no particular interests are involved and conflicts can be solved more rationally. Following this reasoning, we may infer that the technocratic challenge to democracy does not really exist, but it could be considered as an evolution of the democratic system. According to Tucker and Zilinsky (2020) in fact, technocracy is not threatening democracy in any way, and the crisis of representative democracy is simply the result of its inefficiency and inability to meet the public opinion’s demands.

Nevertheless, technocratic governments stem from a crisis or a particular need of a society, where democratic processes are felt to be inadequate and helpless. We will then say that the adoption of technocracy, as well as its implementation, both derive and enhance the weaknesses of democratic systems. The democratic deficit itself gives birth to technocracy, stemming from the distrust of people in democratic governments. The

technocratic presence keeps then rooting in governments, thus enlarging such deficit, promising more efficiency and economic development. A part from being a government for the people, the technocratic approach deepens the democratic deficit through a complete escape from elections and vote, claiming legitimacy from the results it will achieve, for the people. The word ‘challenge’ could be considered as too heavy, however it is self-evident that technocracy has an impact on representative democracy and its crisis.

3.4.3 Technocracy and democracy’s relationship

Technocracy needs democratic institutions to rely on. Born within the institutions, its task is to respond to some kind of demand that democracy is failing to supply. Technocracy is however external to elections and votes, which is often considered its weakness. Nevertheless, Eri Bertsou (2020) underlines how elections are not a synonym for more responsive or more just political actors, since forms of clientelism happen in any case.

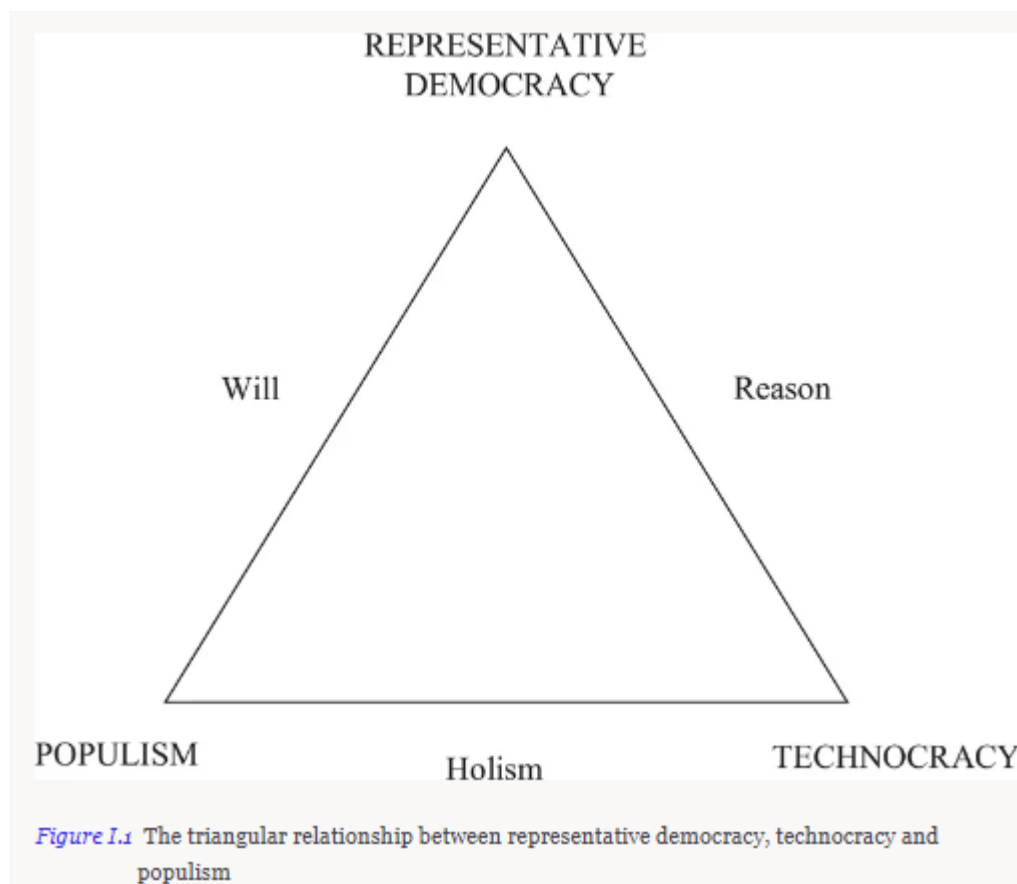
Once technocrats become part of a government, their decisions impact the political sphere, thus they become political. The true threat to democracy is to be reached in the masking of decisions into some necessary and impartial choices, even when they are not (Bertsou, 2020). Indeed, technocratic decisions are considered to be correct and unquestionable, due to their character of expertise. Any opposition results illegitimate, face the scientific basis it relies on, thus technocratic rule can become incontrovertible. Experts are not immune to biases, which may be present in their reasoning and decisions, which however could be not questionable because hidden in the technicalities of the decisions. All this however, may pose a problem to the democratic system.

