

Volunteer engagement as a form of political participation: A study on Italian emerging adults

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Abstract

Despite that the political and civic engagement are fundamental, recent trends suggest that in several democratic countries around the world youths' disengaged from politics are increasing, but it seems that they are more involved in volunteer activities beneficial for the community in which they are involved. This study examined differences between youths who consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation and who do not interpret their involvement in this way. The sample consisted of 247 Italian emerging adults, aged between 18 and 30 years, who were actively involved in volunteer groups: environmental associations; cultural associations; social associations; inclusive/solidarity economy associations. In our results, the youth who considered their volunteer activity as a form of political participation were slightly older, more left-wing oriented, and were more involved in some contexts of volunteerism than their counterparts who do not view their volunteer involvement as a form of political participation.

Keywords: Volunteers, political engagement, emerging adults, motivation, gender.

1 Introduction

The term “civic engagement” refers to a broad construct that includes civic skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and goals. There are numerous definitions for this term (see Adler & Goggin, 2005 for a discussion) and there is a debate about what activities can be considered “civic”. In this paper, youth civic engagement includes both community-oriented and political participation and goals, and we used to denote the engagement of an individual with the interests, goals, concerns and common good of a community.

More recent definitions of political participation have thus tended to be wider in scope (Ekman & Amna, 2012). Brady for example defines political participation as “action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes” (Brady, 1999, 737).

On the other hand, the term political engagement as used in the paper, denotes the engagement of an individual with political institutions, processes and decision-making.

According to Barrett and Zani's (2015) dissertation, engagement typically involves participatory behaviours directed towards either the polity (in the case of political engagement) or a community (in the case of civic engagement). However, not all engagement is behavioural. One can hold an interest in, pay attention to and have knowledge, opinions or feelings about political or civic matters, without necessarily participating in any manifested action towards either the polity or the community. Individuals can be cognitively or affectively engaged without necessarily being behaviourally engaged. Psychological engagement can be indexed in many different ways, for example via levels of political or civic knowledge, the intensity of feelings about political or civic matters, levels of attention to media sources such as newspapers, television news or news on the Internet, and also the extent to which an individual discusses politics or civic affairs with family or friends. However, political and civic engagement usually involves not only psychological states and processes but also active participatory behaviours. Political participation takes many forms. Some forms involve electoral processes: voting, election campaigning, donating money to a political party, standing or running for election, etc. Other forms of political participation take place outside the electoral arena. These non-conventional forms of political participation include: writing political, signing petitions, participating in political demonstrations.

Barrett and Zani (2015) explained that citizens' political and civic engagement is important in democratic societies. First, in a democracy, the citizens' political engagement through voting in elections is extremely important because, if too few citizens vote, it is not that clear whether the elected government (that is elected) has the people's consent (of the people) to govern. Second, within healthy democracies, governments also need to be kept under scrutiny and actively monitored in order to ensure that citizens are protected against the arbitrary exercise of power and to ensure that decision-makers are not dishonest or corrupt. Third, if citizens do not communicate their views to decision-makers, the latter may be deprived of vital information which is needed to reach informed outcomes. The result/consequence might be that they may make ill-informed decisions which have negative or deleterious consequences for citizens. This is especially visible in the case of disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Fourth, participation helps individual citizens build up a wide range of personal and social capacities, enhances people's sense of subjective well-being, life satisfaction and tolerance towards others, including a sense of personal efficacy, a sense of responsibility towards others, an appreciation of civic duty, social capital, trust, and civic and political skills. A fifth argument frequently made on behalf of participation is that citizens themselves are the most appropriate

people to judge what is in their own best interests, and therefore political decisions need to be made with the active involvement of those whose lives are going to be affected and bound by those decisions.

Despite that the political and civic engagement are fundamental, recent trends suggest that in several democratic countries around the world youths' disengaged from politics are increasing, but it seems that they are more involved in volunteer activities beneficial for the community in which they are involved (e.g., Lopez et al., 2006; Marta & Pozzi, 2007).

2 Youth civic and political participation in Italy: the role of organizational membership

National surveys indicate that in the United States, a percentage between 45% and 55% of adults spend at least some of their time in unpaid voluntary work in service organizations (Penner& Finkelstein, 1998). About 64.3 million Americans, i.e. 26.8% of the adult population, donated 7.9 billion hours of volunteer service, worth \$171 billion in 2011 (www.independentsector.org).

