FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest editors

Gabriele Manella
Madalena Corte-Real

Special Issue Combining Safety and Equity in the Post-Covid City: New Trends between Local Policies and Bottom-Up Practices

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Summary

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What is a city? This is the question

Sebastiano Citroni[1]

Local Authorities and Civic Actions Disentangled: Legibility and Scene Styles[2]

Introduction

A recurring trend has become evident in a variety of urban contexts: the growing involvement of civil society actors – by definition external to institutional politics (Jessop, 2020) – in local governance practices. This is not particularly new, and is covered by many research strands: for example, urban studies on shifting city-state relations, analysis of public action in large metropolises (Les Gales & Vitale, 2015), and research into the hybridisation processes of third-sector groups and the rise of public-civic partnerships (Horvat, 2019). In spite of their differences, these phenomena – and the associated studies – all agree on the growing relevance in urban contexts of government through civil society (Citroni & Coppola, 2021), that is urban governance practices that involve "bottom-linked" initiatives (Eizaguirre *et al.,* 2012) interacting with supra-local institutions (Oosterlyink & Sarius, 2022).

"Neoliberal civil society" (Jessen, 2021) is a too broad frame to make sense of these recent phenomena, as they vary widely in different local contexts. They include, for example, the conflictual ways that counterculture has become involved in local urban government in Geneva (Pattaroni, 2020); the formalised agreements through which third-sector organisations provide public services in the local welfare, as in Milan (Pacchi, 2020); and Berlin's recent public-civic partnerships (Horvat, 2019) supporting regeneration processes with social inclusivity aims. These urban governance practices have little in common apart from the controversy they court, as they are both the object of fierce criticism – the "Trojan horse of global capitalism" (Savioli, 2019) – and the source of new hope that a more just city can be achieved through urban social innovation (Oosterlynck & Sarius, 2022). Indeed, these emerging practices are producing a variety of outcomes, that have been the object of growing debates about which conditions ensure the most inclusive results (Jakob, 2012).

This paper aims to focus on the collaboration between local authorities and bottom-up civic actions in the implementation of urban government, concentrating on what is currently going on in specific urban domains and how such phenomena are addressed in the urban studies literature. Indeed, in a variety of urban research strands, a general contradiction has become clear that – more subtly – also characterises many studies of third-sector organisations providing welfare services. This contradiction concerns the fact that, on the one hand, such studies underline the increasing interdependence between state and civil society actors in a variety of domains and processes but, on the other hand, the relation between these actors and their reciprocal influence is analysed as if they were separated entities, through causal models that assume their strict autonomy from one another. Only in recent specific studies that aim to overcome the all-encompassing term of neoliberalism has there been an effort to address the relations between civil society actors and the state in a more nuanced and precise way, such as with the study of the reshaping of the welfare diamond prompted by social innovation and social investment initiatives (Jessen, 2021).

It is worth underling the social relevance of the limit this paper aims to address: indeed, postulating a clear-cut separation between the state and civil society is not only inaccurate to describe one of the most significant recent governance trends (particular evident in urban contexts), but it means also de facto reproducing a neo-liberal ideology that rhetorically is sustained by the belief and value of such separation. It is hardly by chance that Gramsci clearly warned that «the distinction between the state and civil society is purely methodical and not absolute» (Gramsci,

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1997, p. 201). Therefore, assuming an absolute separation between state and civil society is not a neutral operation, as it consolidates and legitimises the neoliberal governmentality project, to the extent that it becomes hegemonic (Foucault, 2015).

This poses a challenge for the researcher interested in disentangling the civic actions' contribution to current urban governance. On the one hand, the situation described above encourages us to avoid reifying the separation between state and civil society so as not to become accidental accomplices in reproducing the neoliberal orientation in urban government practices. On the other hand, the dramatic nature of the problems and forms of inequality that are concentrated in urban areas (and often too hastily traced back to the neoliberal model of urban governance) makes questioning and disentangling the reciprocal influences between the state and civil society a pressing matter.

In summary, this paper addresses the dilemma of how to analyse the relations between two entities (state and civil society) whose separation is neither absolute nor clear-cut. I will do so by focusing on the everyday practices of civil society actors using the "Civic Action" approach (Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014). This shift in viewpoint requires adequate introduction, as its focus on everyday practices may at first seem like a micro-sociological approach that does not allow any kind of generalisation. On the contrary, while adopting the totalisation strategies typical of ethnographic approaches (Baszanger & Dodier, 2006), the focus on tiny practices within the Civic Action approach is required to analyse broad processes and address general questions such as the double one adopted in this paper: how specific forms of government through civil society may alter the latter's daily actions, and how the everyday practices of civil society affect the contextual conditions imposed by public policies.

