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**SHAPING OF THE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP
IN THE POST-TOTALITARIAN SOCIETIES.
REFLECTIONS AFTER 15 YEARS OF EU ENLARGEMENT**



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Antonella Nuzzaci, Andrea Natalini and Paola Rizzi

1. Local context including: a brief history of authoritarianism/totalitarianism. The transformation. The Current Situation

The end of World War I caused a series of political, social, and economic tensions. Factories in northern Italy struggled to move from war production to peace production; moreover, the sharp fall in consumption caused a contraction in industrial production, resulting in unemployment. In addition to the unemployed in industry, there were war veterans, who were also looking for work. To this difficult social situation was added the failure to obtain during the peace negotiations those territories that had been promised to Italy to convince it to go to war alongside France, Great Britain and Russia. This gave rise to the feeling in public opinion that Italy, despite having won the war, had been betrayed by its allies. This fueled discontent among veterans, who spoke of “mutilated victory”, and who gathered in organizations aimed at seeing the sacrifices of former combatants recognized. One of these organizations was founded in Milan in 1919 by Benito Mussolini, a socialist in favor of Italy's entry into the war, who called it Fasci Italiani di Combattimento, and initially proposed himself as an alternative to both the right and the left. The organization founded by Mussolini was immediately characterized by its violence against the left, especially the Bolsheviks, who were very active in organizing strikes and factory occupations. For two years Italy was covered by violent clashes between fascists and Bolsheviks. In 1921 the Italian Combat Bundles were renamed the National Fascist Party, which managed to get a few dozen deputies elected to Parliament. In 1922 a few tens of thousands of fascists marched on Rome, where they arrived on October 28 without encountering any resistance. On October 30, King Victor Emmanuel III commissioned Benito Mussolini to form a new government. Before the 1924 elections Mussolini passed a law by parliament guaranteeing two-thirds of the party's seats that he had obtained at least 25% of the vote. The National Fascist Party won the elections, which consolidated mussolini's power, which remained at the helm of the country until 1943. Between 1925 and 1926, laws were enacted that suppressed press freedom, dissolved all

parties, created a Special Court for the Defense of the State to persecute political opponents of the regime. Fascism had become a dictatorship.

The fascist regime lasted until July 1943, when Mussolini was dismissed and arrested by King Victor Emmanuel III. In September, Italy signed an armistice with the Allies, who had since landed in the South. Once the armistice was made public, the king fled to the south under allied protection. On September 12, 1943 Mussolini was liberated by the Germans and put in charge of a puppet government in northern Italy, called the Italian Social Republic, which lasted until the end of the war, on April 25, 1945. In the referendum of June 2, 1946 the Italians chose to abandon the monarchy and choose the parliamentary republic. Soon after, work began on the Constituent Assembly responsible for preparing the new Republican Constitution, which came into force on January 1, 1948. The Italian political landscape immediately polarized on two parties: the Christian Democracy, of moderate Catholic inspiration, and the Italian Communist Party. The first general elections in 1948 were won by the Christian Democracy, and Italy chose the Western camp. Thanks to this he obtained, together with other European countries, large American funding under the Marshall Plan for post-war reconstruction. In 1949, Italy joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and in 1955 was admitted to the United Nations. On 25 March 1957 Italy, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg signed two Treaties in Rome for cooperation in the field of nuclear energy (Euratom) and economic cooperation (EEC - European Economy Community). These treaties represent the first in a series of multilateral agreements that will lead to the current European Union, of which Italy is one of the founding countries. The Italian political system that emerged from the end of the Second World War is that of a parliamentary republic, which is based on the classic system of division of legislative, executive and judicial powers.

The democratic process in Italy is now mature, on the same level as the other EU countries, guaranteeing sufficient representativeness and all fundamental democratic rights.

2. Conclusions from the survey

There were 132 respondents to the survey. The sample, from the point of view of gender, age group, employment, degree and region of origin, is composed of predominantly female (56.5%) and male (43.5%) participants. 91.6% of those aged between 20 and 60, with a prevalence of those aged between 30 and 40.

