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Representative Democracy As Mediated Politics:

Rethinking The Links Between
Representation And Participation

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Abstract

This paper is divided into three sections. The first two sections critically review the literature on representation and participation respectively to propose, in the last section, an alternative theoretical framing of the links between those two concepts. Section one critically analyses democratic minimalism's election-centred understanding of political representation: in this model, elections are the quintessential institution of representative government. Under democratic minimalism, representation is fundamentally reduced to the act of electoral authorization; its function being to select a government. In this understanding, democratic representation is an activity that largely rests on the initiatives and actions of political leaders. Civic participation (other than electoral mobilisation) is not considered a significant input to democratic governance.

Section two engages in a critical review of participation theory. Critics of minimal democracy advocate a sustained increase in participation, arguing that participation plays a positive role under democracy. They disagree however, on their understanding of what participation means or in what particular ways does participation contribute to democratic life. Proponents of participatory democracy view participation as an alternative rather than a complement to representation, searching to expand direct forms of civic involvement within civil society. But even within those authors that do not oppose participation to representation, there is no agreement regarding the role that civic engagement plays in a representative democracy. Their consensus around a need for a more participatory type of democracy usually hides significant disagreements on the way to think about the functions of participation and of its specific contribution to representative government. Calls for greater civic activism frequently reveals contrasting notions about what participatory formats are desirable. The competing understandings about what participation means are sometimes bridged by placing all of them under the wing of a more encompassing concept: civil society. Such a theoretical move, however, is a rather unfruitful exercise that simply sweeps competing notions of participation under the carpet of a more abstract term

without really articulating them into a new theoretical synthesis. As a result, the quarrel of interpretations resurfaces as a conflict between opposing meanings of civil society. The way out of such a theoretical deadlock is to elaborate a comprehensive theory of civic participation that could hold and make sense of the actual diversity of meanings and forms of civic engagement that are found in contemporary societies. This is the task set for section three.

In the last section, I introduce a theoretical framework to integrate both sets of literature into a model of representative democracy that breaks with the dominant electoral understanding of the concept. The distinctive feature of representative democracy, I will argue, is not elections but the establishment of an institutional setting that gives citizens the opportunity to influence the dynamics of representative institutions not only on Election Day but on a continuous and regular basis. In this rendering of the concept of representative democracy, the quality of a regime will not be solely measured against the standard of free and competitive elections but fundamentally by the scope and influence that the informal space of mediated politics has over formal representative arrangements. The arena of mediated politics includes a variety of actors and practices that need to be analytically distinguished to allow a proper understanding of how different forms of civic actors interact with each other and how they each feed and reproduce the representative bond in contemporary democracies. Civic participation and political representation are no longer presented as alternative ways to organise the polity but as the two sides of the Janus-faced institution of democratic representation. The idea of representative government as mediated politics requires the elaboration of a more sophisticated and differentiated theory of participation that could give account of the diverse set of actors and of the multiple forms of collective action that contribute to the practice of democratic representation in contemporary societies.

1. The electoral rendering of representation: a critical review

A significant part of the recent academic production about representative government is framed within a purely electoral understanding of democracy. The genealogy of such an impoverished notion of representation can be traced back to the realist model proposed by Joseph Schumpeter. The realist or elitist model of democracy considers elections to be the paradigmatic institution of representative government. This election-centred model of representation is built upon the following presuppositions:

- a) a static and formal rendering of representation that --by highlighting the act of electoral delegation that opens up or closes a representative period-- leaves aside the crucial aspect of *what goes on during the exercise of representation*;
- b) The use of the principal-agent metaphor to describe the nature of the representative bond as a personal tie between an isolated individual and her/his representative. In such rendering of representation, the associational dimension of the concept of citizenship is simply ignored¹.

There are, of course, also significant differences within this model, particularly the extent to which they are willing to include a notion of democratic accountability into their conception of representation. While the latter concept is absent in Schumpeter's original rendition, recent works have tried to build into the model the notion that elections are not merely a mechanism of elite selection but also a tool of citizen control.

1.1 Divorcing Democracy from the Citizenship Principle: The Schumpeterian Model of Representation

In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Joseph Schumpeter established the basic tenants of what became known as the realist theory of democracy. According to Schumpeter, the workings of existing consolidated democracies bear little resemblance to the normative ideal of democracy as the rule of the people.

Contemporary democracies, he argues, are removed from any notion of popular will:

“Democracy does not mean and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of the terms ‘people’ and ‘rule’. Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them... Now one aspect of this may be expressed by saying that democracy is the rule of the politician.” Schumpeter (1950, pp. 284-5)

What makes a regime democratic is the presence of free, regular, and competitive elections. Elections are, in Schumpeter’s opinion, the central institution of representative democracy. Elections, however, are not conceived as a mechanism through which the electorate signals its preferences to governmental elites but rather as a method of selection of those who are going to rule. Electoral contests require, in his view, ample use of techniques of mass manipulation to attract the attention of the electorate on a candidate. Manipulative techniques, Schumpeter acknowledges, play a substantial role in modern mass democracies, becoming a crucial aspect and weapon of the political combat:

“...the psycho-techniques of party management and party advertising, slogans and marching tunes, are not accessories –he argues-- They are the essence of politics.” Schumpeter (1950, p. 283)

In Schumpeter’s notion of representation there is no room for the idea of accountability. Constituents play a mere reactive role: to respond to the stimulus presented by the competing elites in the electoral campaign by selecting the most appealing one. The electorate has no initiative and is incapable of shaping the political agenda in any meaningful way. Rather, it is the electorate who is being shaped by the political leadership, “...and the shaping of it –Schumpeter remarks-- is an essential part of the democratic contest.” Schumpeter (1950, p 282) Even in those cases in which the electorate might have “strong and definitive” volitions, he argues, those demands will remain latent “until they are called into life by some political leader.” Schumpeter (1950, p.270).

In this model, the crucial side of the representative equation is that of the representatives since it is in them where all political initiative begins and ends. The main task of representation is to generate political leadership. The constituent or represented side of the relation is largely irrelevant. Constituents are depicted as a passive and irrational mass incapable of autonomous political action or initiative. The end result is a notion of representation that is completely divorced from any idea of governmental accountability or responsiveness: representative democracy does not establish the rule of the people but of politicians.

1.2 Introducing the notion of accountability into the Schumpeterian Model:

B. Manin

The possibility of choosing elites in competitive elections is also the starting point of Bernard Manin's analysis of representative government. In his influential *The Principles of Representative Government* he defines elections as "the central institution of representative government." Manin (1997, p. 6). Representative government, Manin argues, establishes a political regime in which elites are chosen to make decisions and those decisions are made subject to the verdict of the people. All forms of democracy, direct and indirect, rests on the government of the few. The real difference between direct and indirect democracy is not one between self-government and government by the few since they both institute government by minorities. Rather, it lies in their contrasting methods for selecting elites: direct democracy resorts to lot and representative government to elections as their respective methods of selection of rulers (Manin 1997, p.42).