Thus, is technocracy a friend or an enemy of democracy? To answer this question, we will take Bertsou’s words from the section of his book *Technocracy and democracy*: “Technocracy is a friend to democracy when it helps representative democratic systems to balance the need for expertise, efficiency and responsibility in governance with the demands placed upon the system by the citizens. (...) Technocracy is a foe to democracy when it is blind to the existence of conflict and disregards how technocratic decisions impact various groups in society (...)” (Bertsou, 2020, p. 266). Hence, technocracy and democracy are in a dual relationship. Their coexistence is possible, however respecting certain conditions of democratic legitimacy.

3.4.4 The risks of delegated powers

In the complex relationship described, delegating too many powers to technocracy may constitute a risk for democracy. Castellani isolates four consequences of the delegation of powers to the technocratic mechanism that could damage democracy (Castellani, 2021), and therefore create an imbalance in the relationship. First, the professor mentions the possibility that more technique-centered institutions could become less comprehensible, and thus distant from citizens. Technocrats could also become a way for politicians to avoid taking important decisions, turning all responsibility on the technical apparatus of a government. Moreover,

the push for avoiding conflict in the name of a widespread rationality is, according to Castellani, doomed to fail. Politics is made up of different interests, passions, discussions and opinions; it preserves an element of irrationality and individuality that sooner or later comes out. Last, Castellani disagrees with other authors, arguing that technocrats do not grant impartiality and neutrality only for the fact of being experts, and this aspect should not be taken into consideration when they are entrusted with specific decision-making works. Enhancing the risks of technocracy, Scicluna and Auer write that “excessive reliance on technocratic logic tends to impoverish democracy and fuel the turn to populism within member states” (Scicluna & Auer, 2019, p. 1434). Indeed, unregulated technocracy and populism, besides being opposites, are both possible threats to representative democracy. Representative democracy and populism share popular participation and the implementation of some democratic channels; representative democracy and technocracy share effective governance and separation of power (Caramani, 2020). However, technocracy lacks an essential element that the conception of democracy entails: the consideration of the will of the people. Technocracy threatens democracy with its appeal to an holistic vision, that tends to eliminate pluralism. The figure below shows the links that exist among the three political styles. The triangle makes intuitively visible affinities and cleavages.



(Caramani, 2020).

3.5 Proposals of possible alternatives

Notwithstanding its controversial side, technocracy is today perceived as indispensable. Some critics even attack its alleged objectivity, seen as an excuse to impose itself in the society (Antonelli, 2019). However, to eradicate technocracy an alternative mechanism should be implemented, one capable of holding science,

technique and democracy together. A solution that would have a smoother impact on representative democracy.

A possible alternative should be able to gain citizens' trust, since "citizens who perceive their democratically elected governments and institutions to be untrustworthy may redirect their attention to technocracy, as an alternative mode of decision-making (...)" (Bertsou & Pastorella, 2017, p. 434). Democratic participation should stand next to technocratic problem-solving, in order to provide democratic legitimacy and efficient technique.

A democratic tool that we may suppose could meet the requirements of efficiency and participation is the open government model, based on clear access to information and principles of transparency. In open government, "the process of governing is thus articulated in a network of actors who are partners in decision-making: the state can be best conceived as a platform providing resources, rules and skills in order to build a "facilitating framework" for all the other stakeholders to collaborate" (De Blasio & Sorice, 2016, p. 19).

Participation is then democratic, and includes citizens, private companies and organizations, involved in the decision-making processes also through online methods, which can cover a broader spectrum of the population. Dialogue and collaboration are the bases on which decisions are designed, resulting in a good efficiency standard on the achievements' side. Indeed, "open government can be conceived as a progressive stage model, from the access to information (in transparency) to full collaborative governance, in which the power of decision-making is symmetrical among all the participants" (De Blasio & Sorice, 2016, p. 20).

