POPULISMS AMONG TECHNOLOGY, E-DEMOCRACY AND THE DEPOLITICISATION PROCESS

EL AUGE DE LOS PARTIDOS POPULISTAS ENTRE LA TECNOLOGÍA, LA E-DEMOCRACIA Y EL PROCESO DE DESPOLITIZACIÓN

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, the economic crisis and the mistrust in democratic institutions have contributed to a major crisis of political parties across Europe. These are some of the causes that led to the formation of political movements with purely populist characteristics as replacement of the traditional delegitimized intermediary bodies. The crisis of representation is the crisis of the post 1945 idea of representation as a tool to increase the people's participation. We have noted a convergence between some populist appeals to direct democracy and the more radical neo-liberal approaches that pretend to reduce people's participation, even if by appealing to some forms of "surrogate representation". The theoretical background of this paper is based upon the relationships between "surrogate representation" and the institutionalization of the neo-populist movements, quickly transformed in neo-populist parties. In other words, we can highlight the strange coming together of technological storytelling on direct democracy with technocracy myths and the overlap of technopopulism with direct democracy and "direct e-democracy" (that is profoundly different from deliberative and participatory e-democracy). The aim of the paper is to analyse the connections between the emerging forms of populism (such as techno-populism), the rhetoric on the importance of digital communication for the improvement of democracy, and the depoliticisation processes.

RESUMEN

En la última década, la crisis económica y la desconfianza en las instituciones democráticas han contribuido a una gran crisis de los partidos políticos en toda Europa. Estas son algunas de las causas que llevaron a la formación de movimientos políticos con características puramente populistas como reemplazo de los organismos intermediarios tradicionalmente deslegitimados. La crisis de la representación es la crisis de la idea de representación posterior a 1945 como una herramienta para aumentar la participación popular. Hemos notado una convergencia entre algunos llamamientos populistas a la democracia directa y los enfoques neoliberales más radicales que pretenden reducir la participación de la gente, incluso si apelamos a algunas formas de "representación sustituta". Los antecedentes teóricos de este documento se basan en las relaciones entre la "representación sustituta" y la institucionalización de los movimientos neopopulistas, que se transformaron rápidamente en partidos neopopulistas. En otras palabras, podemos destacar la extraña unión de narraciones tecnológicas sobre democracia directa con mitos de tecnocracia y la superposición de tecnopopulismo con democracia directa y "democracia electrónica directa" (que es profundamente diferente de democracia electrónica participativa y deliberativa). El objetivo del documento es analizar las conexiones entre las formas emergentes de populismo (como el tecopopulismo), la retórica sobre la importancia de la comunicación digital para el mejoramiento de la democracia y los procesos de despolitización.

Introduction

At the end of 2017, the Cambridge Dictionary declared "populism" its 2017 word of the year. At the same time, the dictionary defined populism as "political ideas and activities that are intended to get support of ordinary people by giving them what they want". In an article published by The Guardian on 7 December 2017, Cas Mudde added, "Oddly enough, this is almost identical to the interpretation used by many populists themselves". Mudde continued to describe his idea of populism as an "ideology that considers society to be separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite' and argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people". The Dutch political scientist contested the Cambridge Dictionary's choice, saying that "nativism" should be considered the most appropriate "word of the year" (https://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2017/dec/07/cambridge-dictionary-nativism-populism-word-year). The word "populism" has also been used by politicians and the mass media in a derogatory way, synonymous with demagogy. This use of "populism" is simplistic and not scientifically useful: in fact, it cannot be operationalized.

The aim of this article is to identify how different definitions of populism can be framed within the definition of populism as an effect of hyper-representation. It also aims to better understand some of the new emerging trends of contemporary populism, such as that of so-called techno-populism. Therefore, in this article, we will attempt to highlight the connections between the emerging forms of populism (such as techno-populism), the rhetoric on the importance of digital communication for the improvement of democracy, and the depoliticisation processes (together with consequent re-politicisation trends).

The term "populism" has been discussed at length academically, and several definitions and analytic frameworks of the topic have been offered in the last four decades. We have considered the most frequently used definitions of populism, from the very influential work of Margaret Canovan (1981) to the recent theorizations of Cas Mudde (2004) and Paul Taggart (2000). Among these definitions, we can highlight a) the idea of populism as a political communication style and/or a set of discursive practices (Taguieff 2002; Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Moffitt and Tormey 2014); b) the concept of populism as a political strategy framed in certain kinds of organizations (Weyland 2001; Betz 2002; Kriesi 2015); c) Mudde's conceptualization of populism as a "thin" ideology (Mudde 2004; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; van Kessel 2015), a frequently discussed and interesting definition; d) the idea that "populism is neither the authentic part of modern democratic politics nor a kind of pathol-ogy caused by irrational citizens". It is the "permanent shadow of representative politics", as argued by Müller (2017). We propose to use another approach that – even if it is compatible with other theoretical definitions –is based upon the concept of hyper-representation (Mastropaolo 2016; Fasano, Panarari and Sorice 2016).

1. Populism as hyper-representation

Populisms are often interpreted as responses to the lack of participation that would distinguish liberal representative democracies. The deficit in popular participation and the connected rising of neo-populist parties are also based on the awareness of the crisis of representation. We should also consider, however, the acceleration in the decline of political parties' credibility as a result of the 2007 economic crisis that affected the Eurozone also produced a wave of movement parties, which obtained a vast electoral success[1]. The crisis of a neoliberal approach to economy that spread from the United States to Europe, indeed, combined with a crisis of traditional parties led to two contrasting trends: a) on the one hand the growing of the far-right populist parties, and b) on the other, the emergence of movement-parties (della Porta 2015; della Porta, Fernández, Kouki and Mosca 2017)[2]. The first ones have shown some traditional characteristics of right-wing populism, such as an anti-immigration rhetoric and a substantial anti-system approach to politics; the second ones have highlighted an anti-establishment frame, not necessarily anti-system. The movement-parties are not necessarily "populist"; in some cases, in fact, they do not use the distinction between "the people" (us) and the "non-people" (them), preferring a distinction between the economic élites and the "exploited" people (as in the famous slogan "we are the 99%" that, also from a linguistic perspective, designates a counter-position of the "majority" of people against a rich and powerful "minority"). As Müller (2017) points out, there is a marked difference between, for example, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who at a party congress responds to the opponents: "We are the people. Who are you?" and social movements contrasting the élites but accepting pluralism. Populism moves in the wake of hyper-representation and it is, for this reason, also fundamentally anti-pluralist. The progressive erosion of long-term identities upon which parties' legitimization was founded has also put in crisis the established forms of political participation.

