



Mateus Meeting, 15th - 16th October

**Social Capital & Trust  
mobilization and demobilization in modern democracies**

**Calloni, Marina**

---

University of Milano-Bicocca, Milano (Italy)

**Common resources and the development of social/ human capital**

In his study on “*What makes democracy work?*” (1993), Robert D. Putnam considers the history of the Italian city-states as an example able to indicate why some democratic governments succeed, while others fail. Referring to a republican approach and to a form of political power as circumscribed within a limited community, Putnam aims at stressing the importance that social capital, cultural cohesion and networks have on the development of a good governance and economic welfare. Within this dynamics, citizens are pictured as loyal and commonly engaged in public affairs. The issue of trust becomes thus a central concept for understanding the composition and transformation of civil society as well as the development of both individual and collective capabilities in processes of public mobilization.

The specificity of the cultural and political background of the Italian peninsula (which became a nation-state in 1861) is also the focus of a study on *The Second Industrial Divide. Possibilities for Prosperity*, written by Michael J. Sable and Charles F. Piore in 1984. In this book, the authors mention Italy as a case-study that represents a successful transition from an industrial society to a post-Fordist regime, thanks to the development of flexible, specialized and small/ mid-size companies and the establishment of regionally delimited districts based on post-industrial networks. Indeed, the Italian fashion industry was a “family based” answer (where trust among belonging people is taken for granted) for facing the economic crisis, valorizing the cultural capital and the aesthetic tradition of Italy in the end of the “work society”.

Taking as a background these interpretations about the value of the historical background and the significance of cultural/ social capital for the development of a good governance and collective welfare, in my paper I'll refer to a recent phenomenon, which has become world-spread: the slow food movement (<http://www.slowfood.com>). This interested group was grounded in Italy in 1989 and defines itself as "a global, grassroots organization with supporters in 150 countries around the world who are linking the pleasure of good food with a commitment to their community and the environment." In two decades this movement has become global and very popular in various societies. The reason of the success is that the *Slow Food* association is a *glocal* network, that is contextual and at the same time universal. It does not in fact refer to specific Western traditions or ideologies but to the interest in applying and differentiating the general notion of quality of daily life in different cultures from bottom up. The valorization of bio-diversity in terms of respect of the environment, development of human capital and the growing of collective wellbeing is thus prior. Trust becomes the basis for a cross-cultural mobilization.

However, this post-ecologic perspective presents innovative aspects together with critical elements. With the increasing consumption of material resources and the systemic environmental crisis of the planet, new political and social alliances are needed together with a new approach to the understanding of the meaning of common natural and cultural resources. However, re-thinking a new relationship between environment and rights, politics and global civil society the issue of sustainability has to be re-discussed in the global political agenda and public discourse.