The sample is as follows:

- for the most part (37.40%) subjects belonging to the category called "Intellectual, scientific and highly specialized professions" (archaeologist, architect, teacher, engineer, professional, doctor, musician, researcher and writer);
- university students and PhD students (17.56%);
- subjects belonging to the category "Executive professions in office work", to which employees in the public and private sectors belong (15.27%);
- "Legislators, entrepreneurs and senior management" category (entrepreneurs and managers - 5.34%);
- unemployed respondents (4.58%);
- "Technical Professions" category, (consultants, educators and tour guides - 3.82%);
- "Plant operators, fixed and mobile machinery workers and vehicle drivers" (3.05%);
- "Skilled professions in business and services"(2.29%);
- "Skilled workers and farmers" and "Unskilled professions" (2.29%).

Participants were then asked to declare the highest title obtained. The results were grouped into 7 categories according to the reference course of education: primary school diploma, 1st level secondary school diploma, 2nd level secondary school diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree, PhD and university master's degree (1st and 2nd level). 2.9% of the population have a level of education lower than upper secondary education; 21.6% of the population have a secondary school diploma; 61.9% of respondents have a bachelor's and/or

master's degree; the remaining 13.5% have a level of education higher than the degree level, including PhD and 1st and 2nd degree university masters.

Regarding the region of residence, most respondents live in the areas of Central and Southern Italy and the Islands, in particular Lazio, Abruzzo and Sardinia Region. In northern Italy, Emilia-Romagna is the region with the highest number of respondents. Finally, 1.5% of subjects come from foreign countries.

Citizen: the survey shows that for 91.7% of those surveyed, the active citizen is the one who regularly participates to the elections voting, but not as a candidate (57.6%), and that considers it's important to participate (72.0%), even occasionally, in non-political social activities (such as neighbourhood activities) and to be considered a trustworthy person on whom one can always rely (68.9%).

In fact, most of the respondents say that they have never run for a general election and are not interested in doing so (51.5%), although 36.7% leave open the possibility of being able to do so in future, while a smaller percentage (22.8%) declares that he/she had previously been a candidate in an election, mainly municipal ones (35.0%) (35.0%).

The majority of respondents say they are members of non-political social associations 53.8%) and a large part of them have never been part of it (36.7%), although a substantial percentage do not rule out being able to join associations in the future. Among those who claim to be part of social associations, those who adhere to associations for voluntary (10%), cultural and recreational activities (19.8%). The involvement of the sample in activities spontaneously organised by citizens (social movements, neighbourhood, etc.) concerns 41.7% of the subjects interviewed, who appear perfectly mirrored to those who are not involved in these kinds of activities (46.2), but which does not exclude doing so in the future.

Social integration and the community: when it comes to assessing the level of social integration, the majority of respondents are satisfied with it, even if they consider the quality of collaboration to be almost unchanged over time or significantly improved. Only 9.85% of respondents believe it has worsened compared to the past.

With regard to the assessment of mutual trust in the community, respondents consider themselves in 69.7% of cases on average satisfied or very satisfied with the level of trust present in their community, while in 30.3% of cases they are not satisfied with its reliability.

In addition, 47.7% believe that the level of trust inherent in their community has remained almost unchanged over time, while 43.2% say that overall it has improved; only a small fraction of respondents (9.1%) think it is worsening.

Then, it emerges the image of an integrated "citizen", responsible for the action and interested in the community to which he belongs to.

Transition and policy change: compared with 1945-48, almost all respondents (92.4%) positively evaluate the transition period from the fall of fascism to the approval of the Constitution, noting that it has had a predominantly positive impact on their city or municipality (90.2%); only 7.6% of respondents, in fact, consider this change and its impact on their community and city /municipality negative.

On a personal level, the political change is considered positive by most respondents (86.5%), although the analysis of the data shows that the percentage of those who consider it negative, compared to the social dimension, is a small percentage (11.8%); the percentage of those who declare that they do not know how to make an assessment or who do not provide an answer remains low (1.7%). This is also to be put in close contact with the age of the subjects interviewed.