Populism represents an appeal to the people in a political order in which the people are formally already the sovereign (Urbinati 2013: 145). In other words, populism should be situated within representative democracy[3]. The crisis of representation is substantiated by an agency deficit that is evident
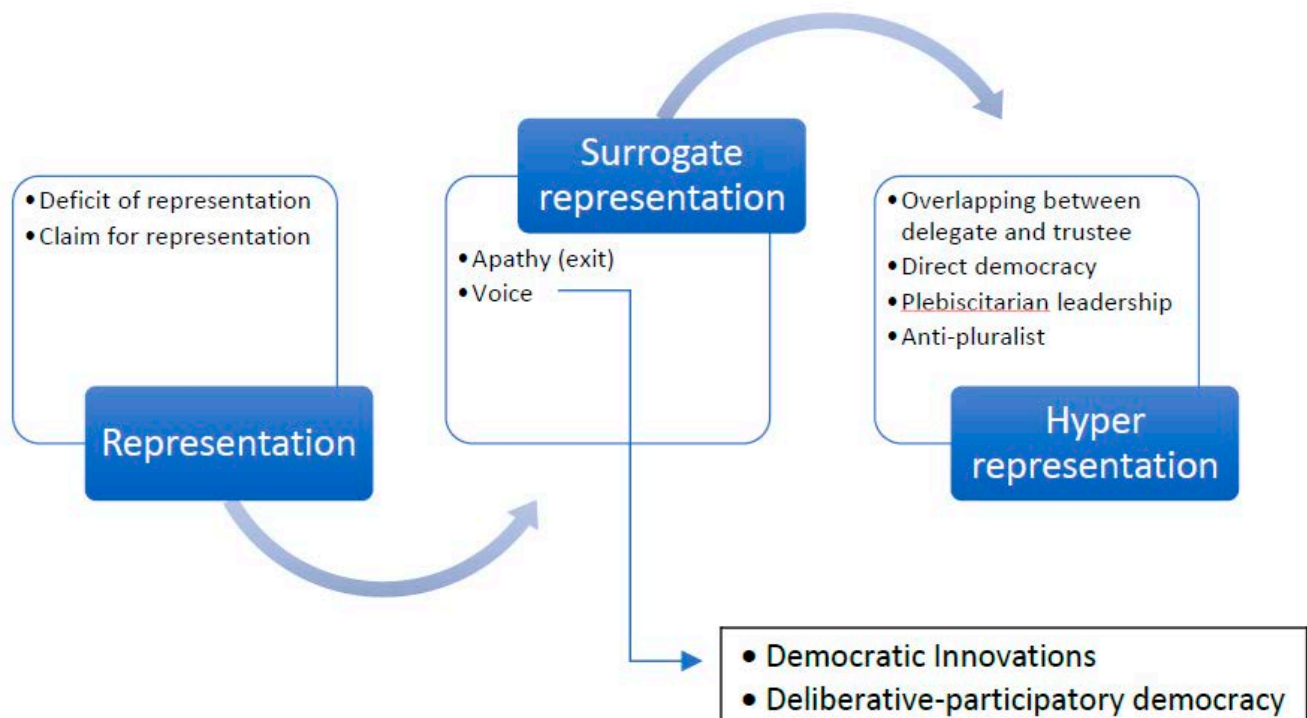
in the diminished centrality of political parties and by a request for an increasingly less fiduciary and more sanctioning representation. In fact, the trust relationship between the representative and the represented has been replaced by a systematic lack of trust in which the representative is subjected to the continuous control of her/his work: in this context, the re-emergence (in the populist rhetoric) of "recall" (present in some countries and already active in the USSR during the Stalinist era) and the contemporary detriment of the so-called "non-imperative mandate" are no coincidence.[4]

The crisis of representation is partly mitigated by the emergence of forms of surrogate representation[5]. In this case, the latter constitutes a moment of potential synthesis between the forms of "exit" and those of "voice". In other words, in addition to social apathy there are at least two other possibilities for "voice": on one side is the populist appeal as a sort of "claim for representation" (Saward 2010), and on the other side is a voice often consisting of the most advanced experiences of democratic innovations (De Blasio and Sorice 2016; Smith 2009; della Porta 2013). The populist response to the risk of exit, however, consists of a substantial conceptual overlap between "delegates" and "trustees", of the constant appeal to direct democracy and, often, of the adoption of plebiscitary (and sometimes

authoritarian) leadership[6]. The synthesis of these variables produces the phenomenon known as *hyper-representation* (see figure 1). In this case, the emphasis on participation – reduced mainly to the practices of direct democracy – usually dissipates in the plebiscitary appeal for the legitimization of the leader (supreme representative of the people) against all others (the non-people). From this perspective, hyper-representation is also strongly connected with the idea of populism as the "hypertrophy of popular sovereignty" (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2017, p. 337).

The development of hyper-representation[7] has also been made possible because of the crisis of public bureaucracies, which is also one of the structural causes of the crisis of Western Democracies (Sintomer 2011). The affirmation of new public management has accompanied the lightweight state rhetoric, which is very often used as a tool to speed up the crisis of democratic institutions (Crouch 2003: see table 1). This process has served as a pretext for populists' appeal against the lack of participation in representative democracy, but at the same time, it has strongly supported the emergence of new sub-forms of populism, such as the so-called *technopopulism* (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2017, Deseriis 2017; De Blasio and Sorice 2018).

Figure 1.
From the crisis of representation to the hyper-representation

Table 1.
The (d)evolution of democracy according Colin Crouch

1. Relationship between liberalism and democracy The tendency to equality (typical of democracy) and liberal "opportunities" tend to come into conflict, often to the benefit of the latter over the former Loss of centrality of the welfare state Changing role of political parties	**2. Professionalization of politics** o From the protagonism of militants and sympathizers to the centrality of the opinion polls o Rising of leaders legitimated by the media
3. Companies as a model for institutional excellence o Loss of **credibility** of politics and **trust** in government o "Incompetence" of the State (**lack of confidence**) o Neoliberal market in an anti-liberal loop	**4. Commodification of citizenship** o Market: from tool to final purpose

Source: Sorice (2014).