1. From Civil Society to Civic Actions

Before proceeding any further, it is essential to define the two parties in the relationship this paper intends to analyse, namely local authorities and civil society. The former includes not only public authorities, but also other regulatory institutions, including private foundations, which play a significant role in local welfare systems[3]. Civil society is a much fuzzier term, and includes a variety of actors and initiatives with different legal and organisational forms, repertoires of action and domains of intervention (Citroni & Coppola, 2021). Classic examples of civil society actors include environmental or human rights organisations; lobby groups and advocacy coalitions of various kinds oriented towards the adoption of specific policies; third-sector social or cultural organisations; and social cooperatives that offer work to disadvantaged people. In terms of definitions, these bodies share the fact that they cannot be ascribed in legal terms, and above all in terms of their logic of action, to either purely the public and bureaucratic sphere or the market. It is no coincidence that one of the main components of civil society is known as the "third sector", where the word "third" underlines its otherness with respect to the other spheres: bureaucracy and the market.

However, when one goes beyond the formal definitions and investigates the processes and their informal dimension, the framework sketched above becomes much more complex, to the point of making the aforementioned "thirdness" controversial. Looking at civil society's actions, it is not uncommon to see it collaborating closely with public and local authorities, which involves following bureaucratic standards and procedures or resorting to actions aimed at efficiency and the pursuit of profit.

Since the terms "civil society" and "third sector" allude to an ideal-typical extraneousness to public bodies and urban government that is only rarely achieved, the author prefers the more pragmatic category of "Civic Action" (Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014; Lichterman, 2021), relating to

3   Polizzi, E. (2017). *Quale nuovo radicamento per il Terzo settore italiano?*. This paper was presented at the X annual conference of Espanet Italia, it has not been published and has been shared with me by the author.

any form of bottom-up collective efforts to address social problems, regardless of the legal form adopted, the field of intervention and the relationships activated with the public in carrying it forward.

This definition includes the same phenomena to which the expression civil society refers, but moves the adopted point of view from organisations, groups and actors to actions, practices and processes. With respect to more established categories, such as non-profit organisations, the adopted approach follow the actions and pays attention to the type of relations practised, leaving the task of characterising what kind of collective action it is to empirical investigation.

The relationship between local authorities and civic actions has been the subject of countless studies attributable to various lines of analysis and research, which would be impossible to summarise here. Looking exclusively at more recent contributions, studies on social innovation (Nicholls *et. al.,* 2015*)* have brought to public attention the relevance of the relationship between civic action and urban government, particularly in the areas of combating poverty and promoting diversity (Oosterlynck *et al*., 2017; Vicari & Moulaert, 2009). Even more recently, research on public-civic partnerships (Horvat, 2019) has explored the potential for new emerging urban governance practices to address the issues of growing inequality and social exclusion more effectively than traditional policies (Oosterlynck *et al.,* 2019).

These studies – as well as older works dealing more generally with civic actions and their relationships with local authorities – display three recurring flaws that this analysis seeks to overcome and that here can only be mentioned briefly. Firstly, most studies have focused on how local authorities affect civic actions, with no attention to the latter's possible retroactions or general influence. Secondly, as already stated in the previous section, local authorities and civil society organisations in these studies are taken to be two strictly separate entities, instead of seeing their separation as purely "methodical", not absolute (Gramsci, 1997). This is a central feature for critical scholars of civil society and the state (Jessop, 2020), but it generally leaves no space for any empirical exploration (Les Gales & Vitale 2015). And finally, this study aims to avoid the general overlooking of everyday civic practices as supposedly irrelevant aspects, when these details are actually capable of revealing broad patterns (Tsing, 2015; Lichterman, 2021).

While these are recurring problems in the empirical studies conducted into the relationship between civic actions and local authorities; they are not universal. On the contrary, especially outside welfare studies, there are some examples that clearly go in a different direction and avoid reproducing the limitations mentioned above: for example, civil society's everyday practices, their informal dimension and their relationship with public bodies are central to the analysis of social movements conducted by Melucci (1996) and Berezin's (2002) investigation of cultural production.