What are the consequences of representative government's choice of elections as the selection method to appoint political representatives? A central argument of *The Principles of Representative Government* is that the choice for elections inevitably introduces an aristocratic element into democratic representation. "Citizens" Manin argues, "are viewed primarily as the source of legitimate government, not as persons who might desire to hold offices themselves." (Manin, 1997, p.92). Selection by lot gives everyone equal chance of exercising power. Elections, instead, do not guarantee such equality. Elections distribute office

unequally to an elite of distinguished citizens. Lot is a more equalitarian method of allocation of power than elections. Representative government choice for elections gives every citizen the equal right to consent to power but not an equal chance to hold office, establishing an elective aristocracy. (Manin, 1997, p. 92)²

Manin analyses electoral dynamics as a psychological process of identification of the voter with the representative. Elections are irremediably a choice for persons and, consequently, of personality traits. Distinctive personalities will be more likely to be positively judged by voters than politicians with average personality traits. Elections inevitably introduce an aristocratic element in representative relations since citizens tend to vote for distinctive or salient personalities that are above the average individual: "At the heart of the elective procedure", he concludes, "there is a force pulling in the opposite direction from the desire for similarity between rulers and ruled." Manin, (1997, p. 142) As Nadia Urbinati argues, Manin's vision of the representative process is that of a psychological game of comparing personality traits with no intervention of any sort of institutional intermediation (Urbinati 2006, p. 9).

Yet, in contrast to Schumpeter, there is a concern in Manin to reconnect the idea of representation to the popular will. He does it by inserting into the model the concept of electoral accountability: "It is the rendering of accounts what has constituted from the beginning the democratic component of representation." (Manin, 1997, p. 234) According to Manin, there are several features of representative government that force representatives to take the wishes of the electorate into account. The existence of basic freedoms of the press and of expression, for example, allows different constituents to establish horizontal forms of connection among themselves to voice their wishes and criticisms to the government³. Yet, the feature that he considers crucial for generating governmental responsiveness is *the repeated character of elections*:

"The most important feature of representative systems that allows voters to influence the decisions of their representatives is the recurring character of elections." Manin, (1997, p. 175).

Regular elections, he argues, provide a key incentive for governments to take into consideration the will of the electorate. This is an aspect of electoral competition that, in his view, Schumpeter's model overlooks:

"It is surprising that Schumpeter scarcely mentions the periodic nature of elections in his theory of democracy. Although, as we saw, Schumpeter presents his definition of democracy as closer to observable reality than is the 'classical conception,' his definition of does not include the empirical fact that electoral competition is repeated." Manin (1997, p. 174)⁴

For Manin, the central mechanism to citizen's influence is what Carl Friedrich termed the "rule of anticipated reaction" (Friedrich, 1963, pp.199-215). Representatives who are subject to re-election - anticipating the likely response of the electorate at the moment of evaluating their political term in the next election - decide to behave in a responsible manner throughout their tenure. The repeated character of elections is, according to Manin, "the channel through which the will of the governed enters into the calculations of those in power." Manin, (1997, p.178).

1.3 The limitations of elections as an accountability tool: Przeworski, Manin & Stokes

In *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*, A. Przeworski, S. C. Stokes and B. Manin reopen the debate about the role of elections as an accountability tool. Like Schumpeter and Manin, they consider elections to be the defining feature of representative government: "...what is distinctive about democracies [is that] rulers are selected through elections." (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999, p. 5) The central question addressed by the editors' introduction and their collaborative chapter is whether the fact that politicians are elected is sufficient to make them act in a representative manner (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999, p. 5). Using the individual agent – principal analogy, they wonder to what extent is the principal qualify to evaluate autonomously and critically what constitutes her/his best interest. Several factors, they argue, might prevent an adequate evaluation:

the voter can misread the signals sent by the representative, s/he might lack of sufficient information to make a proper judgement of the situation and/or exhibit inconsistent opinions. Without reaching the extremes of Schumpeter, the authors introduce some doubts about the cognitive capabilities of the average voter.

But even if we leave aside the doubts that were raised concerning the ability of the individual voter to adequately evaluate what decisions serve her/his best interest, there are more fundamental obstacles, in their opinion, that prevent elections from being an efficient tool for political accountability. What are those factors? Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes provide three main arguments. First, there is an intrinsic limitation in voting for it grants citizens only one chance to punish or reward numerous governmental decisions. Voting is a blunt instrument of control for it does not serve to effectively signal which particular governmental decisions or which particular agency is being targeted: “one cannot control a thousand targets - they argue - with only one instrument.” (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999, p. 50). Voters, consequently, have very limited power to shape the outcome of most governmental policies due to the inadequate nature of voting as a signalling mechanism. Second, and due to the decentralised nature of the act of voting, there are basic problems of coordinating the orientation of such actions. (Przeworski, 1991, p. 12) Since citizens cannot synchronise the orientation of their votes there is no way of telling if a certain electoral result was prospectively or retrospectively guided. Elections merely aggregate an inorganic group of individual preferences. Third, there are profound asymmetries of information between represented and representatives that prevent an adequate evaluation of governmental performance and decisions by the average citizen.⁵

Institutional reforms might contribute to level the informational gap by improving public access to information and governmental transparency. Yet, even if the third quandary raised by the authors were dealt with, the two others remain unsolvable: elections will still remain ineffective as instruments of voter's control over representatives. The bleak picture that the authors present, however, does not lead them to completely abandon the idea of accountable government. In light of

the inadequacy of elections as a tool for political accountability, they shift the agenda to issues of legal accountability. Any agenda of institutional reform, they conclude, should aim at improving horizontal accountability, that is, it should aim at developing an adequate system of checks and balances to force representatives to act in the public interest. Representative government turns into responsible government. To act in a representative way is not predicated in the presence of fluid channels of communication between representatives and represented but on the establishment of an institutional environment that promotes mutual checks among the political leadership. In this way, the notion of representation becomes detached (once again) of any links with the constituents' wishes and aspirations.

The limitations of the elitist model of representation forces us to think of a reconstruction of the idea of representative democracy that does not relegate constituents to an irrelevant position. If democratic representation implies a specific type of link between citizens and their representatives, the analysis of representative dynamics must focus on the multiple political processes that feed and recreate channels of communication between represented and representatives. Any analysis that relegates constituents to an irrelevant position is thus inadequate. Political representation must be thought relationally (Plotke 1997, p. 24), i.e., the analysis should focus on those contact points that representative and represented establish throughout the duration of a governmental tenure. A relational perspective implies treating both sides of the representative equation as relevant. Obviously elections constitute a crucial channel of communication between citizens and the political system but it is not the only one. There are multiple alternative ways through which citizens seek to influence governmental decisions. It is necessary to include those initiatives into the analysis of representative government to determine to which extent those actions are effective at generating democratic responsiveness.

