WHAT CAN ETHNOGRAPHY BRING TO THE STUDY OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY?
Evidence from a study on the impact of participation on actors

¿QUÉ PUEDE APORTAR LA ETNOGRAFÍA AL ESTUDIO DE LA DEMOCRACIA DELIBERATIVA?
Evidencias procedentes de un estudio sobre el impacto de la participación en los actores

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ABSTRACT
The study of the individual effects of participation has mainly focused on the impact of deliberation on actors' preferences, mostly based on quantitative and experimental research. I argue here that ethnography, based on a praxeologic and process approach, can offer broader results on actors' learning in participatory devices than the cognitive effects generally emphasized. Grounded in a case-study of a participatory budget in Rome, the research shows participation allows learning new skills and civic habits but may also bring about a greater distrust with politics. Explaining the learning process, the paper stresses the different learning potential of participatory institutions. A condition for the durability of the effects observed is that participation be repeated over time. This requires integration within the institution, which happens for only a few; the majority of participants being disappointed stop participating. Speaking the language of the institution, some participants are however integrated enough to acquire further civic skills and knowledge, and even to endure a politicization process. Finally, the study of actors' long-term trajectories allows drawing conclusions on the social conditions of civic bifurcation. Ethnography thereby allows grasping the long-term consequences of civic engagement.

KEYWORDS
Cynicism; Learning; Participatory budget; Political ethnography; Socialization.

RESUMEN
El estudio de los efectos individuales de la participación se ha centrado sobre todo en la influencia de la deliberación en las preferencias de los actores, basándose principalmente en la investigación cuantitativa y experimental. En este artículo defiendo que la etnografía, mediante una aproximación praxeológica y procesual, puede ofrecer resultados sobre el aprendizaje de los actores en contextos de participación que van más allá de los efectos cognitivos que se suelen destacar. Apoyándonos en un estudio de caso sobre presupuestos participativos en Roma, la investigación demuestra que la participación permite adquirir nuevas aptitudes y hábitos cívicos, si bien puede generar también una mayor desconfianza en la política. Al explicar el proceso de aprendizaje, el artículo acentúa el diferente potencial de aprendizaje de las instituciones participativas. Una condición para que los efectos observados sean duraderos consiste en que la participación se repita a lo largo del tiempo. Ello requiere integración en la institución, lo que solo ocurre en algunos casos, pues la mayoría de los participantes se decepcionan al dejar de participar. Sin embargo, algunos participantes, al manejarse bien en el lenguaje de la institución, están lo bastante integrados como para adquirir nuevas aptitudes y conocimientos cívicos e incluso para asumir un proceso de politización. Por último, el estudio de las trayectorias de los actores a largo plazo permite extraer conclusiones sobre las condiciones sociales de la bifurcación cívica. Por tal motivo, la etnografía permite que se comprendan las consecuencias a largo plazo del compromiso cívico.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Aprendizaje; Cinismo; Etnografía política; Presupuesto participativo; Socialización.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the impact of participation on actors has mostly taken the form, until now, of research on the effects of deliberation on actors' preferences. The work of James Fishkin (Fishkin 1995; Luskin, Fishkin and Jowell 2002) is of course symbolic of this approach, and has since then given rise to a rich literature (Gastil, Dillard, 1999; Goodin, Niemeyer 2003; Barabas 2004; Hansen, Andersen 2004; Rosenberg 2009). While these works have brought important advances in the understanding of partici-patory and deliberative phenomena, they face a number of shortcomings. Three are emphasized here, related to the question of the individual impact of participation. First of all, these research are mostly based on experimental designs (such as deliberative polls), which leads to question the external validity of the results and their transfera-bility to the social world, made of power relationships and conflicts of interests. We still don't know, for instance, whether individuals' preferences are as malleable when actors' interests are directly at stake in the discussions. Then, these studies only offer a short-term analysis (a few days or weeks after the deliberative event) of short-lived set-ups (one or two week-ends), so well that we still know little about the long-term consequences of engagement in more permanent participatory or deliberative institu-tions. Finally, focusing on the before and the after rather than on what happens within deliberative arenas, these works hardly ever question the conditions of possibility and felicity of the observed impact, so well that it is often difficult to determine precisely what is the origin of preference change (Ryfe 2005). More deeply, they focus solely on the cognitive consequences of deliberation (impact on preferences), while participation in such experiments could also have more practical effects, with the development for instance of new civic skills.

I offer here in contrast an analysis of the effects of participation on actors based on a non-experimental research, on the long-term, focusing on what happens inside and around the participatory institutions, in order to understand what institutions do to actors. While several ethnographic studies have been dealing with participatory institutions (see especially Baiocchi 2005), none of them focus specifically on the way participants are affected by the experience, as is ambitioned here. A praxeologic and process analysis of the effects of participation is therefore proposed. It appears first of all necessary to take into account the learning potential offered by institutions. All institutions —and thus all participatory devices— are not granted the same learning potential. I stress here, through the in-depth study of Rome 11th district participatory budget (PB), that actors are affec-ted differently depending on the intensity and frequency of the interactions institutions permit. More precisely, the nature of interactions (type of meetings and facilitation, type of material supporting the discussion, organized tours on the field, moments of sociability, collective actions, etc.) shape the type of learning, of skills and competences, allowed by the institution, which cannot remain a black box to the analyst.

