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INTERACTIONS, HEALTH AND COMMUNITY

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SUMMARY

Preface

NORWAY, ITALY

di *Mario Aldo Toscano*

p. 9

Introduction

di *Andrea Salvini, Anders Johan W. Andersen*

13

Part I

DISCOURSES

19

I. Governing Health. Discourse Analysis in Public Health Research

di *Anders Johan W. Andersen*

21

II. Network Theories for Healthier Communities

di *Andrea Salvini*

35

III. Recognition. A Question of Morality or Professionalism?

di *Janneke Quarles van Ufford*

47

IV. The Qualitative Interview. From Romanticism to Social Enactment

di *Anne Ryen*

59

Part II

ISSUES AND RESEARCHES

75

V. Social Control as a Form of “Care”. The New Function of the Nation-State and the Role of the Prison

di *Andrea Borghini*

77

VI. Do I Have a Healthy Faith? When Religion Affect Health

di *Carolina Nuti*

91

VII. Materiality Talks. Including Materiality in Mental Health Research

di *Inger Beate Larsen*

101

VIII. Obesity and Its Consequences di <i>Tor-Ivar Karlsen</i>	p. 115
IX. Social Exclusion and Social Capital. Can the Concepts Enrich Each Other and Are They Relevant for Studies on Children Living in Low-Income Families? di <i>Anne Brita Thorud</i>	129
Part III	
PRACTICES	147
X. What about Practice? The Recurrent Question in Social Work Education di <i>Torunn Alise Ask</i>	149
XI. Notes on a Possible “Post-University” Program of Psycho-Social Training for the Social Worker di <i>Roberto Mazzu</i>	161
XII. “Dance Me to the End of Love”. Theories and Practice of Dance Movement Therapy di <i>Malvern Lumsden</i>	175
XIII. Health Coaching as an Intervention During Crises or Times of Stress di <i>John O. Bjørnestad, Anne Valen-Sendstad Skisland, Rune Hoigård</i>	193
XIV. Network Perspectives for Community Building di <i>Irene Psaroudakis</i>	205
XV. Social Networks: Body and Voice of the Community. Network Intervention in Italian Social Work di <i>Barbara Montanaro</i>	217
XVI. Integration and Public Health. The Experience of the “Società della Salute” (“Society of Health”) di <i>Giuseppe Cecchi</i>	231
Part IV	
VOLUNTEERING FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT	239
XVII. The Contradictions of Volunteer Work. A Factor of Fragmented Social Cohesion? The Case of the VOs in Tuscany di <i>Luca Corchia</i>	241

XVIII. From User Participation to User Interface. Reflections On The Need For New Metaphors In The Mental Health Field di <i>Odd Volden, Anders Johan W. Andersen</i>	p. 255
XIX. Groups and Associations of Self-Help/Mutual Aid as Instruments of Individual and Collective Empowerment di <i>Mario Serrano, Paolo Pini</i>	267
XX. Volunteering and Social Cohesion di <i>Dania Cordaz</i>	277
AUTHORS	289

Chapter XVII

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF VOLUNTEER WORK. A FACTOR OF FRAGMENTED SOCIAL COHESION? THE CASE OF THE VOS IN TUSCANY

by *Luca Corchia*

The essay describes some contradictions relating to the complex world of Italian voluntary organizations. In particular, the empirical analysis of this phenomenon in Tuscany reveals an informal redefinition of the mission of solidarity, which complicates the contribution of voluntary associations to the construction of a more general sense of "social cohesion". The data regarding the "propensity to networking" seems to confirm the dominance of dynamics of fragmentation, specialization and dependence on public institutions that prevent the "meanings of networks" to condense into "social capital".

