

Women and political representation in Italian local government

Agostino Massa

Università di Genova

Abstract

In Italy, as well as in many European Countries, women are less represented than men in political institutions. After a discussion of the reasons for this situation in general, the article aims to see what happens when it comes to basic institutions in local government. We shall focus on the case of the *Consigli di circoscrizione*, district councils since the late seventies directly elected by citizens in the major Italian cities, less important in terms of power and visibility in comparison with other institutions at national or regional level. First, relying on recent data about a sample of nine cities, we shall try to investigate whether there are elements in favour of the hypothesis setting an inverse relation between level of power and female representation, according to which there should be a higher rate of elected women in district councils than, for instance, in city councils or in regional assemblies. Second, drawing from the results of a quantitative research carried out in 2010 on the decentralization system in the city of Genoa, where a special type of *Cdc* called *Municipi* have been set up, the article is set to describe the main features of the socio-graphic and political profiles of women elected in these local institutions.

Keywords: women's political participation and representation, local government, Italy.

1. Introduction¹

In Italy, as well as in many European Countries, women are less represented than men in political institutions, but the imbalance here looks particularly serious, at risk of affecting the quality of democracy itself. Moreover, since the Country is doing poorly also with regard to many other indicators of gender equality, this low rate of political representation can be identified among those processes of “vertical gender segregation” still going on, keeping women out of all the places in which relevant decisions are made in many dimensions of social life.

Considering female institutional representation in Italy, however, a distinction must be made between the parliamentary level, on the one hand, and regional and local governments, on the other.

At the last national election, held in February 2013, the percentage of women elected in the *Camera dei Deputati* has reached 31%², showing a significant progress in the course of the last decade. With reference to national Parliaments, data place now Italy in 34th position in a ranking of 146³, while world average female representation is about 21%. Election rates of women in the current legislature evidence a leap forward from 21% and 52nd position in the previous one as well as from 17% and 61st position in the legislature started in 2006 – not to mention the 11% and 88th position in 2001.

On the contrary, women’s representation remains low or shows a slower increase in the 20 regional assemblies, where female councillors are about 13%, and in the councils of the major Italian cities, where they are slightly more than 14%. At both levels, since they are not directly elected but nominated by the president or by the mayor, women’s representation in the boards is definitely higher, about 24% in the Municipalities⁴. If we shift our focus, however, from the assemblies to the most powerful positions, the situa-

¹ This article is a development of the paper *Women and political participation in district councils: a research on the Municipalities of the comune of Genoa*, presented to the 2nd Pidop International Multidisciplinary Conference on “Political and Civic Participation”, University of Surrey (Guildford, UK), April 16-17, 2012.

² Source: www.camera.it, June 2013.

³ Data for Single or Lower House updated at April 1st, 2013. Source: www.ipu.org.

⁴ Source: <http://amministratori.interno.it/AmmStat.htm>, as in May 2013.

tion turns even worse. In local government offices, for instance, women are just about 10% of mayors and about 8% of presidents of the Provinces (Sartori 2009, 201-204).

As we stick to the composition of the assemblies, even if official data do not always confirm it⁵, it is general opinion that – at least up to now – women are more represented in local government institutions, notably in smaller cities, because of some reasons we shall show further forward. Sarlo and Zajczyk (2012, 7), quoting from a research carried out by the Association of Italian Municipalities (Cittalia Anci 2012), indicate that the number of women elected at communal level is about 18%, higher than those elected in the assemblies of the Provinces (14%) and of the Regions (12%). According to the same study, the presence of women is characterized by an inverse relation with the demographic dimension of the Municipalities, and therefore with their relevance and visibility: more than 90% of politically engaged women operate in Municipalities up to 20,000 inhabitants, while only 0.4% are in charge of political responsibilities in cities which population is more than 250,000. This trend is confirmed by data provided by the *Ministero dell'interno*. According to the Home Office⁶, female councillors are 22% in the Municipalities up to 15,000 inhabitants and 14% in the local institutions with a higher population.