The Study on Volunteering in the European Union, reveals that in 2010, the level of participation in Europe in 2010 was as follows (table 1):

TABLE 1

Tab. 1 Level of participation in Europe

Level	% Population	Countries
Very high	Over 40%	Austria, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom
High	30%-39%	Denmark, Germany, Finland, Luxembourg
Medium	20%-29%	Estonia, France, Latvia
Relatively low	10%-19%	Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia, Spain
Low	Under 10%	Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania

In the last 20 years, a sociological survey on nationally representative Italian sample of youth, have documented a constant increase of repulsion toward formal politics (Buzzi et al. 2002, Fermani, 2008, 2011). Recently Italian researches (Fermani 2009, 2013) showed that the majority of adolescents and young Italian people, especially women, perceive themselves as not competent in politics and thus not interested. Initial interpretation of these data focused on the increasing disaffection toward politics in an Italian society, which is similar to other countries. Yet, a more recent perspective, stressed other factors. Italian youth may be disillusioned and perceive themselves as powerless and helpless towards the future of the Italian society.

Italians aged 15-24 prefer different forms of civic engagement, for example volunteering. In Italy more than 1 million volunteers are involved in associations: 54, 4% are males and 45.6% are females. We have nearly 900,000 people of all ages: 22.1% is under 29 years; 41.1% is between 30 and 54 years; 23.3% is between 55 and 64 years and 13.5% is over 64. The total number of people donating their time to voluntary organizations for solidarity purposes seems to have increased from 7% to 10%, from 1993 to 2012 (ISTAT, 2013). Even this percentage is low compare to northern European countries, but it is high among young people. The National Institute of Statistics (2013) shows that the percentage of people donate money to support volunteers organization increased from 14 to 18 percent. While in 2011, this result decreased, probably because there was onset of the general economic crises in Italy.

Web technology 2.0 had a fundamental role in facilitating youth civic and political participation. In 2012, recorded an increase in adolescents' online consultations (e.g. talking about politics or looking for information about political topics).

In line with Hendry, Shucksmith, Love and Glendinning(1993), Albano (2005) found that the majority of adolescents and young people participated regularly in only one association. Sport and recreational groups are very popular while religious and political groups are always less popular (Fermani, 2008, 2009, 2011).

Numerous researches mentioned in Barret & Zani, (2015)or in Henderson, Brown and Pancer (2012), focusedon the importance of early socialization processes in contexts of families, schools, and peer groups as well as on opportunities for civic involvement during adolescence

Leone (2011) found a positive correlation between associational experience (formal and no formal organizations and groups) and participation in discussion on social issues. Organizational membership predicts civic and political participation because of its role in building social capital. Social capital increases the likelihood of people being civil and politically engaged, moreover it enhances the involvement of people with different perspectives, interest and needs (Albanesi et. al., 2015). Involvement in adolescence is crucial for future adult political participation, to the social trust and civic commitment and seems to increase the young personal skills and resources. For example, participation in volunteers' organizations lead to an increase in the ability in: deliberation, compromise, speaking in public, expressing an opinion, learning to work in groups, conflict management, resilience and problem solving ability, assimilating other people's opinions, willingness to sustain volunteering over time (Marta &Pozzi, 2007). Involvement enhances the construction of a more complex civic and political identity, sense of ownership and belonging to the community. In fact, identification and sense of community plays a strong role in civic and political participation (Albanesi et. al., 2015).

Albanesi, Mazzoni, Cicognani and Zani (2015) results support the idea that acquisition of practical skills is one of the key mechanisms through which associational membership promotes civic and political participation. The nature, intensity and quality of participatory activities and their potential for learning and building competences are crucial factors.

For this reason, understanding youth civic engagement holds an increasing interest and importance in the research agenda in many fields such as psychology, political science, and sociology. However, the processes which are currently driving younger people away from conventional political participation towards other forms of participation are yet poorly understood.

3 Aim and research questions

The main question we address in this contribution, is whether youths consider their types of volunteer engagement as a form of political participation.

Then, we will examine differences between those youths who consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation and those who do not interpret their involvement in this way.

In this paper, to achieve these goals, we identify three research question:

1. Do youths consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation?
2. Do youths who consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation hold motivations to voluntary work, different from their peers who do not consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation? In this question the theoretical background was the Functional Approach to Volunteers' Motivations (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1995) since it has potential utility in understanding a wide range of different types of social action.