Then, the way actors live this experience should also be taken into account from a comprehensive perspective. Depending on the evaluation of the experience —positive

or negative—, the type of learning and the effects will be different. I will thus show that disappointing or frustrating experiences mostly create cynicism, participants rapidly exiting the institution. On the contrary, those who have a positive interpretation of participation increasingly become integrated within the institution, and can therefore be more deeply affected. Finally, I describe the long-term trajectory of actors. What did they learn? What new skills and competences have been incorporated? Can a change in discourses or argumentative repertoires be observed over time? Do learning lead to a politicization process for actors (who could start voting again, engage in civil society or local politics, etc.)? The paper concludes by arguing that, in the observed case, the effects are not only linked to deliberation, but also to the informal interactions taking place around the discussion phases. In so doing, deliberation is relocated in the diversity of the activities taking place in participatory institutions.

This research is based on a two years ethnographic study in 3 PBs (Rome, Seville and Morsang-sur-Orge). More precisely, it relies on (a) the observation of more than 120 public meetings —which allows noting the evolution of argumentative repertoires; (b) on 30 life-history interviews with participants, scrutinizing the role of previous political socialization in the eventually observed bifurcation of individual trajectories; (c) on interviews with the organizers of the PBs, to grasp the spirit of local civic life beyond the PB. I focus here solely on Rome 11th district case however to offer a thicker description of the case. Some comparative elements from the two other case-studies are used to draw some more general conclusions. The article is therefore based on a two years ethnographic study —between December 2004 and September 2006— in and around the participatory budget of Rome 11th district in Italy. This case has been chosen as it offers an important co-decision making power to citizens and makes of the education to citizenship one of its central goals.[1] In order to understand the impact on individuals of repeated participation in a PB, it was necessary to follow actors in situation —to evaluate whether the way they interact in public evolved through time— which was done through the observation of 54 public meetings of the Roman XI PB. It was then necessary to replace this experience in the broader biography of actors, in order to evaluate the novelty of the observed competences and the meaning it had for them, hence the dozen life-history interviews conducted with more or less engaged participants[2].

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[1] This research takes place in a broader project. See Julien Talpin, 2011.

[2] Diversity was the main driving factor for the choice of interviewees, in terms of age, gender and previous political participation (both activists and non-activists).

Taking the context into account. The learning potential of participatory institutions

While experimental methods aim at neutralizing the context, ethnography ambitions on the contrary to take the context of interaction into account to see to what extent the results can be explained by situational or other factors[3]. From this perspective, the learning potential offered by institutions has to be scrutinized to evaluate their potential consequences. All institutions —and thus all participatory set-ups— do not offer the same learning potential, the experiences they offer to individuals being of an unequal richness. The inception of participatory budgeting in 2003 in the 11th district of Rome was part of a radical political project, embodying the will of a recently elected Communist mayor close to the far-left anti-globalization movement, "to deepen democracy."[4] Procedurally, the Roman PB is based on a cycle of annual meetings based on the budget calendar. The district is divided into seven neighborhoods that are the central spaces of participation. At the start of the year, an assembly is organized in each neighborhood, during which delegates are elected after a short presentation of themselves and their goals for the neighborhood. PB delegates do not have a representative function however; they are regular participants, pillars of the participatory body. Next, and this is the heart of the process, thematic working-groups meet 4 or 5 times for a two-hours meeting over the following months, in order to set-up projects related to the five principal municipal competencies, in particular urbanism, the network of roads and waterways, green spaces, cultural policies, youth activities, and sports. The meetings of the working-groups are open to the delegates as well as to all inhabitants (including foreign citizens) of the neighborhood.

Working-groups meetings generally take the form of small thematic discussion groups —they break up in small groups focusing on the different areas of competence— gathering between 5 and 10 participants, along which it is not uncommon that pictures, maps or power points be presented. A crucial element in the structuring of the interactions, that was only introduced the second year of my observation, is a sheet of paper —called *Verbale*, as it works as an official report of the meeting— that each group has to fill-in, by listing the nature of the problem that is discussed, its location and the potential solutions evoked. This document is then sent to the technical services of the municipality, who answer on the same sheet.[5] This tool plays a crucial role in the dynamic of the discussion, framing them as a problem-solving talk. Participants isolate a problem, offer a concrete solution and discuss it. A few weeks later they receive an answer from the

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[3] To do so "thick descriptions" should be offered, which is not possible here for reasons of space. See Geertz 1973.

[4] Interview with L. Ummarino, city official in charge of participatory budgeting, Rome, December 16, 2004.

[5] The Verbale is pretty close, from a formal point of view, of the "beat form" described by Archon Fung in the case of Chicago. See Fung 2004:61-68.

technical services of the administration, stressing the financial and technical viability of the projects. These sheets embody an important cognitive element —potential source of learning for individuals— by synthesizing the comments from the technical services.[6] The problem-solving aspect of the discussions does not foster however the development of general political discussions, often considered useless or loss of time, as will be seen later. Learning technical know-how and getting in touch with the political stakes of an issue does not necessary go together. Another important element in the structuring of participation, the website, bringing together all the dates, reports, etc. and where an on-line discussion forum on the proposals has progressively been created.

Finally, at the end of the process, a neighborhood assembly is organized —where participation is more important than in the working-groups, up to a hundred— during which the participants vote for one project per theme, the first one (in terms of vote) per category being integrated into the district budget. The allocation of up to 5 million euros —20% of the municipal investment budget— is thus directly decided upon by the residents of the district.