1. Some contradictions of volunteer work

Over the last decades certain factors of transformation of the social systems have been operating in numerous areas. The fortunate metaphor of the "liquefaction of solid bodies" of Zygmunt Bauman well represents the flaking away of the traditional structures and the reshuffling of functions in the spheres of material and symbolic reproduction¹. In this picture, in volunteer work, too, dynamics which are adaptive to changes underway – particularly in respect to the *welfare state* – are present, which seem to be determining an alteration of its "constitutive nature".

Like a two-faced Janus, the world of volunteer organizations ("VOs") is animated by contradictory orientations, some of which are forward-looking, others gazing behind them. On the quantitative level the role of the VOs is decisive for maintaining the levels of well-being of Italian society, and volunteerism draws wide public appreciation. Nevertheless, if we consider its structural dynamics,

¹ Bauman Z. [2000], *Modernità liquida*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002.

we cannot help but notice that qualitatively within the associations there is in fact a change that involves the “*mission* of volunteer action”², with the passage from a “vocational” approach to a “managerial” one, based on the concept of social utility. A lesser degree of attention to the dimensions lying at the base of the “being” more than of the “doing” regarding volunteerism feed the spread of a pragmatic attitude oriented towards the achievement of operational objectives, which, moreover, run the risk of losing their wider cultural and social sense. What is in play is the identity of volunteerism and, therefore, its “being-able-to-be-itself”, even through physiological transformations³.

In one way, volunteerism is characterized by an adjustment to the exigencies of rationality typical of modern forms of association.

The “surrogate-like” and “integrative” functions of the policies of the *Welfare state* asked of the Third sector⁴ lead to a greater institutional propensity of the VOs, ever more official in their conventions, service contracts, partnerships, and other forms of collaboration. The law regarding the regions no. 328/2000 –*Law for the realization of an integrated system of intervention and social services* – sanctions, on the normative level, the integration between volunteer organizations and public institutions. The internal organization of the VOs, too, is more “isomorphous” to those public, private and semi-private administrations with which the volunteer organizations maintain continuing relationships, and whose organizational flowcharts are taken as models for the division of labor and the specification of duties. The diversification of the services, in function of the opportunities afforded by a given context, the management of actions of intervention, and the relationship with the users of the services seem to respond to criteria of a methodical entrepreneurial form of conduct. The strategies of *fund raising*, the establishment of offices of representation, the enrollment in the regional profession-

² For a review of the principal definitions of volunteer action, the essay by Cnaan R.A., Handy F., Wadsworth M., *Defining who is a volunteer*, which appeared in the “Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly”, 25, 1996, remains a fundamental point of reference.

³ On the gradual but profound change in the way of considering volunteerism, cfr. Salvini A., ‘*Identità e trasformazioni del volontariato*’, in “Areté”, 2, 2009.

⁴ Towards the end of the 1990s, Salamon and Anheier identified a type of “modularity” in the interactions among the public, private, and “social private” spheres, according to the nature of the political, social, and economic contexts of the different countries that they studied. Cfr. Salamon L., Anheier H., *Social Origins of Civil Society: Explaining the Non-Profit Sector Cross-Nationally*, in “Voluntas”, IX, 3, 1998.

al list, the training of personnel, internal and external communication, are all elements of the “new volunteerism” which come together to delineate a recognizable identity in the territory of reference, and, therefore, the credibility of the VOs as distributors of services of public utility on the part of the public institutions, the primary source of their funding.

If these are the principal traits of the “structural change” regarding the way in which the VOs constitute and organize themselves, and then insert themselves into the social fabric, there exists also a contrasting side, in which the evolution of the sector is lived by a part of the associations and by many volunteers as a barely-tolerated compromise, if not as an outright betrayal of the constitutive ethical tension, completely gratuitous, and connected to the concept of the gift of voluntary action⁵. A “symbolic change” that regards personal motivations, collective conduct and the cultural values of reference of the world of volunteerism in Italy seems, therefore, to be superimposed on the structural change, and risks eroding the pure feeling of altruism towards others⁶.