2. Scene Styles

These and other studies are able to overcome the three limitations highlighted above because they share a general characteristic that recurs in even the most disparate fields in which the relationship between civic actions and public administrations is investigated. In short, these studies pay attention not only to *what* the civic actions concern – the themes and domains to which they refer – but also to *how* the civic actions are structured and carried out (Citroni & Lichterman, 2017). In other words, rather than focusing exclusively on which non-profit organisations do or do not do (e.g. services or advocacy), the studies that inspire this paper's analysis of the relationship between local authorities and civic actions focus on *how* the latter are structured both on a formal level (organisational structures and legal forms) and on an informal level, which includes their everyday practices (Citroni, 2015).

Ever since Hegel's classic reflections on civil society (Jessen, 2021), the state's actions towards it have always been expressed in terms of how it is structured and acts, given that the authorities

define the organisational and legal forms – and even earlier the criteria of legibility (Scott, 1998) – to which the civic action must conform in order to be legitimate (Jessen, 2021). This subtle yet important influence shapes what civil society can do even more than what it actually does (Citroni, 2020). Furthermore, paying attention to civic action's structure (and not only to what it does) allows us to draw on a growing stream of studies that look at civic practices in the context of other topics, with meso-analysis clarifying the relationships between the micro level of the actions studied and the macro level of their contextual factors (Fine, 2021; Citroni, 2022).

This study's focus on civic actions benefits from a cultural analysis of everyday practices capable of disentangling this elusive dimension. Indeed, this paper does not focus on the official or organisational aspects of civil society (its legal form or organisational structure), but rather on the minute and informal dimension of civic action: the daily practices through which it develops. This dimension is investigated by observing it through the variable of "scene styles" (Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014), a category developed within the field of pragmatic cultural sociology that refers to the recurring patterns of interaction (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003) and group formation practiced by those involved in civic action in relation to the observed settings. The basic assumption underpinning this variable is that individuals do not invent the way they relate each time from scratch, but instead draw from a common repertoire of shared codes, just as our language is based on a common stock of largely taken-for-granted knowledge.

A specific attribute of the category of scene styles is the way it is centred in the "interaction order" (Goffman, 2015): the basic unit to which this category refers is not individuals or organisations, but the observed "scene", that is the participants' shared definition of what is happening here and now (Goffman, 1986, p. 8-10). This type of situated centring allows us to grasp the variety of configurations and relationships with public administrations that the same organisation can assume under different circumstances (Biorcio & Vitale, 2016, p. 9). To focus on scene style allows to draw on a growing international research strand that has pinpointed the repertoire of interaction patterns shaping different collective actions in a variety of contexts, including but not limited to Italy (Bordieri, 2023; Citroni, 2022). Similar studies show how scene styles such as community of interest, militancy, or community of identity do not refer exclusively to the micro-sociological dimension but instead possess a much wider value, which manifest itself in scenes but concern a dimension broad as that of the meanings of collective actions. This is an invitation to avoid the same misunderstanding that has so often concerned the work of Goffman, from which the approach adopted here derives.

This can be done here effectively by underling how the literature on scene styles shows how this variable filters the institutional conditions and processes in which they are practiced (Lichterman, 2005): the meanings the latter assume derive from the recurring models through which they are experienced and practically interpreted (Lichterman, 2005). For example, the same change in context – such as the spread of new forms of participation – can constitute either a renewal opportunity for an organisation or a threat to its survival, and these different results derive from the scene styles practised in each case (Citroni, 2022). This filter action is anything but neutral, given that at the level of everyday practices, scene styles generate the specific meanings the general dimensions take on regarding relations with public bodies.

The filter operation conducted by scene styles corresponds to what de Certeau called the "metaphorization" by everyday customs and practices of the formal representations and codes in which they take place (de Certeau, 1990). Specifically, metaphorization coincides with a double – apparently contradictory – operation from the practices towards the contextual conditions in which they occur: at a formal level the former consolidate the latter, while at an informal level contextual and institutional conditions are always used for purposes and according to logics that inevitably differ from those for which the conditions were originally set up, bending them to the organisation's customs and daily practices.

Attention to practices, particularly understood through the category of scene styles, allows us to tackle the full complexity of the relationship between civic action and public bodies while

neither reifying their separation nor focusing exclusively on the latter's influence on the former. Through close analysis of the relationship between the two parties, this analysis will also examine how civic action filters and metaphorizes the constraints and opportunities deriving from its relations with local authorities.