Beyond its procedural format, the learning potential of a participatory institution also depends on the diversity of the public it gathers. The richness and the creativity of the PB directly stem from bringing together actors with varied initial knowledge and competencies. While the rate of participation is weak, since only 1,498 people participated in 2004, which represents approximately 1% of the population of the district, the public in the PB is relatively heterogeneous, although certain categories are over-represented.[7] First and foremost there was real gender diversity, since in 2004, 53% of the participants of the Roman PB were women (Ummarino 2005:178). In terms of generations, while we can observe an over-representation of those over 50 years of age (36% of participants were older than 51), all age brackets were represented, with 12% of participants being students, for example. In regard to socio-professional categories, there was an over-representation of white-collar employees (25% of participants) and an under-representation of the unemployed (only 5% of the total). The participants of the Roman PB have, in general, a higher than average level of education, with 24% having a university diploma, and 41% with at least a high school diploma. Finally, there was a marked over-representation of activists: 63% of the participants were members of an association, a political party, or a union (d'Albergo 2005:75-76)[8]. This last point appears particularly important to the extent that it is precisely the interaction between activists and non-politicized actors that allows the acquisition of most new capacities.

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[6] The role of this type of form can be seen by comparing with other cases, in which it is not used, and where interactions where less rich and precise. See Talpin 2011:142-144.

[7] We will not seek here to debate the topic, although fundamental, of the legitimacy of decisions made in institutions with such a limited public.

[8] These numbers are certainly inflated by the fact that activists are more likely to respond to questionnaires than others.

Despite the clear over-representation of certain fractions of the population, which only confirms the weight of social origins and of cultural resources in political participation phenomena that has already been largely documented (Gaxie 1978; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995) it is possible to underline the strong diversity of the participating public, in particular with regard to other, more conventional, political arenas. These actors with heterogeneous profiles bring up different types of knowledge and of expertise during public discussions in order to give weight to their reasoning and to convince the audience of the logic of their propositions. Three types of initial competencies have been observed: local knowledge, technical know-how, and political competence.[9] Each form of knowledge and expertise is not mastered by all of the participants. Some possess many forms (activists, architects, etc.), while others appear relatively weak. Lacking access to systematic socio-demographic data on this matter, it appears nevertheless evident that technical knowledge —considering the professional competencies it requires— is reserved for individuals from certain socio-professional categories, and that political competence is directly correlated to cultural capital. Inversely, local knowledge is the weapon of the weak, the resource for those who do not have any other. Such as workers who could only count on the strength of their workforce in production relationships, the weakest residents can only count on their personal experience of the territory to draw upon in participatory budgeting meetings.

To what extent interactions between this heterogeneous public in the framework of the Roman PB allows learning to happen? Beyond the desire to democratize the decision-making process, the Roman experiment expressly promotes the desire to create an active and critical citizenship. The first article of the PB constitution —that has been written by elected officials in cooperation with participation experts— thus clarify that "the PB aims for the promotion of an active citizenship through the inclusion of citizens in the decisions of the district."[10] Beyond this political understanding of the PB, the facilitators of the meetings[11] also see in the PB a true school of citizenship, the goal of the experience being to "offer an opportunity for personal development to citizens by making individual knowledge a common resource for all citizens."[12] This is especially embodied in the way they facilitate the meetings, trying to follow what they see as a Habermasian perspective. To what extent engagement in this type of institution affects the trajectories of actors and is able, as it claims, to create a more competent citizenship, ready to participate more actively in the public sphere?

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[9] This classification is inspired in part by Sintomer 2008.

[10] See the site of the Roman participatory budgeting program: http://www.municipiopartecipato.it/pages/index/tab/regolamento

[11] Meetings are facilitated by members of a Roman association contracted by but independent from the municipality, *Progetto Sensibilizzando,* composed of young professionals particularly socialized to social work and social sciences.

[12] Associazione Progetto Laboratorio Onius, "Il progetto Sensibilizzando," in Massimilano Smeriglio, Gianluca Peciola, and Luciano Ummarino, eds., *Pillola rossa o pillola blu? Pratiche di Democrazia Partecipativa nel Municipio Roma XI* (Rome: Intra Moenia Edition, 2005), 160.

Learning the discursive norms of the institution to integrate it durably

A crucial condition of socialization through participation is that it be repeated in time, the intensity of interactions being a condition to the bifurcation of individual trajectories.[13] Not all citizens participate in the PB with the same level of intensity. The PB is structured by circles of participation, which reflect the regularity of participation and the degree of integration within the institution. Three concentric circles can be distinguished. To exist and stabilize, participatory institutions need to create a group of regular participants, that I call the "group of good citizens." It is generally composed of 10 to 15 volunteers, who form the first circle of participants. A "group of good citizens" existed in each neighborhood assembly of the Roman PB —but also in the other cases studied. Well integrated into the institution, they knew the rules of the game and regularly speak in front of the assembly, so well that they have an important influence on the behaviour of others and on final decisions. The second circle is comprised of intermittent participants, who only attend a few meetings each year, especially for voting. Finally, the third circle is comprised of the population as a whole and thus represents the 95% of the population that never participates in the PB.

Integration to the "group of good citizens" appears necessary to be affected by participation, as irregular participants revealed almost unimpacted by a superficial engagement. To integrate this group, individual must first be present regularly, participation being seen as a minimal form of engagement and of support for the process. They then have to be able to speak in public. The participatory bodies studied rely in fact on public deliberation for making their decisions[14]. Participants must therefore possess or acquire the confidence necessary for public speaking in order to promote their needs or projects. The necessity of voice embodies a first filter, as indicated by the weakest participation in discussion meetings —the working groups— as compared to decision meetings (limited to a vote and featuring only a few speakers). While, in 2004, 1,498 people participated in the Roman PB, only approximately one hundred regularly participated in the working groups.[15] Although the exit mechanisms cannot be reduced only to the fear of speaking: factors such as the amount of time required for such a participation, level of interest in meetings that are not directly decision-oriented (even though they play a role in the selection of propositions to be voted), and the implicit delegation to "delegates" who, without being representatives, are there precisely to ensure the construction of proposals. These factors cannot be pushed aside —they also embody a first filter.

