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New forms of democratic local governance: The case of the Citizen's Committee for Decentralised Cooperation of the City of Rome

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Abstract. The economic, political and social changes that have characterised the beginning of the 21st century have been accompanied by a proliferation of new forms of relationships between governments and citizens that are more inclusive, transparent and accountable. These numerous new and varied democratic practices represent a search for greater and differentiated civic participation that aims to offer a response to a crisis that is corroding democracy in various geopolitical areas. Present in both the north and south of the globe, they demonstrate a greater capacity for innovation at a local level.

The focus of this article is an analysis, at the local level, of international development cooperation, meaning the set of policies that aim to change the imbalance that continues to characterise North-South relationships. It studies an example of democratic innovation in the international aid activity of a Municipality, specifically the case of the Citizen's Committee for Decentralised Cooperation of the City of Rome, which has been operating for twenty years. This resource method was chosen to verify hypotheses and suggest path that may contribute to overall reflections on the processes of constructing new forms of governance, today at the very heart of democracy.

Keywords. Governance, Democracy, Participation, Deliberation, Local government, International Cooperation, Citizen's Committee, Italy

1. Governance in a changing world

The issue of governance is taking on a central role in a world undergoing accelerated change, where economic and social actors are multiplying, public spheres proliferating, and a loss of legitimacy and effectiveness raises questions about the elitist form of democracy that has dominated years of neo-liberalism. Since the 1970s, the search for new rules, new processes and a new method of government (governance defined by Rhodes, 2007) has been expressed in different areas: in state administration, city government, economic corporations and international politics. Today, in an increasingly multi-polar society with multiple levels of decision-making (local/national/global), it acquires greater force without coping with its unresolved problems: the difficulty and challenge of reorienting the public/private relationship by establishing different roles and responsibilities, of making multiple, differing and often conflicting interests compatible, of uniting participation and deliberation, legitimacy and effectiveness, expert and common knowledge.

At the beginning of the 21st century, economic globalisation, the Nation-State crisis, the processes of "opening" and "closing" evident in different cultures (Habermas, 1999), are accompanied by a deep crisis of democracy that is structural, rather than temporary, in nature. As previously dominant social relationships break down (Touraine, 2005), removing the attractiveness and effectiveness of related modes of action and organisation (firstly syndicates and parties), unprecedented social movements and forms of political action appear. They demonstrate the presence of a wide-spread desire to participate in public life; however, this is characterised by interactions that are more horizontal and mobile, more 'liquid' in Bauman's words (2007), appearing as fluid networks rather than formal structures (Kaldor y Selchow, 2012; della Porta, 2011). The alternatives that separate economics, society, politics and culture (Appadurai, 1996), in a more integrated and, at the same time, more fragmented (in 2003 Rosenau introduces *fraggementation*) world, add the task of rebuilding "bridges" and re-establishing lost links to the processes of constructing a democratic governance.

Markets “freed” from state regulations show the progress of formerly peripheral countries, completely redesigning North-South relationships. However, the economic growth seen in emerging economies in the last decade, particularly in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) also brings with it increased inequality, with the odd exception. This inequality increases in different geopolitical areas (OECD, 2011), revealing a different profile depending on the focus point, stimulating a search for a new measurement system (see the recent proposal by Cobham and Sumner, 2013). Global inequality¹ demonstrates an increase in polarisation between the wealthiest 5% and the poorest 5% of the world's population, while the status of the intermediary quintiles varies substantially. In fact, as the income of the lower middle class increases, i.e. the income of the emerging countries (+80/70%), there is a corresponding downturn in that of the highest middle class, i.e. the income of the most industrialised countries (Milanovic, 2012). In turn, if the relationship between countries is examined, taking into account the demographic weight of each, it is evident that there is a significant increase in participation by countries such as China, India and Brazil in the gross global product while the poverty map is transformed, with a reduction in the number of low income countries (Sumner, 2010). The neoliberal framework, which has guided the latest stages of globalisation and shows itself to be increasingly incapable of overcoming its self-generated crises, tends to position the growth of inequality at a world level and within countries, rather than between countries. The profile of inequality is new and differentiated, and the methodological approaches in use until recently have consequently lost their capacity for analysis.