In this article, after a discussion of the possible reasons for this very low women's representation in public offices in general, we are set to see what happens when it comes to basic political institutions in local government. We shall focus on the case of the *Consigli di circoscrizione*, district councils since the late Seventies directly elected by citizens in the major Italian cities⁷. Since women's representation appears to be slightly higher in town councils than in other institutions at national or regional level, we shall try to investigate whether this is even higher in such local councils, which are much closer to citizens and wield in practice very little power⁸.

⁵ See, for instance, Sartori (2009, 204).

⁶ Source: <http://amministratori.interno.it/AmmStat.htm>, as in May 2013.

⁷ These institutions are generally called *Consigli di circoscrizione*, but in a few cities they are also known as *Consigli di zona* (Milan) or *Municipi* (Naples and Rome). Here we have shortened *Consigli di circoscrizione* to *Cdc*. We refer to them also as to district councils or, only in the case of the city of Genoa, as to *municipi* (municipalities).

⁸ We rely here on data about women's representation in nine major Italian cities, as found analyzing the composition of councils and boards, at both levels of Municipalities and district councils for every city, as published in their official websites in May 2013.

Finally, drawing also from the results of a quantitative research carried out in 2010 on the decentralization system in the city of Genoa⁹ (Massa 2011), where a special type of *Cdc* called *municipi* have been set up, we aim to describe and comment the socio-graphic and the political profiles of the women elected in these institutions.

2. Women and political representation in Italy

Italy, as we have seen, is a laggard in comparison with most advanced Countries regarding the presence of women in political institutions. To understand and explain this situation, it is worth considering all the steps of the process leading from someone's general attitude of interest in politics to the decision to stand as a candidate and, finally, to the capacity to succeed in an election. Different questions can be formulated about this process, in a gender perspective:

- Are women as interested in politics and as keen on participating as men?
- Are women more interested in conventional or non conventional political participation?
- Are they more interested in local than in national politics?
- When women are interested in politics and keen on participating, why do they find it more difficult than men to succeed in an election?

In this paragraph, we shall deal very shortly with the former couple of questions, later to focus on the latter.

Starting from the discussion of general attitudes towards politics and political participation, with particular regard to young people, both genders currently show similarities, such as low levels of interest and participation (De Luca 2007). As it has been recently highlighted (Albanesi *et al.* 2012), on the one hand, male youth are keener on more traditional political manifest participation, while girls and young women seem to be characterized by a stronger civic engagement and involvement in consumerism; on the other hand, besides these differences, similarities across genders have been found on voting attitudes and net participation, because of the so-called “web effect”.

⁹ Genoa, the capital city of the Liguria Region, is located in Northern Italy and in 2011 had a population of 607,000 inhabitants.

Data related to the overall population confirm these attitudes and behaviours. In particular, they show that almost five out of ten women, compared to just three out of ten men, declare to take absolutely no interest in politics, while similar distances are found when talking politics or getting information about politics (Sartori 2009, 187).

Shifting to consider conventional political participation, notably in its institutional dimension, the analysis must focus on what happens between the moment of a woman's decision to run as a candidate and the following steps of the electoral procedure: being recruited by a party in a list of candidates and being elected to a political position. Such analysis is basically aiming to understand which are the constraints, along this path, impeding women to enter politics successfully.

In the traditional literature on the topic, political participation has been matched with the concept of socio-economic “centrality” (Milbrath 1965), in that participation grows with the “centrality” of an individual's social position. Limiting our analysis to one of the main indicators of social centrality, we see that in the Italian society women's participation in the labour market is very low, once again one of the lowest in Europe, and even when they work it is very difficult for them to reach top positions, in private and public organizations as well as in the world of professionals.

To better understand our case, however, besides this classic concept, we find it useful to apply to mainstream professional political activity the explanations of political participation provided by Verba *et al.* (1995) in their Civic Voluntarism Model. Following the Authors as they invert the usual question on this topic, we might ask why people do not become political activists. Three answers then come to mind: «because they can't; because they don't want to; or because nobody asked. In other words, people may be inactive because they lack resources, because they lack psychological engagement with politics, or because they are outside of the recruitment networks that bring people into politics» (ivi, 268). In this perspective, resources – in terms of time, money and civic skills – are important but not enough to explain the whole process, since political engagement, as an individual predisposition, must be met by institutions able (and effective) to mobilize citizens to political action.