In this situation of crisis within organized political representation, one ideological element of neo-populist parties resides precisely in the attempt to delegitimize representation, which means being eliminated in the face of opportunities offered by "bottom-up" participation. The latter, however, seems to be limited to the practice of direct democracy (which is based upon the principle of aggregation: della Porta 2013) and it is meaningfully opposed to the logic of participatory democracy or methods of deliberation. Additionally, the emphasis of some populist movements on the presumed libertarian effect of technologies is not surprising; this position is not so different from that proposed by neo-liberal populism, in which the confidence in technological efficiency shifts towards the exaltation of the technocracy.

The emergence of specific forms of populism such as the technopopulism and the affirmation of certain keywords (identity, citizenship, meritocracy, etc.) seem to be elements of a more general process, namely, *depoliticisation* (Jaeger 2007; Wilson and Swyngedouw 2015; Fawcett, Flinders, Hay and Wood 2017).

2. DEPOLITICISATION AND CITIZENSHIP

When Colin Hay published his influential book *Why We Hate Politics* in 2007, the linkage between anti-politics, certain tendencies of populism and the process of depoliticisation became clear and shed new light on some trends in the neo-liberal turn. Additionally, several political-institutional innovations (and some institutional re-shaping) that may facilitate the growth of participation (such as the experiences of collaborative governance, declinations of e-government and different tools of public consultation) have been absorbed within processes of the anesthetization of popular participation in favour of a marked increase in representation logics, which, in many cases, are perceived by the people to be elitist and inevitably top-down. Not coincidentally, certain state reforms have gone in the same direction; in other words, even some aspects of democratic innovations have been used as tactics and tools for the affirmation of the neo-liberal project. The expression "tactics and tools" was used by Flinders and Buller (2006) and concerns the "mechanisms used by politicians to depoliticize issues—including delegation, but also the creation of binding rules and discursive preference shaping" (Fawcett, Flinders, Hay and Wood 2017).

The relationships between the depoliticisation process and the two (sometimes) converging phenomena of anti-politics and populism constitute an important theoretical point of reference for re-

searchers. "Anti-politics overlaps with depoliticisation where public disengagement is concerned, manifested in declining public participation in elections and parties, as well as acquiescence to dominant paradigms of public policy" (Ibidem). However, the slippery concept of anti-politics[8] can be connected to insurgent populist politicians, whose dominant slogans concern their capacity to replace "exhausted" politics with more "authentic" governing skills (which include, in many cases, minimal governance action) (Albertazzi and Mueller 2013). From the perspective of this minimal governance action, we can also observe the emergence of the so-called "post-politics", which can be defined as "the reduction of the political to the economic – the creation of a 'welcoming business environment', which inspires 'investor confidence, and provides the economic guarantees deemed necessary for 'strong and stable markets'. This subordination is not only ideological, but is embodied in concrete institutional forms, including the privatisation of central banks; the imposition of austerity on the instruction of the International Monetary Fund; the subordination of national legislation to the juridical regimes of the World Trade Organization and other multilateral organisations; the translation of corporate agendas into public policy through close formal and informal cooperation with business networks; and the delegation of numerous decision-making powers to non-state o quasi-state institutional forms" (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2015).

Post-politics, as a specific space for depoliticisation, can also favour the rise of anti-political trends. Further elements of the facilitation of anti-political tendencies and of the affirmation of phenomena such as technopopulism are, in fact, constituted by the progressive shifting from government to governance. This passage – which is strongly present in the rhetoric and in scientific approaches of new public management – has often been associated with the idea of "innovation" and, at least from a rhetorical point of view, represented the capacity for "common" citizens to govern their daily lives. The underlying idea of this rhetoric is that the government (and, with it, politics as a strategic activity) are matters for the political élites, while governance, which develops at a micro-territorial level, would allow greater control by citizens. In reality, the shifting from government to governance determines an even smaller weight for citizens, which is often confined to the management of important but subordinate issues, while strategic questions – also because of the loss of centrality of political parties – have firmly landed in the hands of technocracies and of large economic-financial corporations. In other words, "the shift from 'government to governance' refers to a passage or direction of travel from traditional 'top-down' bureaucracy to networks and

markets and other distinctive modes of governing, while 'anti-politics' refers to disengagement from and disenchantment with traditional forms of political organization and participation. The literature on depoliticisation investigates the 'nexus' between these trends by seeking to develop a better understanding of how the political character of decision-making is displaced. The literature on governance and political participation contributes to the interest in depoliticisation by suggesting that trends towards the latter are likely to take on a different form in recent years, given changes in the way governance works and the different ways citizens participate in that process" (Fawcett, Flinders, Hay and Wood 2017). An interesting example provided by Burnham (2001) was taken up by Fawcett, Flinders, Hay and Wood (2017): "Tony Blair's New Labour government in the UK created a process of 'depoliticisation' through which otherwise contentious neo-liberal reforms were presented as 'inevitable' through delegation to arm's-length agencies, leading to apathy, disillusionment, and ultimately submission among the electorate". In other words, depoliticisation becomes a "bridging concept operating at the nexus between micro-trends (the disengagement of individual citizens), meso-level institutional mechanisms and reforms (modes of governance), and macro-level ideologies and dominant growth models" (Fawcett, Flinders, Hay and Wood 2017).

Flinders and Buller (2006: 299) consider – above all variables – globalization, neo-liberalism and new public management as micro-political-level variables of the depoliticisation process. This process, according to Hay (2007), can lead to public disaffection and produce social apathy or, we can add, some forms of "exit". One of these forms is the refusal of the liberal representation, which was replaced by new forms of hyper-representation and populism.

Sørensen and Torfing (2017) argue that governance is a preferential road towards depoliticisation as an element of a strong and efficient neo-liberal strategy. From this perspective, some tendencies towards deliberative democracy, some experiments of democratic innovations and even some outcomes of e-government and e-democracy should not be considered as products of politicisation, but rather as tools to depoliticize decision-making processes (Urbinati 2014). Even the idea of the centrality of experts as guides in certain experiences of collaborative governance would, in this dimension, prove the centrality of the power of technocracy. This phenomenon, together with the lack of representation, the absence of political control by citizens and the lack of an articulated public debate, produces a substantial "alliance" among the processes of depoliticisation and the onset of populism.

