Democracy on the Net – or in the Net?

Aosta, June 28-30

Over the last decades a process of transformation has been taking place. Its manifestations are geographically diversified yet similar in content. Regimes that are commonly considered democratic tend to assume undemocratic features: the seats of power move from popular assemblies to the top of the executive power; the role of communication systems, TV in the first place, has become the decisive factor in deciding the competition between leaders; the social inequalities erodes essential preconditions of a democratic public life… To define the nature of these political phenomena, the scholarly literature has used telling labels such as «post-democracy», «electoral dictatorship», «elective autocracy», «audience democracy». Citizens are increasingly defiant towards the very procedures of democracy: the most elementary rules of the game are applied but without bit on reality. They no longer «produce» political self-determination. Citizens are counted but they are not aware of counting.

Moreover, the weight and importance of the decisions taken by States and supranational institutions (such as the EU) are undetermined by substantial transfers of sovereignty to global oligarchies of hybrid type (political, economic, financial) that lack any form of democratic legitimacy. Trapped in the net of global powers, classic institutions of representative democracy appear to be weakened and void, as in a state of siege, their decisions are less autonomous and less effective. Has Western democracy entered the twilight zone?

However the recent cases of popular mobilization – in North Africa, Spain, in the US – have been welcomed as a sign in favor of democratic awakening. Beyond the obvious differences, they are united by the use of ICTs. Could democracy trapped «in the net» pull itself out of it by going «on the net»?

The net seems, to some observers, to offer a suitable tool to promote new forms of participation and deliberation through which citizens, «connected horizontally», can escape the limits and distortions of the political decision-making processes, both formal and informal. Others, however, have highlighted how the use of forms of political action related to ICTs does not come without a wide range of risks: e.g. populist tendencies, radicalization of opinions, disparities in access to information, exacerbation of control mechanisms.

The literature on democracy and ICTs have thus been polarized between the cyberoptimism of those who see the net as an instrument of emancipation (democracy on the net) and the cyberpessimism of those who fear the advent of new forms of inequality and global control (democracy in the net).

This congress discussion deals with these issues, looking for innovative perspectives on the political implications of the use of ICTs.

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Thursday June 28 **Afternoon Session**	Friday June 29 **Afternoon Session**
Introduction Ermanno Vitale Michelangelo Bovero Remo Bodei Aosta Turin UCLA	Digital Dissidence **Giovanni Ziccardi** Milan
What Does e- Add to Democracy? **Patricia Mindus** Uppsala	Discussant: **Andrea Greppi** Universidad Carlos III, Madrid
Democracy in the Age of the Internet **Gloria Origgi** Institut Jean Nicod, Paris	Social Networks and New Paths for Democracy **Miguel Carbonell** UNAM, México
Discussant **Massimo Durante** Turin	Discussant: **Giuliano Bobba** Turin
Friday June 29 **Morning Session**	**Saturday June 30** **Morning Session**
What is Emancipative Networking? **Carol Gould** City University of New York	Law in the Net **Stefano Rodotà** La Sapienza, Rome
Discussant: **Massimo Cuono** Sassari	Discussant: **Corrado Druetta** NEXA, Turin