So, among the main reasons for low women's representation, one can include the scarcity of social resources at their disposal, in terms of relations, power, money and so-

cial visibility, which they can transform into political resources, to be recruited as candidates and then to get elected. They find it more difficult to set up or enter social networks relevant for gaining a successful access to the political arena, in a male-dominated world such as that of party politics¹⁰. Moreover, the declining relevance of traditional political parties and their transformation towards the “cartel party” model (Katz and Mair 1995) also involve the decline of their capacity of mediation between society and the political system. And it goes without saying that ...“when the going gets tough, the tough gets going”.

Nonetheless, if we consider the issue of low women’s representation in public office not from the point of view of the political class but from that of the electorate, the fact that women themselves do not seem to completely trust female candidates, to the extent that they are not keen on voting for them, is also discussed in the literature among its reasons¹¹.

Last but not least, when political engagement turns into a professional activity, Italian women find it as difficult as staying in the labour market, because of a burden of care activities unequally shared in the family, in a Country where the level of social services such as child care centres remains poor¹².

Being this the state-of-the-art, at least in national and regional politics, we would like to test in this article the hypothesis of a higher female representation in the peculiar dimension of local government represented by *Cdc*. These decentralized institutions share with local government the fact that, at this level, the presence of elements making female political participation easier and therefore improving women’s representation in public office is supposed: more direct relations with citizens and interest groups; a smaller amount of resources needed for electoral campaigns; political output closer to real everyday life issues; more opportunities for conciliation of political activity and family life. As it has been pointed out, «Local councillors are charged with making decisions about how public money will be spent on a broad range of local services. They also share, with national government and other governance institutions, responsibilities

¹⁰ Franciscato *et al.* (2008) refer to these as to “male gate-keeping practices”. Other authors esteem female presence at about 20% of the top echelons in Italian political parties (Sartori 2009, 205; Sarlo and Zajczyk 2012, 7).

¹¹ For a different position on this point, see Sala (2008, 98).

¹² See “situational obstacles” in Franciscato *et al.* (2008).

for policies that impact on gender inequalities in the public and private spheres, which means that they can affect women's lives in local communities» (Welsh and Halcli 2003, 345).

Moreover, Italian district councils are political institutions with very little power and resources in short supply. Therefore, they are not usually targets of a hard electoral competition between more “central” political actors. On the contrary, according to an aspect of Tarrow's theory of political opportunity structures (Tarrow 1994), participation at this level should be as more open as institutions are more decentralized.

3. Administrative decentralization and women's representation in Italian major cities

The *Consigli di circoscrizione*, the lowest tier in the Italian system of local government, are a ground for conventional political participation, far from the centre-stage of the political arena but very interesting to some extent. According to Law 278/1976, which instituted the *decentramento comunale* (Municipal decentralization), the city administration can be divided into *Circoscrizioni*, each of which with an assembly of elected councillors and a president, elected by the assembly itself. *Cdc*, however, have no formal autonomy, as they are part of the city administration, but just devolved power and functions. These are in fact very few, since district councils have a consultative more than a decisional role. Their main areas of interest are: public places maintenance; local cultural events; social services.

Within the general legislative frame provided by Law 278/1976 (implemented by Law 142/1990 and later included in D.Lgs. 267/2000), every city has the faculty to decide some features of its decentralization system in the communal statute. The city of Genoa has currently an advanced system organized in nine *municipi* (municipalities), each of them with a president and a municipal board with three members (the presence of persons of both sexes must be granted in the board). The 23 councillors and the president are directly elected by the residents in the municipal area, while the board is nominated by the president and voted by the council. Elections for the municipalities are held together with those for the mayor and the city council. If the mayor is forced to step

down, the city council dissolves and new elections are decided, so that municipal councils must also be dissolved and get back to the polls.

The political class elected in district councils, generally speaking, does not consist of professional politicians, in terms of engagement as well as in terms of reward. Even if some of them, according to the traditional Weberian categories, can “live for politics”, nobody is likely to “live off politics”. Differences can however be found between councillors and presidents or assessors. Rank-and-file councillors usually get a very small attendance fee and have meetings few times a month, so that, to some extent, their activity can be considered within the concept of “voluntary political participation” (Verba *et al.* 1995). Only the presidents are entitled to get a decent allowance for a full-time commitment. Nonetheless, it must be stressed that the situation varies greatly all over the Country. According to the local implementation of national rules, unlike the case of Genoa, for instance, there are some cities in which one can make a living off being elected as simple district councillor (Brancaccio and Zaccaria 2007; Massa 2011).