3. A Lively, Still Partially Opaque, Landscape of Civic Actions

Italian third-sector organisations provide an excellent case study for investigating relations between local authorities and civil society: the type of civic action they develop is characterised – compared to other European contexts (Ranci, 2015) – by a high level of institutionalisation, which developed earlier than other countries and has profoundly affected the structuring of local welfare (Fazzi, 2013). The institutionalisation of the Italian third sector, which started more than thirty years ago with the first laws that defined legal forms of volunteering and social cooperation and regulated their relations with public institutions, is still ongoing. A reform of all legislation in this area was launched in 2016, which remains unfinished in 2023; one of its main objectives is standardising and regulating – through various shared administration processes (e.g. co-planning and co-programming) – the increasingly close collaboration between civic action and public bodies.

The institutionalisation of the third sector represents an effort to make civic actions increasingly legible and controllable by defining categories relating to legal forms, organisational structures, formal requirements (e.g. statutes) and areas of intervention that groups and organisations must comply with in order to be able to relate to public bodies. The imposition of clarity and simplification criteria on third-sector civic action comes both from the state and from the market (Scott, 1998): the recent tarnishing of the image of non-profit organisations in Italy following a series of scandals and abuses (Moro, 2014) has made transparency and social impact assessment a central requirement for all nonprofit groups. All this has made Italy a work-in-progress that is ideal for studying the relationship between civic action and local authorities, the development of which involves increasing institutionalisation, simplification and legibility by the public authorities. The most interesting aspect of the Italian case is that the process is still ongoing, with recent legal obligations relating to transparency struggling to impose themselves on a field of civic action which – often unintentionally – comprises an incoherent and open assemblage, largely opaque to its own protagonists.

In Italy, Milanese civil society has historically been characterised as the most advanced laboratory for the transformation of civic action (Tomai, 1994) and political and social change (Melucci, 1996). Civic action in Milan has repeatedly been considered a forerunner of general social and cultural trends that only subsequently reach other parts of the country (Biorcio, 2001). Many of the trends observed have a particularly controversial character: for example, the disintermediation of civic participation or the loss of relevance of the organisational dimension, the rise of the scene style "plug-in volunteering" (Eliasoph, 2012; Citroni, 2018), and the professionalisation of the third sector and its growing supporting role for the neoliberal orientation of local government (Meulabach, 2012). Regardless of the specific nature of these trends, it should be noted that the ability of Milan's civic action to anticipate them stems from certain local characteristics: its international ties (it is often considered closer to Europe than the rest of Italy) and its rich, heterogeneous civil society, with a strong capacity for innovation and collaborative attitude towards public bodies (Pacchi, 2020).

Milan offers particularly interesting local conditions for studying the relationship between local authorities and civic action, as conflicting trends concentrate there and come into contact with one another, with unpredictable outcomes. These can be summarised in terms of two opposing dynamics: on the one hand, the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the local third sector together with its recognised collaborative attitude (*Ibidem*), as well as the visibility it enjoys in

an urban context, lead to a tendency for simplification, transparency and legibility; on the other hand, there is also an opposing trend that resists this, helping to make Milanese civic action lively but also opaque, to a certain extent indeterminate and overall rather inconsistent. This second trend can essentially be attributed to three factors: 1) the historic anchoring of many participants in civic action in the traditional white (Catholic) and red (communist) political cultures, together with the fact that their age makes it difficult for them to adapt to new regulatory transparency and legibility requirements; 2) the effervescent vitality that characterises Milanese civil society as a whole, with a constant stream of new initiatives and new groups in a wide variety of fields, whose practices are informed by different scene styles, often not particularly compatible with the requirements for collaboration with local authorities; 3) the fact that the spread of a collaborative attitude implies that the minority of groups that do not embrace it tend to marginalise themselves by failing to adhere to the transparency criteria required for collaboration with the public authorities.

The research project introduced in the next section, from which the analysis in this paper is drawn, will further highlight the extent to which Milan civil society remains obscure and illegible, despite the high levels of collaboration with the public actors it comprises.

4. Methodology

The empirical material discussed on the following pages is derived from an ethnographic study conducted by the author from 2014 to 2016 in the Via Padova area of Milan (Citroni, 2022). The initial aim was to grasp the meaning of certain trends of change taking place in local third sector groups – detected in a previous study (Citroni, 2014) – and in particular to grasp the limits and opportunities that these changes implied for everyday group life. One of the changes investigated was the transformation of the relationship between civic actions and public bodies, which involved increasing "contractualisation" (Ranci, 2015) and collaboration in urban government practices (Pacchi, 2020).