Figure 2.
The relationships of depoliticisation, neo-liberal ideology and some forms of populism
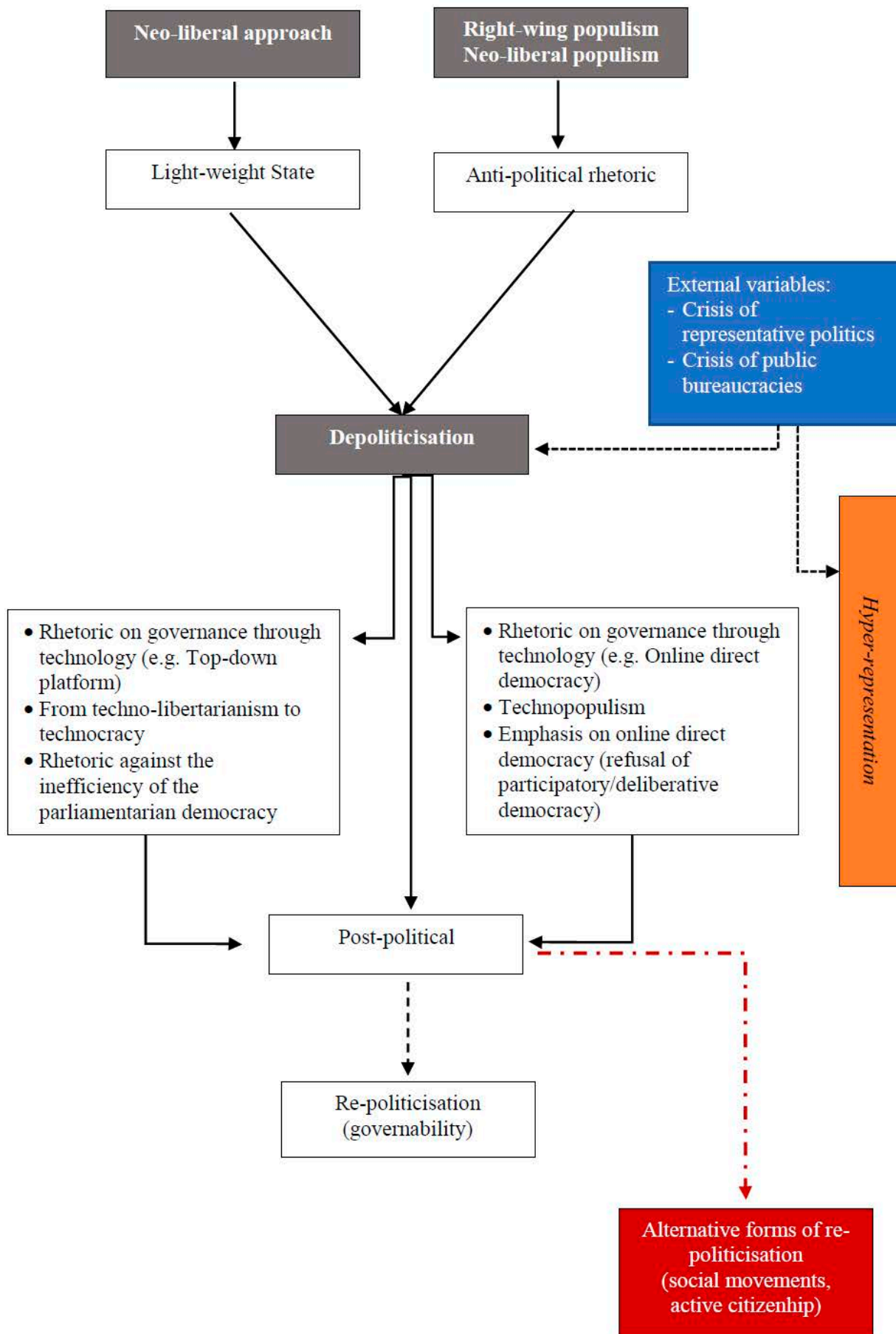
This phenomenon is also the background of some "deformations" of open government (De Blasio and Sorice 2016) and its implicit exaltation of digital technologies. The rhetoric of digital technologies for participation has been strongly present in Italian politics in the last few years, and it has been de facto legitimized by the new centrality assumed by the public participation platforms used by the state to promote open government. Technology can also play a role in renewing old mass parties (now often liquid and stratarchically presidentialized) and new ones (straddling franchise models and genuinely participatory trends). Generally, digital technology can play a role in improving "efficiency". With this in the background, we must remember that one of the rhetorical arguments that accompanied the advance of neo-liberalism found a keyword in "efficiency". An efficient state requires a strong executive at the centre and has no need for the red tape of parliamentary procedures: this argument leads to the idea that parliaments should reduce their competencies (or perhaps even disappear or be replaced by more "lightweight" institutions). The links between technopopulist rhetoric and neo-liberal populism are evident here and are framed from the perspective of depoliticisation (see figure 2).

Another important theoretical point to consider concerns the notion of citizenship, which can be conceptualized as "status" or as the set of civic knowledge. It is not random that the populist appeal looks for legitimation in the concept of citizenship as status (Italy: "Prima gli italiani!", UK: "The English first!", and Switzerland–Ticin: "Prima i nostri!"; many other similar examples can be found in the European scenario). In the first case, citizenship is ascriptive: in many cases, representative democracy and direct democracy are both anchored to the idea of citizenship as status, and this is also the premise in which the neo-liberal ideology is rooted (Mastropaolo 2000). In the second case, the inclusiveness of people with civic knowledge constitutes the basic point of reference for affiliative citizenship. From this perspective, participatory democracy – provided that it is not limited to a simplistic practice – can represent a sort of counter-hegemonic tool; the idea of participation in decision-making processes as a social right is, in fact, one of the key concepts traditionally used by left-wing political parties.