From time to time, notably in periods of public spending review, there is the proposal to eliminate district councils, but it never came into practice, at least in the major cities, mainly because of parties’ interests in local government. Our opinion is that, even if their output is widely seen as ineffective, within the transformation of political organizations towards the “cartel party” model these institutions offer many positions, not very powerful but providing political visibility, to reward grassroots militants. In other words, district councils can be seen as the bulwarks of parties on the territory, where local councillors manage to intermediate between citizens and political institutions, to keep the former up-to-date about political issues or to channel their demands to a higher government level. Cronyism may sometimes affect these relations.

Starting to analyse women’s representation in this lower tier of local government, we find that in the nine *municipi* of the city of Genoa female councillors are 25.9%, a higher rate than in the city council, where women are just 22.5% (Tables 1-2). In the previous administration (2007-2012), female councillors were respectively 25.5% in the *municipi* and 18.0% in the city council.

Currently, eight out of nine presidents are men, while women are 37% of all municipal board members. It must be highlighted that this is mainly in compliance with the rule of

the city statute requiring the mandatory representation of both sexes in these organs. In more detail, in eight of these boards there are two male and one female assessors, and only in one there are one man and two women.

Tab. 1 – *Gender representation in municipal decentralized institutions (Cdc)*

	Presidents			Councillors		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Turin	90.0	10.0	100.0	78.0	22.0	100.0
Milan	77.8	22.2	100.0	75.2	24.8	100.0
Venice	100.0	0.0	100.0	85.1	14.9	100.0
Genoa	88.9	11.1	100.0	74.1	25.9	100.0
Florence	100.0	0.0	100.0	69.6	30.4	100.0
Rome	89.5	10.5	100.0	83.1	16.9	100.0
Naples	80.0	20.0	100.0	89.4	10.6	100.0
Bari	100.0	0.0	100.0	86.0	14.0	100.0
Palermo	87.5	12.5	100.0	92.2	7.8	100.0
Total	89.4	10.6	100.0	81.3	18.7	100.0

Tab. 2 – *Gender representation in boards and city councils at municipal level*

	Assessors			Councillors		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Turin	54.5	45.5	100.0	75.0	25.0	100.0
Milan	50.0	50.0	100.0	77.1	22.9	100.0
Venice	75.0	25.0	100.0	93.5	6.5	100.0
Genoa	45.5	54.5	100.0	77.5	22.5	100.0
Florence	37.5	62.5	100.0	76.6	23.4	100.0
Rome	58.3	41.7	100.0	93.3	6.7	100.0
Naples	66.7	33.3	100.0	89.8	10.2	100.0
Bari	75.0	25.0	100.0	93.5	6.5	100.0
Palermo	70.0	30.0	100.0	80.0	20.0	100.0
Total	60.0	40.0	100.0	84.5	15.5	100.0

Data for the main city of the Liguria Region can be compared with those related to a sample of eight other major cities from Northern, Central, and Southern Italy¹³. Overall figures confirm the findings from Genoa. At national level, female presence in *Cdc* is at 19% while it is at 15.5% in the city councils. It is higher in the decentralized institutions of all cities, except Turin and Palermo.

Within our sample, the highest female representation in *Cdc* is found in Florence at 30%, the lowest in Palermo at 8%.

With regard to city councils, the highest rate of female councillors is in Turin (25.0%), with Florence close behind (23.4%), while in Venice, Rome and Bari women are just about 6.5% of the assembly.

The situation looks different in city boards, with an average female representation of 40%. It must be stressed however that, while members of city councils are elected by citizens, after a competition with other (male and female) candidates, members of city boards are directly appointed by the mayor. Moreover, in some cases a push towards a broader women's representation in these boards has come from Regional Administrative Court decisions, forcing the mayor to better balance the composition by gender when female assessors have been judged too few – as happened in Rome in 2011¹⁴.