The idea of representation as a particular type of bond forces us to establish a conceptual link between participation and representation. Participation should not

be thought of as a threat nor as an alternative to representation but rather as a prerequisite of good representative government. The problem with the previously reviewed theories is that the constituent side of the equation is reduced to a passive role, except on Election Day. The represented are portrayed as isolated citizens that merely mobilise at election time in order to produce a government (when they are not depicted as irrational masses, as is the case of Schumpeter). It is thus imperative to introduce into the analysis of representation different forms of collective action, of associational life, of actors and initiatives that feed, question, and reproduce the democratic bond. The analysis of representation must be expanded beyond the activities of the elites or of the occasional electoral choices of individual voters make to incorporate the civil society variable.

2. The diverse meanings of the concept of participation in democratic theory

The concept of participation does not have a univocal meaning. The term is employed to refer to a great variety of initiatives from a very heterogeneous group of actors. There is a great deal of discussion within the field of participation studies over the specific role that participation plays in democratic societies and about the civic actors that are most politically relevant to public life. As a result, there are wide disagreements over the understanding of the concept as well as about the type of associational activity that is considered crucial for the well-being of a democracy. Competing theoretical approaches disagree with one another over very basic issues, each highlighting a specific tier of associational life as being the crucial one for understanding the political dynamics of representative democracy as well as attributing very different roles to civic participation.

This section will analyse what I consider to be the three main theoretical models about the role of participation in democratic societies: social capital, public space, and interest group theories. Why choose these three perspectives over other ones? Because each of these perspectives focuses on what I consider to be the three main layers in which participation takes place under representative democracy. Each of these frameworks emphasises a distinctive social arena or layer of what I term, mediated politics. Each layer is occupied by different sort of actors that engage in very specific forms of collective action. Social capital theory is interested on the contribution of non-political associational activity to democratic life⁶. The public sphere perspective on informal actors that are politically oriented yet they operate outside the boundaries of the formal institutional setting of representative politics. Lastly, the interest group literature focuses on formal and professionalised organisations that are politically oriented and insiders to the political system. Each perspective has in mind a distinctive type of group activity, a particular social terrain as the locus of group activity, and they tend to privilege or grant relevance to a specific form of associative life. Finally, each of the perspectives attributes very different functions to participation under democracy.

Notwithstanding the mayor differences that undoubtedly exist among the three theoretical perspectives regarding their understanding of politics, democracy and of civil society, I believe they can be integrated into the broader conceptual framework of mediated politics.

After synthetically reviewing the main arguments of each of those theoretical corpuses, I will proceed to bring them together under a common interpretative framework where each form of participation is place in a complex multi-level scenario of mediated politics. The analysis and theoretical review is not meant to be a comprehensive description of the significant theoretical contributions that each of those perspectives have made to democratic theory but aims at selecting certain elements of those traditions to elaborate a more differentiated theory of democratic participation under representative government. More than competing theories of democratic participation, they rather represent partial theories of participation under democracy, each of them shedding important light on a specific layer or terrain of group activity. In the next chapter I will attempt at bringing them together into a more comprehensive theory of democratic participation.

2.1 The social capital model

The authors that work within this model are part of what Jane Mansbridge termed the pedagogic approach to participation (Mansbridge 1998). Participation is viewed as a way to acquire certain psychological traits that are considered relevant in the formation of a democratic personality. Through participation, citizens incorporate habits and develop capacities that are crucial in shaping their character in a democratic direction. The arena in which such pedagogic dynamic takes place is the pre-political associational networks of society, where intense face-to-face interaction among citizens takes place. By shaping the character of citizens, participation in voluntary associations contribute to indirectly build a civic culture. The civic culture provides the enabling social environment that is need for the well-functioning of political institutions. The main authors within this tradition are G. Almond, S. Verba, R. Putnam, and C. Pateman. There are, obviously,

important differences among them concerning the role that participation should play in a democratic society. While authors such as Almond and Verba develop a realist theory of participation compatible with the elitist model of democracy, Pateman employs the same theoretical tools to advance a theory of participatory democracy.

In their classic study of the civic culture, Almond and Verba establish a direct connection between the development of certain psychological traits and the proper workings of democratic institutions (Almond and Verba, 1963)

The Civic Culture introduces what will later become the main tenants of social capital theory. A central argument of the book is that the generalisation of certain pre-political attitudes in the individual is important for the proper functioning of democratic institutions. According to Almond and Verba, primary groups provide key socialising arenas where the individual can acquire and develop skills and habits that will shape his/her attitude toward politics. If the social environments where citizens spend most of their lives are characterised by the presence of high degrees of interpersonal trust and by cooperation, it is most likely that they will contribute to the development of democratic personalities (Almond and Verba, 1963, p. 239).

Their theory establishes a direct correlation between participation and individual learning. The spheres where the individual spends most of his/her time (the family, school, work, voluntary associations, etc.) - and thus present greater opportunities for direct participation - are the crucial sites for learning. Work and voluntary associations, they argue, are particularly important social spaces for two reasons: first, because those types of structures are more formalised than others and thus resemble more closely the structures of political authority; second, because in contrast to school and family, the participatory experience in voluntary associations and work is usually coetaneous with that of political life.

The pre-political associative tier of civil society provides a crucial training ground for the development of democratic skills and attitudes in the individual. The proliferation of democratic personalities throughout society will eventually led to the emergence of a *civic culture*. The concept of civic culture is a realist rendering of the notion of democratic culture: it is the political culture that predominates in Western democracies. Almond and Verba developed a theory of participation adequate to the elitist democratic model. In their opinion, the political culture that predominates in consolidated democracies bears little resemblance to the democratic ideal of the active citizen. In present democracies, they argue, the citizen is not an active but a potentially active individual (Almond and Verba, 1963, p. 347). The development of democratic capacities does not necessarily translate into actual participation. The latter does not mean, however, that democratic institutions are not receptive to citizen's demands. According to Almond and Verba, representative institutions do not require active citizens to remain receptive to their demands; it is enough for governments to know that citizens can eventually engage in collective action for them to act in a responsive manner. The law of anticipated reaction that was the basis of Manin's theory of electoral accountability is now stretched to cover non-electoral activities as well. Representatives behave in a responsive manner because they anticipate not only electoral behaviour but also eventual actions of protest against their alleged decisions (Almond and Verba, 1963, p. 350). Consolidated democracies are built upon a compromise between accountability and stability. Brief surges of mobilisation might be necessary to keep representative institutions accountable. But once those demands are addressed, democratic politics should return to a 'normal' state, that is, to a situation where politically oriented civic participation is reduced to a minimum.