What is in play is the “anthropological asset” of the way of being of volunteerism, and it cannot be ruled out that the future will see a profound change in its identity.

2. Are Voluntary Organizations factors of social cohesion?

If volunteerism has running through it processes of “entrepreneurialism”, a further question arises which is of no little importance: does volunteerism represent a factor of social cohesion, or does the prevalence of a “managerial approach” in the management of the VOs as well as the presence of “competitive reasoning” in the non-profit sector render it a factor of social division? Put in

⁵ Limiting ourselves to the legal level, in law no. 266/1991 (“Law regarding volunteerism in the regions”), Article II, we find the definition of volunteerism as “a service personally rendered, spontaneous and gratuitous, through the organization to which the volunteer belongs, with no aim towards profit, including indirect, and exclusively oriented towards solidarity”, and that “there could be no retribution of any kind, not even from the beneficiary”.

⁶ Cfr. Licursi S., *Sociologia della solidarietà*, Roma, Carocci, 2010. Among the many contributions regarding this theme should be noted the research carried out by Irene Psaroudakis within the research team of the Department of Political and Social Sciences. Cfr. Psaroudakis I., *Profili del volontario. Nuove direzioni della gratuità*, in Toscano M.A. (ed.), *Zoon Politikon 2010. II – Politiche sociali e partecipazione*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2010, pp. 111-124.

other terms, it's a question of investigating whether volunteerism does or does not constitute a "collective good" arising from the integrative structure of the associative networks, and from which the entire community draws advantage in the construction of interpretations, values, a sense of belonging, and opportunities of inclusion and of participation.

The concept of "social cohesion" inserted itself into the analytical apparatus of the discipline of Sociology, and it isn't difficult to find ample treatments in the study of the "classics" on order and social change⁷. On the strictly methodological level, this concept has created not a few problems of "operationalization" due to the multiple theoretical frames of reference subtended in the research designs⁸. Antonio Maria Chiesi proposes a systematization of those dimensions which are semantically implicated in the concept of social cohesion, and are most relevant in the specific study of volunteer organizations:

possiamo individuare quattro dimensioni del concetto in esame: – livello strutturale, che si riferisce ai meccanismi di inclusione ed esclusione sociale, le opportunità di accesso a differenti ambiti, il grado di mobilità sociale, struttura delle disuguaglianze; – livello culturale, che riguarda il grado in cui norme, valori e credenze sono comunemente condivise; – livello dell'identità, che riguarda il sentimento di comune appartenenza, il grado di riconoscimento di gruppi diversi e la tolleranza nei loro confronti; – livello dell'azione, che riguarda il tasso di partecipazione ad attività collettive, il coinvolgimento nelle associazioni, la frequenza delle interazioni personali e la densità dei networks su cui gli individui possono contare (capitale sociale)⁹.

⁷ On the theme of social integration in the positivist tradition, cfr. Toscano M.A., *Divenire e dover essere. Lessico della sociologia positivista*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1996.

⁸ For an initial examination see: Gross N., Martin W.E., *On Group Cohesiveness*, in the "Journal of Sociology", 57, 1952, pp. 533-564; Bollen K. A., Hoyle R.H., *Perceived Cohesion: A Conceptual and Empirical Examination*, in "Social Forces", 69, 1990, pp. 479-504; Jenson J., *Mapping Social Cohesion: The State of Research*, Ottawa, Canadian Policy Research Network, 1998; Berger-Schmitt R., *Social Cohesion as an Aspect of the Quality of Societies: Concept and Measurement*, EuReporting WP No. 14, Manheim, Centre for Survey Research and Methodology, 2000; Chan J., To H., Chan E., *Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research*, in "Social Indicators Research", 75, 2006, pp. 273-302.

