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Articles

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The sub-municipal level of politics in Italy: a case study

Abstract

District authorities in the system of communal decentralization, known in many Italian cities as *Consigli di circoscrizione* (*Cdc*), were established between the end of the '70s and the early '80s to make the local government closer to citizens and to promote, at the same time, the participation of the latter in the administration of the former. The set up of such district councils was also a move aiming to give real answers to the many questions raised by the urban social movements active in the big metropolitan areas of the Country.

This article, starting from the results of some recent studies on the decentralization system within the Commune of Genova, is set to discuss the implications of the establishment and the evolution of *Cdc* for political parties as well as for citizens' committees exerting pressure on local authorities. In other terms, it will describe the patterns of institutional and non-institutional political participation prompted by this new layout of local government, considered as an example of change in the political opportunity structure, trying also to verify if these two fields of participation may somehow overlap.

With regard to the local case study, where a new system of nine decentralized organs called *Municipi* was set up in 2007, the following points will be discussed.

First, what kind of political actors and what kind of lists participate in the elections to the bodies of the communal decentralization system. In more detail: are they civic or local lists (organized *bottom-up*) or organized by traditional political parties (*top-down*)?

Second, what kind of relationships are set with these institutions by neighbourhood-based citizens' committees that choose not to take part in elections at this level directly.

Third, the sociographic profile and attitudes of the politicians elected to these bodies, trying to verify whether they are closer to the mainstream political class or, say, to neighbourhood volunteers.

1. Introduction

The focus of this article is on the sub-municipal level of politics in Italy, which includes the political and administrative organs, directly elected by citizens, set at the district level but within the broader institutional framework of the *Comune*, the Italian political and administrative institution of city government.

District authorities in the system of municipal decentralization, known in many Italian cities as *Consigli di circoscrizione* (*Cdc*), have been established to make the local government closer to citizens, and to promote, at the same time, the participation of the latter in the administration of the former. The set up of such district councils between the end of the '70s and the early '80s was also a move aiming to give real answers to the many questions raised by the urban social movements active in the big metropolitan areas of the Country.[1]

This article, starting from the results of some recent studies on the experience of the decentralization process in the city of Genova (Massa 2005, 2011, 2015), the sixth in the Country with regard to the number of inhabitants, is set to discuss the implications of the establishment of these new local institutions and their evolution in Italy, over the last forty years, for political parties as well as for the urban social movements acting as neighbourhood-based groups exerting pressure on local authorities, both central (the *Comune*) and

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[1]   We shall use the English terms "Municipality" to refer to the *Comune* and "District council" to refer to *Cdc*, the political and administrative organs in the system of municipal decentralization. Nonetheless, please take note that these decentralized organs in the city of Genova (*Cdc*) since 2007 have been renamed as "*Municipi*".

decentralized (*Cdc*). In other terms, we shall describe the patterns of institutional and non-institutional political participation prompted by this new layout of local government, trying also to verify if these two fields of participation may somehow overlap.

According to the national law 278/1976 establishing the *decentramento comunale* (municipal decentralization), cities could be divided into *Circoscrizioni* in relation to traditional city districts or a combination thereof, with an assembly of councillors elected by the citizens and a president elected by the assembly itself. These rules have been later improved by Law 142/1990 and then included in D.Lgs 267/2000, the main source of regulations for Italian local government institutions.

The opportunity to set up such district councils has been later restricted to the cities whose population is over 250.000 inhabitants (D.Lgs. 267/2000, art. 17), while Law 56/2014 has recently recognized as *Città metropolitane* the areas around the biggest cities of the Regions with an ordinary statute.[2]

In the current legal frame, *Cdc* have no autonomy, as they are formally part of the overall city administration, but with devolved power and functions. These are in fact very insignificant, since District councils have had a consultative rather than a decisional role – with differences from city to city. Their main areas of interest are: maintenance of public places; social services; local cultural events.