Employing the same theoretical tools than Almond and Verba, Carole Pateman engages in a harsh criticism of the elitist democratic model. In *Participation and Democratic Theory*, she develops a theoretical argument about the democratic potential of participation, challenging the dominant consensus established by the realist model about the dangers that participation entails to democratic

governance. Far from a threat to democratic stability, Pateman argues participation must be seen as an essential prerequisite for the proper workings of representative democracy. Her theory aims to establish a model of participatory democracy adequate to the scale and complexity of contemporary democracies.

Pateman's arguments on behalf of participation, however, do not differ substantially to the ones advanced by Almond and Verba. Participation fulfils a pedagogic role for the individual and can eventually contribute to the emergence of a civic culture amenable to democracy. Obviously, her definition of civic culture differs substantially from that of Almond and Verba. However, she agrees with them on the fact that the major tenants of such culture are built in the non-political associative spaces of society. In this sense, her book is an attempt to use the premises of the culture civic approach to elaborate a theory of participative democracy.

Pateman postulates the need to democratise those social spaces that provide the environment of contemporary realist democracies (family, work, education). In particular, she focuses on the arena of labour relations which she views as a crucial social site that needs to be redefined through democratic reform. Her theory of participatory democracy, however, is limited by the fact that it remains bound to the goal of democratising society without making any dent on the operation of formal political institutions. She acknowledges that the paradigm of participatory democracy finds its limits in "conditions where representation is going to be widely necessary" (Pateman, 1970, p. 44). In fact, her model draws a clear line between the national and the local level, or the political system and society at large. Whereas the level of national political structures is considered a hostile setting for the introduction of participatory structures, the societal realm appears as a virgin arena that calls for democratic experimentation (Pateman, 1970, p. 106). It is not clear to what extent the democratisation of social relations will affect the elitist logic of representative democracy. Pateman herself acknowledges that her model is compatible with that of minimalist democracy:

“A defender of the contemporary theory of democracy might object at this point that although the idea of participatory society might not be completely unrealistic, this does not affect his definition of democracy.... There is an obvious sense in which the objection is valid at the level of the national political system. In an electorate of, say, thirty five million, the role of the individual must consist almost entirely of choosing representatives” (Pateman, 1970, p. 109).

The two forms of democracy can coexist without significantly affecting one another, like two unconnected compartments of the social system. Elections, even if participatory democracy is introduced in society, would remain the main form of connection between the citizenry and representative institutions.

The last variant of the civic culture argument is R. Putnam's theory of social capital which is built upon many of the postulates outlined by Almond and Verba as well. Like the latter, Putnam stresses the significance that non-political forms of civic engagement have for institutional dynamics. The concept of social capital is a synthesis of most of the positive attributes that *The Civic Culture* attributed to civic participation. What are those features? The existence of interpersonal trust, bonds of reciprocity, cooperative attitudes, as well as the presence of horizontal forms of solidarity. The social space that Putnam sees as particularly valuable is that of voluntary organisations. In his view, the social capital index of a society is directly related to the associational density of its civil society.

The emphasis on the role of voluntary associations leads Putnam to elaborate a theory of social capital decline: in his view, the social landscape of modern democracies is experiencing significant change. The associational structure of contemporary civil societies is being dramatically redefined (Putnam, 2000). Such changes can be synthesised in two hypotheses: the first one postulates that civic participation in secondary associations is declining and that such a phenomenon leads to a sharp decrease of associational density. Many major civic organisations of the United States - the boy scouts, the Red Cross, parent-teacher associations, church related groups, labour unions, etc. - Putnam argues, have experienced a substantial erosion of their membership base in the last few

decades. The second hypothesis postulates the replacement of secondary voluntary associations by a new tier of tertiary organisations.⁷ In tertiary organisations Putnam argues that “membership is essentially an honorific rhetorical device for fundraising.” (Putnam, 2000, p. 156). These mass-membership organisations - where the only act of membership is the writing of a check for dues - “have more in common with mail-order commercial organisations than with old-fashioned face-to-face associations” (Putnam, 2000, p. 51). The gradual replacement of secondary associations by nationally-based mass organisations inevitably leads to a decline in the stock of social capital of modern democracies. As associations tend to growth in scope and number - thus growing distant from its members - the chances of exercising civic virtues within them decline. While tertiary associations might help to foster greater visibility to their demands in the public sphere and to provide more effective lobbying channels, they are unable to generate the positive effects on political culture that the social connectedness of face to face interactions in small scale voluntary organisations allegedly generate.⁸

The social capital/civic culture approach focuses on a series of psychological and cultural processes that have a single individual at the starting point but that will eventually affect the institutional dynamics of democratic regimes as well. The direction of the causal flow goes from the individual to society. The steps assumed by this theory are the following. First, the experience of civic participation leads to individual self-development and thus to the building of a democratic personality. Second, a society where a large majority of citizens have developed a common set of civic virtues provides a fertile soil for the flourishing and consolidation of a democratic political culture. Third, the development of a civic culture congruent with democracy will positively influence institutional performance for it creates a facilitating social environment for the proper workings of the political system. Associational life is thus seen as a crucial site for socialisation. Their theory of learning is fundamentally a theory of the socialisation process by which the individual acquires a personality that is compatible with the existing institutional structures⁹. While the arguments are plausible and

convincing, it has been argued that the hypothesis about the educational effect of participation on individuals has not been empirically proved (Mansbridge, 1998). Nor has it been properly explained how well changes at the micro level of society travel to the macro levels of the political system, that is, in which specific ways the forms of civic engagement that are not politically oriented and which are the main focus of these theories impact on the political processes and institutional dynamics of representative democracy. Even C. Pateman, the author that within this tradition most strongly emphasises the importance of expanding participatory practices in all realms of society, acknowledges that even if a fully participatory society develops there is no certainty that those changes in the societal realm will have a significant effect on the dynamics of the national political system.

In brief, the social capital model focuses on pre-political social arena of sociability but stops short of providing an eloquent explanation about the specific ways in which those sociability spaces influence representative dynamics. Such question is the starting point of the remaining two models that will be considered: the public sphere and the interest group politics approaches. Those theories concentrate on the interactions between politically oriented forms of participation and the representative system. Each of them focuses on a specific set of civic actors and initiatives: the public sphere model on the indirect influence of informal social movements while the interest group model on the direct influence of lobbying organisations over the political system.

2.2 The Public Sphere model

The public sphere model focuses on forms of collective action that unfold in an intermediary arena that stands between the realms of thick primary networks (social capital approach) and of institutional politics (interest group model). In this tradition, the notion of civil society refers fundamentally to social movements and informal publics that provide voice to actors and discourses that are being ignored or not properly considered within the realm of institutional politics (party and interest groups politics). The politics of civil society helps to bring the voice of

underrepresented or novel groups to light, making them visible in the public sphere.