⁹ "We can individuate four dimensions of the concept under examination: - structural level, which refers to the mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion, the opportunities of access to different areas, the degree of social mobility, structure of inequality; - cultural level, which regards the degree to which

Given the complexity of conceptual and operative problems, to which specific research has to be devoted, here we will only concentrate on the “level of action” and, in particular, the “propensity towards *networking*” of the volunteer organizations; this is a dimension which we believe covers at least a part of the phenomena relative to social cohesion.

The favorable orientation towards collaboration on the part of the VOs is quite surely an important factor from the point of view of the organizational capacity, of the exchange of experiences, of access to resources which would otherwise be unavailable, and of the more general predisposition to “*inter*” and “*intra*” forms of organizational development. Certainly, the amount of work accomplished in synergy doesn’t yet prefigure a real and true “network operation”; nevertheless, it constitutes its “base”. But beyond the strategic aspects of *networking*, what is most interesting is that the “network making” of the VOs – especially within the world of volunteerism – can be taken as an indicator of “social cohesion”. It’s a question, therefore, of verifying the nexus between the levels of “structural cohesion” of the volunteer organizations and the levels of social cohesion of the social systems.

The practicing of collaboration should promote that “spirit of reticularity” which can consolidate a mental attitude oriented in the direction of a possible development of social solidarity. But, in contrast, as was observed by Dania Cordaz, potential tendencies towards fragmentation within volunteerism could lead to reducing effects as regards “the more general levels of social cohesion”¹⁰.

norms, values and beliefs are commonly shared; - the level of identity, which regards the feeling of common belonging, the degree of recognition of groups that are different and of tolerance in their regard; - the level of action, which regards the rate of participation and collective activity, involvement in the associations, the frequency of personal interactions, and the density of the networks on which individuals can count (social capital”). Chiesi A., *Coesione sociale: un concetto complesso*, in “Impresa e stato”, XX, 79, 2007, p. 47. In the international literature dealing with the theme of “social cohesion” and the structural cohesion of volunteer organizations one can consult: Blau J.R., Rabrenovic G., *Interorganizational relations of nonprofit organizations: An exploratory study*, in “Sociological Forum”, VI, 2, 1991, pp. 327-347; Galaskiewicz J., Bielefeld W., Dowell M., *Networks and organizational Growth: A study of Community Based Nonprofits*, in “Administrative Science Quarterly”, 51, 2006, pp. 337-380; Glanville J.L., *Voluntary Associations and Social Network Structure: Why Organizational Location and Type Are Important*, in “Sociological Forum”, XIX, 3, 2004.

¹⁰ Cordaz D., *Volontariato e coesione sociale. Problemi e prospettive*, Toscano M.A. (ed.), *Zoon Politikon 2010. II – Politiche sociali e partecipazione*, cit., p. 94.

3. An empirical research program on the structural cohesion of voluntary organizations in Tuscany

A favorable occasion for attempting to formulate this question, albeit in a completely preliminary way, was offered by the series of empirical investigations on the *Identity and Needs of Volunteerism*, organized beginning in 1998 by Andrea Salvini at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Pisa, within the framework of the conventions stipulated with the CESVOT (Center of Services for Volunteerism in Tuscany)¹¹.

Even though the area of research is territorially limited in respect to the various realities of volunteerism in Italy, the circumstance of being one of the most important regions of north-central Italy makes the *panel* an important “study case”. Since the investigations of Robert Putnam¹² on the civic traditions of Italian municipalities, the width and capillarity of the associative experience in Tuscany well correspond to the common interpretation – something that has been verified – of volunteer action as a factor of cohesion and expansion of “social capital”¹³.

¹¹ Cfr. Salvini A., *Identità e bisogni del volontariato in Toscana*, Firenze, I Quaderni del Cesvot, n. 7, 1998; Salvini A., Cordaz D. (eds.), *Le trasformazioni del volontariato in Toscana. 2º rapporto di indagine*, Firenze, I Quaderni del Cesvot, n. 27, 2005; Salvini A., *Identità e tendenze del volontariato in Toscana*, Pisa-Firenze, Dipartimento di Scienze Sociali (UniPi)-Cesvot, 2007; Salvini A. (ed.), *Profilo dei volontari in Toscana*, Pisa-Firenze, Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche Sociali (UniPi)-Cesvot, 2010.