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[13] This makes the durability of effects linked to participation to mini-publics, lasting only one or two weekends, rather dubious. See Talpin, Wojcik 2010.

[14] Sometimes, however, for matters of time, discussions were settled by vote. Vote was always preceded by a collective discussion allowing for the definition, clarification, and evaluation of propositions and arguments.

[15] More precisely, 278 people participated in the working groups in 2004. This number, however, includes repeated counts of individuals who participated in many meetings, to the extent that we can estimate that about one hundred participated regularly in the working groups.

Next, not everyone speaks up within the working groups. 21% of participants in working groups thus never spoke in the observed meetings.[16] This data does not reflect however inequalities among participants' interventions —some actors speaking up many times and for lengthy comments, others only speaking briefly and once. It also shows the importance of the procedural device for access to public speaking. Working groups meetings were divided, as a general rule, into three or four small discussion groups, each one comprised of 5 to 10 members. This allowed the majority of participants to speak, unlike other studied cases where the groups were larger (at least twenty or thirty people) and the rate of speaking lower (68% in Morsang-sur-Orge, 40% in Seville). Those who remain silent are condemned to remain at the margins of the institution. Participating irregularly, they can pick up some information, but they are not significantly affected in their civic practices. I never met a regular participant, truly integrated in the PB, who never spoke in the public assemblies.

Not only must the participants speak, they must also speak appropriately, according to the requisite discursive norms regulating interactions in these institutions. A necessary condition for integration within the institution is the respect of the grammatical rules defining the correct way to speak in public (Cardon, Heurtin, Lemieux, 1995; Céfaï, 2002; Lemieux, 2010). Individuals simply cannot say anything and everything in public;[17] if they do they are heavily symbolically sanctioned, as indicated by an example that occurred in the Tormarencia neighborhood.

Mazia was coming for the first time to a PB meeting, and was apparently motivated by a personal trouble: the trees in her street had not been cut down for a long time and their branches created a danger for cars and pedestrians. She wanted to make a proposal to the PB on this issue, but was apparently frustrated when she learnt that it was impossible as this was the last PB session of the year, impeding any new proposal to be made. The other participants —regular ones— invited her to stay anyway, as she would be allowed to vote for the proposals concerning the neighbourhood. She answered: 'I cannot vote on the proposal related to street X, as I don't know it. And this street does not concern me'. She therefore decided to leave the meeting: 'At this point, as there are no problems related to my street, I'm going; because personally I don't know anything about those [other] problems'. A man nevertheless greeted her and encouraged her to come back the following year: '*At least you did* [...] *not your duty, because it's not a duty, but something good'.* Mazia, obviously upset as she was speaking faster and faster in a rather aggressive tone, made clear she would not come back as her problem was

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[16] We accounted essentially for speakers in the working groups, since the other meetings—elections of delegates or voting —were not set up to have a collective discussion. Thus, 340 of the 430 participants in the working groups that we observed spoke up at least one time.

[17] This idea is central in all literature about deliberative democracy —of Kantian inspiration— with the strength of publicity being attributed by Habermas (1985) to the nature of communication, by Elster (1994) to the strategic quest for convincing the undecided, or by Fearon (1998) to the submission to certain social norms.

not taken into account. She was therefore sanctioned for her parochialism by the other participants: 'Enlarge your horizons. You focus too much on your own street here we're not working for our own streets egoistically, but for everybody.' Mazia, feeling attacked answered: 'I will enlarge my horizons when I'll see my problems solved'. Roberta explained to her afterwards that the delegates of the PB were not like delegates of their street or their zone, but of the whole neighbourhood. Mazia never came back to the assembly.[18]

As often, tensed interactions reveal the rules of the game implicitly followed by actors (Boltanski, Thévenot 1992). Usually, participants know they should not voice self-interested proposals; so they do not. In this case however, this newcomer, participating for the first time, did not know the grammatical rules of the institution. As they had been infringed, the rules had to be recalled and defined explicitly: 'here we're not working for our own streets egoistically, but for everybody'. Overly personalized interventions, centered on the private interests of speakers, are severely sanctioned within PB assemblies, through the attribution of disparaging reputations —"bigmouth," "consumer," "egotistical," "lobbyist"— and a symbolic form of exclusion. This question is all the more complex in that the PB allows for an opening of public action to traditionally excluded forms of knowledge, and especially local knowledge. The latter being necessarily linked to a form of individual, personal, and relatively idiosyncratic practice, speakers must frame it in such a way that it can appear compatible with the grammar of the institution. Local knowledge is thus never an end in and of itself. It must lead to a more general discussion of what must be done. While the participants may start with a personal narrative to illustrate their complaints, they must nevertheless move toward a generalization arising from it. To be heard in a participatory arena, one must adopt the point of view of the community and aim for the general interest. The definition of the general interest is constructed in interaction by the group of good citizens. It implicitly promotes a unanimist version of the common good, in which proposals have to foster the interests of all the residents of the neighborhood. Other definitions of the common good —like giving more to those who have less— were never discussed in the assemblies, all the more as the most marginalized inhabitants of the area were not present in the PB process. Thus, the working consensus on PB discursive interactions had, partly, a contradictory effect to its initial goal: instead of including as many residents as possible, it very often excluded those who could not speak immediately the language of the institution.