4. Socio-graphic and political profiles of women elected in Genoese Municipalities

Let us focus now on the socio-graphic and political profiles of women elected in Genoese municipalities, drawing from the results of a survey carried out on a sample of 144 out of 216 people elected in these institutions, stratified by three variables: municipality, list of election and gender¹⁵. The overall sample therefore comprises 61 elected in centre-right parties and 83 in the centre-left or, in other terms, 103 men and 41 women (Tab. 3). Women result more active in centre-left parties than in the centre-right (34.9% vs. 19.7%).

¹³ Updated at May 2013 (before local election in Rome).

¹⁴ See, for instance, Cerroni (2012).

¹⁵ More details on the methodology of the research can be found in Massa (2011, 111-122).

Tab. 3 – *Coalition per gender*

	Centre-right	Centre-left	Total
Male	80.3	65.1	71.5
Female	19.7	34.9	28.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Men are more represented in the age class 18-44, women in the 55-64 band (Tab. 4). This is in line with what we can read in literature about the fact that active political participation is higher when individuals have already achieved important steps in the family and work dimensions of life. In our case, we might say that women are more likely to get involved in politics as soon as they have fewer family responsibilities. With regard to this last aspect we can see that, among women, pensioners and housekeepers are slightly more represented (Tab. 5).

Tab. 4 – *Age*

	Male	Female	Total
18 – 24 years	2.9	0.0	2.1
25 – 34 years	15.5	7.3	13.2
35 – 44 years	17.5	14.6	16.7
45 – 54 years	27.2	26.8	27.0
55 – 64 years	26.2	41.5	30.6
65 years and over	10.7	9.8	10.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Tab. 5 – *Occupational status*

	Male	Female	Total
Employed	75.7	61.0	71.5
Pensioner	18.4	24.4	20.1
Housekeeper	0.0	12.2	3.5
Student	4.9	2.4	4.2
Unemployed	1.0	00.0	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

To complete the commentary on basic personal information about councillors elected in these municipalities, we can add that women are also slightly more educated than men, since among them those with secondary school and university degree are more represented (Tab. 6).

Tab. 6 – *Education*

	Male	Female	Total
None / Primary	1.0	2.4	1.4
Secondary (lower)	16.5	7.3	13.9
Secondary (higher)	48.5	53.7	50.0
University	34.0	36.6	34.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Both male and female councillors have currently the same level of participation in political parties, about 82.0%, but among men those who are not party members now but have been in the past is 12.6%, against only 2.4% among women (Tab. 7).

Differences also arise with regard to party leadership (Tab. 8). Four out of 10 male councillors have now directive responsibilities in political parties, against just one out of four women. In this case, the percentage of women not active now but in the past is slightly higher than men's. Moreover, among female councillors, 51.2% have never had directive roles, against 41.7% of men.

Tab. 7 – *Political party membership*

	Male	Female	Total
Yes, currently	81.6	82.9	82.0
Not now, yes in the past	12.6	2.5	9.7
No, never	5.8	14.6	8.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Tab. 8 – *Directive responsibilities in political parties*

	Male	Female	Total
Yes, currently	39.8	24.4	35.4

Not now, yes in the past	18.5	24.4	20.2
No, never	41.7	51.2	44.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The rate of councillors who are or were members of trade unions, currently as well as only in the past, is higher among men than among women (Tab. 9). Membership of associations is currently the same for both sexes, about 76.0% (Tab. 10). While one out of ten male councillors were members in the past and are not any more, no female councillors result to be in such a condition.

Tab. 9 – *Trade union membership*

	Male	Female	Total
Yes, currently	36.9	31.7	35.4
Not now, yes in the past	18.4	14.6	17.4
No, never	44.7	53.7	47.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Tab. 10 – *Association membership*

	Male	Female	Total
Yes, currently	76.7	75.6	76.4
Not now, yes in the past	9.7	0.0	6.9
No, never	13.6	24.4	16.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The only organizations in which women seem more involved than men are local protest groups, active in city districts (Tab. 11). This is a kind of overlapping membership, an indicator of both institutional and non-institutional participation.