3. FOUR TYPES OF POPULISM

It is important to note that there is a specific difference between populist parties and populist rhetoric; the former have determined characteristics and very often present authoritarian or presidentialized leaderships in the frame of hyper-representation; the latter is a discursive strategy and it can also be used – more or less frequently – by non-populist parties and/or leaders. The consideration presented here originates from the first outcomes of forthcoming research on populist political parties and populist political leaders in some European countries.[9] We have identified four predominant types of populism which present points of contact with the many studies developed across Europe. Those four types (neo-liberal populism, social populism, national populism, and techno-populism) have several common characteristics (see Table 2). Among these, we must highlight the emphasis on the centrality of direct democracy and the insurgence of hyper-representation logic (albeit with different forms) and with the (significant) exception of social (or democratic) populism in which only areas of the radical left and antagonistic social movements are located. It is no coincidence that only the latter segment explicitly refers to participatory democracy, clearly identified as an alternative to liberal democracy and conveniently descended from direct democracy (on parties and movements against austerity, see Porta, Fernández, Kouki and Mosca 2017). It should also be noted that in this area, anti-establishment rhetoric almost completely replaces the anti-system position (typical, for example, of right-wing and ethnic populisms). To this extent, it can be useful to highlight that the post-Marxist left-wing parties and the radical left[10] across Europe are characterized by a strong anti-establishment – but not necessarily anti-system – position (Damiani 2017; Zulianello 2017).

Observing Table 2, we can schematically underline several relevant aspects.

1. The presence and substantial resilience of two types of penal populism (Anastasia, Anselmi and Falcinelli 2015). The first derives from the clash between the rule of law and the "rule of the people", while the second is accompanied by conservative rhetoric of "law and order".

2. The existence of figures concerning the corruption of the élites and/or the government and the lack in efficiency of the politicians. These figures are transversally presented in all four types of populism.

3. The presence of technopopulism, where technology is defined from mostly a positive and optimistic perspective, as in many of the techno-libertarian dreams of the possibilities given to democracy by the new digital technologies.

4. The emerging key figure of "meritocracy", a loaded and controversial term, used by politicians in several different ways and sometimes from an ideological perspective. The concept of "meritocracy" and the related semantic constellation are present in different ways in different types of populism, although they are mainly an ideological mean. As Jo Littler stated in 2013, "we should pay close attention to meritocracy because it has become a key ideological means by which plutocracy – or government by a wealthy élite – perpetuates itself through neoliberal culture. It is not, in other words, merely a coincidence that the common idea that we live, or should live, in a meritocratic age co-exists with a pronounced

Table 2.
Four types of populism

	Neo-liberal populism	Social populism (democratic)	National populism (ethnic)	Techno-populism
Basic elements	•Free market •No intervention of the State in economic issues •People as tax-payers •Direct democracy •Techno-libertarianism •Hyper-representation (technical skills possession, technocracy)	•Egalitarianism •Anti-capitalism •People as workers and/or "excluded" •Direct democracy as possibility, participatory democracy as practice •Technology as a tool •Diffused representation	•Ethnic position •Xenophobia •People as nation (imagined) •Religious traditions •Direct democracy •Hyper-representation (authoritarian leaderism) •Emotional figures	•Egalitarianism through the Internet •People as "social community" •Direct democracy •Techno-libertarianism •Hyper-representation (technical skills possession, anti-élite technocracy)
Key figures	•Political élites are corrupted •Government is corrupted, politics is non-efficient •Individualism •Meritocracy as ideology •Rule of law vs rule of the people (penal populism)	•Capitalist élites are corrupted •People as collective entity •Listening to the people •Popular sovereignty •Rule of law	•Migrants as enemies •Christian roots •Authoritarianism and national sovereignty (sovereignism) • "Law and order" (penal populism) •Anger	•Political élites are corrupted •Government is corrupted, politics is non-efficient •Rule of law •Meritocracy as ideology

lack of social mobility and the continuation of vested hereditary economic interests" (see also Littler 2018).

5. The presence of sovereignist populism. Its relationships with the concept of national community and, in general, with exclusionary populism have been launched and supported by new right-wing parties. Even if the anti-system perspective can be implemented by right and left parties mutually, we have noted a strong discursive difference between left-wing parties and right-wing parties regarding the concept of sovereignty. Left-wing parties usually define sovereignty as constitutional popular control, whilst right-wing parties (and especially far-right movements and parties) translate sovereignty into exclusionary sovereignism. Some similarities also exist between exclusionary populism the so-called national/ethnic populism.

6. The logic of "us vs. them" (which is very common in the populist appeal). In this perspective, we can use Weyland's conception of populism. Having presented the "people" as the "losers" of modernization (and of globalization), he identifies the "élites" with the old political class. Indeed, populist supporters consider oligarchies to be the exploiters that have caused their present woes. Therefore, strong attacks against the perceived (or existing) oligarchy have a double function: they enhance the populist leader's image of authority to their electors while contributing to eroding the opponents' legitimacy. The individuation of a political enemy is necessary to unify their support, as John Thompson (1995)

has rightly pointed out, which illustrates the tools through which *ideology* works. It is not surprising that populism emerges in times of crisis: in such cases, allegedly inept and corrupt political leadership often becomes the first target of popular anger, thereby conveying the populist message (Weyland 1996).

7. The strong call for the need to save the Christian roots (or at least "traditional" identitarian roots). Most present in the right-wing populism, this religious argument is used jointly with the rhetoric of defending national sovereignty: this defence, however, is usually symbolized by the narration of contrast to the "invasion of migrants"[11].

8. The adoption of anti-political rhetoric. It seems to be another distinctive characteristic of populism. Anti-politics are only a populist rhetoric that feeds on the clash between "us" and "them": *we the real people against the political institutions dominated by bureaucracies; we the people against the state who exploits citizens through taxes; we the people against the political parties dominated by the "casta"[12]; we the simple people against the intellectuals and professors[13], the other side of the oppressing "casta".*

9. Elements and rhetorical figures of social populism in some radical left-wing formations and even in new civic aggregations (those that we can define as the outcome of the re-politicisation of the post-political). According to some commentators, typical elements of social/democratic populism can be found in the Spanish political party "Podemos".[14]

It is important to avoid confusing anti-political rhetoric with *populist style.* While anti-political rhetoric is strongly connected with populism, populist style is not necessarily a symptom of populism. At the same time, we can also consider anti-political rhetoric as an indicator of a populist discursive style.

Table 3 is our partial re-elaboration of the indicators used by Roberta Bracciale and Antonio Martella (2017), analysing the relationships between Twitter and political leaders. The importance of the media (and the digital media) for the study of populism is widely attested. "The contribution of the media to the establishment of a 'populist Zeitgeist' in the twenty-first century appears to be threefold (…) the function of politically educating the citizenry (once played by mass parties) is now largely delegated to the national media, which in turn favours those telegenic politicians who speak in slogans and soundbites" (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). The indicators of populist style can be very useful to evaluate populist strategies without framing all of them in the same definition of "populism".