While an orientation toward the common good is required, this must not take the form of overtly political or partisan discourse, which is often considered "blabber" or "politicking," appearing both ineffective and not useful for carrying out the projects of the PB. When the participants get carried away in general or political discussions, they are interrupted and brought back to order by a "but what is your proposal, in the end?", such as Giorgio in one meeting, that was bashed publicly by another participant for not being specific enough in his street rehabilitation proposal: "You're doing philosophy here. We

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[18] Observation notes, Tormarencia, Working Group no. 4, Rome, March 28, 2005.

have to point out some specific streets".[19] Speakers must therefore promote the general interest, while still connecting it to a concrete project that does not appear to be motivated by a private interest. It is in this sense that discussions within these institutions are at first not directly political, to the extent that the subjects brought up must first be approached from a practical angle —a problem is raised to the members of the community— before being generalized, that is to say presented as collectively treatable.

Thus, the first thing participants learn in a PB —and which is a condition for their integration within the institution— is to speak according to requisite grammatical forms.[20] Mastery of the specific grammar of the institution, through mechanisms of sanction and gratification, can thus appear, as voting did when it was introduced in Europe in 19th Century, as a process of the domestication of citizens, who must conform to the correct ways of acting in the public sphere. In this case, the dominate actors —the group of good citizens— are able to impose their definition of discursive norms, which appears excluding some actors, often less accustomed to civic life.

Scrutinizing the norms of civic life would have been impossible without spending months on the field, observing patterns of interactions and regularities, and sometimes seeing a breach in the normal course of the situation. It should be stressed, however, that in PB institutions people do not act as in ordinary life. While experimental methods have been criticized for drawing conclusions from artificial settings ungeneralizable to real-life situations, the same could be argued in the case of political ethnography. The main difference, however, is that while PB participants had to take a public role, adapted to the publicity of the situation, the latter is part of social life, it is not created artificially by the social scientist. The conclusions that can be drawn from this research are therefore restricted —and can only be extended— to public situation learning[21].

How do citizens live their participatory experience. Practical learning and increased political distrust

Speaking the language of the institution, actors can progressively integrate the "group of good citizens" and thus attain a regular participation that, most of the time, will significantly affect them. It should however be stressed that a majority of participants never pass this first step.[22] Remaining discursively incompetent, they are doomed to remain

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[19] Observation notes, Montagnola working group n.1, Rome, 18th January 2006.

[20] For more empirical materials illustrating the learning of the role of "good citizen," see Julien Talpin 2006: 13-31.

[21] Learning in school, or in more intimate contexts might therefore be different.

[22] A sign of difficulties in integrating into the participatory budgeting institution is the very high degree of turnover, since approximately 50% of participants in 2003 did not come back in 2004. High turnover rates have also been observed in Morsang and Seville, as well as in many (and non-PB) participatory devices. See Blondiaux 2008.

on the margins of the institution. While this learning process is intensive, it only involved around a hundred people in the Roman case. Among the hundred regular participants, only 21% were not initially engaged actors (d'albergo 2005:76) and they were the ones who could be the most affected by their participation. While different forms of learning could be stressed, such as technical knowledge (linked to urban or budget issues) or a formation to collective action, the emphasis is put here on deliberation as a practical achievement and on the transmission of political knowledge.

Learning to deliberate. A collective competence

What is generally qualified as deliberation, understood as a reasoned exchange of arguments aimed at taking a collective decision, can be broken down into a series of gestures and practices, requiring of each participant specific competencies: learning to listen to others, respecting them by speaking politely in turn and without aggression, to ask questions for clarification, and to make "concrete" and "constructive" proposals. The practice of deliberation, far from being spontaneous, requires both a procedural organization and a collective learning process. We can in this vein evoke the experience of the neighborhood assembly of Montagnola, where a learning process took shape over time, by imitation and trial and error.

The first two meetings of the year had been chaotic. The approximately thirty participants had refused to divide into working groups —against the advice of the organizers. This refusal led to a disorganized debate, some speaking over others, not listening to each other, jumping from one subject to another. At the third meeting, a month later, the participants decided to divide into working groups, which were then only comprised of 6 to 8 members. The dynamic of the discussion changed dramatically. Within the group that I observed, the discussion was calm and constructive, the moderator occasionally clarifying, "not all at the same time," and "each one in turn." A speaking list was organized, proposals written down, and those who cut off speakers were systematically sanctioned. A good deliberation was thus able to arise, resting on the collective evaluation of arguments for and against a given proposal. In a short time, by the imitation of rules of good behavior defined by the facilitators, citizens had learned to debate; the improved organization of the discussion allowed them to move from an agonistic and sometimes aggressive debate to more cooperative and constructive exchanges.[23]

It was thus through trial and error, as a result of failures discovered in the process (observations shared by the participants about the ineffective nature of discursive messiness), thanks to the enlightened influence of facilitators who never ceased emphasizing the importance of simple procedures of discussion management, that a collective apprenticeship could occur. The learning of the role of the (good) citizen occurs in this way, first through the acquisition of relatively standardized and conventional ways of

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[23] Observation notes, Montagnola, Roma, January-May 2005.

doing, which can only come up in interaction. Participation in PB assemblies thus allows individuals to learn to express their opinions, to speak in public, to manage a meeting, to distribute speaking turns and to allow less competent actors to speak.