Tab. 11 – *Local pressure groups membership*

	Male	Female	Total
Yes, currently	17.5	19.5	18.1
Not now, yes in the past	11.7	17.1	13.2
No, never	70.8	63.4	68.7

Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
-------	-------	-------	-------

Among female councillors, 19.5% have declared that they also participate in such non formal groups, against 17.5% among males. The percentage of those who have taken part in the past and do not any more among women is higher than among men: 17.1% against 11.7%.

A third, and last, group of data refers to the councillors' political past experience and current activity. The survey has investigated whether in the past they have already been elected in political institutions (Tab. 12). On the one hand, experience in district councils seems to be similar for both sexes, since 39.8% of male and 36.6% of female municipal councillors were elected in previous *Cdc*. On the other hand, while 7.8% of males also had political experience in the city council (and a mere 1% also in the Province assembly), only 2.4% of females did the same.

Tab. 12 – *Previous experience in other elected political institutions*

	Male			Female			Total		
	Yes	No	Tot.	Yes	No	Tot.	Yes	No	Tot.
District	39.8	60.2	100.0	36.6	63.4	100.0	38.9	61.1	100.0
City	7.8	92.2	100.0	2.4	97.6	100.0	6.3	93.7	100.0
Province	1.0	99.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.7	99.3	100.0
Region	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0

Looking at the near future, women are more likely to stand as candidates at the same level, men more at a higher level, which means basically to run for the city council (Tab. 13). It is worth stressing that one in four incumbent district councillors declare that their political career will be over at the end of the current administrative cycle and that 36.8% of the overall councillors do not yet know what they will do.

Analysing the councillors' current political activity, we can try to sketch their network of relationships. It is therefore possible to see that women have fewer contacts with representatives of their own party as well as of other parties. The same happens for contacts with administrators in the city council or in institutions at higher levels. Nevertheless, they appear to be as involved as men in contacts with citizens

Tab. 13 – *Attitude towards future candidacies*

	Male	Female	Total
Yes, Municipality	12.6	19.5	14.6
Yes, other institutions	26.2	12.2	22.2
No	26.2	26.8	26.4
Do not know	35.0	41.5	36.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

It is then no surprise that, when asked about what is more important to be elected, whether the support from their own party or the confidence of the voters, among male councillors 6.6% rely on the former and 89.3% on the latter, while among females only 2.4% trust the party and 97.6% commit themselves to their electorate's confidence (Tab. 14).

Tab. 14 – *What matters more to be elected*

	Male	Female	Total
Support from the party	6.8	2.4	5.6
Electors' confidence	89.3	97.6	91.6
Do not know / answer	3.9	0.0	2.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

5. Conclusions

We have focused here on women's representation in the different institutional levels of the Italian political system, with particular regard to local government. Dealing with this dimension of conventional political participation, consisting in standing as a candidate and being elected in political assemblies, we have tried to verify whether, in decentralized institutions of local government, a low level of power is accompanied by a greater openness towards female participation.

A first point to discuss, however, deals with the results of the last national elections for Parliament, which seem to challenge our main hypothesis. In February 2013, women were about three out of 10 elected in the Lower House, almost double the female coun-

cillors in the cities of our sample and even more than female district councillors. It will be very interesting to check at the next elections whether this relatively high women's representation rate, ten points more than the 21% of the previous polls, is part of an upward trend or just a positive exception. A decisive contribution to this result has come from the performance of parties such as the *Partito Democratico*, electing 38% of women among its MPs, and the *Movimento 5 Stelle*, where the women elected were 34%. In the frame of an electoral law¹⁶ based on blocked lists, our opinion is that the performance of PD is due mainly to the high number of female candidates, successful in the internal primary elections for the preparation of the lists, while the movement led by the former comedian Beppe Grillo – the real novelty in this election – is characterized by core activists socialized to politics not in traditional ways but using the Internet and social media, where gender differences tend to blur.

Considering now the local government level, with regard to the city of Genoa data from our research show that women's representation in district councils is higher than in the city council and in regional councils as well. The same happens in most other major Italian cities, very often with lower figures than in the Ligurian capital city.

Female representation in local districts of Northern cities is higher than in those in the South. Even if this could be an interesting starting point for further research, we would like just to notice here that it is higher in the regions with a strong tradition in civic participation¹⁷ and lower where, because of a difficult economic and occupational situation, political positions at this basic level are also considered valuable.