An ethnographic approach was adopted to grasp the meanings of the changes investigated, involving the author's participant observation in three case studies of civic actions. The cases were chosen – after an initial qualitative mapping – as they were organisations that were going through one of the changes the study was investigating. At least eight months of participant observation was carried out for each case study, preceded each time by interviews with the main representatives of the selected cases, so that the official depiction of the changes investigated could be compared with the practices through which they were experienced on a daily basis. The researcher's access in the field differed from case to case – as specified in Citroni 2022 – but always involved conducting voluntary work and eventually sharing the results that emerged from the study.

The hypothesis this study explored concerned the possibility that, in line with previous research (Lichterman, 2005; Citroni, 2015), the dimension of the practices – and the scene styles that inform them – plays a filtering role in shaping how the transformations manifest themselves in the daily life of the studied groups. The main research results confirmed the initial hypothesis for all the transformations investigated, including the one connected to relations with local authorities. In more general terms, the research confirmed at the level of the individual case studies the aforementioned statements regarding the relevance and controversial nature of the relationship between civic actions and local authorities in Milan. On the one hand, the representations investigated with the interviews showed how public bodies' efforts to simplify and improve the legibility of local civic actions was fully accomplished, to the extent that the categories they "spontaneously and naturally" brought up to describe themselves and their work during the interviews largely corresponded to the legal requirements. On the other hand, however, the simplification and legibility efforts had failed, as the practices within the categories imposed by

the local authorities always pursued goals that were largely unrelated to the intended aims (as shown below in section 4.3). While the level of representations offered legibility and simplified largely heterogeneous phenomena into a few categories, the level of practices restored indeterminacy and opacity and re-introduced dimensions that are difficult to interpret but relevant to the purposes of the research conducted.

That said, the study did not reveal total indeterminacy and opacity: instead it showed the extent to which the practices uncovered were informed by five recurring scene styles, all present in the same civic action but distributed across its different scenes following recurring patterns that were dominant in specific settings.

The study of the relationship between public bodies and civic actions, thanks to the focus on the dimension of scene styles, revealed – as will be illustrated more fully in the next section – the extent to which the distribution of scene styles in everyday group life was re-articulated by the type of relationship activated with local authorities and how much the styles detected were in turn able to re-articulate the contextual conditions in which they were practiced.

Before developing these two points more fully in the next two sections, it is worth briefly introducing some characteristics of the Villa Pallavicini association, the case study chosen to analyse the relationship between local authorities and civic actions. Firstly, it should be noted that it was a particularly complex example of everyday life in an organisation: all five scene styles mapped in the study were practiced in at least one of the observed situations. Secondly, it is worth highlighting that, during the participant observation, the association began a new relationship with a private foundation – in Milan, private foundations are the biggest provider of financial support for the local welfare system – to fund a cultural initiative consisting of a festival on the theme of multiculturalism to encourage processes of social inclusion in a multi-ethnic suburban neighbourhood (Via Padova in Milan).

For the selected case study, this relationship meant the initiative had to comply with three specific requirements: (1) the activation of the users involved, who were called to be proactive protagonists in the festival rather than mere spectators; (2) the construction and coordination of a network of local groups (charged with setting up the festival) that varied greatly in terms of their organisational forms and areas of intervention; and, finally, (3) the preparation of social impact procedures that could measure how much the festival achieved its official goals. To untangle the relationship with the local authorities, attention will be paid both to how the formal requirements informed the studied practices and to how these requirements were used at the level of everyday practices.

4.1 Seeing Like a City

The relationship Villa Pallavicini entered into with the local foundation to put on the multicultural festival impacted the civic action in ways that are not immediately evident. While on the one hand the relationship with public authorities implies a simplification and legibility that have a direct impact on the level of representations with which the civic action interprets itself and its own work, on the other hand it is harder to identify the type of action in terms of the practices, in other words the ways these representations are used in the dimension on which this contribution focuses.