In other aspects, globalisation has an impact on the local, drastically transforming it. G-local is the term that was invented to qualify the phenomena of de-territorialisation and, at the same time, simultaneous re-territorialisation on record. The global breaks down hierarchies, relations, values, it de-materialises limits, however, at the same time it also needs to “materialize”, to agglomerate the structures that support it in defined locations (Sassen, 2007). The local, in terms of the g.local, is freed from its old subordination to the State and takes on an economic and political centrality. In recent decades and on different continents, decentralisation, one of the main indicators of the new strength of the local, has accompanied processes of democratisation and the spirals of growth concentrated in specific areas, creating pockets of wealth and impoverished slums (World Bank, 2009; Sumner, 2010). Temporary or continuous over time? This is debatable.

Under the new framework, and in response to different trends, local governments are beginning to experiment with innovative forms of micro-democracy, of “governing with the people”, and are open to greater, different civic participation (Schmidt, 2006). In both the North and South these unprecedented methods of local governance, differentiated

by country and subject (civic courts, consensus conferences, forums, neighbourhood councils, participative budgets, community boards, social budgets etc.), have similarly varied levels of inclusiveness, democracy and decision-making power (della Porta, 2011). Untying the knot in each that binds the search for legitimacy, desire for control, demands for effectiveness and efficiency, hope for inclusion, recognition among equals and social justice, unveils a decisive step towards escaping rhetoric and making the strengths and directions of these new practices transparent.

Change has also reached the international scene where, for the first time, records show that local government and civil society have entered into a world that was previously closed to them (Hocking, 1999; Beck, 2005). It is significant that development cooperation, an important area in international relations, has also registered similar changes that are seen, among other ways, in the appearance of a new form of action: decentralised cooperation. This is a true break as it represents not just the entry of new actors into aid politics, i.e. local governments and territorial actors (non-governmental development organisations, cooperatives, non-profit associations, syndicates, universities) but also, and above all, the assertion of an unprecedented logic of action. This new logic is seen in a wide and varied web consisting of methods of dialogue, agreement and participative management between partners and regions and, at the same time, between the multiple economic, social and institutional actors present in each (Ianni, 2004). More generally, a deep and complex process of change is running through development cooperation. The multiplication of objectives, of actors and instruments (the triple revolution discussed by Severino and Ray - 2009) drives changes that combine continuity and significant breaks with the past. In the second decade of the 21st century, the large part of the international community that united around the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) platform, established at the start of the century, with concern for the effectiveness and efficiency of action (central theme of the 4 High Level Forums organised between 2003 and 2011 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD), increasingly has to face the challenge of achieving greater convergence in the area of new donors (firstly from the emerging countries), opening up to participation from civil society and local governments, entirely redefining (not just updating) aims, strategies and the very vision of development. In this context, decentralised cooperation presents itself as a response to the issues on the agenda and, at the same time, as a space capable of intercepting new democratic practices that emerge at a local level, offering suggestions and contributions that go beyond aid.

These are the reasons behind the decision to study democratic governance for aid, specifically, the Citizen's Committee for Decentralised Cooperation (CCDC) of the City of Rome. The aim is to verify advanced hypotheses about the basis of other local practices, identify paths that could contribute to better defining the characteristics and strengths of the democratic innovations of the new century, the focus points for a new democratic perspective.

¹ Global inequality takes into account individuals and their incomes, putting membership of a country afterwards in brackets. It therefore surpasses the framework of States and takes on a global perspective (Milanovic, 2012).

2. Methodological note

It was only possible to produce this study thanks to the continuous availability of the CCDC, the associations that comprise it and Rome City Council; they gave the author access to their files and made time for discussion and dialogue.

This availability made it possible to apply various tools as part of the chosen methodology:

- Bibliographic review of the main works on the analysed subjects;
- Document analysis, including documents produced by the CCDC and administrative documents belonging to the City Council;
- Semi-structured interviews with different members of the CCDC, civil servants and City Council politicians;
- Repeated, in-depth interviews with the City Council civil servant responsible for supporting the CCDC;
- Participation in different events organised by the Committee, whether as an observer or as a rapporteur-actor;
- Focus group with 15 members of the Assembly where the initial draft of research results was presented and discussed.