We can affirm that anti-political rhetoric adopts a mechanism of ideological *unification*. In other words, anti-politics is absolutely ideological even when it adopts discursive strategies against party "ideologies". At the same time, anti-political discourse maintains a strong relationship with the many faces of the depoliticisation.

Anti-political rhetoric is also characterized by the recourse of "newism" against the "old" (obviously represented by the "non-people") and by a constant reference to specific keywords. Among those, we must highlight the importance of terms such as *efficiency* and *privatization*, the concept of *short-termism* (variously declined), the many forms of *newism*, the insurgence of the rhetoric about the *meritocracy* and the centrality of *technology*.

Among the four types of populism, we have dedicated a special focus to the emergence of technopopulism and its relationships with e-democracy.

4. BETWEEN TECHNOCRACY AND TECHNO-LIBERTARIANISM: THE EMERGENCE OF TECHNOPOPULISM

Technopopulism represents a major emerging "innovation", even though the relationship between populism and technology is not new in the European political scenario. Several commentators have suggested that the old opposition between left and right may have been replaced by the "cleavage" between populism and technocracy (Freeland 2010). We suggest looking at this topic from another perspective: on one hand, the opposition between technocracy and techno-libertarianism[15], and on the other, the relationship between populism and technocracy. "Technocracy holds that there is only one correct policy solution; populism holds that there is only one authentic will of the people" (Müller 2017). This statement means that both, in a certain way, refuse democratic debate and can be interpreted as an outcome of the depoliticisation process. They are, in other words, another aspect of the post-political era: an effect of depoliticisation and a new form of re-politicisation through technology.

Table 3.
Indicators of populist style

Indicators of populist style	Characteristics
Anti-political rhetoric	Anti-system, anti-State, anti-parties, anti-intellectuals
Emotionalisation	Sharing emotions or revealing insights (Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Van Santen & Van Zoonen 2010)
Informality	Adopting a direct, simple, non-formal and non-institutional style (Moffitt & Tormey 2014)
Instrumental actualisation	Exploiting specific events in order to support political bias and applying incorrect inductive reasoning (cherry-picking fallacy) based on current events (Krämer 2014) -> *post-truth tendency?*
Intimisation	Recounting his/her own life (Stanyer 2012)
Negative affect	Appealing to emotions of fear or using apodictic registers to arouse interest, alarm and mobilise people on negative feelings (Alvares & Dahlgren 2016) -> *Anger*
Simplification	Oversimplifying issues and solutions (Alvares & Dahlgren, 2016; Caiani & Graziano 2016)
Storytelling	• Narrating politics • Meritocracy (as a key to go beyond the "corrupted élites")
Exaggerations	The frequent recourse to proverbs, stereotypes, clichés and other expression of "popular wisdom"'
Taboo breaker	Breaking "taboos" and fighting against political correctness (to distinguish oneself from the élite) (Caiani & Graziano 2016; Krämer 2014; Moffitt & Tormey 2014)
Victimhood	• Politicians considering people as not ready to understand their proposals • Politicians focusing on presumed *conspiracies against them,* when they have not achieved their programmes
Vulgarism	Using vulgar language to reach "ordinary people" (Mastropaolo 2008)

Source: Bracciale and Martella (2017) with integrations and modifications.

Figure 3.
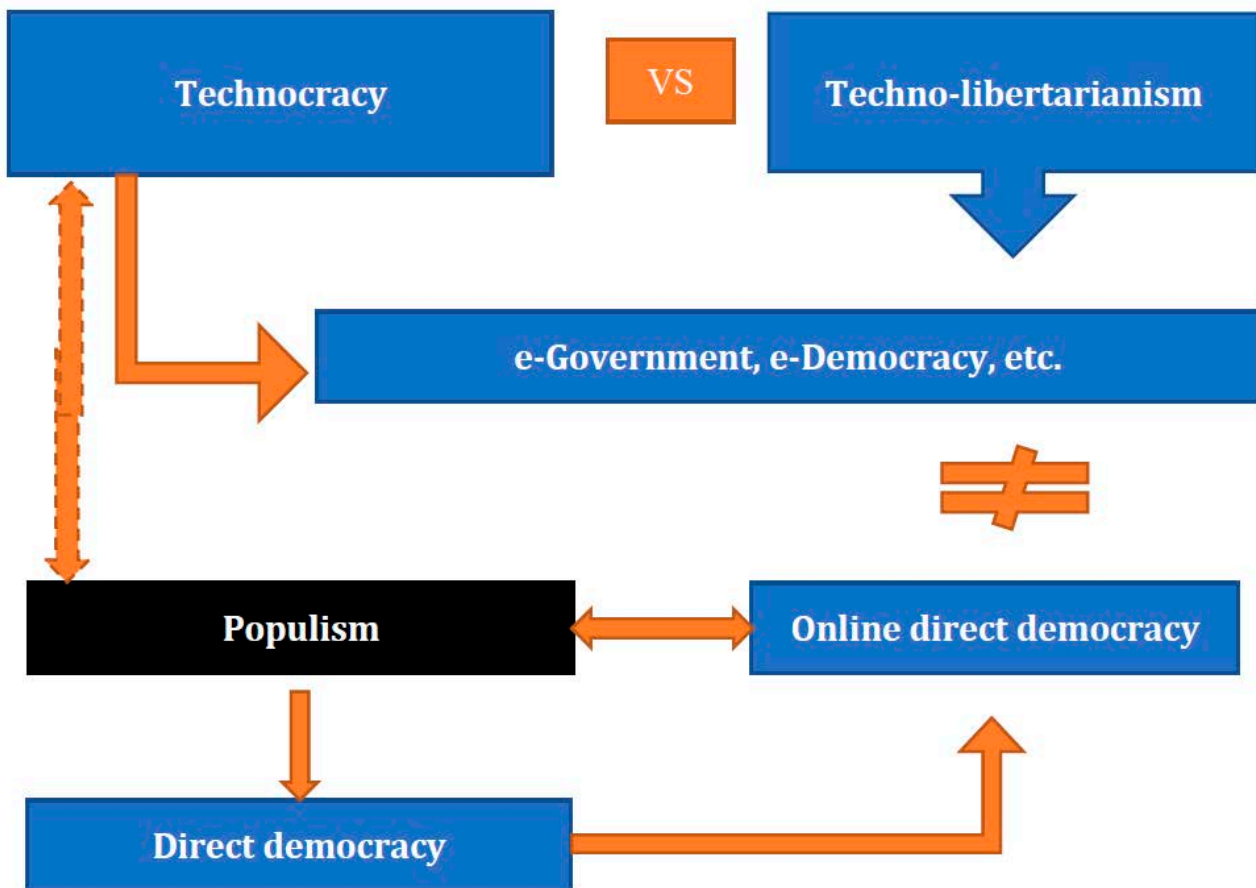*The relationships between technocracy, techno-libertarianism and populism*