Open government involves transparency, participation, collaboration and digital technologies (De Blasio & Sorice, 2016), and may therefore constitute a valid alternative to the alleged essential technocracy.

The democratic element is embodied by participation and collaboration, the technocratic one by digital technologies and collaboration with expert stakeholders. Hence, we deduce that experts would have a say, however opposition would be possible and not illegitimate, in a context of widespread participation.

Conclusions

The aim of this work is to answer to the question posed in the beginning:

What impact has technocracy on society through its communicative style?

And which role does it play in the crisis of democracy?

The hypotheses supposed, since the beginning, some type of impact and involvement of technocracy in the areas of communication and democratic crisis, nonetheless different and opposite points of view are taken into consideration along the study. Indeed, the research conducted focuses on the analysis and comparison of studies and theories taken from academic books, online articles, statistical research, philosophical dissertations. Even though this work does not aim at providing empirical or new findings, it constitutes a mix of sociological perspectives concerning the theme of technocracy and its implication in original and currently discussed contexts.

Summing up, thanks to this work the impact of technocracy's communicative style is highlighted. If on one hand, the elements that technocracy uses in his communication engage "technocratic citizens", who tend to have a higher political and educational background and present specific personality traits such as consciousness and neuroticism, on the other the technocratic discourse can generate a real opposition to the "strong powers" by that part of the population which perceives the technocratic influence as hegemonic and a usurpation of the power of the people. Especially the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced how portions of society have their doubts on the validity of scientific considerations over public consensus and popular will, considered as the pillar of democracy and freedom. The reactions to a negative perception of technocratic governments include the rise of technopopulist movements, as analysed at the end of chapter 2. Stemming from the conclusions of this work, we can also infer that technocracy and its communication do have an impact on the crisis of representative democracy, increasing distrust and depoliticization processes among citizens. Indeed, notwithstanding positions in disagreement to this conclusion (i.e., by Tucker and Zilinsky), the results in favor of these hypotheses are solid.

Technocratic governments stem from a crisis or a particular need of a society, where democratic processes are felt to be inadequate and helpless. The technocratic discourse conveys efficiency and resoluteness. Thus, reporting a subparagraph of Chapter 3, "the democratic deficit itself gives birth to technocracy, stemming from the distrust of people in democratic governments. The technocratic presence keeps then rooting in governments, thus enlarging such deficit, promising more efficiency and economic development. Therefore, it deepens the democratic deficit, through a complete escape from elections and vote." Moreover, the way in which the democratic deficit is enhanced by technocratic institutions is evaluated through considerations on EU (technocratic) institutions.

This work ends with an open proposal, a proposal of something new, something that could lead to further studies and comparisons with the technocratic structure. The open government model, which according to recent studies would ensure a good proportion of popular participation and scientific efficiency, would allow

new analysis on technocracy and its structure, perhaps improving its relationship with democracy or even leading to the disappearance of both the democratic and the technocratic structures in favor of this new political model.

In conclusion, the strengths of this work reside in the variety of sources implied and in their comparative analysis, which enhanced the weaknesses of some theories and the key features of others. Indeed, this work is not supposed to prove anyone wrong, though it aims at emphasizing how technocracy leaves its traces in society and how this affects the current crisis of representative democracy.

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Abstract

La relazione tra i concetti di conoscenza e potere ha radici profonde. Le opere di Platone, risalenti al 400 a.C., contemplavano già una mentalità tecnocratica in cui i filosofi (cioè le persone che possedevano conoscenze e capacità cognitive sofisticate) avrebbero dovuto governare. Secondo l'antico filosofo greco, solo le loro competenze potevano fornire al resto della società il tipo di servizi di cui aveva bisogno.

Oggi come ieri, la concezione della conoscenza è legata all'idea di ragione; l'epoca in cui questo legame è diventato più stretto e indissolubile è stata quella dell'Illuminismo. L'incontro tra conoscenza empirica e governo durante l'Illuminismo è alla base del progressismo.

Il primo filosofo che considerò questi aspetti della società industriale fu Henri de Saint-Simon, il primo vero teorico della tecnocrazia progressista. Nel XIX secolo teorizzò l'impossibilità per una società industriale di sopravvivere senza l'esistenza di scienziati, ingegneri, manager e tecnici (Putnam, 1977).