Compared to the referendum of 1946, it was asked to evaluate the choice made by citizens about the governmental form of the Italian State (between monarchy and republic). This choice is mainly referred to as a symbol of national wisdom and reconciliation for 88.6%, connoting itself as an example/model of democratic practices for 93.2% of respondents and a business of the elite that passes "above the heads of ordinary citizens" from 36.4%, although, in the latter option, the percentage of those who think that such wait is irrelevant is around 60.6%. 17.4% even see it as a "national betrayal", although this appears irrelevant to 78.8% of subjects.

European integration and membership: when you move on to questions about European integration, where respondents are asked to assess the implications that EU membership has had on their country/city, most declare the presence of post-effects (78.8%), while the rest consider this membership negatively or prefer not to answer. Compared to general EU membership, most rate it in a positive sense (75.0%), but the percentage of those who consider such membership negative (25.0%) rises.

With regard to the personal benefits of being a member of the EU, the most important ones would concern the possibilities of traveling freely in Europe (93.9%), followed by that of enriching one's cultural experiences (83.3%), then that of being able to feel like European citizens (77.3%) and the increase in one's professional competence (65.9%) and, finally, that of the use of European funds (50.8%), but the latter sees 45.5% of respondents as irrelevant. It is interesting to note the responses of those who have responded to the "other" category, underlining the existence of personal advantages related to the use of the Eurocurrency (33.3%), personal improvement (33.3%) and the feeling of living in a conflict-protected environment (33.3%).

The respondents then go on to state that the negative causes suffered on a personal level, due to being members of the European Union, are mainly due to the emigration of relatives abroad (25.8%), to the decrease in the sense of personal security (20.5%), which however seems irrelevant for 50.0% of the subjects, to the possible sense of alienation (18.9%), irrelevant instead for 76.5%, to the greatest difficulties of finding a job (27.3%), but this is also to be considered an aspect not relevant by 70.5% of respondents.

Those who responded to the "other" statement specify additional causes related to being members of the European Union, which concern the poor prospects for life and personal growth (50.0%) and the impossibility of leaving the European Union (50.0%).

Civic practices in democracy: when it comes to civic practices in democracy, respondents are convinced that the thing that is most needed in everyday life is to have a video surveillance system (50.0%) to have meeting places and social community centers (46.2%), to have places where you can practice your beliefs as churches, temples etc. (85.6%), to have places to park (61.4%), to be able to count on spaces where it is possible to picnic with friends (73.5%), to have means of protection such as recensions against intruders (36.4%), but this is irrelevant for 61.4% of subjects. 44.7% think that the quality of life in the city depends exclusively on themselves and their family and relatives, on good cooperation with their neighbours (82.6%), on the activities of local authorities (94.7%), on the actions of the central government (91.7%) and the activities of non-governmental organisations (84.8%). The highest percentage of respondents (31.8%) it considers that it cannot define whether, as citizens, they can have any influence on what happens in their country, while 30.3% of respondents believe that they can influence the decisions of their country, while 37.1% believe that they have no impact.

Regarding the ability to influence what happens in the place where you live, 31.8% of respondents feel that they cannot define whether, as citizens, they have an influence on what happens in their city. 37.9% of respondents thought they had an influence on their city's decisions, while 30.3% felt they had none.

Citizenship skills: in the opinion of those who have had the greatest influence in learning civil and democratic behaviour, respondents say that most of those who influenced them in life were parents and family (94.7%), school (92.4%), school, colleagues and friends (81.8%), workshops and training courses carried out by non-governmental organisations (59.8%), traditional media such as television and newspapers (51.5%) and internet discussion forums (37.1%). Respondents believe that 51.5% of the best decisions for the community should be made by a strong leader (while 46.2% this is irrelevant), 92.4% by community representatives elected in democratic elections, 86.4% by experts and technicians, and 56.8% by ordinary citizens. The fact that the latter aspect is considered irrelevant by 40.9% is a very significant fact. Respondents say that for them patriotism means sacrificing life for the fatherland (50.8%), publicly demonstrating national pride (51.5%), but above all collaborating with others and sacrificing themselves for their community (95.5%), being honest (87.1%) and doing their job well (81.1%).