In terms of the conceptual scaffolding applied, it is important to clarify that the main concepts are defined as follows: - Deliberation: identified with dialogue characterised by the freedom and equality of all participants, argument-based interaction and changes to initially held positions (Elster, 1998; Manin, 2005; Bobbio, 2007). - Participation: has different forms, from the most limited and purely nominal participation to participation that represents a real change in the balance of existing power, taking the works of S. White (1996) and Arnstein (1969) as a main reference point. A dynamic, two-tier focus was used that aimed to highlight the conditions that make it possible to move up or down from one step to the next on the participative ladder. - Governance: mainly refers to three aspects of action, in the specific case of the relationship between Rome City Council and its citizens: decision-making processes and management, the effectiveness of established policies and the regulatory and organisational principles adopted (Kooiman, 2008).

3. The Citizen's Committee for Decentralised Cooperation of the City of Rome. Different areas for more democratic governance

The Citizen's Committee for decentralised cooperation in Rome was created in 1996, during a period in which similar ideas flourished in a number of other Italian cities: Bergamo, Naples, Catania, Palermo, Genoa, Arezzo, Viareggio (Ianni, 2011). Its aim was to create a space for dialogue between city administration and regional actors in order to

“promote, coordinate, assess and programme initiatives” on development cooperation implemented by the city. This was how the purpose of the CCDC was defined in the Regulations that later formalised its foundation in 2003.

This type of committee had different roots; in some, the city council's desire to extend consensus dominated, others were influenced by demands for participation from the region (Ianni, 2011) and therefore, taken as a whole, the new spaces tended to lie between poles that consisted of “offered” and “claimed” spaces (Gaventa, 2004). However, common to all was the heavy weight of external requests represented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) multi-lateral programmes, which were partly financed at this time by Italian governmental cooperation. These incorporated an element of decentralised cooperation, and the various Italian cities that started international cooperation activity at this time registered their initiatives under their framework (Ianni, 1999). In other areas, it is important to highlight that the social space of these committees was a mixed space on the borderline between being social and institutional, in line with similar experiments in the area of local development. It was therefore different from the space of citizen's committees that are exclusively comprised of social actors and are mobilised, now as then, around specific themes, without any formal structure and with “elements typical to social movements” (della Porta, 2004: 14); it also differed from the participative experiences of the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, committees of decentralised cooperation do not claim to represent established interests; in contrast they aim to establish common interests, to build shared plans.

However, in the second decade of the 21st century, all the committees described above appear, for different reasons, to have been dissolved; besides the CCDC in Rome only the Committees of Arezzo and Modena province remain and these differ slightly because, since the beginning, the former was a Local Committee and not a Citizen's Committee², and the latter has a provincial aspect. Changes in the political climate and the evolution of interaction between the willingness of local government to “cede power” and the strength and wealth of local practices present in the territory, as well as the dominant type of political culture (agonic or antagonist, ready to confront adversaries or determined to fight with enemies it is necessary to remove - Mouffe, 2003) proved to be decisive. The CCDC in Rome, due to its remarkable durability, represents a unique case for studying these factors and the innovative strength of these new practices.

4. The City Council relationship: a “claimed” and yet “offered” space

The CCDC in Rome was established on the Mayor's initiative, however, from the beginning, international solidarity and cooperation associations in the city supported its creation to the degree that its institutional formalisation was the result of a specific demand submitted by these organisations to the

² Local Committees, in contrast to Citizen's Committees, unite active or interested actors around a specific programme, reducing their capacity to create an impact on the life of a city, although they are more specific and have greater functionality (Ianni, 2004).

centre-left candidate in the 2002 municipal elections, an issue he then made his own. Once declared the winner, he found himself committed to making it a reality, On 17 October 2002, the Municipal Council debated the establishment of the Committee; on 18 March 2003 the Assembly of the CCDC, following a lengthy process of analysis and debate, approved the Regulations that govern its structure and activity (Luzzatto, 2004).