"Tecnocrazia" come termine vero e proprio ha fatto la sua prima apparizione nel 1919 negli Stati Uniti. Si impose però all'attenzione dell'opinione pubblica solo negli anni '30, quando un movimento non politico di New York, chiamato appunto "Technocracy", iniziò a sostenere la necessità di un governo composto da scienziati, economisti ed esperti per risollevarsi dalla Grande Depressione (CFI Team, 2022). Lo spartiacque tra la tecnocrazia progressista e quella neoliberista fu la crisi degli anni Settanta. La crisi politica ed economica fu percepita come generata da una classe politica inefficiente, incapace di prendere decisioni efficaci. Tuttavia, la crisi della tecnocrazia progressista ha generato un altro tipo di tecnocrazia, perché la necessità di esperti si è rivelata ancora una volta cruciale. La tecnocrazia neoliberale sostiene la libertà dei mercati intesa come libertà dal potere politico; quindi, l'approccio neoliberale e tecnocratico vedono la depoliticizzazione dell'economia come un modo per preservare la libertà del mercato. La libertà è associata alla competitività dell'economia di mercato, l'economia venendo ancora prima della politica.

I tecnocrati costruiscono un sistema in cui la razionalità strumentale e quella valoriale tendono ad allinearsi. Data la base scientifica e razionale delle azioni tecnocratiche, mezzi e fini sono guidati da verità oggettive e sono i più desiderabili.

Il fatto di far parte di governi tecnici o di ricoprire posizioni di potere rende inevitabilmente i tecnocrati parte della sfera dei media e della comunicazione. I tecnocrati hanno sviluppato un proprio stile di comunicazione e un linguaggio ben definito.

Nel libro "Tecnocrazia e democrazia" (2019), Antonelli si riferisce al potere tecnocratico come "il potere che abilita limitando". Infatti, grazie al loro carattere di razionalità scientifica, le decisioni tecnocratiche sono ineludibili, limitando ogni ulteriore interpretazione o alternativa a una determinata situazione. Un'aura di infallibilità circonda le figure tecnocratiche dei governi, mantenuta alta anche dalle aspettative della società. Tuttavia, capita che gli esseri umani falliscano, e così i tecnocrati.

Il motivo per cui la comunicazione tecnocratica costituisce un argomento interessante non deriva solo dal già citato interesse per il funzionamento della mentalità tecnocratica, ma anche dalla risposta sociologica che il linguaggio tecnocratico scatena all'interno della società.

Da una prospettiva tecnocratica, il discorso tecnocratico può essere definito come “un insieme discorsivo di ideali per la *governance*, che enfatizza le virtù della depoliticizzazione, dell'armonizzazione, della razionalizzazione e dell'oggettivazione del *policy-making* e della valutazione, e che promuove il ruolo degli esperti tecnici nel *policy-making* rispetto agli attori pubblici sostanzialmente “politici” o “democratici”” (Meislová, 2021, p. 170). La soluzione razionale dei problemi viene quindi privilegiata rispetto alle soluzioni basate sui valori. La società è convinta che le questioni politiche e sociali possano essere risolte meglio con una solida base amministrativa dai tratti manageriali.

Nella “Introduction to the technocratic challenge”, Caramani individua un elenco di dimensioni che sono normalmente individuabili nel discorso tecnocratico (Caramani, 2020, p. 17):

- 1) Elitismo.
- 2) Approccio scientifico.
- 3) Orientamento al risultato.
- 4) Orientamento agli obiettivi. L'obiettivo principale è l'efficienza, seguita da un buon controllo delle finanze e dei costi.
- 5) Antipolitica.
- 6) Stile. Al contrario del discorso populista, il tono è neutro e piatto. Le parole non sono deputate a infiammare le emozioni delle persone.

La percezione da parte dei cittadini dell'approccio comunicativo tecnocratico varia, ed è possibile individuare sia riscontri positivi che negativi.

Gli atteggiamenti tecnocratici delle persone si identificano nella preferenza per essere governati da esperti, a volte disdegnando la formazione della volontà politica popolare democratica. I cittadini tecnocratici sono antipolitici; non solo credono in una migliore gestione delle situazioni politiche da parte degli esperti, ma vedono anche nella loro presunta neutralità un interesse genuino a lungo termine per il corretto funzionamento della società. In effetti, i leader politici e la politica dei partiti sono permeati dalla retorica delle campagne permanenti, e i cittadini tecnocratici li percepiscono troppo concentrati sull'organizzazione delle elezioni piuttosto che sulla gestione della polis politica.