3. Conclusions from the in-depth interviews

For the needs of the project, a qualitative research method was adopted using the technique of the semi-structured interview in depth. The interviews made it possible to grasp central aspects, asking further questions than those foreseen in the survey (re-launches). These interviews allowed the respondent to speak freely, referring to all the topics covered, and had the merit of providing a complete overview of the phenomenon in question, noting the attitudes and behaviors of the respondents in their environment.

The interview was aimed at privileged witnesses such as:

I-1 - Farmer of a farm (Emilia Romagna, Faenza)

I-2 - Archaeologist (Sardinia, Sassari)

I-3 - Architect (Lazio, Vignanello)

I-4 - Director of farmers' organization (Veneto, Noale)

- I-5 - Teacher (Umbria, Marsciano)
- I-6 - Teacher (Veneto, Venice - Mestre)
- I-7 - Philosopher (Lazio, Fiumicino)
- I-8 - Trainer (Sicily, Palermo)
- I-9 - Surveyor (Umbria, Marsciano)
- I-10 - Teacher (Campania, Avellino)
- I-11 - Real Estate Broker (Sardinia, Tissi)
- I-12 - Professor (Veneto, Venice)
- I-13 - Historical (Abruzzo, L'Aquila)
- I-14 - Trainer (Sardinia, Sassari)

The interviews focused on:

- Local democracy, civic society and social capital
- Attitudes towards transformation
- Memory of the authoritarian / totalitarian past
- Attitudes towards European integration

A brief narrative reading of the interviews is proposed below.

Changes linked to the place of residence: with respect to changes related to the place where the respondents live, on the one hand their declarations show little changes with respect to the territory to which they **belong**, to the point that "little has changed, and not what was necessary" (I-1) or even that, in some cases, the situation has worsened (I-10) or that specific problems have arisen ("a complicated problem" I-13). On the other hand, however, the statements of most respondents mark the presence of a “**positive change**” (I-2), determined by a greater "awareness [...] citizens", which urges them to engage in local associations to

"support the most needy" (I-3) and the "**active participation of the citizen**" (I-2). In essence, the statements of the participants certainly show a higher level of democracy over time (I-4), but a lower level of sharing or commitment of the **institutions**, which leads the citizen to have a certain "**distrust**" towards them (I-1), as well as towards the political parties (I-4). This mistrust would have led to a gradual departure of citizens from the institutions, leading to less and less involvement over time. Respondents also mention a strong impoverishment, especially of the elderly population (I-4), an aspect apparently exacerbated by the Covid-19 emergency (I-8). This economic impoverishment, which in recent years has mainly affected Italian **cities** (I-11), is attributed mainly to the **2008** crisis, that led to the closure of numerous businesses with the consequent reduction of family incomes" (I-9), which has produced "social malaise and a feeling of strong antagonism and protest towards the local political class" (I-9), which mirrors "what happened at national level" (I-9). This would have helped to widen the **economic gap**, already present, "which divides the two realities" (I-4). Locally "many activities have closed [...] The crime rate and drug dealing have increased" (I-6), leading to a lack of '**citizens' involvement**'. However, it is stressed that the "decisions to be taken should be diversified in accordance with the territory characteristics. This has never been done and it is unlikely to be taken into account" (I-6).