In fact, our assumptions are:

- people are goal-directed;
- volunteers engage in voluntary work in order to satisfy important personal goals,
- volunteers performing the same volunteer activity may have different reasons for volunteering;
- an individual volunteer may be trying to satisfy two or more motives through one activity;
- outcomes depend on the matching of needs and goals to the opportunities afforded by the context.

The Volunteer Process Model specifies psychological and behavioural features associated with each of three sequential and interactive stages (i.e., antecedents, experiences, consequences) and speaks of activity at multiple levels of analysis (i.e., the individual, the interpersonal, the organizational, and the social system). This model considers both the antecedents of volunteering and what happens to volunteers over time. Volunteerism represents a distinctive form of help. According to these authors, some forms of volunteerism implies a commitment that extends over considerable periods of time and also remarkable personal costs. Volunteerism raises questions of personality, of motivation, and of mechanisms for sustaining it. Omoto and Snyder (1995) believe that as there are usually few situational constraints on the initial decision to undertake activities of volunteering, the available variables play a major role in this decision. Thus, among the important antecedent variables, there are the volunteer's prior personal experiences, current circumstances, current personal reasons and social needs. This model gives special emphasis to such reasons and needs; such conceptualization is based on Clary and Snyder's (1991) functional analysis of prosocial behaviours. This functional analysis proposes that volunteering serves different functions for different people (and perhaps multiple functions for the same person). Particularly, on the motivations scale, the inventory produced five scale scores, each created by summing over the responses to its five items and each measuring a specific motivation for AIDS volunteerism. The five scales, named for the items defining them are: Values, Understanding, Personal Development, Community Concern, and Esteem Enhancement. In order to understand why a person offers help, it is necessary to understand what particular function helping serves for her or him. Therefore, at the antecedent stage, research guided by this model has identified personality characteristics and motivational tendencies, as well as aspects of people's life circumstances, that lead people to get involved as volunteers and that predict who will become more effective and satisfied in his work. When

it comes to starting volunteerism, people are particularly likely to get involved when circumstances suggest that doing so will serve their own motivations. Moreover, once in service, volunteers are likely to continue their involvement when they perceive that their own motivations are being fulfilled.

3. Do youths who consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation have a system of values different from their peers who do not consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation?
4. Do youths who consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation are more identified with their group than their peers who do not consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation? In this case the theoretical background is the Social Identity Theory. Social identity is that part of one's personal self that derives from "the individual's knowledge that he (or she) belongs to certain groups together with some emotional and value significance to him (or her) of the group membership" (Tajfel 1972, p. 31).

4 Method

4.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 247 (40% men and 60% women) Italian emerging adults, aged between 18 and 30 years (Mean age = 24.3 years; SD = 4.2), who were actively involved in volunteer groups. Four association groups were represented in the sample: environmental associations (33 volunteers; 23 M e 10 F); cultural associations (64 volunteers – 23 M e 41 F); social associations (130 volunteers – 42 M e 88 F); inclusive/solidarity economy associations (20 volunteers – 11 M e 9 F).

On average, they practiced voluntary work about 5 years about an average of 10 hours a month.

4.2 Procedure

Prior to initiating the study, we obtained (permission) from the president of the voluntary association an informed consent to be able to administer questionnaires. Once we received the permission, members were informed about the study and asked if they wished to participate. Approximately 99% of the consulted candidates chose to participate. Interviewers visited the associations and asked participants to fill in the questionnaire.

4.3 Measures

All participants completed a first section which comprised of socio-demographic items (gender, age, parental educational level, political attitude and position, type of associations etc). In a second section we employed the following validated scales.

Identification. We employed the short version of *Identification Scale* (Kreiner&Ashforth, 2004) to assess positive identification processes in group contexts. The Identification Scale consists of 6 items with a response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items include: the success of my ethnic group is also my success. Reliability of the Identification scale, in terms of Cronbach's alphas, was found to be adequate with values of .68.

Voluntary Function Inventory. This construct was measured using the Voluntary Function Inventory Scale (VFI: Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Italian adaptation by Barbaranelli, Caprara, Capanna&Imbimbo, 2003). The VFI consists of 30 items with a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Specifically 5 items measure «values function», the person is volunteering in order to express or act on

important values, such as humanitarian help and helping the less fortunate ($\alpha = .86$; e.g. to help members of the my community); 5 items tap «Understanding function», the volunteer is seeking to learn more about the world and/or exercise/practice skills that are often unused ($\alpha = .73$; e.g. to learn more through direct experience); 5 items assess «Enhancement function/Self-Esteem Enhancement», the individual is seeking to grow and develop psychologically through involvement in voluntary work ($\alpha = .77$; e.g. to feel better about myself); 5 items measure «Career function», the volunteer has the goal of gaining career-related experience through voluntary work ($\alpha = .87$; sample items include: to offer the opportunity to have success in my future work); 5 items measure «Social function», volunteering allows the person to strengthen one's social relationships ($\alpha = .77$; e.g. because my friends are involved in voluntary action); 5 items assess «Protective function», the individual uses volunteering to reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or to address personal problems ($\alpha = .78$; e.g. to feel less alone).

