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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ADAPTATION OR TRANSFORMATION?

Interpreting Participation in Times of Austerity in an Old Red Region

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ABSTRACT: This article investigates how political, social and associative participation is changing in the last years in an old Italian "red" region (Emilia-Romagna) with respect the previous decades. The analysis of the new model of participation that is increasingly consolidating in the selected case shows that a process of adaptation, rather than transformation, is taking place. In fact, the actual economic crisis is only accentuating the establishment of this new model, which continues to a large extent to be conditioned by the civic-mindedness historically present in this region, and which has been subject of several studies in the past by Italian and American scholars.

KEYWORDS: Italian regions; Associative Participation; Political Participation; Social Capital; Austerity

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1. Economic Crisis and Participation in Italian Regions: Emilia-Romagna as a Case Study

Along with competition, political participation is the core of a democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2005; Morlino 2011). In fact, both procedural dimensions are connected with the substantial dimensions of equality and liberty: their abnormal functioning would produce a deterioration of the substance of democracy and, retroactively, it could foster the crisis of conventional participation and a larger recourse to protests (Piana and Raniolo 2013, 312).

As highlighted in a vast literature (Biorcio 2003; De Nardis 2013; Elster 1997; Morlino 2011; Pateman 1970; Pettit, 1997; Raniolo 2007; Walzer 1999), the objectives and goals of political participation are several. Individuals participate in order to search for specific utilities, such as to determine whether policy-makers' decisions are congruent with their interests and ideals (instrumental participation). But they also participate in order "to be a part" of something and to reinforce their identity through the sense of belonging to a specific group (identity participation). The latter is a necessary condition to improve civic virtues because it contributes to make citizens more informed and more aware of their rights and their duties. Moreover, to this function – that can be defined as identifying – a formative function should be added given that, by taking part in political life, citizens discuss problems of common interest, confronting their ideas with those of the others.

During the years of the economic crisis, the study of political participation in Europe attracted great attention within the academic debate (Kriesi 2012; Memoli and Vassallo 2016; Morlino and Quaranta 2016; Passarelli and Tuorto 2014). Nevertheless, this attention was primarily focused on national case studies, or in comparative analysis of single dimensions of participation. To the contrary, the evolution of political participation at the sub-national level before and after the start of the economic crisis has received considerably less. In fact, considering that several European States have been historically characterized by different degrees of social commitment within the various areas of the country, it becomes increasingly important to understand if and how the economic crisis is affecting associative and political participation within single sub-national contexts. This article will limit this gap, proposing an explorative analysis in an Italian region, i.e. Emilia-Romagna, analyzing the dimensions of political, social and associative participation.

As it is widely acknowledged, since 1960s Italy has been subject to several academic studies (Alberoni 1967; Barbagli and Macelli 1985; Bardi and Pasquino 1995; Putnam *et al.* 1985), that highlighted two different characteristics of the Italian model of political

participation: i) the exceptional role played by the mass political parties in canalizing political and associative participation, vis-à-vis the American context; ii) the presence of a gap of different levels of participation in Italian regions, with the higher values in the Northern Regions and the lowest in the Southern ones.

As Biorcio pointed out (2003, 23), during 1950s «more than at the level of participation, the attention of the public opinion and of the scholars was addressed to the orientations and the political choices that could prevail among the citizens». In other terms, attention was paid to the latent and invisible dimension of political participation (Barbagli and Macelli 1985), as well as to the political culture and the individual attitudes (Martinotti 1966). For example, in a comparative analysis of five political systems (Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Mexico, USA), Almond and Verba (1966) described Italian political culture as parochial because it was characterized by alienation, social isolation and lacking of confidence, thus depicting Italian citizens as uninformed and less interested in politics. Moreover, from the 1960's the Cattaneo Institute of Bologna launched several studies in order to investigate the characteristics of the two most important Italian parties of these years, i.e. Democrazia Cristiana (DC) and Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI). Contextually, with respect the previous study of Almond and Verba, these studies pointed out several differences among the political cultures in Italy. Among other things, they underlined the presence of two different political subcultures rooted in the North-West of Italy, i.e. the well-known “red” and “white” ones. Moreover, starting from these studies, during the 1970s and the 1980s, several scholars (Bagnasco 1977; Caciagli 1988; Trigilia 1986) showed the presence of a specific socio-economic reality rooted in this area of the Peninsula, the so-called *Terza Italia* (Third Italy).

As Bordandindi and Cartocci (2015, 50) recently remembered, «the two subcultures' territorial policies have delivered to them a high degree of social integration [...], dense relationships of trust and solidarity networks extended [...], widespread political and social participation, [and] non-confrontational industrial relation». More specifically, the so-called Red Zone was characterized by: high degrees of political and social participation; municipal socialism, localism, antifascism and anticlericalism; high levels of trust in institutions; the loyalty to the party; high levels of unionization etc. Moreover, among the “red” regions, all the studies highlighted the exceptional nature of the model of participation present in Emilia-Romagna. In fact, it was characterized by the presence of a higher level of social and manifest political participation than the rest of Italy, including electoral participation, and a widespread civic-mindedness among citizens, displayed through their disinterested commitment to the problems of the community and their interest in politics. The exceptional nature of this region was already

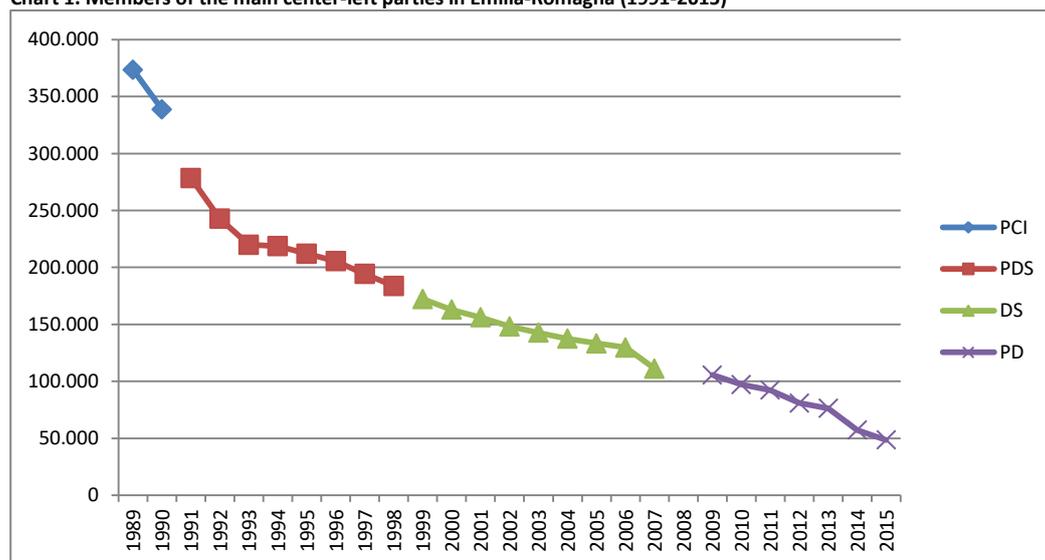
emphasized in the following studies of Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti (1985; 1993), that collocated Emilia-Romagna among the regions with the high levels of institutional performance and civic-mindedness.

In the last two decades, several studies (Casula 2016a, 2017; De Sio 2011; Diamanti 1996; Messina 2001; Ramella 2005) tried to understand the changes within the Italian subcultures above all after the start of the so-called Second Republic, the changing structure of the Italian political and party system, and the transformations of the Italian parties. Literature shares the view that the political sub-cultures do not exist anymore in their historical form, due to the disappearance of the ideological apparatus that historically characterized them, as well as to the end of the party support around which they were historically found. Nevertheless, several legacies continue to be present. While for the "white" sub-culture is possible to observe a fading out and a consequent replacement with another in which several identity elements of the previous historical sub-culture are present, for the "red" one a process of transformation and adaptation is taking place. In fact, according to Floridia (2011, 29), «for the "red" areas [...] we can talk about other things: [...] a strong sense of their own local identity, but lived according to the canons, old but always re-vivify during the decades of the century and then we are most neighbors of a civic "Republican" tradition who sees in institutions a common heritage and shared; and then, a robust institutional plot, a fiduciary dimension that expresses 'horizontally' (including citizens), but also vertically (between citizens and institutions); registered capital feeds by a dense network of associations».

Nevertheless, this process of adaptation and transformation within the "red" areas has been considered as an ongoing process whose its end results, net of exogenous challenges such as the actual economic crisis and the changing structure of the national political system, may greatly differ on the basis of the endogenous characteristics of the single regional context. With respect the endogenous characteristics that today are characterizing Emilia-Romagna four elements must be introduced. Firstly, following Putnam *et al.* (1985; 1993), several studies (Bordandini and Cartocci 2015; Cartocci 2007) confirmed the existence of a very high stock of social capital in this region. Secondly, the use of participatory and deliberative practices has been continually increasing in recent years. In several cases, the latter are also encouraged by the regional Participation Law 3/2010 (Casula 2015). Thirdly, more than in other (ex) "red" regions such as Toscana, the Northern League is increasingly becoming a central actor in this region (Casula 2016b; Passarelli and Tuorto 2012a, 2012b). Fourthly, looking at the evolution in the membership of the main center-left parties in the last three decades (Chart 1), a progressive reduction is possible to observe. The latter in particular is

greatly increasing considering the members of the Partito Democratico (PD) that represents the natural evolution of the hegemonic party in Emilia-Romagna.