L'atteggiamento tecnocratico è più comune nei cittadini che non si relazionano con la politica nella loro vita quotidiana e quindi non sostengono realmente una parte politica. La figura del tecnocrate viene quindi vista come una soluzione al di sopra delle parti, che porrebbe fine ai conflitti in nome dell'efficienza e dell'ordine. Il sentimento tecnocratico risulta anche in questo caso strettamente connesso alla crisi della democrazia rappresentativa, essendo più forte laddove le persone vedono che la politica dei partiti non riesce a soddisfare le loro esigenze. I partiti vengono sfiduciati e le persone ripongono la loro fiducia in figure alternative (Bertsou e Pastorella, 2017). Nella “Introduction to the technocratic challenge” di Caramani, i cittadini mostrano

generalmente una considerazione positiva della tecnocrazia quando hanno alti livelli di istruzione e bassa fiducia nei partiti politici (Caramani, 2020). Inoltre, lo studio di M. Ackermann et al. sui tratti della personalità che danno forma a un atteggiamento tecnocratico sottolinea la consapevolezza e il nevroticismo come fattori chiave. Le persone coscienziose e nevrotiche sembrano preferire l'efficienza alla deliberazione (Ackermann, Ackermann, & Freitag, 2019). Al contrario, le persone gradevoli e quelle con tratti estroversi e personalità aperte alle esperienze, con le dovute eccezioni, rivelano bassi atteggiamenti tecnocratici.

La comunicazione tecnocratica non sempre conduce a un'accettazione positiva e a un grande grado di atteggiamento tecnocratico tra le persone. In particolare, la pandemia COVID-19 ha messo in evidenza come porzioni della società dubitino della validità delle considerazioni scientifiche rispetto al consenso pubblico e alla volontà popolare, considerati il pilastro della democrazia e della libertà. Se da un lato la gestione (prevalentemente) tecnocratica della pandemia ha portato a un'accelerazione del processo di depoliticizzazione e di affermazione della tecnocrazia, dall'altro ha visto l'ascesa di gruppi populistici che hanno risposto negativamente all'approccio tecnocratico (Foster, Brusenbauch Meislova, & Grzymalski, 2021).

La correlazione tra populismo, tecnocrazia e comunicazione digitale dà vita a un tipo specifico di populismo: il tecnopopulismo. Esattamente come la tecnocrazia, il tecnopopulismo si sviluppa nella sfera della tecnologia. I tecnopopulisti sostengono la democrazia diretta online, quindi la creazione di partiti-piattaforma (De Blasio & Sorice, *Populismi tra tecnologia, e-democracy e processo di depoliticizzazione*, 2018). Anche se gli strumenti online come l'e-democracy sono stati concepiti per rafforzare la democrazia rappresentativa, l'uso tecnopopulista dei mezzi di comunicazione spinge verso la depoliticizzazione del processo democratico. Pertanto, anche se da una prospettiva opposta, il tecnopopulismo contribuisce alla crisi della democrazia rappresentativa, pur non avendo tratti tecnocratici.

Tutto ciò premesso, quando i cittadini presentano un atteggiamento tecnocratico, accettano apertamente, o addirittura preferiscono, che i tecnocrati occupino posizioni di potere. Questo atteggiamento positivo verso le competenze e le capacità manageriali, piuttosto che verso le ideologie politiche e le elezioni democratiche, costituisce una minaccia per l'integrità dei sistemi democratici rappresentativi. Possiamo dedurre che anche un approccio negativo alla regola tecnocratica non garantisce la sicurezza della democrazia rappresentativa, poiché può spingere i cittadini verso ideali populistici e quindi verso la richiesta di una democrazia più diretta. In ogni caso, la tecnocrazia gioca un ruolo nella crisi della democrazia rappresentativa, avendo il potere di accelerare il processo di depoliticizzazione dall'interno.

La tecnocrazia è uno strumento che le democrazie adottano per affrontare meglio eventi critici o tecnici; più che una scelta, può sembrare un obbligo, soprattutto quando sono coinvolti affari sovranazionali di natura economica e finanziaria. Pertanto, la tecnocrazia non è una minaccia esterna alla democrazia rappresentativa, ma piuttosto una minaccia interna. Acquisisce legittimità attraverso un sovvertimento della democrazia rappresentativa, deturpando e sostenendo allo stesso tempo il concetto di legittimità derivante dalla scelta

popolare. Infatti, se da un lato l'efficacia diventa una scorciatoia per governare, dall'altro questa viene legittimamente accettata dal popolo come una soluzione razionale.