This rendering of the concept of civil society is intrinsically linked to that of the public sphere. The former is considered by the public sphere approach as the main arena of intervention of civic actors. While social movements are also oriented to the state and to influencing legislation and public policy, the public sphere approach emphasises an indirect politics of influence through the mobilisation of convictions in the citizenry at large¹⁰. The role that this model attributes to participation is twofold: on the one hand, it contributes to balance the representation of social demands, opening the political system to groups that stand in the periphery of formal political processes; on the other hand, it fulfils a transformative role: participation is not only a means to close the representational deficits of certain constituencies but also plays a transformative role over existing social and political identities (Peruzzotti, 2006a). For the public sphere model, this transformative role of participation is much more important than the first one; its existence is crucial for preventing a corporatist closure of civil society into its dominant identities and interests.

Civil society studies share pluralist theory's emphasis on participation as a way to strengthen representation with the pedagogic approach of the social capital model. There are, however, significant differences as well. The focus of pluralist theories is largely on how existing interests make their way into the representative system. The emphasis of the public sphere model is, instead, on the transformative cultural role that new movements play in democracy. In contrast to the social capital model, the public sphere approach focuses not so much on the contribution of associations to socialisation but on collective processes of learning. The public sphere appears as a crucial site for social contestation and transformation. The civic actors that this model is interested in are not in those associations which merely reproduce established identities, values, and institutional structures but in movements that articulate new social concerns and projects. The role of collective learning is fundamentally transformative: it is not

geared at establishing and/or reproducing a specific type of political culture but rather to questioning it, raising novel issues and generating new values and identities. It is this creative and critical logic of civil society politics that theorists working on this model view as the main contribution of civic engagement to the betterment of democratic arrangements. Participation, for this strand of civil society theory is not only important for establishing the cultural preconditions for good governance but it is conceived as a site of social contestation. Civil society politics are thus viewed as an integral aspect of democratic politics.

J. L. Cohen and A. Arato are the authors that have developed the most important work within this model. In their theory, social movements appear as the dynamic element of contemporary civil societies (Cohen and Arato, 1992, p. 492). Cohen & Arato are concerned with the role that non-bureaucratic associative forms play under democracy. Their notion of civil society aims to question the dominance of pluralist and neocorporatist approaches to group politics: the politics of interest representation and aggregation, they argue, can not be considered the only politically relevant form of associative life (Cohen and Arato, 1992, p. 461). Nor can civil society be merely equated with pre-political forms of socialisation, as in the social capital model. Social movements are a particularly relevant form of collective action for democratic life and it is misleading to equate them with interest group organisations. In contrast with the insider politics of pressure groups, social movements attempt to influence the political system from the outside by trying to generate effective agenda-setting in the public sphere.

Social movements are self-constituted actors that are not part of the mediating political and social structures that are the focus of pluralism and neocorporatism. Social movements cannot be considered an integral part of the mediating structures of political or economic society, Cohen and Arato argue, rather they represent outsiders' forms of collective action that attempt to bring the attention of representative institutions to their claims. They contrast grassroots associations embedded in a life-world context against the formal organisations that operate in the mediating structures of political and economic society. Mediating

organisational structures such as interest groups and political parties are bureaucratised structures:

“The cost of being able to act on the political and economic systems seems to be the penetration of societal self-organization by the logic of bureaucracy, that is, the medium of power.” (Cohen and Arato, 1992, p. 473).

Social movements instead rely on more participatory and loose forms of organisations that can be differentiated from the hierarchical and/or professionalised bureaucratic structures of mass political parties and of interest group organisations¹¹. They represent grassroots forms of collective action that process claims that are being overlooked by the political system but maintaining their connections with the life-world contexts from which they initially emerged. Social movements do not restrict themselves to a life-world context (as was the case of the associational tier analysed by the social capital model) but act in the public sphere, trying to exert indirect influence on the mediating structures of political and economic society. The goal of *Civil Society and Political Theory* is to call attention over certain type of participatory practices that constitute a form of politics that unfolds in the seams between life-world and system:

Our approach enables us to see that movements operate on both sides of the system/life-world divide... the ‘defensive’ aspect of the movements involves preserving and developing the communicative infrastructure of the life-world... The expressive, normative, and communicative modes of collective action have their proper place here, but this dimension of collective action also involves efforts to secure institutional changes within civil society that correspond to new meanings, identities and norms that are created... The ‘offensive’ aspect of collective action targets political and economic society—the realms of ‘mediation’ between civil society and the subsystems of the administrative state and the economy. Certainly, this involves the development of organizations that can exert pressure for inclusion within these domains and extract benefits for them. The strategic and instrumental modes of collective action are indispensable for such projects... the offensive politics of the new movements involve... a politics of influence targeting political (and perhaps economic) insiders and self-limiting processes of institutional reforms. (Cohen and Arato, 1992, pp. 531-2).

In *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Jurgen Habermas expands the analysis initially introduced by Cohen and Arato about the role of the public sphere under representative democracy (Habermas, 1996). Habermas defines the public sphere as a network for communicating information and points of view that acts as a sounding board for problems that are being otherwise ignored by the political system. Deliberative politics in contemporary democracies, he argues, requires the institutionalisation of procedures and conditions for communication as well as a proper interplay between the institutionalised deliberative processes that take place within the political system with the informally developed public opinions that emerge in the public sphere (Habermas, 1996, p. 308).

Due to their closeness to the private life experience of citizens, the social-civil periphery described by Cohen and Arato is particularly effective in detecting new issues. To reach the broader public, communication processes need to move from the thick structures of private life to the public sphere and such travel implies sorting out an intricate system of sluices. Communicative processes, Habermas argues, have to sort out several sluices before becoming issues of the public agenda:

Moving in from this outmost periphery... issues force their way into newspapers and interested associations, clubs, professional organizations, academies, universities. They find forums, citizen initiatives, and other platforms before they catalyze the growth of social movements and new subcultures. The latter can in turn dramatize contributions, presenting them so effectively that the mass media take up the matter. Only through their controversial presentation in the media do such topics reach the larger public and subsequently gain a place on the 'public agenda'. Sometimes the support of sensational actions, mass protests, and incessant campaigning is required before an issue can make its way via the surprising election of marginal candidates or radical parties, expanded platforms of 'established' parties, important court decisions, and so on, into the core of the political system and there receive formal consideration (Habermas, 1996, p. 381).