The local authority charter issued by the Council established that "The Committee is established, in addition to local authority representatives, by non-governmental organisations, non-profit organisations, volunteer societies and related associations operating in the civic sphere and that have been committed to working for at least a year in the development cooperation sector". The Regulation structures the CCDC into three areas (Assembly, Commission, Round Tables) that are differentiated by "access rules", forms of representation, functions and operating dynamics, the number of actors and decision-making powers, and these interact with one other to create one sole area, a space governed by defined rules and purposes. Placing the institution-social actor relationship inside the participative deliberative space, combined with the presence of second level actors (associations) as an almost exclusive expression of citizenship, represent the specific aspects of the chosen organisational form.

Access to the Assembly is open, but the right to vote is limited to the associations that belong to the Committee, which participate through a representative with written authority or by delegating authority to another association (only one delegation is permitted). The permanent Commission is composed of a set number of members with mixed representation: 14 members are chosen by the Assembly to represent the different types of association and 5 (7 in the most recent period) are appointed by the Mayor: directors of different technical/administrative areas and political representatives, including a Deputy Councillor³ and the Councillor for relations with European institutions and neo-EU citizens. Coordinators from the Round Tables and other Deputy Councillors, representing overseas communities, also participate but do not have the right to vote. The Round Tables include members of CCDC associations that have not been formally appointed, non-affiliated associations and other interested people. The Tables were established by theme⁴ Peace (now inactive), Fight against poverty, Interculture, Sustainable development, today, Commons, Decentralisation (now inactive) and represent a fluid area without set external limits, open to new additions (Ianni, 2012).

Dialogue as a method of interaction dominates each of the three areas. However, while the dynamic of the Round Tables is based on deliberation, meaning they are characterised by argument, equality in debate and the freedom to introduce

new subjects (Benhabib, 1996), in the Assembly, and particularly the Commission, the opposite is true; they are based on strategic negotiation, i.e. the search for agreement between established, differing and sometimes conflicting interests. The latter two bodies therefore represent a space that is more participative than deliberative, that "balances" interests rather than converting them into shared positions (Habermas, 1999; Benhabib, 1996; della Porta, 2011). In these dynamics, the prompt verbalisation of work by the Tables, Assembly and Commission and its dissemination on the internet (when CCDC creates its own website), will guarantee the transparency of debate and decision-making and encourage significant forms of collective learning.

In summary, the CCDC in Rome shows itself to be an interesting combination of deliberation and strategic action, characterised by different levels of participation (from symbolic participation to embryonic forms of civic power - Arnstein, 1969). It is an area subject to fluctuating fortunes but, to date, resistant to being affected by them thanks to a weak yet constant force of integration.

5. Weaknesses of the experience in Rome

The dynamics of the CCDC face different types of obstacles in terms of expansion; some stem from the City Council, while others have their roots in the very heterogeneity and self-referential nature of the city's association-related fabric.

Following the formal creation of the CCDC, the City Council continues to undertake a large part of its development cooperation initiatives without the Committee. Those with the greatest media impact (the first Italy-Africa sessions, activity in Rwanda and Mozambique, G-local Forums in the first half of the 2000s) were initiatives directly assumed by the Mayor; others, including EU programmes, were allocated to members of the governing board and borough authorities⁵. The most negative aspect is the fact that, by 2013, the Municipality still had neither a strategic nor annual programme (Ianni, 2012). This weakens the CCDC's capacity for dialogue and the performance of its acknowledged functions.

In turn, Rome has a very particular profile, with a clear universalist focus strengthened by the presence of the Vatican State and a notable leading role at a national level. It is home to the strongest Italian associations, international organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) and numerous national and international universities. Social networks demonstrate equally significant strengths and weaknesses; they are open to the world but have fragile roots, and great problems in finding common ground and methods of coordination with one another (Rhi Sausi, Coletti, Conato, Rufini, 2004). These characteristics of the association-related fabric of Rome are reflected in the world of the Committee, with internal differences in terms of aims,

³ Created in 2003, the purpose of the Deputy Councillors chosen by foreign, non-EU citizens is to represent these citizens in the City Council and the Borough Councils. The Regulations of the City Council state that Deputy Councillors do not have the right to vote, may not sign any motions of no confidence and are not included in the official count of those present.

⁴ In the 1990s, the Tables were geographic in nature; the change that took place in the following decade in this respect was in response to the decision to prioritise coordination over territorial specifics.