Every city has the faculty to decide some features of its decentralization system in its statute. Genova was one the first cities to establish such system, also because of the historical

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[2]   See, among others, Testa (2013).

features of its formation. The evolution of municipal decentralization in the city can be divided into four periods:

- first phase (1965-1981): District committees and Delegation councils, non elected and presided by a representative of the city Mayor;
- second phase (1981-1997): 25 *Cdc* with 21 elected councillors including the president, set up according to Law 278/76, corresponding to traditional districts of Genova and former autonomous Municipalities incorporated into the city in 1874 and 1926;
- third phase (1997-2007): nine *Cdc*, with 30 elected councillors including the president;
- fourth phase (2007-today): nine *Municipi*, with 23 elected councillors and the president, supported by a municipal board of three assessors.

In the current system, each *Municipio* has an assembly, a president and a board of three members, in which the presence of persons of both sexes must be granted. The councillors, including the president, are directly elected by the citizens who are resident in the district area, while the board is nominated by the president and voted by the council. Elections for the *Cdc* are held at the same time as those for the Mayor and the City council. If the Mayor is forced to step down, the City council dissolves and new elections are called. Therefore, all District councils dissolve too and go to the polls again.

Considering the topic at a more general level of analysis, our starting point is to maintain that the institution of District councils has in fact opened a new space for the political participation and the institutional representation of citizens living in Italian big cities. This can be seen as a clear example

of changes in the political opportunity structure, which occur, among others, in decentralized states providing a multitude of targets for citizens' participation at the system's base (Tarrow 1994, p. 89). The decentralization of power from the nation-State to the Regions, for instance, from the Regions to the cities, from the cities to their districts, has been considered as an opening of the institutional system of bottom-up social pressures (Cotta et Al. 2008, pp. 175-176).

While this process of rescaling was going on in different Countries at the national level (Brenner 1999, 2003, 2009; Keating 1998, 2013), since the late '70s, in the framework of the institutional political participation, beside the chance to get involved at the municipal level, citizens could also stand as candidates and try to get elected, or just support a list of candidates, at the district level. They could join lists organized by political parties or try to set up local or civic lists. We might also suggest that, to some extent, a new component of the political class was set to rise at this lower tier of local government.

On the other hand, if citizens would have preferred instead forms of non-institutional political participation, as individuals or, more often, within local protest groups, they could find the *Cdc* as a new actor to deal with, setting different possible kinds of relationships. District councils could be either an ally on the territory, to share campaigns against other public powers, or an adversary against which they intend to exert pressure at local level. It was also possible for these groups of citizens to organize lists for district elections and try to be directly represented in these decentralized organs.

With regard to non-institutional political participation, we have referred here to "citizens' committees": local groups that could be considered as forms of "neighbourhood-based

urban social movements". They have many characteristics typical of social movements, such as temporary existence and loosely structured organization. Moreover, the city is not just the setting in which they operate, but they focus precisely on urban problems. Nonetheless, they are usually related to a single neighbourhood – or even just to a part of it.

In general terms, the main aim of such groups is to work for "local mobilization". These are defined as a specific class of collective actions, organized by "entrepreneurs", in which the actors involved raise local problems and let them become public, developing interactions with public authorities and policies, pursuing one ore more shared goals (Vitale 2007a, p. 10).

Within these legislative and sociological frames, the following points will be discussed in the article.

- What kind of political actors, and what kind of lists, take part in the elections to the bodies of the communal decentralization system? In more detail: are they civic or local lists (organized *bottom-up*) or organized by traditional political parties (*top-down*)? What are the sociographic characteristics of the people elected to these bodies? Are they closer to the mainstream political class or, say, to neighbourhood volunteers?

- What kind of relationships are set with these institutions by neighbourhood-based citizens committees that decide not to take part in the elections at this level?

- What kind of administrative and political relationships are set between the central and the decentralized level of local government institutions?

2. Elections for *Cdc* and *Municipi* in the city of Genova

Elections for District councils, as we have just pointed out, are always held at the same time as those for the Mayor and the City council. An analysis of the electoral offer since the first elections until today must be divided into three parts: from 1981 to 1990, the election of 1993, and from 1997 until today.