Values. The short version of the checklist taken from the IARD studies (Buzzi, Cavalli, De Lillo, 2007) was employed/administered. The list consists in 7 values (e.g. of values were: friendship, love, family, religion, politics - some values are missing) with a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

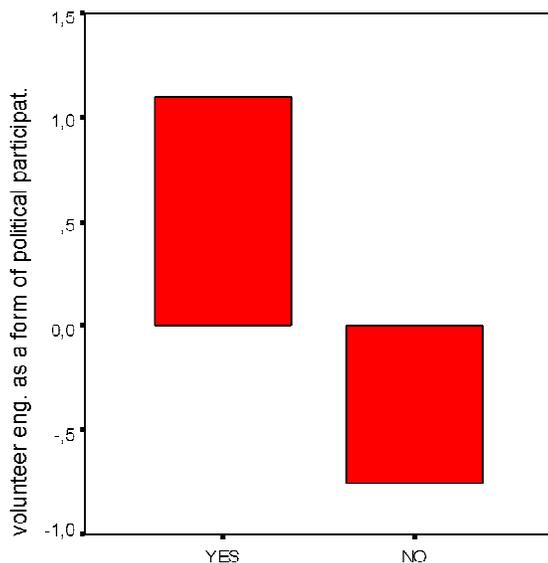
5 Results

The first aim of this study was to investigate whether youths consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation (question number 1).

In order to reach this aim, we carried out a cluster analysis to empirically obtain 2 statuses from the combination of volunteer engagement representation: “yes” and “no” (i.e., yes, volunteer engagement is a form of political participation and absolutely no). The final 2-cluster solution reported a very good explanatory power, as it explained 83% of the variance. The Z-scores are shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

Fig 1 Z scores for the 2 clusters



The “yes” cluster consisted of 97 emerging adults, the “no” cluster consisted of 142 emerging adults.

Age, gender and parental educational level differences were (inspected) examined with a Univariate Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA). The results showed that older participants consider volunteer engagement as a form of political participation more than younger participants ($F(1, 239) = 4.714, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$). On the other hand no gender and parental educational level differences were detected.

About this 2 clusters, the differences in the percentages of distribution into political attitudes, political positions and among various type of associations were statistically significant ($p < .001$) (see table 2).

TABLE 2

Tab. 2 Percentages of political attitude, political position and type of associations

	Volunteer engagement is a form of political participation	
	YES	NOT
<i>Political attitude</i>		
I am politically committed	29.9 %	7.8 %
I am interested in politics but not personally involved	47.4 %	54.6 %
Politics should be done only by competent people	10.3 %	14.9 %
I am repelled by politics	12.4 %	22.7 %
<i>Political position</i>		
Right	14.9 %	26.8%
Center	14.9%	30.1%
Left	70.1%	43.1%
<i>Type of associations</i>		
Environmental ass.	21.6 %	7.7 %
Cultural ass.	13.4 %	35.2 %
Social ass.	48.5 %	54.2 %
Solidarity economy ass.	16.5 %	2.8 %

The participants who considered their volunteer activity as a form of political participation were slightly older in age, more left-wing oriented, and were more involved in some contexts of volunteerism (e.g., environmental organizations and associations that promote solidarity economy) than their counterparts who do not view their volunteer involvement as a form of political participation

In order to explore if those who consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation have hold motivations to (volunteer) carry out voluntary work different from those (of their peers) who do not consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation, we assessed mean-level differences with a ANOVA (question number 2). It is imperative to note that these comparisons should be interpreted with caution, because we did not establish scalar measurement equivalence. Descriptive statistics for these mean-level comparisons are displayed in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Tab.3 Means (SD) of Volunteer engagement is a form of political participation and type of motivations

	Volunteer engagement is a form of political participation		F (1, 239)	η ²
	YES (n = 97)	NOT (n = 142)		
Values function	3.76 (.51)	3.58 (.65)	5.57*	.02
Understanding function	3.92 (.53)	3.56 (.70)	18.71***	.07
Enhancement function	3.33 (.69)	3.21 (.82)	1.35	.01
Career function	2.60 (.92)	2.18 (.88)	12.96***	.05
Social Function	3.19 (.70)	3.00 (.71)	4.41*	.02
Protective function	2.58 (.75)	2.54 (.84)	.14	.00

Note. ***p < .001.