From this perspective, ethnography and quantitative research can appear complementary in participation research. Indeed, before and after research design have stressed convincingly that people do learn along deliberation, their preferences becoming more informed (Price, Capella 2005; Gastil, Black and Moscovitz 2008; Jacobs, Lomax Cook and Delli Carpini 2009; Esterling, Neblo and Lazer 2011). But the learning consequences of the practice of deliberation cannot be reduced to its cognitive aspect only, people acquiring as well know-how and practical competences that are difficult to grasp through questionnaires.

Spreading political knowledge

Despite the exclusion of properly political discussions in participatory arenas, they are not cut off from the local political field, to the extent that participation is a way to expand the political knowledge of the public and can even constitute a space of individual politicization. Although the spread of political knowledge does not occur directly in public meetings, the "groups of good citizens" of the PB also appear to be spaces of sociability. It is thus most often in the hallways, in interpersonal discussions after meetings, in parties, at the bar or in the street that a relationship to politics and a collective interpretation of the commonly lived existence was constructed. The position adopted by a given actor during a meeting was explained through his/her partisan affiliation, and recent municipal decisions were commented upon, as were the advances or barriers of certain dossiers; sometimes members even went as far as to speak of the president of the Council at the time, Silvio Berlusconi, usually to mock him.

Participants thus discover the local political field and the different organizations that make it up. Their engagement allows them to meet, sometimes personally, certain actors in the political field and the first level of elected officials. They can also more easily identify their political color (which was far from being the case for all at the beginning) and situate words and actions according to partisan orientations. They learn to negotiate with elected officials, to play with rivalries and power relations among parties to promote their interests. Finally, participants discover the functioning of the administrative machine, the division of competencies, and the conflicts within the institution. During the public meetings themselves, speeches by certain established actors can sometimes lead to veritable courses on local political power relationships or municipal institutional functions, on the condition of not taking an overly partisan tone. Party members evoke the latest municipal decisions, housing rights advocates tackle the homeless situation in the city, and environmentalists share their knowledge on global warming or urban planning. At a Roman working group meeting, Maurizio, an activist from *Legambiente*, the main Italian environmental organisation, made a very didactic intervention on the implications of the Kyoto protocol for the public transportation policies of Italian municipalities: "You know

that anyway, the Kyoto protocol has come into force in Italy since yesterday [15.02.2005] and Italy has to decrease its CO2 emissions drastically in the following years […] 30 per cent of the use of cars in this city regard trips of less than 3 km i.e., distances easily reachable by bike. It means we could decrease CO2 emissions by 30 per cent just thanks to bikes! Anyway, [...] soon all the metro stations will be equipped with bike parking […] it's a global trend'[24]. Through their engagement in PBs, participants are constantly acquiring new knowledge on the political system and on a variety of salient public issues. Given the exclusion of political discussions from public meetings, politicization happens more often backstage than frontstage however. It is easy to see that while sharing this information has a persuasive goal, it also embodies a substantial cognitive contribution for the actors. In this vein, participatory budgeting institutions can represent spaces of politicization, such as for this participant who declared having "discovered a passion for politics.[25]"

Becoming cynical by participating

Participation in the PB can finally take the form of a negative, critical, or cynical politicization. Hundreds of participants in fact exit the institution in the middle of the year, as indicated by the high rate of turnover.[26] The PB might only offer a trivial amount of power to citizens they say, as illustrated by the slowness and sometimes the absence of the realization of projects approved in PB assemblies, and it might be a way for political powers to manipulate citizens and to stifle contestation. Although exit is generally silent, actors preferring to vote with their feet, cynicism and disappointment is sometimes openly expressed in the assembly:

The participants had been talking for some time about the difficulty for the municipal council not to respect the decisions of the zone assemblies, when Giovanna raised the tone and got literally outraged about the PB process, crying out for five minutes against the insufficiencies of the concrete achievements: "The PB has not done anything yet since its creation! It's a shame! I feel I am a fool. Every time you [the facilitator] tell me not to say this or that, that it is not possible, that it's not in the competence of the Municipio, that it has already been accepted, etc. What is this all for, then? I really feel I am a fool! I made proposals ten times and they haven't changed anything!" People tried to calm her down, which worked after a few minutes. Most of them, explained to her that some projects had been achieved, even if they mostly told her to be patient. Their arguments did not seem to convince her however. Giovanna never came back. [27]

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[24] Observation notes, Garbatella, mobility working group, Rome, 16th February 2005
[25] Interview, Floriana, Rome, March 28, 2006.
[26] Out of the 978 participants in 2003, a just over 500 did not take part in the process in 2004, for example. We can observe that just as many activists as non-engaged participants dropped out from one year to the next.
[27] Observation notes, Roma 70, Working Group no. 3, April 12, 2005.

Disappointed by the model, some participants became more cynical after their participation, as much about participatory democracy in particular as about politics in general. For some, this frustrating experience of participation led them from apolitical to anti-political attitudes. When more actors come out disappointed than satisfied, one can wonder if, in the end, experiments in participatory democracy, when they do not offer sufficient power to citizens or when the participation is not well enough organized, might have a more negative than positive effect in terms of politicization. Far from regenerating democracy, these experiments, if they are not conclusive enough, risk reinforcing a casual suspicion of public life. Clemente Navarro and Joan Font showed for instance a higher distrust and defiance of local government for participants than for non-participants of deliberative experiments (Font, Navarro 2010). While this is not true for all participatory experiences, it is nevertheless appropriate to underline that, in order to have a significant civic impact, experiences must be positively evaluated by citizens, which remains the exception in Europe.