Figure 3 illustrates the complicated relationships between the oppositional pair of "technocracy and techno-libertarianism" on one side, and the converging pair of "technocracy and populism" on the other. As shown in Figure 2, the rhetoric on e-government and several forms of e-democracy essentially derives from techno-libertarian instances, but the presence of technocratic tendencies is also evident, particularly through the new public management approach to the re-shaping of governance. New populism, particularly neo-liberal populism, shows a strong connection with the technocratic approach (that is, at the same time, a target of some populist parties and movements). The myth of online direct democracy is an outcome of direct democracy (one of the measures proposed by populist parties to replace the "declining" representation system); it is not connected with the idea of deliberative e-democracy. It is considered an opportunity (mainly arising from democratic participation platforms) to develop "real" direct democracy (online) at a low cost and without party interference.

We agree with Chris Bickerton and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti (2017) that "far from being political opposites (or even correctives) for one another, populism and technocracy can only be understood – and therefore tackled –*together-,* as parallel expression of the same underlying set of phenomena" (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2017: 327).

The rhetoric of digital technologies for participation has been present in Western democracies for the last few years, and it has been de facto legitimized by the new centrality assumed by public participation platforms used by the state to promote open government. However, we should also note that communication and digital media seem to give new opportunities for political inclusion, from e-voting technicalities to the computerization of organizational infrastructure and the circuits of parliamentary decision-making until the creation of a new public sphere centred on discursive and participatory and deliberative practices. Technology, in other words, can also play a role in the renewal of old mass parties (now often liquid and stratarchically presidentialized) and new ones (caught between franchise models and genuinely participatory trends). It is also important to be precise about the different perspectives on e-government and open government. There is not just one model of e-government; we can consider at least three different models, as highlighted by Table 4.

Table 4.
Models of e-government

| Models of e-government	Main characteristics
Managerial	- ICT as a tool for information - No interactivity *Top-down* communication
Consultative	- ICT as a tool for improvement of *public policy* - Interactivity with specific *stakeholders* - Two-way communication, managed by public administrations
Participatory	- ICT as a tool for democratic innovation - Broader interactivity - Horizontal communication (dialogic dimension)

Source: Reddick 2011; De Blasio 2014.

In the *managerial model*, the prevailing communication logic is top-down and essentially monological; if a two-way communication model is present in the *consultative model* of e-government, it is only in the *participatory* one that communication presents a dialogic dimension. The new forms of open government should theoretically be framed in this third model and should also decline towards deliberative and participatory forms of e-democracy. In reality, the new public management approach has empowered the managerial model of e-government, creating a strange situation in which a tool created to improve social participation has been transformed into a new element to increase apathy ("why participate if we are only responding targets and not protagonists in policy making?"). It has also been noted that very often, there is conceptual overlapping among open government, e-government and e-democracy in European public policies on institutional reshaping and digital participation (De Blasio and Sorice 2016). On the other hand, this overlapping is absolutely natural if e-democracy is conceived as a tool to make consulting people (and voting / e-voting / i-voting) more efficient and not as a tool for active political participation[16].

At this level, we can observe peculiar convergence between technocracy and techno-libertarianism, as graphically shown in Figure 4.

One of the effects of populist discourse is reducing open government to its managerial model (effectively eliminating its innovative dimension) and e-democracy to a simplistic tool of direct democracy through the Internet. In other words, it presents evidence of depoliticisation. Technopopulism can at least be defined as the belief that the 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' (Lincoln 1953 [1863]) is achievable by means of information and communications technology. The term *belief* denotes here an ideology, not in the Marxian sense of false consciousness, but in the Althusserian sense of a set of ideas that have a material existence (Althusser 1971). Technopopulism can also be understood in Foucauldian terms as an emerging discourse (Foucault 1972), that is, as a body of knowledge, norms, attitudes, and practices that arise from the hybridization of two pre-existing discourses: populism and techno-libertarianism" (Deseriis 2017: 441). Marco Deseriis also distinguishes between two variants of technopopulism: "a technocratic and leaderless variant, which pursues and enacts meritocratic forms of democratic participation; and a leaderist, more strictly populist, variant wherein charismatic leaders play a critical role in conferring unity and identity to their parties" (Ibidem). The two variants are linked, in different ways, to the emergence of the "platform-parties".[17]

Figure 4.
Convergence between technocracy and techno-libertarianism
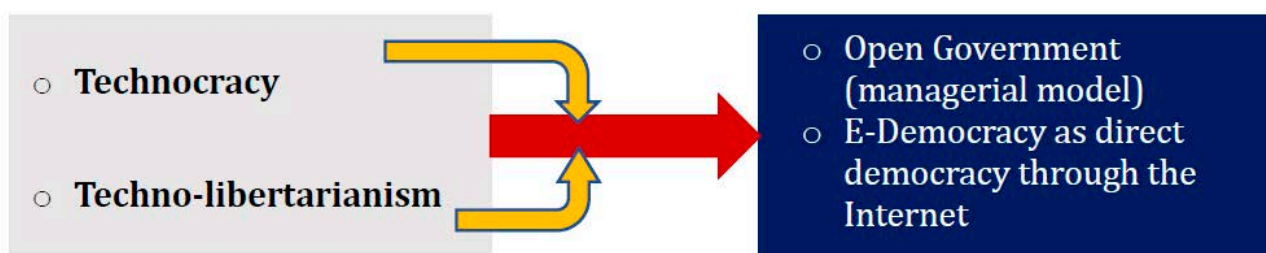
Technopopulism can be considered a basic element of new trends of depoliticisation. If social populism – in Laclau's (2005) perspective – can represent a re-politicisation tool, technopopulism constitutes a way to strengthen the depoliticisation process in Western de-mocracies. The tools of democratic innovation (such as e-democracy, particularly a truly deliberative e-democ-racy) can reinforce democratic participation; however, they often do the opposite, becoming effective enhanc-ers (directly or indirectly) of populist tendencies.

