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# Book Review: Cittadinanza attiva e qualità della democrazia


By Gianni Piazza (<http://italianpoliticalscience.com/author/ipsgpiazza/>),  
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Giovanni Moro, *Cittadinanza attiva e qualità della democrazia*  
([http://www.carocci.it/index.php?option=com\\_carocci&Itemid=72&task=schedalibro&isbn=9788843069644](http://www.carocci.it/index.php?option=com_carocci&Itemid=72&task=schedalibro&isbn=9788843069644)) (Rome, Italy: Carocci Editore, 2013). 296 pp., €23,00 (paperback), ISBN: 9788843069644.



For many years now, research and studies have shown that while the electoral participation in the “advanced democracies” is in gradual and continued decline, the other forms of political participation are increasing almost everywhere—from the more radical disruptive protests to the comparative moderate involvement in voluntary associations. Political scientists and sociologists have studied them through the collective actors that usually adopt these forms: the social movements, which prefer protest, and the interest groups more inclined to lobbying. Rarely have the alternative forms of political participation been studied all together as a new type of practice. As a matter of fact, what would “consumer associations, social movements, environmental groups, grassroots movements, local committees, self-help groups, cooperatives and social enterprises, voluntary and international cooperation organizations...” (p. 22) and other groups, initiatives, and movements have in common? According to Giovanni Moro in *Cittadinanza attiva e qualità della democrazia*, they are some of the forms taken by “civic activism, namely the fact that citizens unite and act in the public scene for reasons of general interest, playing the role of agents of policy making” (p. 21); they would be the practices of groups of citizens that operate in the policies rather than in the politics, representing an anomaly and not a puzzle—quoting Thomas Khun—in the paradigm of democratic citizenship, namely a “phenomenon not incorporable and manageable in the political system, if not questioning the core of the system itself” (p. 23). Therefore, considering the organized activism of citizens in the public arena is still poorly investigated, the author aims to fill this void in this volume, analyzing the phenomenon by placing it in relation to the crisis of the traditional paradigm of democratic citizenship and describing the effects in terms of the quality of democracy.

The book is divided into three sections. In the Introduction, the author explains:

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phenomenon, namely, crossing (participation) with the three “placitizenship practices). The first section discusses citizenship at the end of the twent-first traditional paradigm of citizenship, the “second modernity,” which includes (European, urban, electronic, multicultural, gender); the anonymous activism of citizens—is explored in and misunderstandings of the reality highlighted. In the second section identifying the characteristic features and its analytical definition (Characteristics which citizens unite, mobilize resources and responsibilities in order to provide people in difficulty” (p. 101); the “organizations” (forms, activities, “technologies” of action, impact

the definition of the organizational phenomenon (Chap. 4). The third section discusses the impact of civic activism on the ongoing transformations in advanced democracies. Chapter 5 focuses on the current interpretations of democracy, and in particular, of those that take into account the emergence of civic activism, calling into question the dominant categories and concepts and pointing out active citizenship as an agency of democratic changes; in Chapter 6, a possible definition of the standards of the civic quality of democracy is stated, while dealing with the issues of the relations between active citizenship and policies of participative democracy promoted by institutions, on the one hand, and of the relationships of representation of civic organizations, on the other. In the Conclusion, the author reflects on civic activism as an evolutionary phenomenon of democratic citizenship that, at the same time, represents both a break and a development of the traditional democratic paradigm (p. 270).

The book is interesting because it sheds light on the plurality of forms of involvement and participation of citizens too often neglected by scholars, and it is very ambitious in its effort to analyze and conceptualize these very different forms all together, challenging the ways in which they have traditionally been studied. Nevertheless, it is just from this effort of reconceptualization aimed at analyzing such different experiences as if they were part of the same phenomenon that some doubts and perplexities emerge. For example, if it is empirically founded criticizing—as the author does—the assumption that “more civic participation leads to more political participation, namely the increase of the exercise of the right to vote” (p. 26), nevertheless, it also implies that political participation is equivalent to the electoral one, while the civic participation is different from the political one. However, in the literature it is already established from the 1960s that, political participation is not limited exclusively to the activities connected to the exercise of the right to vote (voting, electoral campaign, etc.). This concept of participation in politics and in policies, which, according to the author, is aimed at changing the traditional paradigm is, in reality, the outcome of an even more traditional idea of politics, and of participation in it, as exclusively linked to voting and playing a role in public institutions. Moreover, always according to the author, interest groups and social movements do not have autonomous existence because their function lies in their interactions with the political system, and “if it was not, there would not be even those,” while the phenomenon of active citizenship, on the contrary, would emerge where the problems or needs connected to the general interest are unrecognized, and their organizations would have an autonomous existence (p. 220). However, given

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that they—the active citizenship organizations—are considered by the author as agents of policy making, where will public decisions be taken and implemented if the political system did not exist? They surely can exist without interacting with the political system, but in that case, they would not play any role in public policy-making. And if they interact with the political system, then they must be considered as interest groups or social movements.



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