⁵ The borough authorities represent "districts of decentralisation from the Municipality", according to the Rome Municipality statute. Created in 2001 with responsibility for governing the region and expenditure on services, by 2013 15 had been established.

associated cultures, experiences, resources, leanings towards movements or more institutional positions, and the choice of international solidarity or social change (Ianni, 2012). In 2013, the Committee was formed by 140 associations. In previous years this number had risen to 180, highlighting a further issue: a reduction in the CCDC's force of attraction, added to the weakness of participation by its associations. This participation, in more than one case, is purely formal and evolving towards withdrawal, and exit⁶; this has its roots in the absence of incentives to become members of the Committee⁷ (particularly important in stronger associations), and the demands on time required by an active presence (a limiting factor for less structured associations). Since 2005 the CCDC has addressed this issue by introducing successive changes to its Regulations (lowering of the attendance quorum, option of delegation by Commission members, discontinuance if not present at three consecutive meetings of the Assembly), revealing a predominantly defensive action rather than a strategy. In contrast, the Municipality does not appear to have raised this matter.

In addition, there is reduced coordination between the Municipality, Province and Region (the three levels of decentralisation in Italy), meaning there is no territorial system of cooperation, which also contributes to creating the context that feeds these weaknesses.

6. CCDC presence in the city and the national sphere

Despite the weaknesses described above, the CCDC in Rome has managed to maintain a notable presence in the city, varying between periods of great visibility, which occur at specific times and also create an impact at a national level, to moments of withdrawal and minimal, almost underground activity. The fact that it is a space that is closed yet, at the same time, partly open, has helped the Committee to build networks of associations that last over time.

The CCDC achieved particular visibility in 2000, in relation to the Jubilee 2000 movement, with its commitment to civic awareness and mobilisation around the issue of debt. This commitment was in line with the national "Sdebitarsi" campaign (in turn linked to the global Jubilee 2000 campaign) which won approval for a national law to cancel third world debt (Law 209 of 2000).

Equally important was the Committee's participation in and contribution to activities that were regularly run in the first half of the 2000s and focused on African problems (Italy-Africa) and the promotion of dialogue between peoples (Intermundia).

However, in terms of all these CCDC initiatives the most noteworthy was issuing a call and organising the "General states of cooperation". The initial proposal, in March 2006, was to create a space for reflection and progress capable of

influencing and re-defining national cooperation policies. The decision to compare civic reality and the national scene, highlighting the actively diverging trends in each (expansion in the former and withdrawal in the latter) contributed to helping this process achieve greater weight and, thanks to the change of political party in the national government (May 2006), dialogue and support from the recently appointed Deputy Minister for International Cooperation. The initiative therefore demonstrated a great capacity for creating an impact and, for three consecutive years (2006-2008), it encouraged unprecedented reflection and debate in Italy, with conferences and work groups that proved to have great rallying power. In 2008 numerous Forums were held in different Italian regions in preparation for the National Forum that revealed the breadth and strength of the mobilisation and influence achieved by the process (Ianni, 2012). A little later, however, political changes in the national and citizens' governments signified the end of the initiative and led to a period of retreat.

This ability to achieve a national presence was once again seen in 2009 with participation by the CCDC in the processes of re-writing the principles guiding Italian cooperation in health, organised by the General-Directorate for Development Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy. On this occasion, links and a positive circle were again made between democratic local practices and the democratic nature of national policy, proving that a "concertina-like" path (intermittent and marked by phases of expansion and long periods of contraction), can have a lasting impact.

7. Democratising democracy: Final comments

The CCDC in Rome represents an interesting and innovative space for civic participation, with varying yet lasting intensity. Its history illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of an experience of participative local government based on a particular theme, in this case development cooperation.

The unprecedented duration of the CCDC, which has existed for almost 20 years, shows that it has roots, among others, in the unstable balance between the willingness of the Municipality to share powers and claims for participation from citizens associations. Over the years and under different Administrations, the Municipality, backed by the Department for International Relations attached to the Mayor's Office, has given limited support to the Committee, making available a physical space for coordinating activities, linking it to its European programmes offices. In turn, the associations, although reduced in number and with varying attendance, demonstrate a core capable of remaining active over time. In particular, the CCDC has redesigned its configuration, its "deliberative setting", more than once to adapt itself to circumstances. Its action has seen a series of expansions and contractions that help it to overcome the severest situations to be able to form, in better times, a public/private partnership characterised by co-participation dynamics, meaning with a certain level of power redistribution between the institution and social actors.