NOTES

1. The political parties' crisis obviously has many causes; certainly, a very important one is represented by the redefinition of cleavages on which traditional parties founded their own legitimacy and their collective iden-tity. It is no coincidence that "high / low" or "centre / peripheral" fractures are more suitable today to explain new social conflicts.

2. The economic crisis has been aggravated by the fact that it was recognized just as a debt crisis derived from the public debt of peripheral EU countries, without un-derstanding all the variables of the problem. European citizens (and not only) have been discussing the role of formal democratic institutions and of political parties, considered too passive to[compared to?] the interna-tional institutions, without the power and the abilities to act in an independent and sovereign way.

3. The concept of representation is traditionally linked to two reference poles: on one hand, the electoral dimen-sion, and on the other, the notion of participation. In fact, this connection is relatively recent and finds its roots in the "democracy-election" connection, which is ideological. See Manin (2012), or how James Madison (1787) judged democracy as "a show full of troubles and disputes", or also the analysis of van Reybrouck (2016) who analyses the elective method as a power control system by economic oligarchies, legitimated by the popular vote. See also De Blasio and Sorice 2018.

4. The Italian Constitution, for example, holds that the members of Parliament have a "non-imperative man-date" (or "free mandate") to guarantee their independ-ence from political parties' oligarchies. A campaign to instate an "imperative mandate" was launched by the Five-Star Movements before the 2013 National Elections.

5. Mansbridge (2003) stated that the traditional idea of representation as delegation co-exists with three other forms of representation that are pervasively present in democratic systems: a) anticipatory representation, b) gyroscopic representation and, c) surrogate represen-tation. She considered these forms as "cumulative" and "complementary, not oppositional" (ivi: 526). Surrogate representation concerns the interests hidden beyond a specific electoral constituency. It "plays the normatively critical role of providing representation to voters who lose in their own district" (ivi: 523).

6. A variation of authoritarian leadership occurs when politicians define themselves as "new": this situation constitutes an example of "top-down populism" or "governmental populism" (Revelli 2017: 26).

7. According to Alfio Mastropaolo (2015) the phenom-enon of hyper-representation arises from the symbolic deconstruction that has struck the traditional parties and their internal organization. This "destabilization of representation" has produced various effects, among which the most evident is that of "hyper-representa-tion". This destabilized representation is a liberalized representation: different social actors, also favored by the media, occupy the public scene and function as agents of symbolic representation, often claiming the agency of social groups. The hyper-representation is based on the hyper-pluralism of the societies in which we live but at the same time it nourishes that hyper-pluralism. The concept of hyper-representation is also connected with the notion of "representative claim" as used by Michael Saward (2010).

8. The concept of anti-politics has been defined by schol-ars and researchers in several ways. As for "populism", it is a loaded term that is very often used (particularly in the media frame) as a denigrating word. Here, we use the concept of anti-politics in a merely instrumen-tal way, as done by Fawcett, Flinders, Hay and Wood (2017): "public disillusionment and disengagement, as-sociated with declining turnout at elections, declining membership of parties and political movements, and public opposition to paradigmatic policy agendas".

9. In that research, which is not the purpose of this arti-cle, we have combined a) a content analysis on po-litical parties (based on parties' documents and their election manifestos, mainly using evaluative assertion analysis); and b) a secondary analysis of leaders' dis-courses.

10. "Radical left" is an ambiguous term, as it designates both Marxist/post-Marxist parties and new politi-cal forces such as Podemos in Spain. The semantic meaning of the expression can also vary in different geographic contexts: Jeremy Corbyn, for example, has been defined by newspapers both as a "radical leftist" and a "traditional social-democratic leader". The term "radical left" should be used with caution.

11. The use of religion is much more about "belonging" than about "belief" and revolves around two main notions: restoration and battle. The restorationist discourse is based on a specific idea of culture as a set of codes (theoretically opposed, for example, to the definition of culture used by the British Cultural Studies or the con-cept of *diaspora* as used by Stuart Hall). Restoration is also based on the idea of the need for a battle to defend "nation" or "territory" from "alien" religions. This battle, anyway, more strongly concerns borders and economic factors than practices of faith. See Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy (2016).

12. The term "caste" is suddenly being used everywhere in journalism to emphasise the separateness (and privi-lege) of "professional politicians".

13. Anti-intellectual rhetoric relied on the development of a new media hegemony that Massimiliano Panarari (2010) appropriately terms *sub-cultural hegemony*. The de-legitimisation of intellectual work is ideologi-cal and tends to side-line argumentation in favour of shouting spectacles, replacing the principle of author-ity with the "principle of majority". It is an international phenomenon: see, for example, the anti-intellectual statements of Donald Trump (Leonid Bershkidky on Chicago Tribune of 14 November 2016: http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-don-ald-trump-revolution-elites-intellectuals-20161114-sto-ry.html). For a taxonomy of anti-political rhetoric, see Sorice 2014.

14.   The Spanish party is often associated with the Italian Five Star Movement; it would be correct to underline the many differences between the two political aggregations. There are in fact considerable differences in terms of a) specific *constituencies* of the two parties (Segatti and Capuzzi 2016); b) the internal organization and the policy proposal process; c) their political assets (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; Vittori 2017).

15.   Techno-libertarianism is rooted in the cyber-punk cultures. Its most known theorist are the cyber-activist John Perry Barlow who wrote a "declaration for the independence of cyberspace" (https://www.eff.org/it/cyberspace-independence), the founder of Electronic Frontier Foundation, John Gilmore, and the US scientist Thurman John Rodgers who strongly supported the so-called "laissez-faire capitalism" (Friedman, Mackey and Rodgers 2005).

16.   From this perspective, it is also possible to analyse other aspects of depoliticisation, from *philanthropocapitalism* (Wilson 2015) to cosmopolitanism and multipolarity (Jaeger 2015).

17.   The party-platform can develop within participatory logic but can also be placed in the frame of hyper-representation. In the latter case the leader (supreme representative of "the whole" people) creates a symbolic connection with the "super-people". In this frame an individualistic conception of participation is evoked and the emphasis on direct democracy delegitimises any forms of participatory democracy.

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