Chart 1. Members of the main center-left parties in Emilia-Romagna (1991-2015)



Source: Elaborated by the author based on the Emilia-Romagna PD dataset

Based on these regional peculiarities, the paper tries to answer the following questions: does Emilia-Romagna still show those peculiarities in the associative and political participation of citizens that distinguished it in the past? Is citizens' participation in this region changing in the years of economic crisis? And if so, how?

In order to answer these questions, the paper will examine the evolution of political, social and associative participation in Emilia-Romagna in the last decades. More specifically, four dimensions will be analyzed: i) electoral participation; ii) invisible participation; iii) visible participation; v) social and associative participation. Each of the four dimensions will be discussed in the following paragraphs. First of all, the analysis will focus on the electoral participation in this region from the Seventies up to now, considering the levels of participation during the European, national, and regional elections as well as national and regional referenda (Section 2). Later, the paper will analyze the other forms of political participation, distinguishing between forms of invisible and visible participation (Barbagli and Macelli 1985) and between conventional and unconventional participation (Barnes and Kaase 1979) (Section 3 and Section 4). The last sub-dimension that will be taken into account is associative and social participation

(Section 5). A specific focus will be dedicated to the empirical analysis of the case selected, by comparing it to the rest of the national territory. For the third and fourth dimensions the empirical analysis has been performed by using the main (and only) surveys realized in the years of reference (ITANES - Italian National Election Studies, ISTAT – Multipurpose and ESS - European Social Survey). Starting from the empirical evidences of each of the previous four paragraphs, conclusions will summarize the main results of the article, discussing both the evolution of each dimension in the last decades and the characteristics of the new model of participation that is consolidating in Emilia-Romagna in the years of austerity.

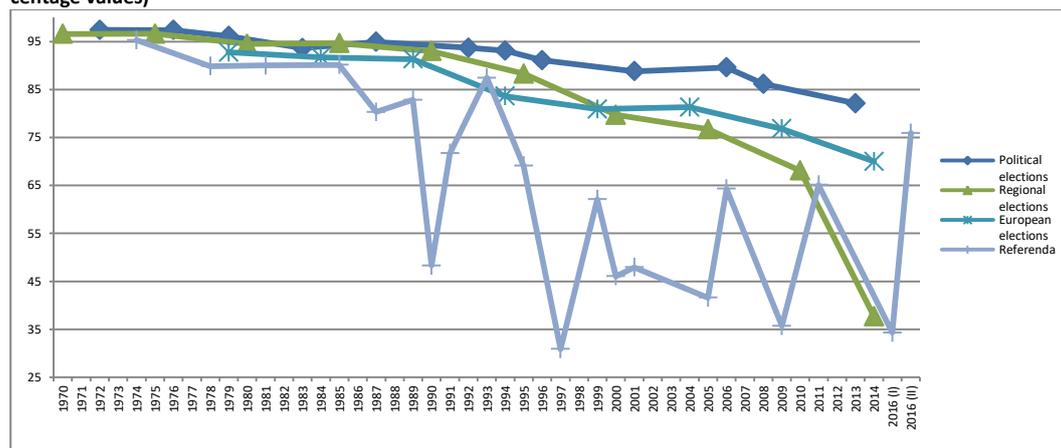
2. Electoral Participation

Since the 1970s, electoral participation in Emilia-Romagna has always been characterized by high levels of turnout, regularly greater than the national average. By carrying out a detailed analysis of the different levels of turnout registered in Emilia-Romagna during the European, political, and regional elections (Chart 2), it is possible to identify a significant change in the use of the vote passing from the First to the Second Republic, similarly to what happened in the rest of the Peninsula (Facello and Quaranta 2013, 38-41). Since the beginning of the Nineties up to the last elections, a decrease in electoral participation can be observed in each of them, culminating in the regional election of November 2014.

The smallest decrease has been reported in national elections: from the 2.6% of abstention in 1972 and 1976 to the 17.9% in the last election. In particular, from 1992 election to 2013 election the decrease was equal to 11.6%, while in the rest of Italy the decrease was equal to 12.2% for the same period. The trend of last elections has confirmed for this region, too, what has happened in the rest of Italian regions, that is a decrease of 4.1% compared to 2013 and 2008 elections (5.4% in the rest of Italian regions) and a decrease of 7.5% compared to 2013 and 2006 elections (8.5% in the rest of Italian regions). Similarly to the rest of the Peninsula, Emilia-Romagna reported an increase in electoral participation from 2001 to 2006 elections, but if in the other Italian regions the increase was equal to 2.3%, in Emilia-Romagna it was equal only to 0.8%. In other words, even in a region such as Emilia-Romagna, where there have historically been higher levels of electoral participation, the last years characterized by economic crisis saw a substantial decrease in electoral turnout. As discussed before, the phenomenon is not connected only with the current crisis but also with a loss of credibility of the current political system and, above all, of the left parties that, in the

past, were able to mobilize a higher number of electors in this region. This reflection is inevitably connected with the failure they experienced in the last regional election.

Chart 2. Voter turnout in European, political, regional elections and referenda in Emilia-Romagna (1970-2016, percentage values)



Source: Elaborated by the author based on the Italian Ministero dell'Interno and Istituto C. Cattaneo dataset

During the First Republic, Emilia-Romagna citizens' participation in regional elections had always been very similar to that reported for national elections. As for the latter, the Second Republic reported a greater decline that should be analysed in conjunction with the characteristics of the regional political system. The latter have influenced the electoral participation and the regional vote for at least two reasons. On one hand, as Vassallo has argued (2001), the notoriety of the regional president was usually lower than in the rest of the Italian regions. On the other hand, the lack of valid alternatives legitimized the centre-left electors to abstain from voting.

These endemic characteristics of political systems have been exacerbated in the last years by a crisis of credibility of the regional political class and, particularly, of the previous Errani executive accused of misappropriation of public funds. Therefore, the high level of abstention in 2013 can be read as an “action of voice” (Hirschman 1970) by electors who decided to abstain in order to show their refusal and hostility to the regional political sphere. In other words, it is an example of strategic punitive vote (Mannheimer and Sani 2001) coming above all from the centre-left electorate based on the analysis of electoral flows (Corbetta *et al.* 2014). Probably, the previous controversies between the Italian premier Renzi and the trade union CGIL about the Jobs Act contributed to the decision of resorting to this punitive vote against the

national party PD, a decision made especially by the more unionized part of the electorate (see par. 5). But its positive value was visible in the people who decided to go to vote. In fact, looking at the percentage of blank and invalid electoral ballots, it can be noted that, compared to the previous regional election (2010) and the 2013 national one, there has been an average increase of approximately 1% in the use of invalid votes, or to use Lancelot's words (1968) of «civic abstention».

Apart from the scandals of the previous executive, the protest could be explained as the incapacity of the main regional party, i.e. the PD, to present a valid and well-received candidate, both for the election and the primary elections. This has been considered as a traditional characteristic of the political class in Emilia-Romagna who has always been able to produce excellent administrations but mediocre politicians. Nevertheless, this failure should be also analysed by considering that, on the occasion of the last regional election, there was not a national election day but only Emilia-Romagna and Calabria citizens voted for replacing their regional councils. The concomitance with the administrative elections or with other regional elections would have mitigated, at least in part, the failure.

The analysis of electoral turnout during referenda deserves a separate discussion. Chart 2 shows an intermittent performance (Lancelot 1968) of electoral participation starting from the 1970s. Also for this type of election it is possible to observe a change in its use from the early 1990s, within which it is however possible to identify the presence of negative and positive peaks. In the first stage, the rounds of voting that mobilized the highest number of electors in Emilia-Romagna has been connected with social issues that were strongly in contrast with the positions taken by the Catholic Church. It happened in 1974 for the legalisation on divorce, in 1981 for abortion and in 1993 for the abrogation of imprisonment for possession of drugs for personal use. In a general climate of continuous abstention, the 62.1% participation in Emilia-Romagna for the 1999 referendum represented the highest turnout in Italy: in this referendum (where a quorum was not reached) the abolition of proportional representation at the Chamber of Deputies was proposed. Two other significant electoral flows on social issues occurred on the occasions of the 2005 and 2011 referenda. Among other things, in 2005 the referendum proposals aimed at guaranteeing artificial insemination and the possibility to choose treatment options more suitable to each individual. Obviously, such proposals raised the objections of the Catholic Church that carried out a heated campaign for abstention. The result was a national turnout equal to 25.6%. Again, though in Emilia-Romagna the 50% mark was not reached, 41.6% of electors went to vote, thus showing an anti-clericalism still present among the citizens of this region. More recently, the heated media campaign for the public management of water – the

so called “Water common good” (2011) - mobilized the 64.1% of electors in this region, while only 32.2% of electors were interested, in 2016, in the issue of the drilling at sea. In addition, during the recent constitutional referenda, in December 2016, Emilia-Romagna was the Italian region in which the second highest turnout was registered (75.9%).