Focusing on the daily life of Villa Pallavicini and its changes linked to the new relationship with the foundation, what emerges is new scenes of everyday group life that did not occur before the funding was received and that developed as a result of the commitments to coordinate the setting up of the festival. One example of this is the biweekly coordination meetings attended by the various partners, which were held at the headquarters of the Villa Pallavicini association. These events formed part of the funded project's schedule and aimed to monitor and organise a variety of activities and tasks. Their official purpose meant the "community of interest" style

prevailed in informing the exchanges between the participants, which were oriented towards tangible and well-defined tasks. As often happens, the dominant recurring pattern of interaction emerged most clearly when it was violated, such as the seemingly disproportionate reaction prompted by the transgression described in the following excerpt from the field notes:

> «Before the usual read-through of the minutes from the previous meeting, there was a short intervention by Marco, a member of the organisation in charge of managing the multicultural event: 'I should say straight away that we haven't done our homework; we've been overwhelmed by other things and this was the last thing on our mind… I'm sorry, we haven't made the occupation of public land requests to the municipality, nor have we been able to contact the server for the plant… sorry, but we didn't manage'. Reply by Carla: "Do you realise we're now in big trouble: what do we do for Saturday›s concerts?? What the hell, that's just not on! We're all overworked, I won›t tell you what happens here every day … but you can't behave like this, a little respect is required … I really don't know what we're doing here if this is what's going to happen» (from the fieldnotes of the author, 18 May 2016).

This reaction immediately seemed disproportionate to the researcher, not because the failings that gave rise to it were not serious, but due to the typically mild and conciliatory attitude of Carla, who reacted that way. Indeed, in another situation recorded in the researcher's field notes, the same person was faced with an equally serious failure to comply with previously agreed commitments on the part of a volunteer – once again, permits had not been requested in time for one of the festival's events to be held on the street – but the reaction was completely different. The point is that, in the "community of interest" style, failing to fulfil commitments takes on a further meaning with respect to the tangible difficulties it implies for the organisation of the festival: it is a violation of the mutual expectations that form the bonds between the participants in this specific scene style. Not taking this failure seriously would have meant practicing a different scene style from the "community of interest", in which the participants' common ground is a shared interest in the realisation of a specific initiative.

It is no coincidence that the scene in which the failure did not elicit an equally vigorous reaction was predominantly informed by another scene style, the "community of identity", in which bonds are not based on the specific commitment made towards others but are rooted in the sharing of the same sense of belonging to a common condition or identity.

Based on the ethnography conducted in the six months preceding the organisation of the festival, the "community of interest" style was only used as a group-forming method during the periodic meetings between the representatives of the coalition that won the tender to put on the festival. In the case under investigation, organising the festival modified the complex repertoire of scene styles practiced in the everyday life of the association, and shifted the balance deriving from the combination of the different approaches to group-forming practiced by volunteers and operators within the various scenes involved. Taking advantage of charity funding to organise a festival with hundreds of participants and dozens of events, in fact, highlighted some situations of group life that would otherwise be less relevant and even introduced new, previously absent scenes, including coordination meetings between the network of associations promoting the festival.

Although minor, the "community of interest" practice was a new scene style previously absent from the life of the organisation studied. In the case, however, of another scene style – "plug-in volunteering" (Eliasoph, 2012; Rapoš Božič, 2021) – organising the festival gave greater prominence to a style already present in the group, informing practices that previously implied other recurrent patterns of interactions. For example, while before the situations in which the group met were generally informed by a "community of identity" style, the group participants' involvement as volunteers at the festival ensured that, at least during meetings and other formal occasions, the "plug-in volunteering" style was also practiced. Their participation in the festival, in fact, was based on performing specific tasks, for limited and clearly defined periods of time (e.g. one hour of leafleting, one morning of stage assembly, two hours of bar service, etc.), relegating

the "community of identity" practice to informal or background moments, in which the volunteers returned to share ideas and discuss, for example, the opportunities that arose for them as a group.

In summary, the analysis of the relationship between local authorities and civic actions highlights two points. Firstly, the charity funding causes new scenes to be created in the daily life of the association which involve some styles ("community of interest") that – even if already detected in other contexts (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003) – were previously absent in the studied settings. Secondly, the requirements deriving from the relationships entered into with local authorities favour certain styles of interaction to the detriment of other, less suitable ones: for example, the requirement to measure social impact legitimises the practice of a style like "plug-in volunteering" (Eliasoph, 2012; Rapoš Božič, 2021), in which the involvement of the participants and the tasks they perform are predefined in advance and are therefore more easily accounted for.