Evaluating long-term effects of participation. The value of a process perspective

While short-term learning processes deriving from participation have received a great deal of attention —especially in experimental or quasi-experimental research— little attention has been paid to the long-term and more stable consequences of participation. What do people become after 6 or 12 months of participation? To what extent the effects of participatory engagement are durable or on the contrary short-lived? Having spend two years of the field —while not enough—, gives some indications on the civic trajectories of regular PB participants. The mobilization and the acquisition of new competencies can only be understood, however, when placed within the larger trajectory of a particular actor, by comparing it to his past experiences, allowing to understand how new experiments are assimilated, rejected, or incorporated.[28] This is what I have tried to do —mostly using the interviews conducted with the participants.

Approximately one hundred participants, provided that they were sufficiently invested in the process, became more competent following their participation experience, acquiring technical, political, and practical knowledge and know-how that they did not possess previously. But to what extent can these new civic capacities bring about a bifurcation in actors' trajectories? Does civic learning in PB institutions translate into a more durable socialization to politics?

Although many citizens were disappointed by their participatory experience, others continued to participate despite initial difficulties, and sometimes saw their civic trajectory

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[28] On the use of the concept of "career" in the sociology of social movements, see Filleule 2010.

radically transformed. A dozen individuals engaged in the PB thus reinvested their newly acquired competencies in other organizations. One of the paradigmatic examples of 11th district PB's impact on local civil society is the creation of Roma 70 (one of the neighborhoods' of the district) youth social centre. In the first year of the PB experience, young people —teenagers between 16 and 22— started participating in the PB and rapidly cooperated to push forward a proposal to create a youth social centre in the neighborhood, as they were lacking a place to gather for social, political, cultural and leisure activities. The proposal was largely voted in at the end of the process, and, more interestingly, it translated rapidly into public policy and public works. A year and a half later, the youth social centre opened its doors, this rapid realization being linked to the direct support of the administration and especially the PB councilor. The latter appeared indeed extremely satisfied with the project, directly fomenting active citizenship according to him: "There is also the case of the young people of Roma 70. They were initiated to public life through their participation to the participatory budget in Roma 70, formulating ideas and proposals that became more and more interesting with time. These teenagers of the neighborhood constituted themselves, autonomously, in a cultural association [that manages the centre]. Now, they are organizing projects on the territory and give autonomous vocational training classes. I think this is a typical example of how other processes of self-organisation, self-training and self-management, which are really important for me, can be created from the participatory budget. They build a competent citizenship."[29] I had the chance to visit the centre, and saw how active it was locally, organizing political debates (rather oriented on the left, most of its members being young leftist activists), local actions, concerts, private lessons, etc. The managing team —composed of the young students who had presented the project in the PB assembly— lived, therefore, its first associative experience. These teenagers were able to re-invest the competences they had learn while participating in the PB, in the framework of this newly created association. The realization of a PB proposal therefore resulted in the creation of an association, and in the acquisition of new skills and competences for actors. On the other hand, it also translated in the exit from the PB process of these newly engaged association members. Roman PB therefore directly encourages (even financially) the bifurcation of individual trajectories in the sense of revitalization of local civil society.[30]

Local associations also look to the PB for potential recruits. Modes of engagement and of expression in fact seem largely comparable between the PB and certain neighborhood associations, so much so that the transfer from one to the other can happen easily. I regularly observed leaders from neighborhood associations invite —more or less publicly— active members of the PB to join their organization. In this sense, participatory democracy can appear as a way to enrich local civil society, by producing new civic actors who strengthen the ranks of existing organizations and encourage the creation of new associations.

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[29] Interview with L. Ummarino, PB councilor, Rome, 9th January 2005.
[30] For much broader effects of PB on civil society, see Baiocchi, 2005.

The growing engagement of certain actors with political professionals has also been observed. Regular participants of the PB, who were not official members of a party, were contacted and co-opted by elected officials and political parties in order to be added to municipal electoral lists for the next elections. The paradigm case of Floriana can be noted, as she experienced a process of practical politicization, marked by an increased engagement following her participation in the PB.

Her local engagement first allowed her to discover a neighborhood reality she had not known about: "I remember, at the first assembly I participated in, they were talking about gardens, lights, etc. and a man whom I did not know got up timidly and said, with a clearly foreign accent: 'I understand that you are busy with public gardens. But you must know that for us, during the winter, there are elderly people who die in the gypsy camp.' He was a delegate from the neighboring gypsy camp. And that was like a punch in the stomach. These two realities..." The direct meeting of a social reality distant from the heart of the PB allowed her to "become aware of certain crucial social problems in the neighborhood. Often, "moral shocks" are the origin of a more direct engagement, a first step in a process of politicization (Jaspers 2001). She thus became active in the PB and this experience allowed her to acquire both practical skills and a network of acquaintances of local officials, which she was then able to use in the political field. Having always voted, but without being an activist for a political party or association, she underwent a process of practical politicization. She was indeed contacted —after three years of participation— by the municipal majority to be on the electoral list of the *Rifondazione Comunista* in the local elections: "I liked this experience in the PB so much that I wanted to continue at a higher level [...]. It's new for me, I always voted, but I had never really been active in anything. So when the mayor suggested I be on the electoral lists, I was very flattered, and I said yes, of course."[31]

The newly acquired civic capacities as well as the progressively constituted network are resources political parties try to catch in their quest for legitimacy and local establishment. Floriana was not the only participant of the PB who was offered to be on the electoral lists for the 2006 local elections, but the others refused. The participatory budget can thus appear as an alternative channel for the recruitment of local political elites, alongside the political parties that traditionally play this role.[32]

Who are the actors who were more deeply affected by participation, in comparison to the others? Why a dozen of the hundred regular participants saw their civic trajectory affected, in terms of new engagements or political commitments, and not the others? One essential condition for politicization through participation is that the engagement be repeated over time in a relatively intensive fashion. The more affected were therefore

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[31] Interview with Floriana, Rome, March 28, 2006.