Coming to the very conclusion, even if we can confirm that at this level political participation is a little bit more open, the situation is very far from a more equal representation of both sexes in local government public office. Moreover, here too men are successful in occupying the most powerful positions: we have counted slightly more than one out of 10 women as presidents in the decentralized institutions of the cities of our sample (Tab. 1).

We can also add that, even if in the district councils the level of power and the contents of political activity can be considered different from those typical of institutions at

¹⁶ Law 270/2005.

¹⁷ See, for instance, the classic work by Putnam (1993) and, more recently, La Valle (2006).

higher levels, the modalities of access and the ways of building up political support are similar. Data from our research related to district councillors' party membership and leadership, for instance, as well as those referred to political experience and current activity, have shown evidence of a lesser involvement of women in networks useful to support their candidacy.

Changing the perspective from a bottom-up to a top-down point of view, we might also consider that senior politicians, elected in other more important institutions or even party leaders, also need to build a supporting network including grassroots militants. They can therefore judge male district councillors more reliable than females in order to "control" the territory.

So, even assuming that the lower tier of local government, such as the Italian *Consigli di circoscrizione*, is a dimension of politics in which more women could enter, at the moment it is not a dimension which men are set to give up.

References

- Albanesi, C., Cicognani, E. and Zani, B. (2012), *Youth Civic and Political Participation through the Lens of Gender: the Italian Case*, paper presented at the 2nd Pidop Conference, Guildford, April 16-17.
- Beccalli, B. (2008), *Identità di genere e rappresentanza politica*, in «Partecipazione e conflitto», n. 0, apr., pp. 141-156.
- Brancaccio, L. and Zaccaria, A.M. (2007), *Verso la città dei municipi. La dimensione territoriale della politica a Napoli*, Naples, Liguori.
- Cerroni, M. (2012), *Il principio di pari opportunità nell'accesso alle cariche elettive alla luce della giurisprudenza amministrativa del 2011. (Nota alla sentenza del Tar Sardegna, Sez. II, 2 agosto 2011, n. 864)*, in «Federalismi.it», X, n. 13.
- Cittalia Fondazione Anci Ricerche (2010), *Le donne e la rappresentanza. Una lettura di genere nelle amministrazioni comunali*, Rome, Anci (second edition).

- De Luca, D. (2007), "Giovani divisi dentro e fuori la politica", in C. Buzzi, A. Cavalli and A. de Lillo (eds. by), *Rapporto Giovani. Sesta indagine dell'Istituto IARD sulla condizione giovanile in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Francescato, D., Mebane, M., Sorace, R., Giacomantonio, M. and Lauriola, M. (2008), *The construction of two short factor-marker scales measuring women's perceived obstacles (WO) and women's coping efficacy (WOC) in politics*, in «TPM – Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology», vol. 15, n. 3 (Fall), pp. 113-133.
- Katz, R.S. and Mair, P. (1995), *Changing models of party organization and party democracy: the emergence of the cartel party*, in «Party Politics», vol. 1, p. 1, pp. 5-28.
- La Valle, D. (2006), *La partecipazione alle associazioni in Italia. Tendenze generali e differenze regionali*, in «Stato e mercato», vol. XXVI, n. 2, pp. 277-304.
- Massa, A. (2011), *La politica dal basso. Istituzioni e personale politico del decentramento nel Comune di Genova*, Milan, Franco Angeli.
- Putnam, R.D., with R. Leonardi and R.Y. Nanetti (1993), *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Sala, E. (2008), *Donne, uomini e potere*, Milan, Franco Angeli.
- Sarlo, A. and Zajczyk, F. (2012), *Dove batte il cuore delle donne? Voto e partecipazione politica in Italia*, Rome-Bari, Laterza.
- Sartori, F. (2009), *Differenze e disuguaglianze di genere*, Bologna, Il Mulino.
- Tarrow, S. (1994), *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Verba, S., Schlozman Lehman, K. and Burns, H.E. (1995), *Voice and Equality. Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press.
- Welsh, E. and Halcli, A. (2003), *Accounts of feminism among women local councilors in England*, in «Women's Studies International Forum», vol. 26, n. 4, pp. 345-356.