4.2 Seeing the City Through

While the influence of local authorities on third-sector bodies is something recognised at a representation level (Scott 1998) but difficult to disentangle at the level of practices, the inverse case considered in this section – how third sector groups may influence the conditions set by local authorities – is difficult to ascertain and a controversial hypothesis, as well as the starting point for the analysis conducted in this case. Two preliminary clarifications are therefore needed, the first of which concerns the importance of avoiding easy determinisms in the relationship between administrations and third-sector bodies: that is, just as the institutions do not determine practices (this relationship is always mediated), one must also avoid thinking that practices in themselves can overturn the institutional conditions that constitute their main condition of possibility. Secondly, one must bear in mind that the analysis here concerns the informal level: it does not look at how practices influence the formal level of conditions, but rather the way in which they manifest themselves at a situated level, their meanings and concrete implications. More precisely, it is a matter of investigating the process of "metaphorization" (de Certeau, 1990) with which practices appropriate institutional rules and conditions, with logics and purposes that necessarily differ from those for which the rules and conditions were originally conceived. Therefore, the conditions required by the funder – in short, users' activation, network coordination and impact measurement – are consolidated by simply participating in institutional relationships that require their compliance; but equally the forms of this participation metaphorize these conditions, as exemplified below.

In particular, the study's results show how the same conditions (the three requirements mentioned above) are metaphorized in different ways through different scene styles, resulting in heterogeneous constraints or action dilemmas at a practices level. This can be demonstrated with reference to the scene styles mentioned above, starting with the "community of interest" and then moving on to "plug-in volunteering".

As already mentioned, the first of these styles was systematically practiced in coordination meetings, occasions in which a large and heterogeneous number of actors were involved by virtue of specific and well-defined operational objectives, concerning the schedule of initiatives organised in the scope of the funded festival. In this approach to group formation, the relationship between the participants was based on the common ground of specific reference to these operational objectives, to the point that all attempts to broaden or deepen it caused embarrassment and were avoided as they undermined the reciprocal expectations linking the participants to the situations in which the "community of interest" was prevalent. Indeed, the requirement for participation to receive the funding led to the activation of a heterogeneous network of subjects which, in terms of practices, translated into relationships informed by a "community of interest" style, that is interactions that were openly instrumental to pursuing concrete goals. Some of the

participants in this style showed awareness of this implication, such as this obvious example from behind the scenes at a meeting:

> «Returning home, Pietro, one of the volunteers from the association I am studying confesses to me that he "initially took this opportunity to further their political action, gain greater visibility and potentially make an impact", but he soon realised that "the partners did not share their cause" and therefore he had to keep his intentions for himself, i.e. further them anyway without raising them openly» (from the author's fieldnotes, 8 May 2014).

This excerpt clearly shows how the aforementioned institutional conditions appeared in a "community of interest" style within a specific dilemma: to put it simply, that of building a broad coalition with a narrowly defined target or a narrow coalition among a few subjects that pursue a broadly defined target. As the first type of configuration gives way to the second, the community of interest style is challenged in favour of the emergence of the "community of identity" as a recurring model of interaction.

However, the dilemma with which the aforementioned conditions manifested themselves through a "plug-in volunteering" style was completely different. In this case, these conditions translated into an alternative, which contrasted the possibility of measuring with that of encouraging the participation of subjects external to the initiative and involved in it as volunteers or beneficiaries. This kind of dilemma was evident in the meetings, particularly in the way the prevalent "plug-in volunteering" style gave way to other styles of interaction, as in the following excerpt:

> «You, Mario, will station yourself at the end of this road, since your size should help you deal with any motorists who are not exactly happy to be there...- No, wait a minute, remember last year? The biggest problems had been in the park, there had been that fight... we should make sure that does not happen again, so nobody gets hurt.
> [Mario] - True, we need to figure out how to do that together... let's think about it for a moment now» (from the author fieldnotes, 24 may 2014).

Mario's intervention exemplifies a scene-switching practice in which the "plug-in volunteering" style gives way to a different model of interaction, defined in the context of this research as "pro-active citizenship" due to its proximity to the ideal of Tocquevillian self-organisation. This type of relationship signals the activation and assumption of responsibility by subjects initially invited to take part as volunteers carrying out specific and predefined activities. Due to its emergent and situated nature, the activation practiced by citizenship is particularly difficult to measure and report; indeed it can be argued that it takes place to the extent that the initial specific involvement parameters are exceeded or go in unexpected directions.