In the social capital model the notion of learning was intrinsically linked with the actual experience of participation. When the spatial structure of simple interactions (that were the focus of the civic culture literature) expands into a public sphere the thick contexts of interactions found in family, friends, work, and the local community disappear to give way more abstract types of publics. While some of those abstract publics might still relate to a concrete locale, that is, they might be integrated by audiences that actually gather in forums, performances, presentations, etc., the vast majority of publics in contemporary mediated public spheres are virtual publics linked largely by the mass media (Habermas, 1996, p. 361). Most of the communicative interactions that take place in the public sphere uncouple themselves from the thick contexts of simple interactions. The more the audience is widened through mass media, the more inclusive and abstract it becomes (Thompson, 1995).¹² Such a transition from simple interactions to an expanded public sphere entails a differentiation between organisers, speakers, and hearers or, as Habermas put it, between stage and viewing space. There is sharp separation of roles between those actors that have media visibility and access to the stage and those who are “merely spectators in the galleries.” Such a process of role differentiation presupposes a distinction between active participants and passive supporters as well as unequal opportunities for exerting influence. Learning thus becomes detached from the actual experience of participation. Learning now depends, to a large extent, on the dramaturgical and organisational skills of active groups and their ability to mobilise convictions in the audience. While the conception of learning of the social capital approach was tied to the notion of socialisation processes and thus had a conservative undertone, processes of collective learning are seen as crucial for questioning, challenging and eventually transforming existing identities.

2.3 The Interest-Representation Model

The interest representation model comprises an extensive body of works and theoretical approaches, the main ones being pluralism, neo-pluralism, and neo-corporativism. In contrast with the social capital and public sphere models, this literature is not interested in the pedagogic role of participation. Rather it aims at

describing the dynamics of pressure politics and to what extent different groups are successful in lobbying government in their behalf.

The introduction of a political process approach to representation that focuses on the activities of social groups is one of the main contributions of classical pluralist theory. Authors such as D. B. Truman, A. F. Bentley, and V. O. Key considered interest groups a key actor of representative politics, actors that were overlooked by the electoral approach to representation (Bentley, 1958; Latham, 1952; Key Jr., 1958; Truman, 1951).¹³ Interest groups represent a particular type of association that is politically oriented to lobbying activities on behalf of special interests. The main argument of classical pluralist theories is that the activities of interest groups are an integral part of the political process and thus need to be included into the analysis of representative politics. Interest groups, Truman argues, provide a crucial input to representative politics. Classical pluralism describes democratic dynamics as a competitive struggle to influence governmental decisions among a multiplicity of interest groups. The analysis of representative government, pluralists argue, cannot be restricted to the issue of elections but should include the multiple and complex relationships that interest groups establish with government. Contemporary representative democracy provides a multiplicity of access points in the executive, judicial and legislative branches of government for groups to establish channels of interaction with decision-making agencies.

The literature on neopluralism and neocorporatism will question some of the basic presuppositions of classical pluralist theory without abandoning the latter's emphasis on the role of interest group politics. There are two major criticisms to pluralist theory: first, that it ignores crucial differences among the organisational structure of interest groups. The groups that are the main focus of pluralist theory, E. E. Schattschneider argues, are a very specific type of organisation: only groups with clearly defined interests are willing to establish a permanent formal organisation to lobby government, largely business and labour. The group theory of pluralism thus does not serve as a universal theory about the role of groups in the political process. It is only useful to understand the political role of a specific

subtype of organisations. The second critique is the one advanced by neocorporatism regarding the differential access to government that certain types of organisations have over the rest. According to the authors working within the neocorporatism framework, the competitive political scenario of classical pluralism does not reflect the reality of present day polities where a handful of business and labour organisations enjoy of a public status that gives them privileged access to the representative decision-making bodies (Offe, 1985, p. 222; Pizzorno, 19, p. 257). The pluralist model assumes a situation of low level of institutionalisation of interest groups politics: articulations of interest and demand have to be accepted as given by the political system, which has to satisfy as many of the specific demands as possible. The measure of responsiveness of the political system is thus evaluated in terms of its capacity to generate policy-outputs to accommodate the greater number of interest groups demands (Offe, 1985, p. 224). Such a competitive political scenario no longer holds. Profound changes have taken place in the system of interest representation. There has been a transition from a pluralist to a neocorporatist mode of interest representation (Offe, 1985, 226; Schmitter 1974). The latter implies the assignment of political status to interest groups representing business and labour. As Offe argues, under neocorporatism,

...a second circuit is added to the machinery of the democratic representative polity. The institutional order of which periodic elections, political parties, and parliamentary government are the main elements is supplemented by a political arrangement consisting of major organized interest groups, their relative procedural status, and bodies of consultation and reconciliation. The characteristic of modern corporatism... is the coexistence of two circuits with only a limited substitution of functional for territorial representation. (Offe, 1985, p. 242).

The literature on neopluralism will attempt to respond to the neocorporatism model by arguing that the number of relevant lobbying actors has significantly expanded in recent decades, undermining the central role that business and labour organisations previously enjoyed in the polity (Berry 1999, Dalton and Scarrow 2003). The rise of post-material interest groups organisations and the significant weight they were able to gain as lobbying institutions indicates that

classical business organisations have lost the privileged position it once had in the lobbying circuit of pressure politics.¹⁴ The growing presence and clout of citizen groups within Washington politics, Jeffrey Berry argues have broadened “the representation of the underrepresented,” (Berry, 1999, p. 28) expanding the political agenda of pressure politics in a post-material direction (equality and rights, environmentalism, consumer protection, good government, family values, etc.):

Citizen groups –Jeffrey Berry argues referring to changes in the USA—have proved to be a particular nemesis for business lobbies. Over time the proportion of issues pitting material versus post-material concerns has risen considerably to just over half the legislation in 1991. Despite business’s fervent opposition to most of the post-material proposals, they have not been able to keep them off the agenda. Nor they have been able to easily defeat the citizen groups in recent wars: when they go head to head, business has found them tough competitors. Business surely remains, however, as the most powerful interest group sector... but the data indicate that they have lost influence in Congress... (Berry, 1999, pp. 85-6)

The flourishing of a significant group of citizen organisations is attributed to the peculiar opportunity structure of the US political system. According to Berry, the American political system is “more conducive to the formation of interest groups than to new political parties.” The growth of a public interest group sector, he argues, is directly related to the emergence of the civil rights and antiwar movements in the 1960s. The new public interest groups were a direct outgrowth of those movements, representing a reorientation of strategies and tactics in a more conventional direction: the outsider politics of social movements was replaced by the more conventional form of interest politics. As Berry argues,

“There is nothing distinctive about the role of citizen groups in agenda building. They attempt to get proposals on the congressional agenda with the same kind of old-fashioned lobbying that all groups use. They identify existing studies; they conduct and publicize new research; they cultivate the press, trying to stimulate coverage; they begin the slow process in Congress by working with staffers, attempting to convince them that their boss can profit from taking up a particular issue; and they lobby other interest groups to

join them in a coalition. In general, the historical case studies indicate that citizen groups succeeded through rather undramatic, traditional lobbying..." (Berry, 1999, p. 69)

Such movement also entailed a drastic change of organisational forms, toward a more bureaucratised and professionalised type of organisation of policy experts. The development of a permanent tier of NGOs, some authors argue, adds a valuable cognitive resource to the policy-making process, ensuring that citizens get a more accurate picture of the considerations that influence policy decisions (Dalton and Scarrow, 2003, p. 262). They also provide an invaluable source of information and communication for protest movements and, when the former are in a stage of demobilisation, public interest organisations are crucial in maintaining certain issues and demands alive in the public agenda (Tarrow, 2004, p. 287).