There is a local community: some realities, such as that of the average-size municipalities, it seems that not much has changed over time: "Ours is a local democracy that is a little immobile, that precisely because of the kind of development the country had, still lives by many clientelisms" (I-6). The problem for the interviewees becomes above all that of the difference between the "large community" and the "small community", in which a different vision would be expressed "of democracy that immediately scales on the very small local community. everything revolves around this concept of community" (I-5). This aspect is also stressed in the answers given to the question concerning European integration, where the size of the place of residence and work plays a fundamental role for the respondent. With respect to the sense of belonging to the community and sharing with it, the respondents perceive in the past a "sharing of traditions, of the common space, very different", which over time has also changed due to the presence of "foreigners", which are interpreted for someone as a problem (I-1) and for someone else as "immigrants who have also integrated" (I-5) or again as a push for the change of an entire city (I-13). This change is perceived by respondents as

gradual, thanks to the policy of previous years" (I-5) and as positive in terms of openness, as it allowed comparison, respectful cohabitation, although "it was not easy" (I-5). It is evident from what has been said a form of regression, although some respondents declare that their city (Palermo) has "never experienced a democratic deficit" (I-8). It can be perceived from the "voice" of the interviewees the image of an Italian democracy "halved", not accomplished, "immature" (I-6), a deterioration of the democracy, with emptying of parliament's role, that brought forward the so-called 'strong men' " (I-6). In a country of "uncritical fans" (I-6) many "have succumbed to the flattery of populism and sovereignty, ready to seek a scapegoat for their respective misfortunes. (I-11). Some respondents believe that this behavior resides in the desire of Italians to be guided (I-1) That partially explains the rise of the fascism. There was engagement. And then the big demonstrations [...] spoke to the heart or if you prefer the belly, not the mind. So the Italians didn't defend themselves. They applauded, they got involved, they ate [...] So there was an endorsement, saying there was no support would be wrong" (I-12).

Follow a "leader" to solve problems. Italians joined the "fascism" because otherwise they would be persecuted. (I-13). But "when fascism increased its "rate of authoritarianism" after the alliance with Hitler, ended up in making citizens' lives difficult" (I-1). "This led to a "partisan war, a civil war" that led to the liberation from Fascism [...] It is not true that only the communists fought: the partisans were not all communists [...] there were partisans of all political faiths, there were also monarchical ones. It was a part of the population that rebelled and wanted the end of that regime" (I-12). "Some citizens (probably of poor civic and social culture) are easily influenced by extremist political ideas that tend to present the return of "differently democratic" regimes as the remedy to all the problems of society" (I-6).

The prerequisites of democracy and the European Union: have Italians defended themselves? Over time, however, the "spirit of survival allowed some to raise their heads and begin to defend the rights of all" (I-6). From here the initial assumptions "of the European Union" that was precisely the democracy of the member states coming to life for the interviewees, only democracy "on paper". This is, however, the time when we go to the polls. "As the system is set up, most of the time what is promised in the election campaign is not achieved. So, let's say it's a democratic system with strong limitations [...] so often what is promised in the election campaign for some reason contradict other indications that come

from the European Union, so the result is that the will of the voters is almost always disregarded" (I-1).

Europe is to be understood as a bit of a 'enclosure', an area of circulation of ideas, because ideas 'do not consider or recognize borders (I-2). **Being inside Europe for respondents has "many advantages":**

- " Just think of the great possibilities to freely travel, having cultural exchanges with other countries and realities, the system of funding and projects for the improvement of the social fabric and local economy" - I-5);

- "just think of freedom of movement, exchange, training and the presence of young people

- given all these elements, the movement of men and women in a relationship of freedom brings only positive construction" (I-2).

In addition to these advantages, however, there are also many concerns in the interviewees, what is called "the other side of the coin", that is, "the economic and financial one, in which our Italy suffers greatly" (I-5). The problem is where "we will all go", the respondents ask, with "especially at a very delicate time like this when Covid-19 and the global health crisis are worsening our conditions" (I-5) of life.