¹² Well known is the essay ‘*Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*’, published in 1993 by Robert D. Putnam, on the functioning of democracy, and translated into Italian with the title *La tradizione civica nelle regioni italiane* (Milano, Mondadori, 1993). In this work, “civic community” means “equality as well as civic contribution”, and is operationally defined based on a series of indicators which evoke the moral densities of Émile Durkheim – such as “the density of local cultural associations and of recreational ones” –, and which converge towards the notion of “social capital” – “the set of those elements of social organization – like trust, shared norms, social networks – that can improve the efficiency of a society viewed overall, in the measure to which it facilitates coordinated action of individuals” – and of which north-central regions such as Tuscany are well-endowed. The intense debate regarding social capital was translated in the creation of “atlases” and “maps” to describe the distribution. Cfr. Cartocci R., *Mappe del tesoro. Atlante del capitale sociale in Italia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2007; Sabatini F., *Un atlante del capitale sociale italiano*, in the “QA Rivista dell’Associazione Rossi Doria”, 1, 2007. Concerning the structure of civil society in Tuscany, see Ramella F., *Cuore rosso? Viaggio politica nell’Italia di mezzo*, Roma, Donzelli, 2005.

¹³ Cfr. Volterrani A., Bilotti A., Carulli S., *Relazionalità diffusa e capitale sociale nelle associazioni di volontariato della Toscana. Rapporto di ricerca*, Firenze, Cesvot, 2009.

The recent investigation conducted in 2011¹⁴ provides a picture of the difficulty of creating network action directed by the VO, and in general of “opening itself” to collaborative relationships of various kinds with other collective subjects, in particular with the other VOs and subjects of the “Third Sector”.

In this research the “network index” was arrived at by combining information gathered from several indicators referring to the availability and the effective action of *networking* of the VOs: *a*) the operative connection in common projects (agreements, *partnerships*, etc.) with other volunteer organizations, the CESVOT, the social cooperatives, the associations for social promotion; *b*) the evaluation given to the extent to which those collaborations were “problematic” and on the need to increase them.

Regarding point “*a*”, the VOs who say they are operatively connected with other associations for the realization of common projects constitute 60.1% of those subjects who responded, with a marked propensity towards collaboration on the part of the VOs operating in the social (63%) and community-health (66.8%) sectors, as well as the most “recent” VOs, constituted from 2000 up to present (67.5%). Those considered to be “consolidated” (from 1985 to 1999) and those “rooted” (before 1985), instead, show a progressive drop in their figures (28.7% and 56.1%, respectively). This propensity is, by contrast, distributed homogeneously in function of the size of the VO. In light of this data, we can evaluate rather positively the level of connection regarding common projects with other associations. Not only are approximately six organizations in ten involved in working together with other VOs, but many of these share multiple projects.

Slightly more than half of those organizations interviewed (52.6%) declare a link with the CESVOT, by now a favored interlocutor regarding their initiatives. Going more into detail, we find a greater incidence of those associations operating in the social and community-health sectors (59.7% and 55.4%, respectively) compared to those belonging to the area that we have defined as “non-welfare” (tutelage and promotion of rights, civil protection, promotion of cultural goods and services, environmental protection, in-

¹⁴ A. Salvini (ed.), *Le trasformazioni del volontariato in Toscana. 3° rapporto di indagine*, Pisa-Firenze, Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Sociali (UniPi)-Cesvot, 2011. This sample-based investigation, conducted from the autumn of 2010 to the spring of 2011, involved 848 of the roughly 3000 VOs sub-divided among the eleven provincial delegations. This represents 25% of the VOs present in the Cesvot archives.