In the first of these periods, traditional parties were still enjoying their long "golden age" in the so-called Italian First Republic. Also at district level here they managed to set up all the lists. No local or civic lists, on the contrary, took part.[3]

This was the last decade of the harsh ideological confrontation in the broader frame of the "cold war". It was important for the political parties, mainly Dc, Pci and Psi, to occupy all the places, even in the *Cdc*, to carry on their own power systems and to promote their values, while empty spaces could have been used by the "adversaries" for their propaganda, according to the logic of the "transmission belt". Grassroots militants in every district have been recruited on both sides to fill the electoral lists. In the decentralized system of that period, every party had to mobilize and deploy the huge number of 525 candidates, 21 for each of the 25 *Cdc*. This task was feasible only for the bigger parties, while others found it very difficult. It is evident that to fill the lists parties had to deploy the same candidates in more than one constituency or to ask people marginally involved in politics to stand as candidates. Councillors' turnover in office was therefore high.

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[3]   See "Le elezioni per i consigli circoscrizionali a Genova (1981-2002)", in Massa (2005): 41-103.

In this period, however, "traditional parties" (Dc, Pci, Psi, Psdi, Pri, Pli, and Msi) were facing the slow rise of "new parties", such as for instance the Greens, the Radical party and the Northern League. All together, traditional parties always got a very high share of valid votes: 96.9% in 1981, 94.2% in 1985, and 83.9% in 1990. In 1990, however, in three districts Pci, then in full transition, did not go for elections with a list of its own but organized left-leaning "civic" lists, whose results cannot be properly considered within traditional parties. Besides that, in all these three elections, the results at both municipal and district level were very similar.

The elections of 1993 started to tell us a different story. In 1992, the system of traditional parties collapsed at national as well as at local level, for both internal and external reasons. In Genova, high fragmentation of the political offer was registered. There were a total of 24 lists for both municipal and district elections, but eight civic lists among them were present only for the *Cdc* polls getting, altogether, 2.5% of the overall valid votes. Measured by the index provided by Laakso and Taagepera (1979), fragmentation rose from 4.0 and 4.2 in 1981 and 1985 to 5.3 in 1990, and 5.9 in 1993 (Massa 2005, p. 59).

In more detail, only three parties participating in the 1990 administrative elections were to run again three years later, bearing the same name and symbol – right-wing Msi was the only one among the traditional parties. Other eight lists were somehow linked to political parties existing at national level. There were also five one-issue lists present at both municipal and district level, focusing on young people, pensioners or the self-employed. There were eight civic lists participating only in their own districts, achieving anyway good results.

These lists were present only at district level: their promoters were not interested in being represented at city level. They have been organized at the moment of crisis of mainstream political parties, in much more difficulties at local level. In Genova, these were the last polls for the system of municipal decentralization with 25 small *Cdc*, where it was not too difficult to organize a civic list. Six out of these eight lists were set up in districts that had been, until 1926, former independent small municipalities, then incorporated into the City of Genova. We could say that, while ideological identities were fading away, people looked for a territorial identity able to mobilize towards the political solution of very local problems.

In 1997, the system of municipal decentralization was reformed and the number of *Cdc* reduced to nine, through the merger of the previous 25. This change, together with consolidation of the party system at national level, led to the disappearance of civic lists in district elections. In that year, only *Insieme per Pegli* tried again to take part in the elections. It got 5.6% and one seat in the *Cdc* VII – Ponente, notably 11.7% in the former district of Pegli that forms this *Cdc* together with Pra' and Voltri. After that, to find another civic list we must wait until 2012, when *Cittadini per Centro Est* got 3.2% and one seat in *Municipio I – Centro Est.*

In the last 20 years, generally speaking, the strategy of citizens' committees has changed, as we shall see in the next paragraph. District councils have become too big institutions for such very locally-based groups to organize lists and succeed at the polls. Such committees usually focus only on one of the many neighbourhoods that make the overall area of a *Municipio*, often just on a small part of it, such as a couple of streets or a *piazza.* On the contrary, some leaders

of committees were included in the lists of other political parties and eventually got elected.

In the last local two elections, moreover, an innovation has been the formation of lists for the City council linked to candidates for Mayor, bearing their names, within different political coalitions. In 2012, one list (*Enrico Musso Sindaco*), and in 2014, four lists of this kind were set up to run for the District councils too, helping the candidates for Mayor to broaden their electoral base and, at the same time, showing evidence of the process of personalization of politics (Calise 2016), started in the mid-'90s at national level (Venturino 2000), also at its lowest tier.

