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TITOLO SESSIONE	Qualità della vita: processi di consultazione e deliberativi
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TITOLO	Granting legitimacy to wellbeing and sustainability indicators through public deliberation and civil society engagement: a case study

ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that the challenge of the definition of wellbeing indicators does not concern the mere technical and methodological sphere but is mainly a matter of definition of the priorities that should guide a society and hence the choices made by policy makers. Given that, the selection of leading indicators represents a political issue, which concerns democracy and needs therefore to result from a legitimization process. Moreover, at the present time, it is an uncontested claim that the pursue of wellbeing has a direct relation to democratic citizenship and the full exert of political, civil, and social rights. In the development of indicators becomes therefore essential to follow the democratic legitimacy principle according to which each one who is involved in the consequences or in the application of norms should be involved in the very process of deliberation about such norms.

Involving citizens in developing indicators is a quite widespread practice in some countries, the so-called "community indicators", yet it is usually limited to small local experiences. When dealing with regional or national territorial levels the inclusion of citizens becomes more difficult and the participatory process should instead refer to organized civil society. In front of the sustained pluralisation of the ethical and cultural forms of life and of the increase of social complexity, traditional representative democratic institutions are showing a number of difficulties, while a stronger role is gained by civil society which shows a decisive, though still undervalued, cognitive potential in the process of democratic legitimacy.

Community indicators developed at local level are among the very few examples in literature of composite and sets of indicators that address the legitimacy problem, but none of them is extending the experience at national level and taking into account a global view of wellbeing and sustainability, nor they are tackling that legitimacy problem with a theoretical instrumentation based on the findings of political-philosophical research – which is one of the aims present study. Furthermore, in the vast majority of cases the definition of wellbeing, the consequent selection of relevant dimensions and eventually the decision on the weighting system is made solely by academic experts.

We present here the case of the Index of Regional Quality of Development (QUARS) proposed by the Italian civil society network Sbilanciamoci! which grants its legitimacy through a deliberative process – here discussed in both its descriptive and normative implications –involving major Italian civil society organizations, overcoming a number of drawbacks due to the contribution of scholars alone. In particular, it is probably best practice in representing and encouraging one of the essential principles of democratic legitimacy: public participation. In the context of official indicators-based reporting, this is an aspect which is often neglected, and whereas the measure we propose is very much limited in its replication because of data availability, it still represents an innovative approach to the measure of progress which stands as a particularly interesting case study and deserves further investigation.