ternational volunteerism, etc.) and working in the sector of health-care (51.2% and 46.7%, respectively). Considering the data related to the year in which the VOs were constituted, among the three aforementioned categories we find first a decrease, then an increase: “rooted” 54.4%, “consolidated” 48.5%, “recent” 54.9%; while, relative to the size of the VO (the indicator here is the number of volunteers belonging to the group, broken down into three categories: from 1 to 10, from 11 to 30, and from 31 on), we see a greater propensity towards collaboration with the CESVOT on the part of the weaker entities, that is, the “small” VOs (57.6%) compared to those of “medium” size (52.6%) and to the “large” VOs (49.5%).

If we evaluate the *links* with other associations belonging to the “Third sector”, it emerges that, overall, 25.0% of the VOs establish collaborative relationships with the social cooperatives, while 24.3% do so with associations for social promotion. Such relationships are found more frequently in the “medium”– and “large”– sized VOs (32.8% and 26%, respectively), and, more specifically we find that the “rooted” VOs have a relatively high rate of such collaborative links (29.6%) with the social cooperatives. Concerning the different sectors, it’s interesting to note that among the “non-welfare” organizations we see that only a small percentage (9.5%) have connections with the social cooperatives, while this number increases substantially (21%) regarding connections with associations for social promotion.

Finally, only 22.3% of the VOs have established relationships with subjects belonging to the “*profit*” area (banks, industries, etc.), particularly the VOs operating in the socio-health sector. The frequency of relationships of about half of the sample, independent of any particular internal differentiations, is somewhat more robust regarding the world of academia and the university. This is a new element in respect to the past, one which denotes, beyond a strategy of simple “recruitment”, a capacity on the part of volunteerism in Tuscany to “conceive of itself” as having, and to “present itself” with, educational proposals able to involve new generations.

As regards point “b”, the judgments that the VOs express concerning the degree to which such collaborative efforts prove “problematic” (*l*)¹⁵ and on the necessity of increasing these relationships

¹⁵ The question on the questionnaire administered to the VOs, relating to the item “Collaboration with other VOs”: “We now ask you to underline those aspects that you consider to be problematic in the life of your organization, indicating the level of “problematicity” based on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “extremely problematic”, and 5 means “not problematic at all (quite the con-

(ii)¹⁶ offer a confusing image of the Tuscan VOs. On the one hand, the rates at which such collaborations were considered to “extremely problematic” or “somewhat problematic” were very low, only 1.6% and 15.6%, respectively. Here there are no significant differences among the different VOs, even if the problem is felt slightly more among those operating in the social sector (4.3% and 17.2%, respectively, compared to the two figures given above). On the other, the sample of associations contacted seems to consider an increase in *networking* as a true challenge for the world of volunteerism: this is affirmed , taken altogether, by 52.4% of the VOs. Examining more in detail, this urgency is more felt in the community-health sector (59.4%) and in the “non-welfare” area (58.8%), among those VOs of “medium” size (54.4%), and those of “recent” constitution (56.8%).

The “map” of outside relationships of the VOs constitutes a sort of “litmus test” for the deepest and widest characteristics of volunteerism in Tuscany. The proposed interpretative hypothesis – one that has to be submitted for further verification – signals a “segmentation” of the world of volunteerism in virtue of the way in which the mission and its management is understood, as well as for a “polarization” dependent on structural aspects. The differentiation existing within the world of volunteerism is one of the elements which can explain the only moderate level of “structural cohesion” to be found among the VOs, and, therefore, places at the center of scientific attention their essential contribution to “social cohesion”¹⁷.

trary...”).

¹⁶ The response “Increase collaboration with other volunteer organizations (creating “network”)” was on a list containing six response options to the question: “What should be done to improve the presence of your organization within the territory? (choose two answers in order of importance)”.