3. Citizens' committees and District councils

The establishment of District councils in the late '70s, besides the officially declared purposes summarized in our Introduction, has been considered also as a move for reducing the relevance of citizens' committees through their institutionalization. Nonetheless, while political parties immediately managed to have a grip on *Cdc*, far from disappearing, the committees kept on developing, notably in the peripheral areas of big cities. Their comeback is seen today as a symptom of the crisis of the decentralization system set up in that period, highlighted by little effectiveness of its political bodies (della Porta 2004, p. 28).

Citizens' committees have generally a transient existence.[4] As in the cases studied here, they usually arise when people meet up to discuss relevant problems concerning their territory and try to come up with new solutions. They organize

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[4]   See, for instance, Toth (2003).

a strategy for local mobilization, often moderate and non ideological but relying on non-conventional forms of participation, to exert pressure on decision makers in local government institutions such as *Cdc*, the *Comune* or the Region. Committees have a defined life course and in most cases come to an end either when they are successful in their campaigns or when they consider their goals impossible to reach.

In the Genoese area, citizens' committees have grown, of course, in every district. Nonetheless, their number, in proportion to the local population, is higher in Val Polcevera and Ponente, where the territory has been used and exploited to host large infrastructures and facilities, such as highways, railways and heavy-industry manufacturing plants. Moreover, in the same districts, the old centres as well as new social housing programmes have received many immigrants, earlier mainly from Southern Italy and now from abroad.

We shall focus here on the case of the committees active in the western districts of the city. Many of them joined into a "*Coordinamento dei comitati del Ponente*", a "Coordination of western committees" aiming to elaborate an effective strategy of relations with the institutions of local government.[5]

Their main point was that the different problems on the territory were not easy to be solved in the short term and that they were all interconnected. It was, therefore, important to create a coordination among the committees and their leaders, in order to share:

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[5]   On the persistence of committees and their coordination structures in other Italian cities, such as Turin and Florence, see Allasino (2004). On local mobilizations in Rome, see D'Albergo and Moini (2011).

- information and knowledge of the problems;
- studies and projects carried out for their solution;
- expertise developed as to committee organization and protest tools.

While each committee is strictly local, the Coordination is the place to raise the point of view to a higher position and consider all the problems at once.

On the one hand, the Coordination has turned from a movement into an institution on the political local ground, becoming a permanent actor, so that all conventional political forces and local government institutions have to deal with it. On the other hand, committees have decided to enter directly these institutions, but not setting up their own lists. As we have seen previously, since 1997 committees all over the city have given up this electoral strategy in favour of including their representatives in the lists that other political parties arranged for both district and municipal elections. These lists have not been chosen (only) on an ideological basis, but because of proximity to their positions on local issues.

In the previous administrative cycles, the committees gathered up in the western Coordination were able to elect their "contact persons", one in the city council and a couple in the *Municipio VII – Ponente.*

It is worth stressing that in the last administrative elections, many candidates with a background in other committees were elected from the lists of the newborn *Movimento 5 Stelle*, to the city council and to the Municipi, but they are not joining the Coordination group.

The committees of the Coordination themselves, for different reasons, have judged positively the choice of electing "contact persons" in the *Municipi.* They can now collect

grassroots issues and channel them directly to the political system, as well as they can have direct access to information, while in the past they had to rely on other non-member councillors in both cases. They can also exercise control from within over the activity of the institutions.

The committees included in the Coordination show also differences among them. Some have been set up in opposition to the decisions that are made – or that are going to be made – by political institutions and their course of action is more likely to go beyond conventional forms of protest. Others mainly just for the valorisation of a district, or a part of it, and to exert pressure for making positive decisions such as, for instance, better roads or new street furniture.[6] Sometimes, the two perspectives overlap. In our case, moreover, other differences are related to the provenance from specific districts.