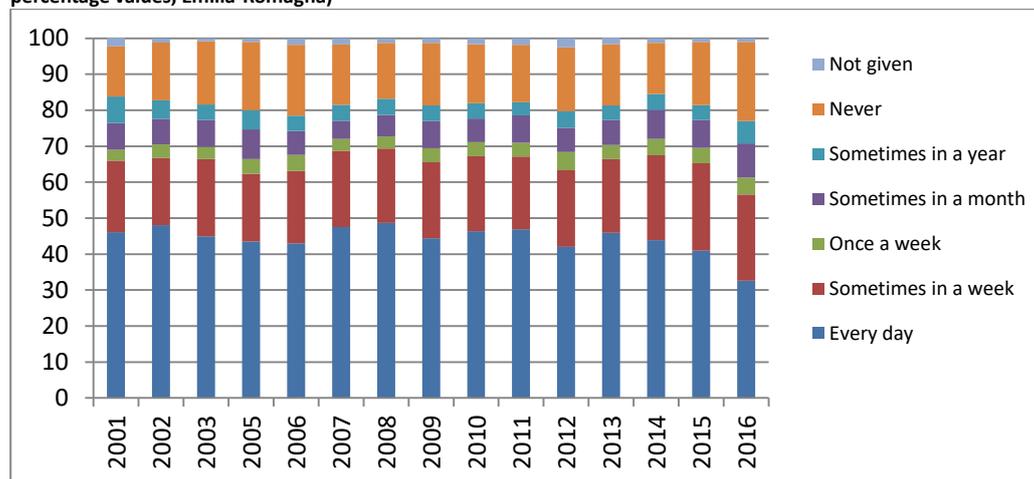
Finally, there is a unique case of regional referendum reported in Emilia-Romagna (1990). It was an abrogative referendum that proposed to eliminate a regional law which provided for restrictions in the possession and use of bird calls and the possibility of hunting in several areas. The result was one of the lowest turnout in this region: only 35.16% went to vote without reaching the quorum.

3. Invisible Participation

The first important study that – among other things – tried to investigate the possible presence of a different latent participation in Italian regions is the abovementioned study on civiness by Putnam *et al.* (1993). What is important to underline in this place is the strong positive correlation between civiness and social and political participation: the presence of a more solid civiness is connected with a greater participation of citizens and their greater interest in politics. Putnam himself placed the concept of civiness alongside that of social capital, understood «in the form of norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement» (*ib.*, 167). This concept was recently reclaimed by Roberto Cartocci (2000; 2007) who came to determine a final index of social capital measured on a provincial level. Among the other things examined in his work, the most important aspect for this analysis is the idea that a society where there is a higher stock of social capital is also a society where citizens are more informed, more involved and more able to give a neutral judgment on the political system.

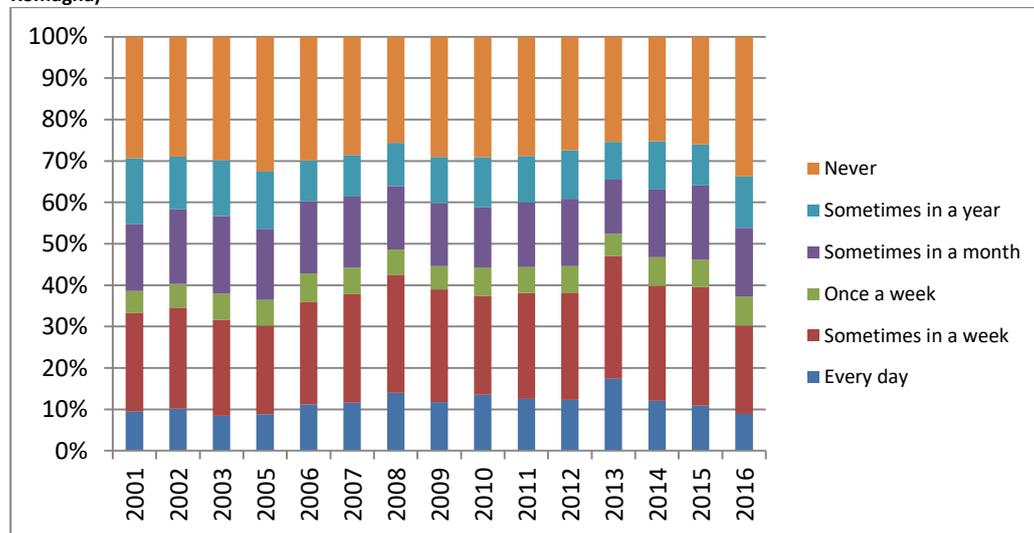
Starting from these theoretical considerations, it is necessary to explain the main characteristics of the invisible participation in Emilia-Romagna. First of all, it should be underlined that, in this region, this type of participation has always been among the highest among the Italian regions. In Chart 3, it is possible to observe that in the period 2001-2016 a percentage slightly lower than half of the population claimed to search for information about politics on a daily basis. On the contrary, the percentage of citizens that claimed to speak about politics every day (Chart 4) has been always around the 10%, even if it reached a peak in 2013 survey (17.1%).

Chart 3. Citizens (more than 14 years old) that claimed to search for information about politics (2001-2016, percentage values, Emilia-Romagna)



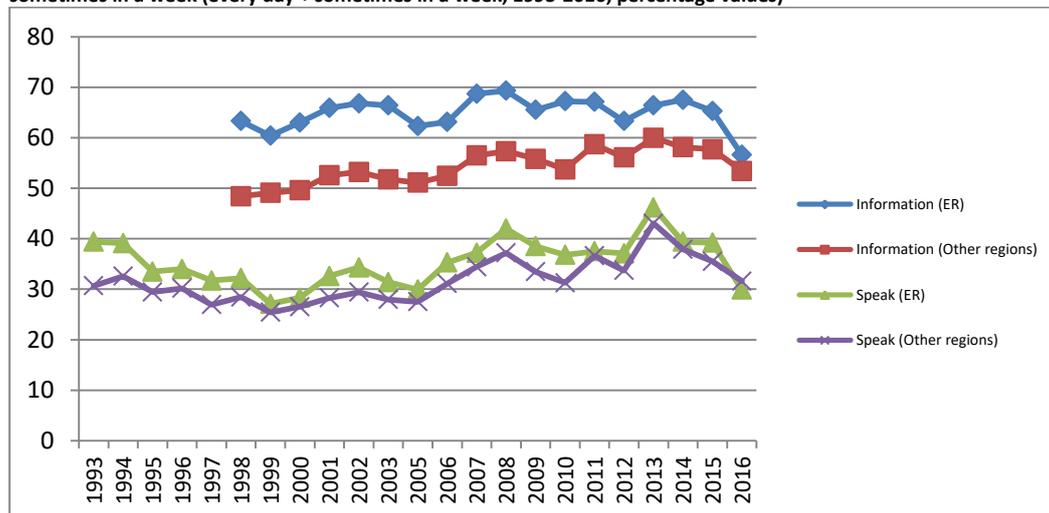
Source: Elaborated by the author based on the ISTAT - Multipurpose Survey dataset

Chart 4. Citizens (more than 14 years old) that claimed to speak about politics (2001-2016, percentage values, Emilia-Romagna)



Source: Elaborated by the author based on the ISTAT - Multipurpose Survey dataset

Chart 5. Citizens (more than 14 years old) that claimed to search for information and speak about politics at least sometimes in a week (every day + sometimes in a week, 1993-2016, percentage values)



Source: Elaborated by the author based on the ISTAT - Multipurpose Survey dataset

By considering the citizens who claimed to search for information and speak about politics at least sometimes in a week (all day + sometimes in a week) and comparing the data with the averages of the other Italian regions (Chart 5), it is possible to observe three characteristics. Firstly, Emilia Romagna ranked always higher for both variables, though presenting a gap from the average of the other Italian regions that is always slightly higher for those who declared to search for information about politics. Secondly, as in the rest of the other regions, the number of citizens who claimed to search for information about politics is always higher compared to those who claimed to speak about politics, presenting values increasingly higher than 60% in the time series of Emilia-Romagna. Thirdly, the last survey available provides evidence of a collapse in the percentages of citizens that claimed both to search for information and to speak about politics.