The Rome example confirms that, even in the case of a space mainly defined by the institution/civic associations

⁶ This was the experience of the Peace Table which, following the impact of internal divisions, rapidly experienced paralysis and inactivity (Ianni, 2012).

⁷ Furthermore, with the exception of the first, Municipality announcements regarding the co-financing of cooperation initiatives do not value participation from the CCDC in any way.

relationship, preserving the respective autonomy of each is a decisive component in the sustainability of the democratic innovation process, as indicated by the experiences of the *Porte Alegre* participative budget and the democratic decentralisation of Kerala (Heller, 2001, 2002; Thomas Isaac y Heller, 2003; Ianni, 2008). At the same time, participation as the capacity to redefine and expand the public space is conditioned, as in other cases (Avritzer 2006), by the effectiveness of the results achieved. The withdrawal in recent years of the strongest associations with the greatest visibility and, in contrast, greater commitment from the weaker associations exemplifies how the results are not measured in the abstract, but rather are differentiated in relation to the characteristics and interests of the different actors. In fact, while limitations in the capacity to agree on significant management issues lead the more structured organisations to withdraw, these same limits do not have an effect on the smaller associations that find reasons to maintain their presence, valuing the possibility of exchanging experiences and building networks.

In turn, the particular democratic governance of aid represented by the CCDC clearly indicates how the local dimension is strengthened or weakened under the impact of what is occurring at a national and international level. The capacity of the CCDC in Rome to develop actions with a national impact will guarantee its durability. The General convention of cooperation initiative, and the links with initiatives by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, demonstrate the virtuous circle that can be generated. They suggest that constructing democratic governance, in an increasingly globalised and multi-polar world, requires multi-level actions and focuses; the starting point of the process is not pre-established or decided, but reveals the links that this process manages to establish with the other levels. Different studies highlight the negative effects of any imbalances that may exist in this regard. In Italy, for example, academics such as Bobbio (2005) demonstrate that in recent decades a fairly clear divergence separates the national level, where a vertical and controlled vision of democracy dominates, and the local level where, in contrast, there are numerous participative and deliberative practices, producing paralysing effects on the dynamics of each. The disconnection between local democratic innovations and the national level often transform these innovations into isolated niches and also, on some occasions, into functional practices for vertical and authoritative centralisation processes.

In terms of development cooperation in particular, the forms and durability of aid governance by the CCDC suggests that an on-the-record redefinition of North-South relations requires not merely political and strategic changes, but also a new vision of development. In other words, it requires taking steps towards co-development, to a win-win circular relationship between actors and different levels of economic growth, social well-being and political liberty. The “development agreement” typical to decentralised cooperation, common to both North and South territories in a joint, differentiated search for fair and long-lasting changes (Ianni, 2009), represents a form of response to this demand for “global action” which is increasingly present in international debate on the future of aid.

Last, but not least, study of the CCDC shows that the deliberation-participation relationship is fluid and changing, also indicating the importance of finding common ground for the purposes of democratic governance. It suggests that participation and deliberation represent processes that interact with one another yet remain different, providing empirical confirmation of the main theories of deliberation (first Habermas) which highlight that deliberation is not necessarily identified with the decision-making moment while this, in contrast, represents the basic foundation of participation. The dynamics that characterise the sub-areas that constitute the CCDC are representative in this respect. At a more general level, the case of the CCDC confirms the teachings related, in a large part, to democratic local governance practices carried out in recent years, i.e. the current crisis of democracy can find paths to resolution not in juxtaposition between democratic forms (direct, delegates, representatives) but rather in the search for links, articulation and common ground between them. It also confirms the decisive nature of both political and institutional frameworks and the culture that inspire social and political forces when constructing a democratic government. In this way it offers, from its perspective, input and contributions to the debate on how to “democratize democracy” in a world in which the Nation-State has lost its centrality, integration and fragmentation progress together and increasingly numerous and heterogeneous actors demand new forms of expression and participation in the definition of common good.

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