**THE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY WAVE FROM CITIES TO EUROPE AND THE WORLD: LATEST NEWS.**

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**O**n January 17, the Deliberative Democracy Cohort was launched as a multi-stakeholder group forming part of the Summit for Democracy. The group is co-led by the European Commission and the Government of Ireland. To understand the historical meaning of this further step to enhance democracy in times of crisis we need to enlarge the perspective.

Democracy, in its multiple meaning of government "of" the people, "for" the people  -or the even more elusive - "in the interest" of the people is a controversial concept, which has received in the course of its now multi-millennial but episodic history various attempts at theorization and even more varied concrete applications.

The idea that its first complete application takes place in the Athens of Pericles is highly accredited, despite being a legacy of previous generations. The first conceptualizations of Plato and Aristotle are well known. However, even then the word was ambivalent: “demos” means undeniably people, yet “kratos” is power, strength, not necessarily good governance. Other words were preferred by the Athenians themselves to designate their own form of government, because the power of the people, or more correctly of the majority, resembles much to what we would call populism today and therefore the introduction over time of a series of counterweights has been decisive in the evolution of the very idea of democracy. Another determining element of evolution, which has gradually merged with the previous one, is in the set of individual rights and freedoms which - starting from equality before the law - make democracy effective.

The notion of democracy is an evolving phenomenon whose connotations change over time and according to cultures. The typically Western formula that informs liberal democracies today has evolved quite a bit from the Athenian polis to the American and French revolutions and from these to the present day; although history has decreed its success, the experiments of other peoples and cultures must not be forgotten. The fair sharing of choices and responsibilities in a given social grouping can take various forms as Amartya Sen pointed out.

The recurring "democratic" element seems to be the presence of assemblies and the decisional process may be closer to consensus than to the majority voting, achieved through methods of comparison and composition of interests ranging from dialogue to storytelling. The delegation of power to those in the assembly may be some kind of election but the appointment may be achieved in different ways, based for example on age and experience, or even on rotation and sortition. The attention of this contribution focuses precisely on the latter hypothesis: the rotation carried out by drawing lots, with all the interesting enrichments that come nowadays from the use of mathematical and IT tools.

The reason for the growing attention to deliberative democracy and specifically to the assemblies of citizens designated by lot is not the happiest.

The ongoing crisis of democracy is attested by numerous indexes; the number of undemocratic or not fully democratic countries is increasing and even where democracy resists it is threatened by anti-politics and abstentionism - serious symptoms of the distance between administrators and administered - by the polarization that takes place in the political arena as well as on social media - also due to political profiling politics - from behaviors such as the diffusion of fake news and the use of hate speech. If all this were not bad enough, recent scandals have revealed how attacks on democracy can be the result of precise strategies, as revealed by the scandal of Cambridge Analytica or by the UN reports concerning the Rohingya genocide in Myanmair.

To understand the growing attention to the phenomenon of citizens' assemblies and the multiplication of these bodies, we need to take a step back.

At the origins of deliberative democracy by drawing lots is the Athenian experience of the classical era. The Boulé - the council of 500 - was composed as a result of a draw among those who were available. The mechanism of sortition was intended to guarantee the equality of citizens and aimed at avoiding the interference that wealth or social position on the selection. Laws were voted on by the ecclesia, the assembly of all the citizens, but only after the initiative of Boulé, a combination of deliberative and direct democracy.

The democratic nature of the process, however, was not only in the drawing of lots, which translates into practice an idea of equal opportunities, but even more so in the deliberative moment: in the exercise of debating that led to the formulation of choices. In direct democracy the positions expressed by the individuals are the result of autonomous deliberation whenever we are in a dimension bigger than a small community where everyone can be part of a conversation. Its current typical instrument is the referendum. Each individual choice sum-up with those of the others but is formed autonomously, at risk of manipulation or polarization. Conversely, in a deliberative democracy model, i.e. in an assembly the main goal is achieving a shared will or at least gain some  collective wisdom, through a process of smoothing out the differences through dialogue and understanding the reasons of the other.