4. The sociographic profile of the personnel elected
to the bodies of the Genoese communal decentralization system

The set up of District councils, generally speaking, has increased the opportunities for institutional political participation and representation at local level. In particular, it has given many more citizens a chance to take part in the electoral competition, even if at a very local level. Before this, such form of political participation in local government was limited to very few people at municipal level. Starting from this point, therefore, it is interesting to find elements to sketch the sociographic profile of the people elected in these organs.

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[6]   These local groups, in some circumstances, have become even service providers for the neighbourhood (de Leonardis and Vitale 2001; della Porta and Diani 2004).

In the period between 1981 and 2007, as we have seen, a remarkable number of people were recruited to be included in electoral lists and for district activities, drawing also from the group marginally involved in politics even if active for example in parishes, neighbourhood associations or trade unions.

Since 1997, the reduction in the number of institutions meant also a reduction in the number of the people involved – with great relief for political parties. The nine new *Cdc* had a territory wider than the previous 25, so that the ties with local associations and committees have become a little weaker. Moreover, since 2007 the presence of a board of assessors working together with the president resulting in differentiating the politicians active in the institutions of the municipal decentralization system.

According to a survey carried out on the city of Genova,[7] about seven out of ten politicians elected to the *Municipi* are men, while women are slightly more represented in district boards, though only because of the rule requiring the presence of persons of both sexes there, in practice granting at least one seat out of three to women.[8]

The age of board members is higher than that of councillors. Among the former, 46% are between ages 35 and 54 years and 54% over 55, while among the latter 43% and 38%, respectively.

As for education, a half of the politicians in *Municipi* have a high school diploma, about 35% a university degree.

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[7]   All the data about the profile of the political class of the District councils of Genova presented in this paragraph are available in Massa (2011).

[8]   About female representation in Italian local government, including Cdc, see Massa (2013).

About seven out of ten have an occupation and, among them, 50% are office employees, 31% self-employed professionals. Manual workers account for just 5%, the same as entrepreneurs and shopkeepers. As for the economic sectors, 64% are occupied in private companies, 29% in public organizations and 7% in the third sector.

The career of district board members seems longer than that of councillors. More than one half among the former began to get involved in politics between 1958 and 1982, only 13% between 1998 and 2007. Among the latter, on the other hand, only 21% started a political career in the first of these two periods, while 46% did it between 1998 and 2007.

In this framework, it is interesting to investigate the differences between ordinary councillors and district board members, whose profile seems to be closer to, or at least less far from, that of politicians at higher institutional levels, such as for instance city councillors or members of the Regional assembly. As regards their experience in political and social activities, by comparison with ordinary councillors, district board members:

- are currently members of political parties in the same percentage, but while all of them have been party members in the past, 10% of councillors have never been;
- have got in a higher percentage directive responsibilities in political parties, currently as well as in the past;
- show a higher rate of trade union membership;
- show a higher rate of association membership;
- show the same level of involvement in local citizens' committees.

Moreover, board members have also a more significant experience of participation in other elective public institutions.

Among them, 58% have already been members of *Cdc*, while among councillors this percentage is just 35%. Former members of city council account for 21% among district assessors and presidents, and only 3% among councillors.

Differences do not concern only their sociographics but also their attitudes and behaviours. In particular, they have a more positive view of the political outcome of the *Municipi*.

5. Conclusion

The establishment of district councils represented a small but interesting change in the political opportunity structure in Italy, opening a new space and new chances for both institutional and non-institutional political participation and representation for citizens living in big cities, an at the same time offering new challenges for political parties and urban social movements.

The institutions of municipal decentralization were established in the '70s to attribute a formal role to the existing informal citizens' committees. Since the very beginning, however, parties have held a strong grip on them. In the case of Genova, only in 1993, at the climax of their crisis, they left room for local civic actors to get in. At the next elections, nonetheless, parties got back completely, helped by the reduction of the number of the *Cdc*.

In the period from the start until 1993, characterized by a harsh ideological confrontation, traditional parties made a great effort to be represented in all political institutions, from the Parliament to District councils, in order to implement their policies, to defend their values and also to make their own power system stronger, according to the logic of the "transmission belt". Many grassroots militants in every

district had to be recruited on both sides to fill the electoral lists and many others to participate in *Cdc* committees open to non-elected volunteer members. More recently, in the framework of a change in the features of parties, less ideological and closer to the models of "cartel party" and "party in office" (Katz - Mair 1995, 2002), militants of this kind, more involved in local civic engagement than in party politics, are still present in the *Municipi* – as we shall see shortly.