Civic competences: the interviewees state that the civic competences training it is up to :

- **The school** "the most important institution" (I-8), which is a place of learning "since the childhood for history and civic education" (I-9), which "has a tremendous task in the formation of consciences, in the formation also of democratic culture that goes hand in hand with democracy" (I-14), "because it is the most widespread, the most rooted in the territory, it is really the most important place where the citizens of tomorrow are trained" (I-8), which "in recent years is trying to encourage democratic practices (just think of the introduction of citizenship and constitution teaching in the school curriculum and which is part of the oral examination of the baccalaureate exam)" (I-6). The school is "the beacon" (I-7), but certainly, the school, as it is structured, is not able to transmit democratic practices [...] staying at a desk 6-8 hours a day motionless is a practice of passivity, not democratic participation. The school, according to the interviewees, represents "the place of learning par excellence and social life", where cultural growth, "comparison, respect for people, the principles of freedom" are

determined, a growth that is completed by associationism which adds "other elements of common and public life" (I-4).

- **The family:** the family is recognized "as the first institution that should teach democratic practices" (I-3) and the school "as the first institution where democratic practices must be taught as children, with activities related to children, because children must grow up" (I-5), taking with them their cultural baggage throughout their lives". The family "for certain values is the interface with the community" (I-5). However, if parents have "good civic skills, most probably they passed on their children. In a family with good democratic values, perhaps it is also an environment where democratic practice is lived in decision-making. (I-7). The family "should have a training role [...] however, sometimes the results from a family point of view unfortunately leave a lot to be desired, or even create damages difficult to fix" (I-14).

- **The media and civic skills:** the media should convey civic skills "doing their job at their best, that is making people aware of their rights and duties [...] the quality of journalism in Italy has dropped sharply [...] In particular [...] the role of the local media is somehow more positive than the national press, both because of its proximity to the citizen and of a dialogue among journalist, citizen and politician (I-7). The media could be important vehicles of citizenship but often "generate a lot of false information" (I-5) and require "stricter rules to protect especially the younger age groups and more vigilance from the media owners" (I-4). The "spread of propagandas puts civic sense at risk, creating more and more hatred and separation and a gradual loss of democracy" (I-14).

- **Associationism** can be represented as "many bulbs that, lit up on a territory, illuminate it [...] it arises from totally different sensitivities, expresses - fortunately - a great, extraordinary plurality of positions, and therefore each one makes a kind of 'indoctrination', depending on the reasons why the association is constituted [...] is a very varied world, as such acts for but also against democratic processes. It is an open place such as families" (I-8). Associations work horizontally, with democratic experience [...] the world of associations is so diverse that there is everything. If we talk about what associations and NGOs are, they are experiences of specific direct democracy in one area, and advocacy and institutional dialogue are also being done to solve concrete problems" (I-7).

- **All institutions** contribute or assist the "individual, as a citizen, to learn good practice" (I-10). Each institution becomes important for the "transmission of democratic values, that cannot be entrusted to a single one as each one presents see them from a different perspective. Furthermore, delegating this role to just one would make the latter excessively burdened with 'work' while the life of each of us takes place on different levels: the family, the school, the working environment, the activities we carry out, etc. However, family and school play a more important role because the human being spends the first years of his life there, the most formative, the one who gives a deep imprinting" (I-11). The local institutions are those more easily accessible by the citizen (I-3), there is a more direct relationship with the citizen and above all "you can verify the results of the policies implemented" (I-1). "They are all important" (I-5) because they bear the "responsibility for informing the community on the basic concepts of democracy, active participation, respect for the common good" (I-2).

- **The family and the school as training institutions for citizenship:** the family and the school give "the basic education to the citizen [...] once the citizen has been formed, the local community must give the opportunity to achieve a shared democracy [...] The media has a very strong responsibility in all this" (I-13). This aspect, however, is very important, since the "different governments in Italy have tried to influence education and I find this a very dangerous thing because school is the basis of the citizen's training and trying to manipulate this training means trying to manipulate the core of the citizen's sense of nationality, therefore I would say that certainly the school is the most important institution from this point of view (I-13).

In these interviews, the value of the school and the family is indisputably affirmed as the founding institutions where the democratic profile and fabric is built "for the formation of an individual who will be the future citizen" (I-10), although the cooperation of all the institutions to the construction of the citizen is emphasized. To complete the civic growth, associations and local institutions are confirmed to be extremely important for the evolution of citizenship and for supporting schools and families in building civic skills, without neglecting the role played by the media to convey an "unpolluted" information.