Generally, it can be noted that there was an increase both in the information provided and in the public discussions in conjunction with political elections, in Emilia-Romagna as well as in the other regions. In particular, the highest values ever recorded are reported during the last two political elections (2008 and 2013). In fact, it should be emphasized that the surveys were carried out in the months of February 2008 and March 2013.

Table 1. Trend analysis (*) of several behaviors in Emilia-Romagna (political participation and associative participation, before the crisis and now)

| | | Behaviors | Trend | |
|-------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| | | | Before 2007 | 2008-2016 |
| Political Participation | Invisible | Information about politics | 0,37 | -0,86 |
| | | Speaking about Politics | -0,19 | -0,54 |
| | Visible | | Before 2008 | 2009-2016 |
| | | Attending political meetings (a) | -0,25 | -0,27 |
| | | Taking part in demonstrations (a) | -0,15 | -0,31 |
| | | Listening to a public debate (a) | -1,24 | -1,22 |
| | | Voluntary activity for a party (a) | -0,09 | -0,13 |
| Offering money to a party (a) | -0,17 | -0,33 | | |
| Associative Participation | | Before 2008 | 2009-2016 | |
| | Participation in the meetings of environmental and pacifist organizations (a) | 0,04 | -0,15 | |
| | Participation in the meetings of cultural and recreational associations (and other type) (a) | 0,06 | -0,15 | |
| | Voluntary activity for no non-profit associations (a) | 0,26 | 0,02 | |
| | Voluntary activity for non-profit associations (a) | 0,04 | 0,00 | |
| | Voluntary activity for unions (a) | -0,02 | -0,07 | |
| | Offering money to an association (a) | 0,29 | -0,71 | |

(*) Trend analysis was done through analysis of the coefficient *b* (regression coefficient) of the linear regression (in which the time variable was the independent variable and the level of participation was the dependent one).

(a) In the twelve months previous to the interview.

Source: Elaborated by the author based on the ISTAT - Multipurpose Survey dataset

Even though the 2008 elections took place on the 13th and 14th of April, the early dissolution of the Chambers on the 6th of February immediately opened the political debate with significant media exposure. Moreover, these were two very heated political campaigns for at least two reasons. On one hand, because of the political alliances present and the entrance in 2013 of the Five Star Movement within the classical Italian bipolar competition that exacerbated the discussions in the media. On the other hand, because the themes discussed during the political campaigns were inevitably connected with the more general themes of the current crisis at its beginning in 2008, and continued to be source of concern and public discussion in 2013. On the contrary, these have not reported a significant increase on the occasion of regional elections.

By analysing the whole set of data provided by the ISTAT - Multipurpose Survey from

the 1990s to 2016, it is possible to affirm that there was an increase during national elections in all the Italian regions. This also occurred in the South and the Islands where the levels of invisible participation have always been low (except for Sardinia). Moreover, while Emilia-Romagna has always ranked first both in the search for information and in speaking about politics, during the years of crisis the gap with the other regions of Central or Northern Italy considerably thinned. For example, as regards the second indicator (speaking about politics) Emilia-Romagna ranked fifth in 2013 following Friuli Venezia Giulia, Piemonte, Lazio and Lombardia.

In order to better understand this point, it is necessary to analyse the trend (Table 1) of the individual political behaviours from the 1990s to 2016 in Emilia-Romagna and compare it with the rest of Italian regions. This analysis is going to consider two different timespans: 1) from the first survey available to 2007; 2) from 2008 to the last survey available. As is known, the current economic crisis burst out following the real estate bubble (the subprime mortgage crisis) that took place in the U.S.A. in August 2007 immediately resulting in worldwide media exposure. Therefore, if the consequent industrial crisis also started in 2008, it is reasonable to think that there was an immediate interest in the global situation, prompted by the media coverage. As already mentioned, in 2008 the survey was carried out in February and the respondents were asked to specify how much they usually searched for information or spoke about politics. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that 2008 survey could be considered as the first survey useful to analyse invisible participation in Italian regions during the years of the crisis.

First of all, by examining political information, it is possible to observe that, while until 2007 the trend was positive, from 2008 there is a significant negative trend (Table 1). Moreover, it is not confirmed in the rest of the Italian regions where the positive trend, started in 1998, remained almost unchanged. Similarly, starting from 2008 a negative trend (- 0.54) can be observed in the number of people who claimed to speak about politics, compared to the previous negative one.

Finally, through the analysis of ITANES surveys carried out starting from 1968, it is possible to investigate the other two indices indicated by Martinotti (1966) as useful in order to study the three orientations proposed by Almond and Verba (1963, 12), i.e. political interest and the lack of political trust.

Table 2. Political Interest (a lot + enough, percentage values) in Emilia-Romagna and in other Italian regions¹

| | 1968 | 1990 | 2006 | 2013 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Emilia Romagna | 7,0 | 20,4 | 50,7 | 36,9 |
| Industrial Zone | 6,2 | 16,2 | 36,1 | 42,1 |
| Red Zone (without ER) | 8,6 | 15,3 | 26,3 | 27,8 |
| White Zone | 10,0 | 14,0 | 34,1 | 48,7 |
| Southern Zone | 10,6 | 12,9 | 30,6 | 32,4 |
| Italy (without ER) | 9,1 | 14,3 | 33,0 | 36,7 |

Source: Elaborated by the author based on the ITANES (Italian National Election Studies) dataset

As for political interest (Table 2), it is possible to observe a great decrease in Emilia-Romagna respondents who declared to be interested (a lot + enough) in politics, with a 13.8% decrease compared to the pre-crisis years and 2013. The impossibility to have time series such as those elaborated by ISTAT does not allow for the development of the same study pattern employed for people who declared to search for information about politics. Nevertheless, from 1968 to 2014 across all Italian territories (and related areas) it is possible to observe an increase of citizens who claimed to be interested in politics. Therefore, the data from 1968 confirms the description given by Almond and Verba, thus establishing that Italian people are not interested in politics (even though the phenomenon can partially vary across different areas). This increase is greater in the Industrial Zone and especially in the White Zone, where in 2013 only 48.7% of the respondents claimed to be interested in politics, compared to 27.8% of other regions in the Red Zone and 36.9% of Emilia-Romagna. Sometimes, a greater increase can be observed in the Southern Zone, where from 2006 there has been an increase of 3.7%, compared to -13.8% of the case study under examination. Moreover, the White and Industrial Zones are the two areas where higher increases have been reported from 2006 (14.6% and 6% respectively), even compared to other regions in the Red Zone where the increase has been equal only to 1.5%. It should be noted, however, that the difference in the total number of respondents from the several surveys employed, though being representative samples, produced some problems in terms of rigorous comparison.

As for political objects seen as reference points – i.e. the President of the Republic, the Parliament, the European Union and the parties citizens can or cannot trust – the

¹ The sample size for Emilia-Romagna is the following: 187 in 1968, 113 in 1990, 109 in 2006, and 112 in 2013. The sample size for Italy is the following: 2499 in 1968, 1496 in 1990, 1882 in 2006, and 1508 in 2013.

situation in Emilia-Romagna is rather complex and heterogeneous, above all if it is compared with the rest of the national territory (Table 3).

Table 3. Political Trust (several political objects) in Emilia-Romagna and in the other Italian regions (percentage values)²

| | A lot + enough (%) | | | A lot (%) | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|
| | 2001 | 2008 | 2013 | 2001 | 2008 | 2013 |
| <i>Emilia-Romagna</i> | | | | | | |
| President of the Republic | 78,14 | 76,86 | 85,71 | 34,88 | 38,86 | 39,29 |
| Parties | 19,25 | 26,09 | 25,89 | 1,41 | 1,74 | 7,14 |
| Parliament | 53,70 | 43,48 | 44,64 | 6,94 | 10,87 | 8,04 |
| European Union | 65,12 | | 72,32 | 18,60 | | 9,82 |
| | | | | | | |
| <i>Italy (Other Regions)</i> | | | | | | |
| President of the Republic | 75,67 | 71,56 | 70,70 | 29,75 | 34,06 | 25,07 |
| Parties | 20,91 | 17,89 | 8,95 | 1,51 | 1,49 | 1,00 |
| Parliament | 45,30 | 34,74 | 18,84 | 6,33 | 5,26 | 2,79 |
| European Union | 59,81 | | 41,91 | 10,34 | | 6,16 |

Source: Elaborated by the author based on the ITANES (Italian National Election Studies) dataset

The President of the Republic is the political reference point presenting the highest values in Emilia-Romagna, measured in terms of “enough” and “a lot of trust” citizens have in him. This data is confirmed by the fact that the total level of confidence in him has always been very high all over the years (34.88% in 2001, 38.86% in 2008 and 39.29% in 2013). Moreover, in Emilia-Romagna the percentage of respondents who declared to have enough or a lot of trust in him increased between 2001 and 2013, while in the rest of Italy it decreased (from 75.67% to 70.70%).