Table 3 suggests that people who consider their involvement as a form of political participation were more motivated by values function, understanding function, career function and social function than their counterparts. On the other hand, we did not find statistically significant differences, for enhancement function and protective function.

In general, the means show that the most motivating factors were Understanding function and Values function, while the least motivating factors resulted to be those related to career and protection.

About the question number 3, we proceeded in examining the specific role of the system of values into the two clusters and we identified a statistical significant difference (see table 4).

TABLE 4

Tab. 4 Means (SD) of Volunteer engagement is a form of political participation and values

	Volunteer engagement is a form of political participation		F (1, 236)	η ²
	YES (n = 96)	NO (n = 140)		
Friendship for parents	3.70 (.85)	3.83 (.93)	1.32	.01
Friendship for friends	4.24 (.82)	4.31 (.79)	.43	.00
Friendship for me	4.50 (.66)	4.62 (.62)	1.97	.01
Love for parents	4.05 (.92)	4.24 (.77)	2.91	.01
Love for friends	4.08 (.82)	4.14 (.78)	.33	.00
Love for me	4.49 (.78)	4.55 (.67)	.36	.00
Family for parents	4.61 (.65)	4.81 (.46)	6.86**	.03
Family for friends	4.27 (3.09)	4.22 (.80)	.03	.00
Family for me	4.34 (.82)	4.71 (.60)	15.74***	.06
Politics for parents	2.99 (1.03)	2.86 (1.06)	.91	.00
Politics for friends	2.97 (1.08)	2.66 (1.08)	4.51*	.02
Politics for me	3.47 (1.09)	2.58 (1.07)	38.82***	.14
Religion for parents	3.42 (1.20)	3.56(1.15)	.91	.00
Religion for friends	2.69 (1.14)	2.79 (1.26)	.37	.00
Religion for me	3.01 (1.36)	3.31 (1.38)	2.66	.01
Society for parents	3.53 (1.00)	3.56 (.98)	.04	.00
Society for friends	3.51 (1.02)	3.29 (1.07)	2.45	.01
Society for me	4.30 (.67)	3.93 (.92)	11.65***	.05
Culture for parents	3.96 (.97)	4.03 (1.08)	.26	.00
Culture for friends	3.48 (1.03)	3.62 (.92)	1.24	.00
Culture for me	4.22 (.90)	4.25 (.81)	.08	.00

Note. ***p < .001.

The participants who consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation assigned more importance to political and social values than their counterparts who do not consider their volunteer involvement as a form of political participation. The first group was found to share more strongly, their ideals with their peers than the second group.

The last question of our research (question number 4) investigated whether there was a difference in the level of identification between the two clusters. No significant differences emerged between the two groups: identification levels were similar.

6 Discussion and conclusion

In general, individuals can be disengaged for a variety of reasons. Barrett and Zani (2015) explain the reasons for the involvement in the following way: some people may be passively and quietly apolitical while others may be actively and strongly anti-political. Some disengaged individuals might think that politics is uninteresting and boring, and feel no desire or need to participate and/or to make their voices heard. While others might refuse to engage with or participate in politics, simply because they think that politics is fundamentally objectionable, corrupt and dishonest. In our study, volunteers represent a heterogeneous group and thus, politics holds different meanings, motivation and system of values for the participants.

Moreover, our research suggests that there is confusion in the representation of “politics”. The two words, “Policy” and “Politics”, in English, although apparently similar, have very different meanings. Policy is the search for a rational way to solve complex problems that involve society, economy and technology. Politics is the quest for popular acclaim, and their aggregation towards solutions that are accepted but not necessarily optimal. In Italian we have a single word: the policy that goes directly to the Politics, where there are different philosophies and where the Policy often disappears. It is hard to get out of the conflict if one does not identify every single problem in the three elementary components: individual interests, collective interests and the values that can be different within the same community. Mingle values and interests and bends rationality to the exercise of sheer power often only ideological. In fact we understand politics in the sense of Hannah Arendt (1958).

