



Social Politicity as a tool to put politics and the future back in the hands of citizens

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A large part of the Italian population has little trust in the parties and the political class, which seem not to perceive real-life issues. This situation, which is not accidental and is also present in most nations of the world, reflects negatively on the organisation and administration of public and social life.

All this leads to widespread frustration, which causes citizens to lose faith in institutions and representative democracy: it is a self-perpetuating process that generates abstentions and anti-democratic drifts.

The Network for Social Politicity (hereafter **RPS**) believes, in a nutshell, that this situation is due to the fact that institutions, as we know them, cannot function. It is time for citizens to take note of this and commit themselves as soon as possible to developing the social dimension of politics.

1) The two types of politicity

Schematically, we can identify two types of politicity.

The first is the **institutional politicity** carried out in the institutions provided for by the constitution, such as the government and parliament, where decisions binding for all are taken.

The second is **social politicity**, which is supposed to be performed by citizens and takes the form of a set of functions and actions that act in close correlation with each other.

2) What is social politicity

By 'social politicity', the RPS means the set of instruments, actions and functions that enable citizens to develop political ideas and visions in order to direct and control institutional politicity in the interest of the community.

Social politicity, therefore, is developed when civil society has political spaces and tools at its disposal to form, debate, express its demands and proposals, participate in the drafting of electoral programmes and the selection of candidates for elected office, and verify and evaluate the work of those elected.

RPS considers it useful to emphasise that elections are not sufficient to affirm that there is social politicity, because elections should be the end point of a path of participation, confrontation and elaboration of a vision of society. Otherwise, elections are reduced to a ritual that becomes a semblance of democracy.

3) The indispensable elements for making social politicity

- a) an independent information system
- b) a civic education for citizenship

c) the existence of political parties and/or formations, understood as associations of citizens to participate and contribute to political choices.

4) Why is there little social politicity in today's society?

Throughout the world, for historical reasons, contemporary political systems do not allow the development of social politicity; on the contrary, they compress it, since they allow the accumulation of power in the hands of the same individuals who claim to exercise both institutional politicity (as parliamentarians or members of the executive) and social politicity (in key party positions) at the same time. This accumulation of roles is the main factor that nullifies social politicity: it is therefore clear that, in order for it to flourish, there must be a clear separation between social and institutional politicity, otherwise controllers and controlled will coincide, leading to a dangerous conflict of interests.

Below is a list of some critical points relating to the Italian situation.

1) It is the party leadership that selects the candidates who, once elected, feel 'bound' for their political future to the parties that got them elected, thus tending to neglect the collective interest. This system of selecting the political and administrative class, which privileges the appointments - in the electoral lists, in public bodies and in investee companies - of people close to the parties and loyal to the bosses, makes the country's ruling class asphyxiated and leads to the progressive spread of clientelism and "consociativism".

2) The elected people tend to put their own re-election into the foreground, entering into a conflict of interest with their public function. This fact, however human and understandable, leads to:

(a) Disruption of the party function because this one is used as an instrument of power and personal promotion instead of as an instrument of social politicity development.

b) Degradation of institutions because people organic to the party are placed in key position, privileging loyalty rather than competence.

3) Election campaigns require large economic and media resources that are often provided by power groups which then, obviously, ask for a quid pro quo.

The phenomena just described favour a perverse intertwining of political power (institutional politicity) and economic-financial, academic and media power, with a sprawling party presence in every aspect of civil life, with a general social flattening and a loss of the potential that only an intellectually free society can express.

The social politicity has a vital need for profoundly renewed political forces.

For all these reasons, we believe that politics cannot be assimilated to a common profession, that it cannot be exercised for life within the institutions, and that in order to resolve the current pathologies of politics, a change of people (albeit with proven honesty and competence) is not enough, but that structural changes in the forms of politics are needed (for example: a law on parties, a limit on the number of mandates, a ban on abandoning the mandate held by the voters). The Network for Social Politicity is committed to developing political and cultural action to overcome the pathologies highlighted.

5) Why is it indispensable to develop social politicity?

Society's wealth of intellectual resources runs the risk of not being valorised by the lack of social politicity, so that the whole of society suffers because it is unable to think politically; hence it does not produce those shared visions that society sorely needs to avoid being overwhelmed by well-organised interests that do not have the social good as their primary goal.

The many political and cultural associations, of which civil society is rich, are unable, for lack of adequate tools and spaces, to relate with institutions that, while declaring themselves sensitive, are in fact deaf to social demands.