The analysis of trust in the parties shows that there has been an increase in the respondents who claimed to trust them a lot (1.41% in 2001, 1.74% in 2008, 7.14% in 2013) and a substantially constant in the respondents who declared to trust them a lot or enough (26.09% in 2008, 25.89% in 2013). On the contrary, the comparison with the national situation shows a different and more problematic profile. Compared to 2008, in 2013 the percentage of those who claimed to trust them enough or a lot is less than

² The sample size for Emilia-Romagna is the following: 216 in 2001 (except for the trust to the President of the Republic, equal to 2017), 230 in 2008, and 112 in 2013. The sample size for Italy is the following: 3208 in 2001 (except for the trust to the Parliament, equal to 3209), 3000 in 2008, and 1508 in 2013.

half (from 17.89% to 8.95%).

The Parliament is the only political reference point in Emilia-Romagna to show a significant decrease (a lot + enough trust), losing ten percentage points from 2001 to 2013 (from 53.70% to 44.64%), even though values remained nearly constant from 2008 to 2013. This decrease is partially confirmed in the citizens who claimed to have a lot of trust in him (from 10.87% in 2008 to 8.04 in 2013). Generally, in the rest of the Italian regions a greater sense of distrust is reported. In fact, compared to a nearly 50% decrease in trust in the Parliament reported in the last years (from 34.7% of 2008 to 18.8% of 2013), there has been an almost double decrease in the number of Italians who claimed to have a total confidence in it (from 6.33 % in 2011 to 2.79 in 2013). Considering that the interviews were conducted in the period between the 9 March 2013 and the 4 May 2013, such a data is not surprising given the difficulty of the Parliament in reaching the majority in order to come up with an executive, via the minimal variance of seats (6) present in the Senate between the centre-left coalition guided by Pier Luigi Bersani and the centre-right coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi.

The last political object under examination is the European Union. Among the four, it is constantly the second political reference point in which citizens had more trust (a lot + enough). Moreover, this data is not confirmed by the fact that from 2001 to 2013 there has been an almost double decrease in the number of Italians who claimed to have a total confidence in it (from 18.60% in 2001 to 9.82% in 2013). Even for this political reference point, Emilia-Romagna exhibited completely different trends compared to the other Italian regions, where there was a general decrease of trust.

4. Visible Participation

With respect to the list of fourteen modalities of participation proposed by Millbrath (1965), in 1985 Barbagli and Macelli proposed another list of behaviours more suitable to the study of Italian political participation because it considers also the forms of political participation connected with the parties, such as registering as a party member, offering money to parties and carrying out voluntary activities for a party. The two Italian scholars also underlined the fact that every single modality of political participation requires a different quantity of time, money and skills (or a mix of them) and, therefore, it is capable of conditioning decision-makers' decisions in a different way because it presents a different complexity of structuration. Considering the different investment of time, money and knowledge, it is not surprising that the

instruments of visible participation have been used in different ways by the citizens of Emilia-Romagna and those of the rest of Italy. Chart 6 illustrates this phenomenon. Listening to a public debate has always been the form of participation mainly used in this region. On the contrary, the least used has been voluntary activity for a party. The other three forms are positioned in the middle and they never reached a percentage higher than 10%. More generally, it is possible to observe that from the end of 1990s there was a visible decrease in the use of these instruments, reported also in the rest of the Peninsula. In fact, in the case of taking part in demonstrations and attending political meetings, the values reported in Emilia-Romagna were usually even lower than the national average. Therefore, in the case of attending political meetings the gap between Emilia-Romagna (reporting values notoriously higher at the beginning of the Nineties) and the rest of the Italian regions reduced and, on the occasion of 1996 elections, the percentage showed by Emilia-Romagna was almost the same of the national average.

Starting from the beginning of the last decade, there was a significant growth in Emilia-Romagna across all the political behaviours, except for voluntary activity for a party that maintained a (more or less) constant trend over the years.

The analysis of political behaviours in Emilia-Romagna and in Italy in the years of the economic crisis requires a different approach than the previous analysis of invisible participation. Indeed, it is not possible to use the 2008 survey as a “breaking point” because the questionnaires administered to citizens asked them to indicate whether or not they engaged in each political behaviour in the twelve months before the interviews. Considering that in 2008 the interviews were administered in the month of February, the use of this year would have detected behaviours related to the beginning of 2007, when the real estate bubble has not yet burst. Therefore, it should have been more appropriate to use 2009 because it registered behaviours related to the beginning of 2008. Then, five surveys are available to analyse the political behaviours of citizens in this region in the years of the crisis.

The analysis of the trends (Table 1) in Emilia-Romagna in the period 2009-2016 shows that each of the forms of manifest participation present a negative trend, although to different degrees. For example, this negative trend is higher for listening to a public debate (-1.22), and it is lower for offering voluntary activity for a party (- 0.13). Generally, by comparing Emilia-Romagna to the rest of Italy, it is possible to observe that in the last years there are significant differences for several forms of visible participation, with respect to the past (Chart 6). For example, in the case of taking part in demonstrations the line of Emilia-Romagna is surprisingly under that of the rest of Italy. Moreover, in the case of all the three forms of visible participation that require a

connection with the parties, i.e. offering money to a party, voluntary activity for a party and attending political meeting, a decrease occurred in the last years (2013-2016).

Table 4. Forms of unconventional participation in Emilia-Romagna and in the other Italian Regions (several years, percentage values)³

| | 2002 (Wave 1, %) | 2004 (Wave 2, %) | 2012 (Wave 6, %) |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <i>Emilia-Romagna</i> | | | |
| Signing a petition | 26,5 | 20,3 | 20,3 |
| Boycotting certain products | 11,5 | 10,2 | 20,3 |
| Taking part into illegal protest activities | 2,7 | - | - |
| <i>Other Italian Regions</i> | | | |
| Signing a petition | 17,6 | 13,7 | 23,4 |
| Boycotting certain products | 7,5 | 7,4 | 11,4 |
| Taking part into illegal protest activities | 2,1 | - | - |

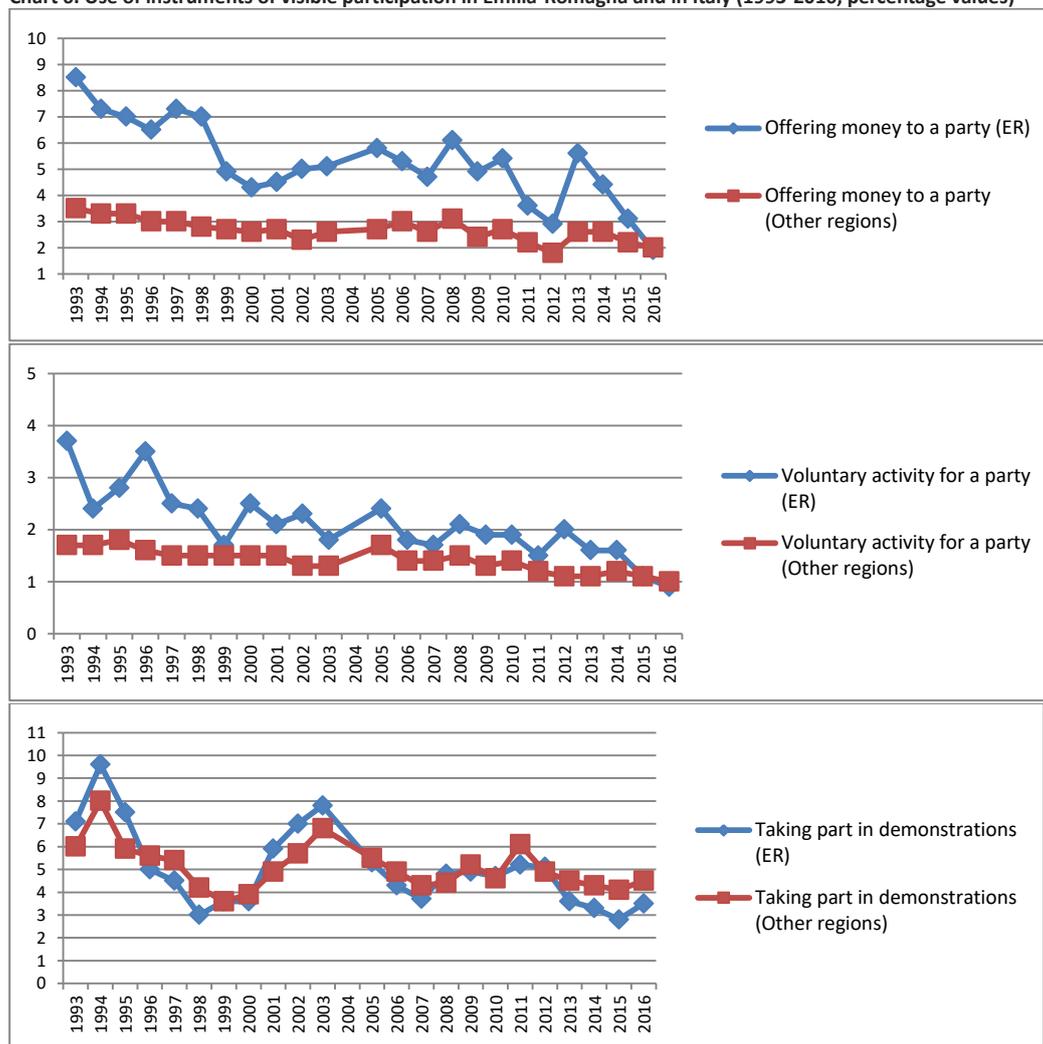
Source: Elaborated by the author based on the ESS (European Social Survey) dataset