3. Representation as mediated politics. Towards a differentiated theory of participation under representative democracy

The first section of this work showed the limitations of a purely electoral approach to representation, arguing for an alternative model that could incorporate non electoral forms of communication between represented and representatives. Elections are not sufficient to justify representative democracy. Schumpeter's and Manin's arguments about the centrality of elections for representative government are in need of revision. Regular and free elections can be found in other forms of democracy such as populist and delegative regimes that bear little resemblance with a representative type (O'Donnell 1999). If elections are not the quintessential institution of representative democracy, then what constitutes the distinctive feature of this type of regime? Following N. Urbinati, I will argue that what makes representative democracy truly distinctive as a political regime is "the character and broadness of its mediated politics." (Urbinati, 2000, p. 765). Representation, she argues, is a complex institution that encompasses several layers of political action that fill in the electoral intervals. Representation entails a complex political process that goes well beyond the electoral moment but extends throughout the duration of a representative tenure through a multiplicity of civic initiatives by which associations, movements and public seek to influence political decision making¹⁵. The distinctive feature of representative democracy is the establishment of a rich, diverse, and active field of mediated politics where multiple, constant and eventually fluid channels of interaction can be established between different constituencies and the political system.

The idea of mediated politics breaks with the individualist vision of representation as resting in a one to one personal relation between a principal (the voter) and its agent (the representative). The notion of political mediations highlight instead the associational dimension of the political process, which cannot be merely reduced to an specific moment of aggregation of individual votes but that should also take into account the role that different groups play throughout the representative tenure. The dyad principal – agent is inappropriate for analysing the complex

political environment of contemporary representative democracies. H. F. Pitkin had already argued about the inadequacy of extrapolating such metaphor to the analysis of representation. Representative government, she argues, involves a public and institutionalised process that involves diverse actors and arenas. Such complex scenario cannot be adequately grasped with a model built around the idea of a person to person relationship:

Perhaps when we conventionally speak of political representation, representative government, and the like, --Pitkin argues-- we do not mean or require that the representative stand in the kind of one-to-one, person-to-person relationship to his constituency or to each constituent in which a private representative stands to his principal. Perhaps when we call a governmental body or system 'representative,' we are saying something broader and more general about the way in which it operates as an institutionalized arrangement. And perhaps even the representing done by an individual legislator must be seen in such a context, as embodied in a whole political system. (Pitkin, 1967, p. 221)

Political representation, she concludes, rests upon the workings of complex institutional machinery oriented to establish a constant situation of responsiveness of the political system to the citizenry (Pitkin, 1967, p. 223). Pitkin's book ends with a call to analyse political representation as a complex and dynamic institutional arrangement. Yet, she stops short of providing an adequate description of the nature and workings of those long-term systematic institutional arrangements. The only concrete references that Pitkin makes is to what in her view are the basic prerequisites for such an institutional system to work: the holding of regular free elections and the existence of a collegiate representative body in "which oppositional viewpoints are officially active." Nothing else is said about the other actors and institutions that contribute to the multifaceted practice of representation in contemporary democracies.

The notion of representative democracy as mediated politics reorients the attention towards the different participatory arenas that contribute to reproduce representative government. Those practices and arenas are diverse, involve numerous types of actors, and they provide different sort of inputs to

representative institutions. In this light, the previously analysed models must not be read as competing ways of understanding participation or civil society but as partial theories that concentrate on the contributions of actors that are located in one of those layers of mediated politics. Seen in this way, the three models depict what I consider to be the three central layers of mediated politics: the organisations that constitute an institutionalised ring of interest representation, the actors that largely operate in the public sphere, and the dense associational primary and secondary networks of social life.

The challenge for a theory of representative democracy as mediated politics is how to integrate those different layers into a coherent multilevel conceptual framework to participation. If we adopt such a perspective, then the three allegedly competing paradigms are nothing but partial descriptions of different associative terrains where democratic practices take place. Table 1 provides a graphic ordering of those three layers. They are ordered according to their degree of closeness/distance with the institutionalised realm of politics.

There is a basic divide between constitutive and representative practices. The layers comprised by the social capital and the public sphere model (2 & 3 respectively) are the arenas where constitutive politics unfolds. The interest group model (layer 3) is part instead of the representative system: it entails a ring of lobbying and advocacy organisations that are an informal complement to the workings of the parliamentary complex and party politics (layer 4). These actors and organisations are subject to a great deal of legal, organisational, financial, constraints that limits their realm of action. Constitutive mediations, instead, are not subject to the formal rules and imperatives of institutionalised representative politics, a fact that gives them ample room for creative action. Finally, a complete picture of the multilevel framework elaborated here should also include, first, the individual or electoral level of participation (layer 1), which is the main focus of election-centred approaches to representation as well as the regional and global associational forms of transnational networks of activists and organisations (layer 5 and 6 respectively).

In no way does such ordering suggest a hierarchy of participatory formats. Each organisational format and arena has its advantages and disadvantage over the others. An interesting agenda of analysis is to determine precisely how each participatory format feeds into the others.¹⁶ Neither intends to establish a drastic demarcation between social arenas and organisational forms. In fact, there is a great deal of discussion about the institutionalisation of contentious politics, the latter process entailing the professionalisation or *NGOisation* of social movement activity (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998; Kaldor, 2003). The previously mentioned theory of social capital decline is also predicated on a major organisational shift, this time from the layer of voluntary association to mass membership and professionalised advocacy organisations. Lastly, authors such as Carole Pateman and other participatory democrats argue the need to politicise some of the associations that are the focus of the social capital model. Thus the analytical demarcation of limits among layers does not preclude certain actors from eventually crossing those lines, transforming themselves into something else. However, I believe that if the space of mediated politics is to remain a rich arena of interaction and participation, there is a need for avert any colonisation of any of those realms by the other. Each form of participation makes a distinctive contribution to democratic politics and thus the weakening of any of those layers would inevitably deprive the others ones of an important resource.