Secondo un'altra prospettiva, Scharpf indica che la legittimità data dall'efficacia rientra nei processi democratici. I governi tecnocratici agiscono per il popolo, il che costituisce una solida base di legittimità (Behr, 2021). Scharpf non considera la tecnocrazia una minaccia per la democrazia, ma semplicemente una variante proveniente da una convinzione legittimante alternativa. La differenza deriva dalla posizione da cui proviene la legittimità. La legittimità basata sugli input proviene dal popolo e dai suoi voti; la legittimità basata sugli output deriva dall'efficacia, che è comunque a beneficio del popolo (Scharpf, 2011).

Al contrario di Scharpf, Behr (2021) è meno convinto della reale accettazione di una legittimità orientata all'output, sostenendo che il sentimento di esclusione di un popolo dalle decisioni politiche può degenerare sia in sfiducia nei confronti dell'autorità (cioè nel populismo) sia in disincanto e indifferenza verso la politica.

Le stesse istituzioni dell'UE hanno acquisito legittimità seguendo un processo di legittimazione orientato ai risultati. La risposta dei cittadini è sempre stata per lo più incoraggiante, con una diffusa accettazione anche degli interventi che non avevano alla base un chiaro input democratico, se non una debole rappresentanza popolare proveniente dal Parlamento europeo (Habermas, 2015).

Nel contesto della tecnocrazia, della democratizzazione e del deficit democratico, ci sono voci contrastanti provenienti da direzioni molto diverse.

Secondo Tucker e Zilinsky, molte ragioni concorrono al distacco dei cittadini dalla democrazia rappresentativa e la tecnocrazia potrebbe essere una di queste, ma non la principale (Tucker & Zilinsky, 2020). Nel loro studio, le istituzioni tecnocratiche hanno un impatto sull'opinione pubblica (sono le preferite) finché vengono affrontate questioni centrali per il Paese. Questo studio apre quindi a una visione diversa dell'impatto che la tecnocrazia ha sulla democrazia, non negandone l'influenza, ma piuttosto sottolineando che tale relazione non è facilmente tracciabile.

In ogni caso, i governi tecnocratici nascono da una crisi o da una particolare esigenza di una società, in cui i processi democratici sono sentiti come inadeguati e impotenti. Diremmo quindi che l'adozione della tecnocrazia, così come la sua attuazione, derivano da e rafforzano le debolezze dei sistemi democratici.

Il deficit democratico stesso fa nascere la tecnocrazia, derivante dalla sfiducia dei cittadini nei confronti dei governi democratici. La presenza tecnocratica continua a radicarsi nei governi, ampliando così tale deficit, promettendo maggiore efficienza e sviluppo economico.

Nonostante l'idea sia quella di un governo per il popolo, l'approccio tecnocratico acuisce il deficit democratico attraverso una completa fuga dalle elezioni e dal voto, rivendicando la legittimità dei risultati che otterrà per il popolo. La parola "sfida" alla democrazia forse è eccessiva; tuttavia, è evidente che la tecnocrazia ha un impatto sulla democrazia rappresentativa e sulla sua crisi.

Quindi, la tecnocrazia è amica o nemica della democrazia? Per rispondere a questa domanda, faremo riferimento alle parole di Bertson dalla sezione del suo libro "Technocracy and democracy": "La tecnocrazia è amica della democrazia quando aiuta i sistemi democratici rappresentativi a bilanciare la necessità di

competenza, efficienza e responsabilità nella governance con le richieste poste al sistema dai cittadini. (...) La tecnocrazia è nemica della democrazia quando non vede l'esistenza di conflitti e non tiene conto dell'impatto delle decisioni tecnocratiche sui vari gruppi della società (...)" (Bertsou, 2020, p. 266).

Tecnocrazia e democrazia sono quindi in una duplice relazione. La loro coesistenza è possibile, tuttavia rispettando alcune condizioni di legittimità democratica.

Nonostante il suo lato controverso, la tecnocrazia è oggi percepita come indispensabile. Una possibile alternativa dovrebbe soddisfare i requisiti di efficienza ma anche di partecipazione. Il modello di governo aperto, basato su un chiaro accesso alle informazioni e sul principio di trasparenza e partecipazione, potrebbe costituire un compromesso, coinvolgendo la società e non avendo un impatto critico sulla democrazia rappresentativa come la tecnocrazia.