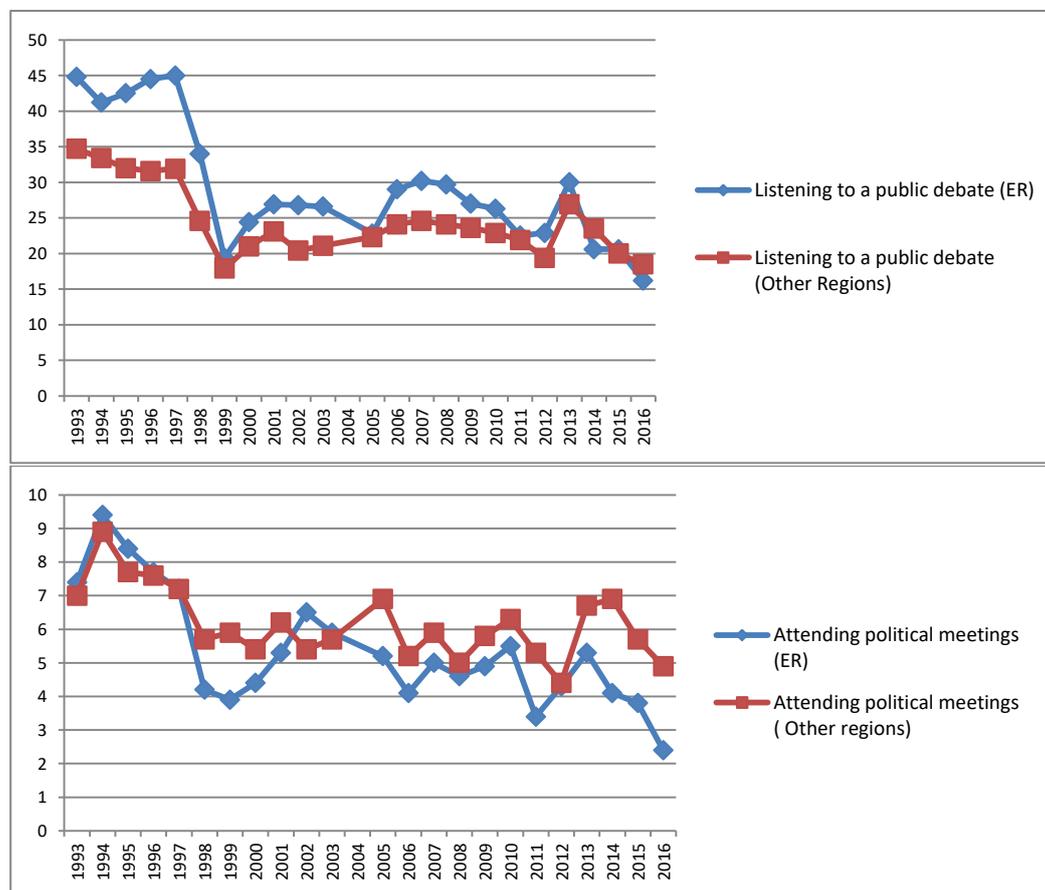
Finally, as already said, this last part of the paragraph is dedicated to several reflections on the possibility to analyse the forms of unconventional participation in Italian regions, starting from the database available. In the first part of this section, it has been argued that several scholars observed that a clear distinction between the forms of conventional and unconventional participation could appear abstract. Furthermore, the previous analysis also included taking part in demonstrations, considered as an unconventional form of participation by several authors (see Topf, 1995). As for the other forms that can be included in the types of unconventional participation, there are no surveys that can allow the analysis of Italian citizens' behaviours in time series. In fact, only three different surveys have been carried out in conjunction with three different waves of the ESS – i.e. Wave 1 (2002), Wave 2 (2004) and Wave 3 (2012). Table 4 shows the main results that emerged from the analysis of the database, comparing in this case Emilia-Romagna to the other Italian regions. The forms of unconventional participation reported are three: signing a petition, boycotting certain products and taking part in illegal protest activities. As for the first two, data are

³ The sample size for Emilia-Romagna is the following: 113 in Wave 1, 118 in Wave 2, and 64 in Wave 6. The sample size for Italy is the following: 1200 in Wave 1 (except for signing a petition, equal to 1195), 1526 for signing a petition and 1528 for boycotting certain products in Wave 2, and 942 for boycotting certain products and 944 for signing a petition in Wave 6.

available for all the three waves; while for the last one they are available only for the first wave. Among the three, signing a petition appears as the most used form over the years both in Emilia-Romagna and in the rest of the Italy. The small number of respondents at the regional level does not allow for significant conclusions to be drawn, as previously done analysing the ISTAT survey.

Chart 6. Use of instruments of visible participation in Emilia-Romagna and in Italy (1993-2016, percentage values)





Source: Elaborated by the author based on the ISTAT (Multipurpose Survey) dataset

5. Social and Associative Participation

Beyond the criticisms of excessive determinism between civicsness and regional institutional performance theorized by Putnam (Bagnasco 1994; Cartocci 1994; Pasquino 1994; Tarrow 1996; Vassallo 2013), his contribution is fundamental for this analysis, as it shows how in the middle of the Eighties there was a great difference in the numbers of associations present in the Italian regions. Some of them had a number of associations similar to the USA, known as the land of civic association (Tocqueville 1835). It was the case of Trentino Alto-Adige and other North-Eastern regions, including

Emilia-Romagna. On the contrary, all the Southern Italian regions (except Sardinia) had the lowest level of associations.

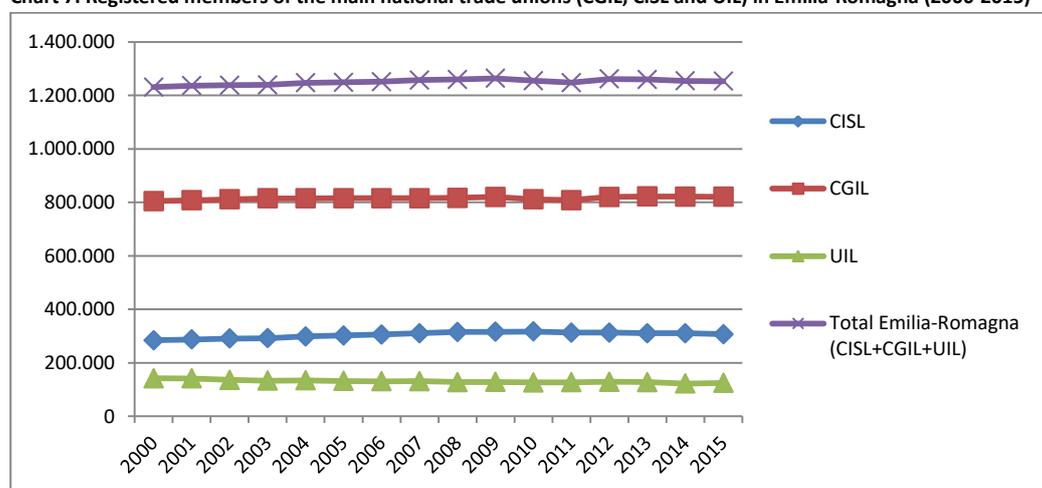
Starting from these considerations, this section is going to present the state-of-the-art of the social and associative participation in Emilia-Romagna, using as indicators both the number of associations and their members and the associative behaviours as emerged from the analysis of the time series in the ISTAT- Multipurpose Analysis (1993-2016). As for the former, a specific aspect of associative participation will be also introduced, that is its representation by the members of the main national trade unions (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro, CGIL; Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori, CISL; and Unione Italiana del Lavoro, UIL).

First of all, in order to understand the geography of the associative phenomena in Emilia-Romagna it is necessary to start from a mapping of the associations of social promotion and non-profit associations identified in each province. Associations of social promotion are non-profit associations with private nature that pursue collective interests by performing social activities in favour of their members or third parties. These activities include, for example, the associations for the promotion of peace, the enhancement of historical, cultural and artistic heritage, the organization of sport activities etc. At the beginning of 2012, in Emilia-Romagna there were 3301 associations of social promotion, located above all in the provinces of Bologna (21% of the regional total) and Modena (23.4%). They were associations especially of cultural (31.7% of the regional total), recreational (24.9%) and sport (20.6%) nature. The feature of Emilia-Romagna as the land of associations is also confirmed in the analysis of voluntary associations present in this Region at the beginning of 2012. With the law 12/2005 this region has taken on a strategic role in the integrated system of voluntary organizations and the management of regional and local services, as well as in the activity of territorial planning. The voluntary associations surveyed were slightly lower than the previous ones (2929 cases). Their highest presence is again registered in the province of Bologna (20.7% of the total), followed by the provinces of Parma (13.8%) and Modena (12.7%). In general, the sectors of social assistance and health are the most frequent for this type of organization (respectively 39.8% and 31.8% of the total) and they are distributed above all in the provinces of Bologna, Modena and Parma.