¹⁷ To this regard, Dania Cordaz underlines the problematic nexus between structural cohesion of volunteer associations and social cohesion of social systems: “one of the most significant current tendencies within volunteerism regards ‘structural polarization’, that is, that process of ‘internal differentiation’ which leads to, along with and in virtue of an excess fragmentation, diversification among organizational realities on the basis of certain affirmed dichotomies: - *territorial centrality/periphericity, small/large dimensions, ample structuralization/limited structuralization, wide/limited access to resources*. This different landscape brings seriously into question the possibility of continuing to abstractly maintain that the presence of volunteerism and of volunteers constitutes, of itself, a factor which produces social cohesion”. Cfr. Cordaz D., *Volontariato e coesione sociale. Problemi e prospettive*, cit., pp. 94-95.

Moreover, it's interesting to note that, looking at the collaborative activities of the VOs as well as their relative awareness of the value of *networking*, volunteerism in Tuscany continues to be incapable of conceiving itself as a "collective subject" able to establish common actions of intervention. This results if we introduce into the picture that has so far been described also the continuous links that the VOs maintain with public administrations, in particular those formalized with the stipulation of conventions with Regions, Provinces, Municipalities, and Local Health Entities. From the analysis of these data a "fragmentation" emerges that reveals the true interlocutors of those organizations which are the most specialized in certain services, of those most "rooted" in time and those that are larger in size.

The greater degree of openness to entering into the orbit of *welfare* services offered within the territory must not be understood exclusively in an "instrumental" sense, that is, oriented only towards the acquisition of resources. On the contrary, what this truly regards is the adoption into its own "philosophy" on the part of the organization of a new idea of support and cooperation with the public administrations¹⁸, which tends to exclude relationships with other volunteer associations. For example, the synthetic index of *networking* ($a + b$) among the VOs is particularly low for those operating in the healthcare sector (4.8% *vs.* 12.0% μ).

This close relationship is causing changes in the internal organization of the VOs, making them more and more like the typical structures of companies and of the public institutions with which they collaborate ("isomorphism").

For these VOs, the judgment expressed by Andrea Salvini is confirmed: "The prevalent nature of inter-institutional relationships is not one of interdependence in a network of non-hierarchical relations, but rather that of dependence in respect to models of action that in large part have been predisposed according to reasoning which is systematic and non-reticular"¹⁹.

In this sense, the thesis put forth by Antonin Wagner²⁰ regard-

¹⁸ The *Manifesto del Volontariato* drawn up in 2007 by the region together with volunteer organizations well expresses the growth in the reciprocal readiness towards collaboration, and of a political-institutional orientation which is more and more decisively pursued by local entities, subjects belonging to the third sector, and volunteerism.

¹⁹ Salvini A., *Il volontariato oltre il Welfare State*, in Toscano M.A. (ed.), *Zoon Politikon 2010. II – Politiche sociali e partecipazione*, cit., p. 53.

²⁰ Wagner A., *Redefining "Social Origin" Theory: The Structural Transformation of the*

ing the existence of a network of interdependencies of subjects of various natures which compete in the defining of a new public sphere (“incorporation”) does not find full verification in the situation in Tuscany, in which the nature of the inter-institutional relationships is not one of “interdependence” of the VOs in respect to the *welfare state* system.

As Jürgen Habermas observed, it's necessary to ascertain if a true “colonization” of the processes of social integration of civil society on the part of the public administrations is in course, that is, a “penetration” of forms of systemic rationalization of “power” within areas of action connotated by bonds of solidarity and understanding²¹.

This would determine a vicious circle, by which the associative entities that are stronger could receive a higher degree of legitimacy directly from the political sphere, tending to “form a system” more with the distributors of resources rather than with other volunteer associations²². “Institutionalization” is, in other words, the “price” that many VOs have to pay in order to guarantee access to public and private economic resources or to benefit from particular fiscal facilitations.