It remains for the respondents the problem of how to "teach democracy [...] There are practices that can be taught. There is a fundamental practice that can be taught: thinking with your own head. This is the hardest thing to teach" (I-12).

4. Summary

The interviews reveal many aspects of the city which involve daily and institutional life in democratic societies. It is clear that cities are important both in cultivating democratic skills in day-to-day politics and in linking them to other aspects of human existence. In the investigations, the "democratic citizen" seems dissatisfied with democratic spaces and forms, in the sense that he less and less trusts his representatives and feels deeply dissatisfied with the action taken by the institutions, due to the fact, that over time the relationships that bind him to the political system have changed. Who are the ones who most manifest this malaise appears to be a controversial problem. In this direction, the objectives of the first survey were to detect people's convictions and attitudes to European integration and citizenship. Decoding the dissatisfaction or satisfaction shown by citizens and assessing their impact on democratic coexistence are aspects that are worth understanding in order to be able to interpret the meaning of "democratic living". However, the relationship of trust/non-trust, satisfaction/non-satisfaction with democracy reveals an ambivalent attitude that pushes us to observe the situation in order to understand the functionality of democracy in Italy. However, it is in cities/municipalities, as democratic spaces, that "acts of citizenship" are unfolded and that links are built between the various "civic spaces". Although citizenship is often interpreted by respondents as ideal, the belief is to encourage values considered 'global', human or common to improve the quality of life. These values include, among others, awareness and commitment to social justice and equity, as well as a sense of effectiveness, which drives people to believe they can make a difference. In addition to these values, citizenship implies the assumption of an active role by the citizen in dealing with the difficulties and crises of the current situation, including that of the COVID-19 emergency. In other words, it presupposes an active commitment to transforming civil society. The democratic citizen is an individual with high aspirations and values, insufferable for the distortions, for the deviations of democracy and for authoritarian solutions, but potentially and favorably willing to commit himself to it in compliance with the rules. The survey and interviews show how adults are concerned about how to equip young people with skills and attitudes that help them think and live as citizens, supporters of a citizenship in which they believe, preparing them from primary education, to play a vital role in becoming agents of change rather than mere passive observers of events. Although there is no agreement on many aspects of democratic living and

a common vision on the part of respondents (in the two surveys), there is a common need to equip young people with the cultural and critical tools necessary to respond to the growing number of environmental, economic and social issues facing society today. The role of education is underlined in its ability to build a sense of fundamental human rights and the values of an ethic of citizenship. However, the lack of a clear definition of citizenship leads to the failure to meet stated objectives.

The above investigations seek to fill these gaps by exploring the ideas that are present in citizens when dealing with the relationship between self-righteousness/totalitarianism and democracy/citizenship education. In the general idea of the interviewees it is mainly the school that is called to promote a culture of citizenship and that increases the probability that students can become citizens in their values and actions. For the interviewees, however, the Italian school is not yet able to provide adequate training responses to the needs of citizenship skills in order to read the problems of society adequately. In the current situation, the risk is disengagement and iniquity. The importance of experiential and proximity in the creation of a democratic culture between the different institutions appears to be a necessary solution for implementing change, where different worlds are called upon to meet in a logic of continuity of action (a recurring aspect in the statements of the interviewees). Although, therefore, in the words of the interviewees, democracy, on the one hand, seems to be the bearer of fundamental human and common values, on the other hand, it is an effective approach to improving the quality of life. At the core of the values, research shows that there is awareness, commitment to social justice and fairness that drive people to believe they can make a difference. In addition to these values, democracy seems to imply the assumption of an active role for the individual in addressing the problems facing today's society through a social and cultural commitment that speaks out in favour of civil society. The fact that emerges is that people work to transform reality, even if the fundamental question remains for the respondents always the same, namely **how to "teach democracy" (I-12), a complex and difficult task to carry out, which involves the assumption of "a fundamental practice that can be taught: thinking with one's own head. This is the hardest thing to teach (I-12).**