In order to calculate the number of citizens actually employed in these organizations, it is necessary to start from the IX General Census of the Industry and of the Services carried out in 2011 by ISTAT and recently used by Bordandini and Cartocci (2015) to revise the index of social capital in Italian regions. By considering the volunteers in local units of non-profit institutions – limited to the sector of social assistance – it can be noted that Emilia-Romagna is the second Italian region with the highest number of

volunteers per 1.000 residents (the 10.17%). In the general ranking, Trentino Alto-Adige ranked first (12.85%), while Lombardia and Toscana ranked third (9.87%) and fourth (9.82%) respectively. In general, this rank confirms the associative framework present in Italy in the middle of the 1980s, as described by Putnam: except for Sardinia, the lowest values were associated to Southern regions, reaching the negative peaks in Campania (3.20%), Sicilia (3.67%) and Puglia (3.96%).

Chart 7. Registered members of the main national trade unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL) in Emilia-Romagna (2000-2015)



Source: Elaborated by the author based on the trade union dataset

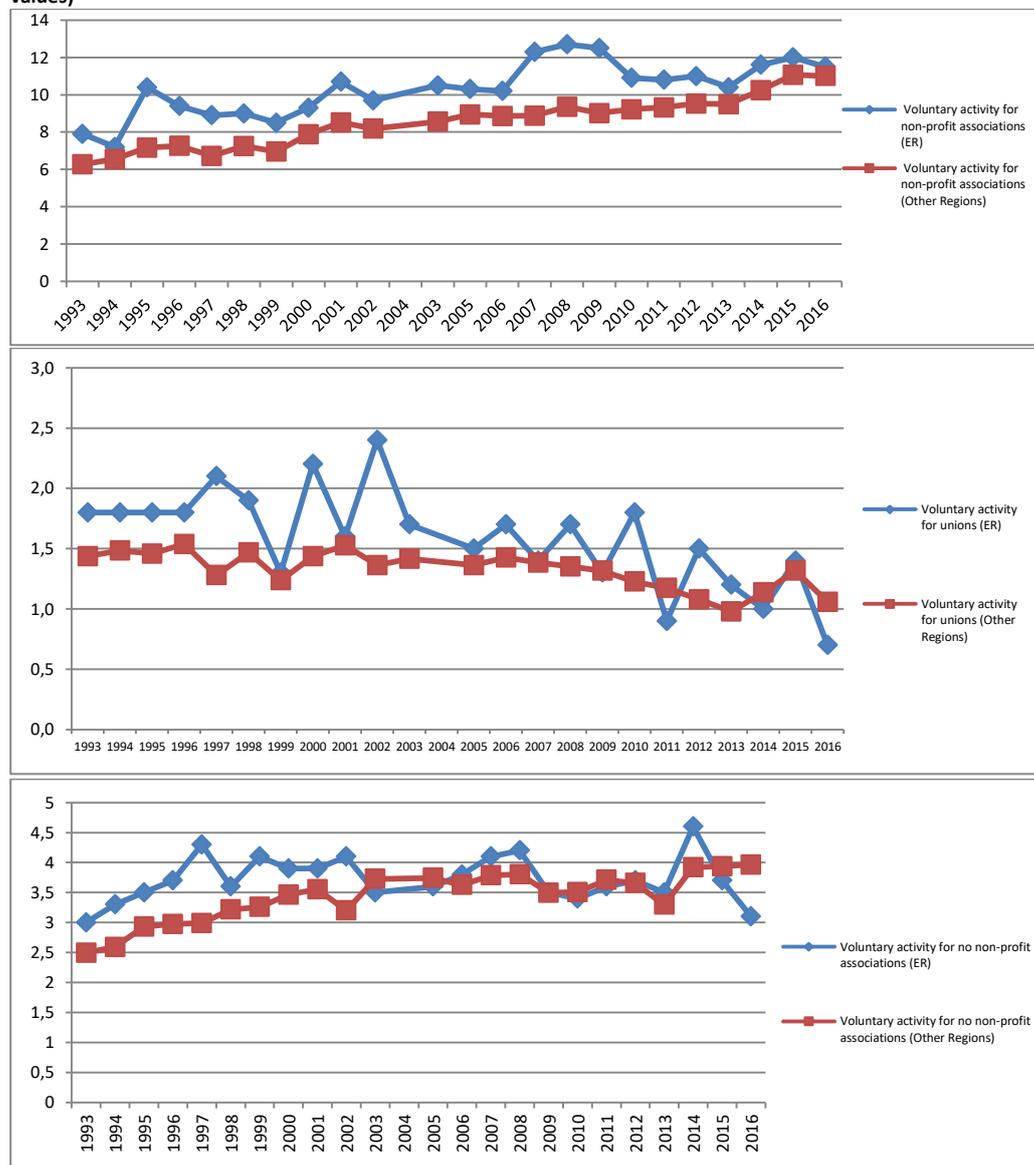
Focusing on the presence of the members of the main Italian trade unions in Emilia-Romagna (Chart 7), it is possible to observe that, from 2000 to 2015, their total number has not been decreasing. On the contrary it has even been raising. The first data worth describing concerns the ever-increasing dominance of CGIL members. As already said in the previous paragraph on electoral participation, Emilia-Romagna continues to be a highly unionized region with a popular vision of unionization that recalls the social-communist background of CGIL. Compared to the catholic matrix of CISL (the second union in this region for number of members), the «genetic code» of CGIL has been constantly characterized by, broadly speaking, a political vocation and inclined to take action on general issues, such as occupation, growth and rights (Carrieri 2012, 74). Therefore, the union membership in this region does not only continue to be particularly accentuated but it also shows an unaltered nature compared to the past.

Finally, the investigation of associative behaviours, as revealed from the study of time series in ISTAT- Multipurpose Analysis (1993-2016), barely confirms the previous

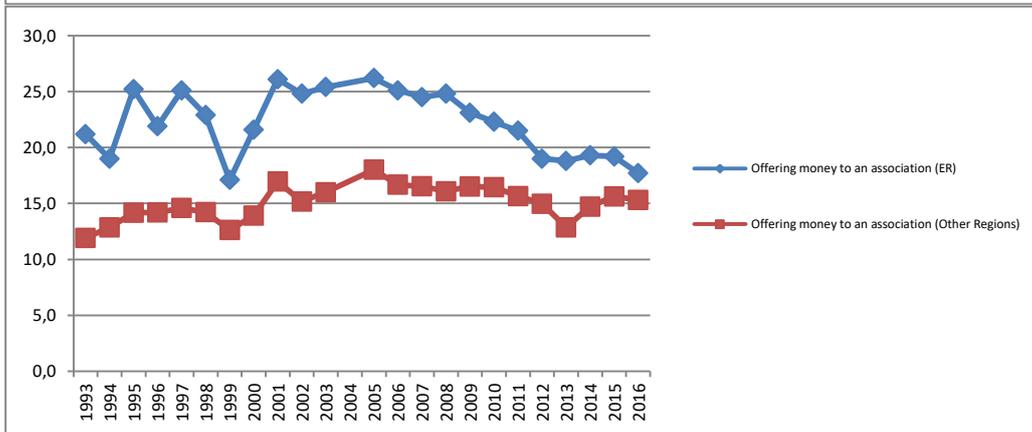
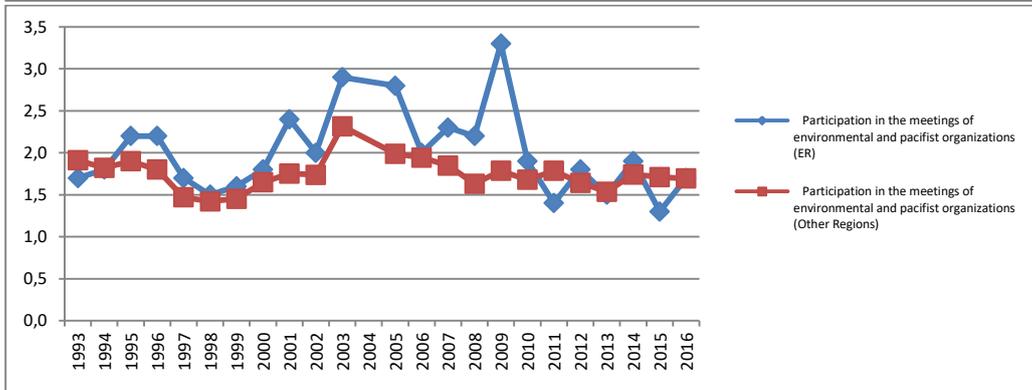
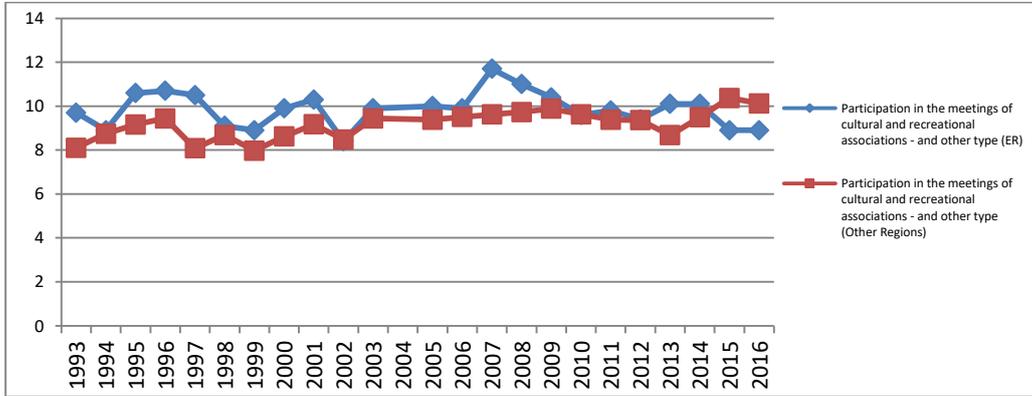
data on the associative phenomenon in Emilia-Romagna. Chart 8 shows the inclination of citizens in this region and in the rest of the Italian regions to offer money to an association, to carry out voluntary activities for an association and to attend meetings in several types of associations.