[32] We emphasize that recruitment outside the party is a classic practice at the municipal level, but that it generally occurs for local association leaders, who have a different profile from the most professionalized members of the participatory budgeting institution who are on municipal councils. On this subject, see Le Bart 2003.

simply the more engaged. But why did they engage more than others then? The intensity of participation is itself dependent upon the biographical availability of individuals —students and retired people, as well as idle activists seeking new engagements, are particularly invested in the PB.[33] In the case of Floriana, her trajectory of politicization cannot be understood if not linked to the time freed up by her retirement and the sentiment of "idleness" that followed. Her engagement thus allowed her to "feel alive again." As a matter of fact, biographical availability is socially driven, working-classes working two jobs a day or who have irregular working shifts have other concerns that the local common good. PB engagement is a luxury some cannot simply afford.

The repetition of participation does not depend uniquely on biographical availability however, but also on the elective affinities between the norms and topics of discussion of the PB and the expectations and dispositions of participants. The most intensively engaged were indeed interested in urban planning, educational or environmental issues, and were also marked by a form of civic good-willingness. Neighborhood do-gooders —they often had previous forms of civic engagement (writing letters to the mayor, voting regularly and sometimes participating to a local association)— they found in the PB a way to value their civic and personal dispositions. The words of Antonio, when presenting for delegates are typical of this profile: I'm someone who gets angry all the time. I'm fighting all the time. And I'm tired to ear, each time I complain or try to do something, 'but who are you?' I answer that I am an Italian citizen who pays his taxes. I get angry all the time about the wastes and misuses of public funds. […] About cars that are stolen or crushed, about recycling, about cleanness of the streets, etc. […] I am not belonging to any political party, but I believe in the revolution of how to spend taxes.[34]" After two years of PB participation Antonio joined a local *comittato di quartiere*. Furthermore, in order to participate intensively in the PB, one must believe that such an engagement can be worth it, that it can have an impact, and that it can be worthwhile to spend time on it —many considerations that are far from shared by a majority of citizens in contemporary democracies (Braconnier, Dormagen 2007). In order to participate regularly enough to be affected by PB engagement, one should therefore show some form of minimal trust with political institutions. While participatory democracy aimed at re-politicizing disengaged citizens, it appears that the most remote from the public sphere have little chance to participate and be affected significantly. Concern for the local common good and biographical disponibility are far from being equally spread along the social spectrum.

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[33] On the concept of "biographical availability," see McAdam 1986.
[34] Montagnola votation assembly, Rome, 4th of February 2005.

Conclusion. Alue and limits of political ethnography

While the different elements presented here might be interesting as such, to what extent do they deepen the understanding of the individual and collective learning processes deriving from participatory engagement? The individuals presented here could remain relatively idiosyncratic, isolated among the majority of Rome 11th district PB participants, this case being itself isolated in the ocean of participatory democracy. This raises the question of the external validity of the ethnographic method.

The results presented here should be read as illustrations of a more regular pattern of self-change through participation that I was able to sever out through repeated observation. The generalizability of ethnographic data indeed comes from come from a constant comparative method (Glasser, Strauss 1967). This was first achieved by comparing discursive interactions in time and between sites. Each assembly being composed of dozens of discursive sequences, this research is based on the comparison of hundreds of discursive sequences among ordinary citizens in PB institutions. The comparison between them allows severing out (discursive and practical) rules —that people follow in general— and deviations, and thus grasping the cultural structures appearing in PB interactions (Eliasoph, Lichterman 2003). Regularity appears indeed as a strong marker of normativity. Each new observation should either confirm, or inflect, the conclusions drawn from the previous observations, in a movement towards generality and typification (Schutz 1970). What I saw in Rome could indeed be compared to what I was observing in two other sites, in Seville and Morsang-sur-Orge. This allowed distinguishing local idiosyncrasies and more general phenomena.

Patterns and regularities were not only observed at the interactional level however. I also observed regularities —with a lower n however— in the evolution of the trajectory of some of the actors I followed over two years. I was able to see that those who stayed and participated intensively, and developed new forms of civic engagement, were specific in comparison to the broader public of PB. Idle and "unemployed" civic agents, concerned by the local common good, they found in the PB an ideal form of engagement, which opened up new political paths to them. The results of ethnographic studies —while hardly replicable —can also be compared to other ethnographic studies on similar objects. From this perspective, the results presented here can be compared— and eventually amended— to other participatory devices and other sites. Mathieu Berger's work shows the norms regulating interactions in Brussels are to a large extent comparable to those I observed in the three sites I studied (Berger 2008). Héloïse Nez's research similar learning patterns of learning in Cordoba and Paris (Nez 2010); and it is only by multiplying such comparisons that deviations and common patterns will be severed out, and finer grounded theories built.

Finally, ethnography allows grasping a crucial element hardly taken into account by other methods, namely the meaning participation has for actors. To understand who is affected or not and why, it is necessary knowing how participants felt along the way. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction appear from this perspective crucial elements in explaining

learning processes. Participants were not indeed passively marked by the norms regulating interactions in participatory institutions. They were able to interpret and react to these normative requirements, to play with them eventually, and therefore be affected by them differently depending on their previous civic, personal or professional experience. Only when the past and the present are taken together in a process perspective can the meaning and consequences participation has for actors be adequately understood.

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