The next step in a direction of a differentiated theory of participation is to analyze the different linkages and interactions among those participatory layers and of each of them with political decision-making centres. The latter opens up a productive agenda of research for participation studies. Such an agenda will push the field of participation studies away from the sterile debate about which is the most adequate form of participation for democracy, opening up instead a broad field of research about the complex and manifold interactions that help to reproduce representative mediated politics. A comprehensive theory of representation cannot be built by turning its back to participation theory. Nor can be constructed around a single model of participation. The concept of participation

needs to be disaggregated in order to be reconstructed within the frame of mediated politics. If successful, such a theoretical move will be able to establish a comprehensive framework for properly understanding the complex practice of democratic representation in contemporary societies.

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¹ For a further elaboration of those arguments, see Peruzzotti (2006b).

² Under an elective system, however, people do not only consent on the selection method, they also consent to the outcomes. By selecting the people who are going to exercise power, elections also create a feeling of obligation on the electorate that is crucial in legitimating the political power of representatives. Manin, (1997, p.85)

³ A minimum of civic and political rights is also acknowledged by Schumpeter, who considers that free voting requires certain freedoms and constitutional guarantees. But in his conception such freedom seem to be important to assure free and fair competition among elites, not of bringing public opinion to the attention of the governing elites. Manin instead, view rights as a mechanism that a) allow people to organize and to voice claims, and b) to connect the represented with the representatives. See Manin,(1997, pp.170-171)

⁴ It is not surprising that in Schumpeter's model there is no concern about the issue of the responsiveness of representatives to the wishes of the electorate given the frequent references that he makes about them as passive, irrational and manipulated masses. His realistic model of democracy seems more interested in finding ways to shield decision-makers from public opinion than on concepts such as responsiveness or accountability to the electorate. The background precondition for the proper functioning of his realistic model of democracy is the existence of a passive citizenry: "...Successful democratic practice in great and complicated societies has invariable been hostile to political back-seat driving... and it takes a lot of self control on the part of the citizen to refrain from it." Schumpeter, (1950, p.295). The latter should even refrain from actions such as "bombarding" representatives with letters and telegrams between elections. See Bachrach, (1980, p.21).

⁵ For an analysis of the issue of informational asymmetries, see Gastil (2000, chapter 3). The argument about informational asymmetry has been recently challenged by Hutchings (2003).

⁶ There is another mayor theoretical approach, that of the third or not for profit sector, that also addresses the contribution of non-political forms of civic activity. While arguments of the contribution of the third sector to democracy are not absent in this perspective, its central reference is rather the market: a major concern of this approach is precisely to highlight the relevance of such sector for socio-economic life in terms of size, employment, performance, productivity, etc. See Lester Salomon and Helmut Anheir,

⁷ Robert Putnam. *Bowling Alone*, chapter 3; also Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy. From Membership to Management in American Civil Life*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2003, chapter 4.

⁸ For a similar diagnosis about the negative consequences brought about the so-called process of “NGOization” of society see Kaldor (2003, pp 86-95)

⁹ Several critics to the social capital approach have called attention on the conservative implications of certain formulations of this approach. Putnam and neo-communitarian theorists focus their attention on traditional forms of voluntary association and their contribution to societal reproduction. In contrast with the Habermasian approach that tends to privilege the transformative role of civil society politics, the social capital perspective usually prefers to focus on the socializing role that associations play in reproducing existing identities and practices. Carole Pateman, instead, calls for the politicization and redesign of those socializing structures as a way of democratizing society. For a critique of the social capital approach from a public sphere perspective see the excellent article by Jean Cohen, “American Civil Society Talk”.

¹⁰ Given that my focus is on the different layers of mediated politics, I privileged the public sphere perspective to social movements over other influential frameworks that have produced extremely relevant empirical analyses and theoretical contributions, such as the resource mobilization, the political process, and the framing approaches. Some of the work produced by this set of literature is particularly relevant for a theory of layers for it predicts a gradual institutionalization of social movement activity which in our layers perspective translates as the gradual transformation of social movement organizations into insider public group organizations. See Meyer and Tarrow (1998). I will return to this hypothesis in the next section on interest group politics.

¹¹ Resource mobilization theory focuses on organization as a crucial resource for collective action. While resource mobilization theory concedes that social movements differ in the degree of formalization and bureaucratization from interest groups, it tends to see the former as emergent organizations that eventually will adopt many of the organizational features that are characteristic of institutionalized actors. See, McAdam & Scott, W. R. (2005).

¹² According to Habermas, such a shift from concrete to abstract publics positively affects the nature of communication. The conditions for communicating among strangers forces a process of intellectualization of discourses:

“When generalized this way, communication structures contract to informational content and points of view that are uncoupled from the thick contexts of simple interactions, from specific persons, and from practical obligations. At the same time, context generalization, inclusion and growing anonymity demand a higher degree of explication that must dispense with technical vocabularies and special codes. Whereas the orientation to laypersons implies a certain loss in differentiation, uncoupling communicated opinions from concrete practical obligations tends to have an intellectualizing effect.” Habermas (1996)

This position challenges a main assumption of social capital theory: that meaningful participation and debate can only take place in a face-to-face context. “Politics without social contact, Putnam argues, is politics at a distance... Without... face-to-face interaction, without immediate feedback, without being forced to examine our opinions under the light of other citizens scrutiny, we find it easier to hawk quick fixes and to demonize anyone who disagrees. Anonymity is fundamentally anathema to deliberation.” Putnam (2000, pp 341-342)

¹³ Late pluralist theory will abandon the earlier focus on groups to adopt a more Schumpeterian approach centered on formal political institutions and elections as the focus of their analysis. After the publication of *Who Governs?* by Robert Dahl, pluralist analysis left the study of interest group politics to adopt an institutional approach. See McFarland (2004, p 16).

¹⁴ The other crucial actor of interest group politics, labor, has experienced a decline in resources and also of influence. Berry, (1999, p. 157)

¹⁵ Urbinati's idea of mediated politics revolves around the idea of a public sphere as a crucial intermediary network of communication that bridges the gap between representative institutions and citizenry. See Urbinati (2000, p.766). My use of the concept of mediated politics is slightly different for it is not solely constructed around the notion of the public sphere but it includes other participatory layers (like pressure groups politics or pre-political forms of engagement) that do not have the public sphere as the central arena of operation.

¹⁶ The analysis of the politics of social accountability in Latin America shows that the most effective forms of civic intervention are those that mobilize actors and resources from all three different layers. Issues such as police violence against young people from popular neighbourhoods, for example, triggered processes of politicization of the primary and secondary social networks of the victims, eventually establishing a social movement that developed close links with public interest groups' organizations and with existing human rights movements. Each of those different actors brought into the cause its own expertise and repertoire of actions and strategies contributing to the overall success of the initiative. See Peruzzotti, E. & Smulovitz, C. (2006)