As for citizens' inclination to offer money to an association, it is possible to observe that, though it continued to be the form of associative participation that showed the highest values compared to others, it reported higher negative trends in the years of the economic crisis (- 0.71). As regards the use of these forms of participation, an intermediate position is occupied by voluntary activities for non-profit associations and the participation in the meetings of cultural and recreational associations (the latter presents a negative trend, i.e. equal to - 0.15). The last three forms of social participation (participation in the meetings of environmental and pacifist organizations, voluntary activities for unions and non-profit associations) are the least frequently used by the citizens in this region, reporting values lower than 5%. Moreover the first two present a negative trend.

Chart 8. Use of Forms of Associative Participation in Emilia-Romagna and in the other regions (1993-2016, percentage values)



Mattia Casula, *Interpreting Participation in Times of Austerity in an Old Red Region*



Source: Elaborated by the author based on the ISTAT (Multipurpose Survey) dataset

As other previous studies pointed out (La Valle 2006; Biorcio *et al.* 2011), comparing the associative behaviors in Emilia-Romagna to the rest of Italian regions, it is possible to observe that in Emilia-Romagna all of them showed values greater than the national averages until the middle of the last decade; on the other hand, in the last years the gap has been reduced and, in several cases, Emilia-Romagna presented lower values than the national average: for example, voluntary activities for non-profit associations showed nearly identical values; while in the cases of voluntary activity for no non-profit associations and for unions, participation in the meetings of cultural and recreational associations and in the meetings of environmental and pacifist organizations, the values were shown to be under the national average over several years. Moreover, by analyzing the time series of the people who declared to offer money to an association, even if Emilia-Romagna has always occupied higher positions compared to the other regions, it is possible to observe the same trend as the other regions with also the same peak. It is worthwhile noting that the negative peak occurred in 1999, when a similar negative peak was also reported for the item listening to a public debate. On the other hand, compared to the averages of the other North-Eastern regions, it is shown to be sometimes higher and sometimes lower. Finally, it is important to underline that a negative peak is present in 2016 for three forms of participation, i.e. voluntary activity for unions, offering money to an association, and voluntary activity for no non-profit associations.

6. Conclusions and Debate

This article analysed if and how political, social and associative participation is changing in Emilia-Romagna in the years of economic crisis with respect the previous decades. Four dimensions have been presented and discussed. The combination of the results that emerged for each of them is useful in order to understand the new model of participation that is increasingly consolidating in this region. The way in which participation is changing in each of the four dimensions is described below, followed by a discussion of the new model of participation. In the last part of the paragraph, several ideas for future research will be presented.

First at all, it is worthwhile noting that electoral participation in each of the rounds of

voting has been reduced. This decrease is lesser in the case of national elections and more accentuated in the case of the regional ones. The latter is to a large extent conditioned by endogenous characteristics that are connected with the loss of credibility of the main party of this region. For example, compared to the past, it would seem that the modality of the voice is not only expressed by the use of the blank ballot but also by abstention, that has been used as a sort of action of voice by the historic electors of the centre-left coalition and of the PD. On the contrary, the analysis of the referenda turnout showed a great continuity in citizens' behaviours in the last years. On one hand, an intermittent use of this electoral instrument is present. On the other hand, as happened in the 1990s, it is possible to underline the presence of a great mobilization in the case of referenda that involved issues historically near to the ideals of the "red" sub-culture. Secondly, considering the invisible participation, the analysis showed the presence of significant negative trends in the number of citizens who claimed both to speak and to inform themselves about politics in the years of the crisis. Moreover, this decrease is higher in the last three years and for the first time since 1993 the number of citizens in Emilia-Romagna who claimed to speak about politics at least sometimes in a week is lower than the rest of the Peninsula. In other words, data showed that political interest among the citizens of this region is decreasing more than in the other Italian regions. Thirdly, the use of forms of visible participation showed the presence of a decrease in the use of all of the forms analysed, and a sharp decrease in the forms of conventional participation strictly related to the party sphere. Fourthly, the analysis of the forms of social and associative participation showed the presence of a lesser reduction in the use of these instruments with respect those historically used. In fact, with respect the forms of visible and invisible participation, a greater endurance is present. On one hand, Emilia-Romagna continues to be a "land of associations" that involve a great number of citizens. On the other hand, a great support for unions continues to be present, above all for the CGIL, i.e. a union that continues to have several ideals in common with the old "red" sub-culture.

On the basis of the empirical evidence of this research it is possible to underline if and how participation is changing in Emilia-Romagna, as well as if and how much the economic crisis is having an impact on it. In the introduction, the concepts of transformation and adaptation have been presented with respect to the changing structure of the previous "red" sub-culture, arguing that the literature underlined the fact that these processes are ongoing and that they can differ a lot in the various contexts on the basis of their endogenous characteristics. The analysis showed that a process of adaptation, rather than transformation, has been taking place in Emilia-Romagna over the course of the last decade. In fact, in the presence of a "hegemonic

party" that now is not more able to canalize participation, the way and the forms of participation strictly related to the party dimension are significantly changing. Nevertheless, both the old ideals and several cultural traits of the "red" sub-culture continue to prevail. On one hand, both high levels of trust with respect to parties and institutions and a high associative and trade union culture continue to be present. In fact, the legacies of the past are visible when analysing the associative fabric that was historically present and that continues to be in the genetic code of the inhabitants of this region, as the tradition of an administrative culture characterized by a specific relationship with the civil society and a particular way to imagine participation through formal organizations. On the other hand, in view of a generalized interest in politics and forms of participation strictly related to parties, citizens are increasingly turning to new instruments of voice. On closer inspection, it is not a new form of net opposition against the party. Rather, it can be considered as a new and a rational mode of expression of dissent against the recent actions of the party, as well as a new way to punish the historical regional political class. In addition, this process of adaptation is not directly determined by the actual crisis. Rather, the crisis is simply accentuating the establishment of a new model of participation that started a long time ago. In fact, the traditional culture of delegation to the party would seem to exist, even if now it manifests itself with different shapes and ways compared to the past.

My results can be further confirmed in a future by regression models aimed to verify the specific impact of the political culture (once the weight of other variables has been taken into account). On the basis of the available surveys, they should also compare the same data in different years, both before and during the years of the economic crisis. They should also consider the observed context effect and its possible change during the years. For example, a preliminary analysis of the 2015 survey showed that: a greater concentration of young adults between the ages of 20 and 30 is present among those who declared to search for information about politics and to speak about politics at least sometimes in a week; while in the case of the people that speak about politics at least sometimes in a week a greater concentration of the workers belonging to the management class is present, in the case of who claimed to inform themselves about politics at least sometimes in a week a fairer distribution among all the categories of workers prevails; a greater concentration of workers belonging to the workman class is present for the forms of visible political participation closer to the parties; the respondents that claimed to participate in the other forms of political participation, as well as in the associative ones, are above all present among the workers framed as managers and directors, and among those that have the maximum educational qualification, i.e. an academic degree. These results should also be used for future

comparisons among the Emilia-Romagna and other "red" areas in order to assess which endogenous factors can help in understanding the different trends in political, social and associative participation and the ongoing process of adaptation or transformation that is taking place in other regional contexts.

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