In a time when the notion of politics loses its intrinsic value, the book “the Human condition”, represents an important recovery of a healthy concept of doing politics. A current thought to evoke "the Greek agora" as a stitch of a comparison of the political debate. Arendt focuses on a conception of political action in its pure form, that is, as supreme human sharing activities. Activities that never were exquisitely cultured as in Greek polis. In particular in our results, the youth who considered their volunteer activity as a form of political participation were slightly older, more left-wing oriented, and were more involved in some contexts of volunteerism (e.g., environmental organizations and associations that promote solidarity economy) than their counterparts who do not view their volunteer involvement as a form of political participation. This result can be explained because the characteristics of some types of associations, such as environmental organizations, in Italy, have avowedly political implications and gravitate in the left area. Our results showed that the youth who consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation scored higher on various motivations to volunteer and assigned more importance to the values of politics and society than their counterparts who do not consider their volunteer involvement as a form of political participation. The first group was found to share their ideals with their peers to a stronger extent than the second group did.

The participants who consider their volunteer engagement as a form of political participation assigned more importance to political and social values than their counterparts who do not consider their volunteer involvement as a form of political participation. The first group was found to share more strongly their ideals with their peers than the second group.

It is supposed that this result can also be explained in terms of self-esteem and identification. Certainly, those who regard politics as being corrupt, cannot consider it important to be involved in politics and refuse to consider their volunteer commitment as a political act. According to the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1972),

the participants who are more involved in more politically oriented associations will be guided by values and motives which are probably more social and collectivist but the level of identification will not be higher. In fact, in our results, no significant differences emerged between the two groups: identification levels were similar.

As mentioned in the introduction, traditionally, four specific groups of individuals have been considered to be at risk of disengagement: migrants, women, ethnic minorities and, in particular, youths. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2008) denotes a historically decline in voting levels by youths in elections in recent years, which has given rise to great concern about the future of democracy in countries in which youths seem always less interested and withdrawn from conventional politics. On the other hand, there it is important to state that among younger generations, non-conventional political and civic participation are taking over more traditional forms of political participation. Many young people are taking voluntary, community and philanthropic activities, consumer activism, protests, demonstrations and other public activism. Even the IDEA denotes that even though traditional forms of political participation such as voting are currently in decline in many European countries, yet there seems a qualitatively different kind of public activism. This generates optimism since civic participation in young people predicts a political engagement and participation in later life. Albanesi, Mazzoni, Cicognani and Zani (2015) sustain that civic participation promotes a sense of belonging to one's community, while prepares young people to hold the necessary personal and social competencies for political action.

Yet the same Albanesi, Mazzoni, Cicognani and Zani affirm at the macro-contextual level, citizens' patterns of engagement are related to factors such as the historical longevity of democracy in a country, the structure of political institutions and the opportunities for participation which these institutions make available to citizens, and the rules and design of the electoral system.

According to Barrett and Zani (2015), patterns of political and civic engagement are also related to demographic and social factors, such as parental attitudes and behaviours, educational practices, practices in the workplace and membership of associations. It seems that the levels of both civic and political participation are directly related to these four levels:

1. the extent to which an individual is politically attentive and knowledgeable,
2. feels politically efficacious,
3. identifies with a political party
4. and is infused with a sense of civic duty.

Van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears (2008) sustain that the willingness to take part in collective dissent through protests and demonstrations, is related to the perception of injustice, the level of perceived identification with the group and the belief that the goals of the protest are attainable. While, Omoto and Snyder (1995) affirm that the length of voluntary service is directly connected to the strength of the personal motivations underlying the volunteering and the satisfaction given by the actual voluntary work.

Thus since the patterns of political and civic engagement seem to be related to factors at all four levels, and are a product of highly complex interactions between multiple factors both within and across these four levels, it is imperative to state that any theoretical statement of engagement which does not take in account factors at all four levels will fail to deliver a complete explanation the matter.

7 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The present findings should be considered in light of at least these following important limitations. First, the cross-sectional design used does not permit us to estimate or predict the persistence of the measured results. As a result, future research should extend the understanding of the involvement by using longitudinal approaches that permit examination of identity trajectories and of antecedents and consequences of the volunteers and politics actions.

Qualitative studies probably are important to capture individuals' point of views so as to understand in depth the perception of the meaning of politics. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the processes that drive the engagement and participation of citizens in political and civic affairs, it is necessary to adopt a multidisciplinary perspective, in particular a perspective which spans the social science disciplines that have different levels of analysis as their primary foci.

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