Neighbourhood-based citizens' committees, on the other hand, are set up to exert pressure on political institutions, sometimes also on private companies, to prevent decisions considered negative for the territory, or to promote positive actions. For committees, decentralization organs are just one among the many political institutions to deal with – maybe the closest but surely not the most relevant. The kind of a relationship they decide to establish with them depends on the kind of a relationship that they decide to set with the institutions exercising real power, such as the Mayor and the City council, the Region or the State and its administrative branches. Therefore, citizens' committees can decide either to go along with the *Municipi*, considering them an ally for common battles against the real decision-makers, or to clash with them when they are seen too aligned with those powerful institutions.[9]

It is worth stressing that also District councils have the problem to decide what kind of a relationship they are to establish with the Municipality, since representatives in both institutions are directly elected by citizens in separate

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[9]   In some cases, when they lack real representation, local movements can have conflictual relations with the residents of the district as well. A good case-study is available in Vitale (2007b).

polls and may decide their own policies. It can even happen that the political majority supporting the district president is different from the majority supporting the city Mayor. With respect to relevant problems of the territory, therefore, such as for instance the building of large infrastructures, District councils themselves can be caught between the hammer of the Municipality and the anvil of the committees, between two loyalties, one political and one related to the territory. In this case, the committees are the ones that can become an ally for local councils.

Our opinion is that the leaders of committees do not consider important for their goals to organize a list and try to enter directly local government bodies. In the first place, they do not think of *Municipi* as very effective political institutions. They then know that setting up a list is very demanding while electoral competition with political parties is hard to beat. Last but not least, participation in neighbourhood committees is very locally focused, as they are usually one-issue oriented. To be part of a political institution, on the contrary, even if at this very low level, means to deal with problems of different kinds and on a wider territory, to set priorities and try to achieve them using limited resources.

Looking at the experience of citizens' committees in Genova, we would like eventually to stress two aspects of their development. First, we consider relevant the decision of some committees in the western districts to create a coordination group among them. Forced to deal with long lasting problems, they have chosen to set up a permanent structure to discuss different issues and have a direct communication channel with local government institutions. In this way, we might say that the *movement* has turned into

an *institution*, since the Coordination has become a permanent actor to be recognized by all other actors present in the same territory – political parties, public institutions, private companies, other committees – when they elaborate their own political strategies. To conclude on this first point, it would be interesting to verify whether committees create such a form of coordination because of the kind of the problems they have to deal with or there are other crucial factors, such as cultural ones for instance. In the case of the Genoese western committees, the Coordination has been established in a mainly working class area with a strong tradition of solidarity and involvement in parties, trade unions and associations, politically dominated by leftist parties. The second relevant aspect, in our view, is the decision of the Coordination, in the last administrative cycle, to let include some of its leaders in the lists of candidates organized by other parties and then get them elected. As we have seen, this move has helped to keep local problems in full light and to have direct access to information.

Another point to discuss in these conclusions is related to the characteristics of the people elected to the bodies of municipal decentralization.

The political class elected to the *Municipi* of Genova, according to our survey (Massa 2011), does not consist of professional politicians – in terms of engagement as well as in terms of reward. Even if many of them, according to the traditional Weberian categories, can "live for politics", nobody is likely to "live off politics". Differences, however, can be found between councillors, on the one hand, and presidents or assessors, on the other. Rank-and-file councillors usually get a very small attendance fee and participate in official meetings a few times per month, so that, to some extent, their

activity could be considered in the concept of "voluntary political participation" (Verba et Al. 1995). The presidents are entitled to get a decent allowance but only when they opt for a full-time commitment.[10]