At present, all political choices are made only by the institutional sector (professional politicians and the bureaucratic apparatus), which, moving according to long-established power and economic relations, cannot develop a political vision aimed at the interest of all. This situation often causes systemic breakdowns such as political, economic, environmental crises or wars. Society, marginalised and deprived of adequate means of participation, is left with nothing but clamorous forms of protest or resigned withdrawal into its own private sphere.

6) What reforms for the development of social politics?

6.1) Party regulations

Status quo: Today each party is led by people who are at the same time in state institutions, creating double roles, double power, great inefficiency, little control and corruption. The electoral lists are not drawn up by the people, after evaluating and selecting the candidates, but by the party apparatus. Finally, there is no transparency about where party funding comes from.

Objective: Those who represent a party or lead it cannot hold public elective office or government posts. The reform of the parties must introduce democracy and participation in the internal decision-making processes of the parties; they will also be given public functions so that they become associative instruments to encourage the participation of citizenship in political choices.

6.2) School reform

Status quo: schools, in general, tend to educate but not to form citizens. People tend to leave school at all levels without knowing how institutions function, without having a basic knowledge of law, without knowing how to exercise their rights and without having the tools to understand the language of public administration.

Objective: the school must not only perform the task of educating, but must train for active citizenship with a single national curriculum so that each person is prepared to enter society with an awareness of his or her role: each citizen must not only know how institutions function, but must also be able to exercise his or her rights and fulfil his or her duties.

Very useful would also be the teaching of non-violence and in particular of non-violent communication, which is fundamental to achieve a widespread ability to dialogue with serenity, to listen and to respect the interlocutor, learning to use social politicity as a tool to compose different visions and transform them into operativeness and norms in favour of the common good.

6.3) Media reform

Status quo: Today, most media, including public media, are controlled by power groups (political and economic) that heavily influence information. Italy ranks 58th according to the 2022 ranking 'Reporters sans frontiers'.

Objective: A free and plural public service to foster critical thinking and awareness. For this purpose, it will be necessary for public information operators to be selected using transparent methods, taking into account the pluralism of information and avoiding position rents. The ultimate goal of the information system must be to fulfil the right to knowledge. It is not enough to make documents and data available to all if the conditions for their effective usability are not created. Particularly with regard to public service broadcasting, we believe that citizens should also have a role in controlling the management of this service in order to guarantee its independence.

7) What role for associations, committees, groups and movements

The approach of social politics, with the creation of parties radically different from the past that become a real bridge between citizenship and institutions, would also favour a natural evolution of the role of associations, groups, movements and committees. However, a change of mentality is needed: we must overcome prejudice towards politics and understand that politics, if structured differently, would become the ideal place for listening, evaluating and possibly implementing the proposals of civil society. These bodies could therefore in the near future make a significant contribution to the smooth functioning of social politics by, for example, collaborating in the definition of political programmes and the recommendation of candidates to be included in electoral lists. The RPS hopes that these bodies will grasp the importance and potential of social politics and therefore decide to be part of it, by becoming part of a more general framework that would allow for interesting synergies and accelerate the cultural change needed to modify the forms of politics in the collective interest.

8) Final reflections

Politics and social politics are intimately linked to non-violent communication, because politics thanks to confrontation and listening, thanks to attention to the other, can find the best synthesis between the different visions of the various components of society. Violence is the negation of politics.

The RPS emphasises that the development of social politics in society could bring about a marked improvement in the functioning of institutions and society in general. In spite of this, the RPS is aware that social politics is not the 'solution to problems' but the indispensable prerequisite for their solution, since it makes it possible to tackle the complex problems generated by the great economic-financial powers that govern the world.

The RPS believes that only through the participation and civic growth of all citizens can both local and global phenomena be better governed for a future of prosperity and peace.

For more on social politics refer to Giuseppe Polistena's(*) essay "La politica sociale: la nuova frontiera della politica" (see www.reteperlapoliticitasociale.org under "documents")

We invite to keep in touch with the Network for Social Politics by registering on the site under "contacts". To write to the network: info@reteperlapoliticitasociale.org

() Giuseppe Polistena - Degree in philosophy. Founder of the philosophical-literary magazine 'Malvagia', he participated in the formation of the Green Party, serving as national coordinator and regional spokesman. Having left the party after the elimination of the early statutory rules that made it a proper archipelago, he began philosophical research work on political forms by setting up various groups of cultural and civil commitment including 'www.formeeriforme.it'. He continues to work as a headmaster in Milan.*