Through the scene styles practiced, the institutional conditions deriving from the relationships entered into with local authorities take on a dilemmatic nature, in which compliance with the requirements set by one of them is to the detriment of the others. Styles metaphorize and modulate the same general conditions in different dilemmas of action: for the "community of interest", for example, the choice is widening the network of subjects involved regarding a specific objective, or restricting the network but structuring it towards a more broadly defined objective and thus approaching a "community of identity" model. For the "plug-in volunteering", meanwhile, it was observed that the possibility of measuring the impact produced negatively affected the activation of the subjects involved, whereas, on the contrary, for "pro-active citizenship", the activation of users was to the detriment of social impact measurement. In summary, while at a formal level the requirements to which the subjects studied had to adhere remained the same (indeed they were reinforced), at the informal level of everyday practices and the dilemmas faced, the institutional conditions deriving from the relationships entered into with public administrations changed.

Conclusion

Urban governance practices are evolving so rapidly that research is struggling to keep up. In addition, although more recent analysis and modelling considers the growing role of the subjects of civil society and their relationship with the authorities, it generally postulates a separation between these subjects that exists only on a formal level. Recent collaborative co-planning and co-programming initiatives – which are at advanced stages in their testing and regulation in Italian cities (Arena & Bombardelli, 2022) – imply such a close collaboration between the authorities and civil society that a study of their relationship must consider any distinction between them to be purely methodical and not absolute (Gramsci, 1997). This assumption is often found, for example, in the critical literature on government through civil society and neo-liberalism, but these hypotheses are formulated in a way that leaves very little room for empirical exploration. In order to offer this space for empirical investigation, but without making naïve assumptions about the separations, the hypothesis formulated in this essay focuses on the informal dimension of the reciprocal influences between local authorities and civic actions.

The relevance of this dimension regarding the action of the state has been noted in the literature on civil society since at least the time of Hegel's classic reflections, while for the other direction in the relationship it was De Certeau who underlined with particular clarity the power of practices to change the contextual factors in which they develop from within. This paper has shown how these types of theoretical orientations can easily be translated into research hypotheses capable of being confirmed at an empirical level. In particular, the focus on scene styles has achieved a double result in the investigation of the relationship between local authorities and civic actions: firstly, the influence of the former on the latter has been resized, placing this effect solely at the level of representations and showing how at a practices level the processes are more complex and less deterministic. In particular, we have seen how local authorities affect civic actions through the constraints placed by the former on the latter, which re-articulate the array of scenes and related styles of interaction of the fabric of daily group life, stimulating new scenes and legitimising some styles at the expense of others. However, this does not mean that the influence is irrelevant, since scene styles are not an internal variable of civic action and its organisational culture, but rather the dimension in which the general functions performed by the action take shape, and the type of task actually accomplished through one's own work (Citroni, 2022). Secondly, a re-appropriation by civic actions of the constraints placed on them by local authorities was detected at the level of practices: the civic actions analysed (and the scene styles that inform them) "metaphorize" these constraints at an informal level in different action dilemmas.

The working hypothesis proposed to investigate the relationship between local authorities and civic action is by no means simple, as it requires a demanding exploration of the everyday informal dimension of civil society. In fact, this paper, rather than reproducing the standard view of civic action's areas of intervention, has instead focused on the ways it is structured on a daily basis, investigated here in terms of scene styles. While it is true that the literature emphasises how the collaboration between public bodies and civil society takes place in specific areas – such as fighting poverty and increasing diversity (Oosterlinck *et al.,* 2017) – it is also true that the study of reciprocal influences must also pay attention to how they act and how these are shaped by, and in turn feedback from, the institutional conditions in which they are situated. This is particularly true when the emerging forms of urban governance are made up of such dense relationships between civic actions and authorities as to make it necessary to avoid reifying their separation. This interweaving, in fact, necessitates overcoming the exclusive focus on representations, to instead investigate the effect of legibility and simplification imposed by local authorities on civil society. This effect is best examined when we not only focus on the categories through which the action represents itself but also consider the situated uses of these categories.

The current complexity of relations between civic actions and local authorities in urban contexts has been the object of a variety of both theoretical and empirical studies that have ended up

redefining civil society: no longer something completely external to public authorities and particularly their actions, but a variety of actors that through bottom-up civic action and initiatives may contribute to the urban governance in different forms (Citroni & Coppola, 2021). This paper is part of the growing interest in such forms and focused on the informal and everyday dimension of civil society (Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014) as a privileged place for studying its relationship with public administrations in urban areas (Brandtner & Powell, 2022).

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