Lists of candidates set up by political parties are the only "vehicle" used today to enter the District councils. Our conclusion, however, is that those who run for election to decentralization organs can be inspired by two different prevailing logics of behaviour, that we could call the logic of *power* and the logic of *service*. According to the former, there are candidates deeply involved in party dynamics that chose a more active political engagement at district level, to implement the policies elaborated by the higher echelons of the institutions or of the parties. These, usually more politically experienced, are more likely to fill the ranks of district presidents and assessors. The latter is typical for citizens who decide to enter the *Municipio* just "to give a helping hand" to the neighbourhood, often for a limited period and without any wish of further political career elsewhere. They are more likely to remain simple councillors, often working hard but setting relations with citizens and local associations rather than with other political authorities. They sometimes get frustrated because of their experience with regard to the little political outcome they see in return for their great commitment. These two logics, of course, none of which carries a negative meaning, may overlap. But while there are presidents and assessors showing a great spirit of service, very

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[10]   This is of course the situation in Genova. We have got some information only about the system of decentralization in few other cities, Naples (Brancaccio - Zaccaria 2007) and Palermo (Massa 2011, pp. 107-108, Rizzo - Stella 2007, pp. 244-245) for instance, where the situation seems to be different.

few councillors inspired only by this are interested in or able to get to the most powerful positions.

District board members are, therefore, closer to the mainstream political class than councillors, not only because of their sociographic profile but also because they have more frequent contacts with politicians at higher levels. This does not mean just that they meet them more frequently, but that there is also evidence of certain upward mobility. Some of them have acquired administrative skills and political experience, so that they could progress in a political career. In fact, there are many cases of assessors and presidents of *Cdc* or *Municipi* that have later become assessors in the city board or members of the regional assembly.

A final point to consider regards the future of the system of municipal decentralization that, as we have seen, was established in the '70s, in the period marked by forms of political participation and culture very different from the current ones. The criticism that from time to time has been made concerns its effectiveness. District councils, since they are decentralized bodies and not autonomous, have only devolved rather than original functions and powers. Moreover, the resources decentralized to *Municipi* are under the control of an administrative manager and not at direct disposal of the president of the District council. The authority of these decentralized organs on the local territory, therefore, has never been as strong as conceived by the lawmakers that decided to introduce this institution more than 40 years ago. If one adds that often the Mayor and the presidents of District councils can be supported by different political coalitions, and so the latter can obstruct the former's policies, it is not surprising that one future trend could be a downgrade rather than an improvement of the municipal decentralization system as it has been up to now.

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Table 1 – Bodies of communal decentralization in the central
Communes of the "Città metropolitane"

Commune	Number of bodies	Denomination	Average population
Torino	10	Circoscrizioni	89.519
Milano	9	Zone	146.972
Genova	9	Municipi	67.549
Venezia	6	Municipalità	45.002
Bologna	9	Quartieri	42.794
Firenze	5	Quartieri	73.412
Roma	15	Municipi	191.572
Napoli	10	Municipalità	102.550
Bari	9	Circoscrizioni	38.274
Reggio Calabria	15	Quartieri	12.371

Source: Adaptation from Testa (2013, p. 236).

Coming to the conclusion on this point, we could add that while the participation of candidates from the western Coordination in other parties' lists has been decided with full awareness, in the frame of a project aiming to set close relationships with the institutions of local government, also candidates from other citizens' committees in the city, often more spontaneously, were elected to *Municipi*. According to a recent survey[11] (Massa 2011, p. 70), in the last administrative cycle 18% of the politicians at district level were also members of a citizens' committee and 13% were not current-

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[11]   The survey was focused on a sample of 144 out of the 216 politicians elected to the *Municipi* of Genova in the 2007-2012 administrative cycle, including presidents and assessors. The sample is representative of gender, political group and the nine district councils in which the city is organized.

ly members but have been members in the past (Table 2). It means that a double membership of both political institutions and citizens' committees is somehow shared by three out of ten of them.

Tab. 2 – Citizens' committee membership

	Board members	Councillors	Total
Yes, currently	16.7	18.3	18.1
Not now, yes in the past	12.5	13.3	13.2
No, never	70.8	68.4	68.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Massa (2011, p. 70)

According to the same survey, the activity of citizens' committees, in order to find a solution for local problems, was considered "very effective" by 10% of the sample and "rather effective" by 40%, while the activity of the *Municipi* was considered "very effective" only by 4% and "rather effective" by 36% (Ibidem, p. 77).

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