Moreover, the tendency of the VOs towards “nuclearization”, the limited average quantity of their human capital, in contrast to the growing number of volunteers over the last two decades, the steady birth-rate, the “springing forth” of new organizations from pre-existing subjects which had been internally fragmented, all of these processes must be placed in connection with an attitude of volunteerism that, in part, continues to be self-referencing and deliberately “apart”. This “standing apart”, especially among the “small” VOs, is due, in part, to their reproduction that is still excessively dependent on “short” relational dynamics, that is, on relationships of friendship and family ties. But the “self-referencing” involves the “large” VOs, too, which are ever more subject to tendencies of professionalization, of the specialization of “vocations”, and of differentiation of the activities and the sectors of intervention. “Organizational dynamism” – which allows the VOs to re-

Public Sphere, in the “Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly”, XIX, 4, 2000.

²¹ Habermas J. [1981], ‘Teoria dell'agire comunicativo. II. Critica della ragione funzionalistica’, Bologna, il Mulino, 1986, p. 990. Cfr. Ampola M., Corchia L., *Dialogo su Jürgen Habermas. Le trasformazioni della modernità*, Pisa, ETS, 2010², pp. 145-150.

²² It cannot be dismissed that the institutionalization of the VOs does not enter into conflict with the request of greater autonomy manifested by those volunteers who are more “reflective”.

orient their strategy regarding the exigencies of the community “served” –does not accompany in a systematic manner the strategies of “network operation”.

4. Provisional Conclusion

The configuration of networks of relationships of the organizations present throughout the Tuscan territory presents, furthermore, diversified values in relation to the degree of structural cohesion within volunteerism. This involves, therefore, clarifying whether, and if so, in what measure and how, “structural cohesion” in these volunteer organizations determines access to information and to opportunities of development for the VOs, and how the internal dynamic of volunteerism does or does not produce “social capital”. In this regard, different, and even opposing, interpretations are possible. The world of volunteerism remains, in fact, a multiform reality, complex and variegated, rich with cues for reflection and levels of analysis.

The Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Pisa, under the direction of Andrea Salvini, is conducting, on behalf of the CESVOT, an investigation on the orientation of the VOs towards network operation, and on the effects of the cohesiveness internal to volunteerism on social capital. The objective is that of reconstructing – through the techniques of *social network analysis*²³ – the structure of the networks of relationships of the VOs in Tuscany, and to correlate the indexes of reticular cohesion with the indicators of social cohesion, in order to finally describe the results of “network operation” among the VOs in the territories in which they perform. This is as much an important cognitive challenge for sociology as it is a political one for the community.

²³ Cfr. Wellman B., *Structural analysis: From metaphor to theory and substance*, in Wellman B., Berkowitz S.D. (eds), *Social structures: A network approach*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 19-61; Wasserman S., Faust K., *Social network analysis: methods and applications*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994. Among those Italian studies: Piselli F., *Reti. L'analisi di network nelle scienze sociali*, Roma, Donzelli, 1995; Chiesi A., *L'analisi dei reticolati*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1999; Salvini A., *L'analisi delle reti sociali. Risorse e meccanismi*, Pisa, Plus, 2005; Salvini A. (ed.), *Analisi delle reti sociali. Teorie, metodi, applicazioni*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2007.

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This book is a collection of scientific papers which, in various ways, highlight questions concerning *interactions, health and community*, as conceptualized by a group of scholar and health and social professionals from Italy and Norway, that have experienced several occasions of intellectual and practical exchanges and encounters.

The reader will certainly find, inside the book, extremely interesting insights having to do with those processes aimed at improving health and wellbeing within different social contexts, the meaning of social research – in its broadest sense – in the field of marginality, human and social suffering, the ways and the form through which local communities can mobilize to become pro-active actors in the process of construction of social welfare. This book, as remembered in the Preface, is situated within the creative tradition of *community among distances* that confirm the persistence of a European culture beyond the borders, theoretical and practical, greatly superior to the limiting formal national contexts.

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