The spring of deliberative democracy based on the lot dates to the last two decades. Particularly significant in this area were the studies conducted within the OECD, which actually followed a series of interesting experiments conducted at a national level on issues of primary importance which demonstrated the effectiveness of the formula. In Europe, after the financial crisis of 2008 both Ireland and Iceland experienced constitutional revision with this formula. However, this is a global trend (see, among others, the experience of British Columbia in Canada in 2004 and Australia in 1998).

Fast forward, we have now permanent assemblies by sortition running from local level, as the Paris’ Assemblée citoyenne or the G1000 in Belgium, to the European level as the panels of the Conference on the Future of Europe, run from May 9 2021 to May 9 2022. We will see more of them as the European Commission has announced that the same kind of gatherings by sortition will precede the adoption of important legislative proposals on food waste, learning mobility and virtual worlds[[1]](http://file/C%3A/Users/user/Desktop/Articolo%20linkedin.docx#_ftn1).

Making the instrument permanent has a further value, it serves to communicate to citizens the message implicit in the rotation: anybody could be next to sit in the assembly and take decisions. It makes all citizens potential actors. Not surprising, many think tanks and grassroot movements are supporting these processes[[2]](http://file/C%3A/Users/user/Desktop/Articolo%20linkedin.docx#_ftn2).

Technological evolution has brought two important evolutionary factors into the process:

a) The sortition may be the result of an algorithm aimed at reflecting the diversity of the administrated or at favoring certain specifically interested categories. The four panels set up within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe were intended to pay attention to both objectives: they reflected socio-economic, geographical and gender diversity and at the same time privileged the category of citizens under 25, who was assigned a third of the seats.

The second is in the fact that artificial intelligence can contribute significantly to pooling ideas and organizing the outcomes of discussions, to extract the shared will and the main options. This too has already been tested in European process. More digital tools are being produced and tested to this aim.

The Conference on the Future of Europe concluded its work with the presentation of the Final Report to the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. It includes 49 proposals comprising more than 300 measures spread across 9 themes.[[3]](http://file/C%3A/Users/user/Desktop/Articolo%20linkedin.docx#_ftn3)

On 4 May 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the follow-up to be given to the Conference, and shortly after, on 17 June, the Commission released a Communication. Both the supranational institutions clearly took the side of the citizens and chose to respond to their expectations. In fact, the Commission prepared an analysis with the 49 proposals divided into thematic areas and subdivided into categories according to whether there were legislative initiatives already in progress, actions planned for follow up on proposals (but not yet or not necessarily at the initiative stage) and new initiatives, but also requests that require revision of the Treaties, accompanied by the intention of following them up. It also specified that implementing the proposals through existing instruments and revising the Treaties were not alternative options, but that what could be done without resorting to revision should be done. The Commission also declared the intention to remain "on the side of those who want to reform the Union to make it work better", also through the reform of the Treaties, if necessary, as may be necessary in the fields of health and foreign and security policy.

The Parliament was even more direct, adopting on June 9th, a Resolution with the formal request to convene a Convention for the revision of the Treaties.

Among the citizens’proposals, one, the 36 no 7, is particularly meaningful:

“Holding Citizens’ assemblies periodically, on the basis of legally binding EU law. Participants must be selected randomly, with representativeness criteria, and participation should be incentivized. If needed, there will be support of experts so that assembly members have enough information for deliberation. If the outcomes are not taken on board by the institutions, this should be duly justified. (…)”. It clearly shows that those in the process found it to be useful and learned within it a new way to be citizens.

[[1]](http://file/C%3A/Users/user/Desktop/Articolo%20linkedin.docx#_ftnref1) COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Commission work programme 2023 A Union standing firm and united, Strasbourg, 18.10.2022 COM(2022) 548 final

[[2]](http://file/C%3A/Users/user/Desktop/Articolo%20linkedin.docx#_ftnref2) *Manifesto for a European Citizens Assembly*[https://europeancitizensassembly.eu](https://europeancitizensassembly.eu/)

[[3]](http://file/C%3A/Users/user/Desktop/Articolo%20linkedin.docx#_ftnref3) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20220509RES29121/20220509RES29121.pdf>