

## WHICH E-DEMOCRACY IS DESIRABLE? A VIABLE PROPOSAL

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### Abstract

This article wants to extract the traits that an ideal e-democracy should have, to describe a viable and effective way to implement a bottom-up form of e-democracy.

The proposal is called L'Agenda La FAcciamo NOi, (from now on L'A.L.Fa.No.), an instrument designed to realize a bottom-up form of local democracy. The instrument is a smartphone app that allows citizens to report problems they encounter in their daily lives, with a related website, which allows them to express on the priorities to be assigned to the various issues. This let any single citizen to express himself on the opportunity to put in the political agenda issues and to express his opinion on the possible actions needed to solve them. Finally I'll examine the possibility, desirability and consequences on politicians, public administrators and society of the implementation and of the use of such technology.

**Keywords:** e-democracy, L'A.L.Fa.No., bottom-up, referendum, referenda, political agenda, active citizenship.

### E-DEMOCRACY: AN OVERVIEW

On what is democracy there are several studies, and there are several views in the scientific community about the definition of the concept, despite a long and significant work of confinement and several theoretical studies. On the other hand, for what concerns e-democracy, we are living the opposite experience: any attempt of defining the confinement is regularly passed by reality. The new ways of political participation created by the development and the use of new technologies do not want to fall into any known patterns of interpretation, and tend to make any attempt to define them to appear inadequate and obsolete. But is this perception true? Is e-democracy a form of democracy or during the path it became something different?

What is certain is that the mechanisms of delegation and political representation to which it has come in the last century (paying an enormous price in blood and stability), seem outdated or at least to be overcome as soon as possible, in the light of the crisis of representation and representativeness of the parties, and, more generally, of the intermediate bodies of society. One of the proposals that seem to be most addressed is the replacement of the actual, known form of democracy with new form based on the heavy use (and perhaps at times even indiscriminate) of new information technologies and the Internet. The basic idea is to re-propose

the experience of direct democracy of classical Athens thanks to a new form of agora electronics<sup>1</sup>.

The development of new ICT has produced a remarkable shift of what is considered desirable, from the concept of representation, which is the cornerstone of representative democracies and the undisputed protagonist of the history of social conquest during the 1900, to the concept of direct participation. The distinguishing feature of direct democracy. At the same time, the discussion has shifted from ensuring the quality of leadership (a characteristic that is of course very important in representative democracy) to ensure the quality of citizenship (character instead more appropriate to the operation of a direct democracy).

Besides all this debate engages in a rut already well known to previous generations of scholars and defined long ago, the idea that with the advent of new communication technologies there is automatically a break with the past. The stereotype of the advent of the future today, thanks to new technological discoveries, is well established, and looks periodically at every technological leap<sup>2</sup>. In this context, the idea of electronic democracy thrives. But new communication technologies are inherently, by their very nature, democratic? Actually they seem to offer new opportunities for political participation directly to citizens, political groups and institutions.

Moreover, the spread of the Internet as a primary and preferred source of news by the public, at least in the most advanced Western democracies, has almost reached the popularity of television, having already equaled the radio and widely surpassed the print [1]. This could not help but turn the discussion note on content, distribution, control and access to political communication channels [2]. The use of the Internet to make decisions is now seen as a major innovation: the advent of a neutral instrument finally, the gateway to a (too often not too well-defined) form of political emancipation of all individual citizen thanks to new technology. But is it really possible to imagine a neutral and intrinsically "democratic" tool (whatever that means: as we said at the beginning, in fact, the debate about what is actually democracy is still open)?

The philosophy behind the idea of the Internet is the peer to peer communication. And this kind of communication model, made up of no more messages broadcast (one to many) but rather by type exchanges *Netcast* (many to many), disrupts the manner typical of centralized society, and this explains why many authoritarian states in the world are attempting, with greater or lesser success, to stop its spread.

But, more specifically for the purposes of this work, in what way the Internet and modern ICT facilitates political participation? Today have been highlighted certain characteristics: participation via the Internet, given the nature of the network itself, tends to transcend national and institutional boundaries, and to trigger new practices of citizenship, media and culture [3], to amplify and reflect the trend of change (and breaking) existing in society that affect the political process [4] creates resonating chambers for the voice of citizens [5] promotes pluralism and socio-cultural [6]; Bimber also noted that Internet speeds up political pluralism, for its ability to catalyze processes that otherwise would remain inert. The Internet and new ICT technologies have also helped to organize events (a typical example is the Arab Spring, which saw an important organizational tool in Twitter and other social networks) and to modernize analog methods necessary to representative democracy (in electronic voting systems tested in different parts of the world, and also much criticized and potentially dangerous, as is shown by *Hacking Democracy*, a 2006 documentary).

But the Internet can also really help to improve or replace today's decision-making processes? Or is it just a myth that has long pursued? Can the Internet really be an aid to democratic life? It makes sense to talk about democracy mail, electronic agora?

Those questions are really hard, and I'm not going to solve it now. By the way, one thing appears to be very clear, and on it there is big agreement in the scientific community: any single theory of democracy requires, in order to work, the voters to be informed and capable to understand what are they voting for, and to be able to choose among the alternatives. For the direct form of e-democracy, this is even more important: what's the sense of letting any citizen to vote on a technical issue he or she doesn't understand? On the other hand, it's pretty clear that given the actual situation we are not really to abandon representative

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<sup>1</sup> Over all, I'd like to remember Newt Gingrich, an American politician who in 1994 announced the end of the Congress, which should have been replaced by a "virtual conference" where every citizen would express their preferences from home.

<sup>2</sup> As noted Vedel, taken from Wainer Lusoli in *Democrazia (elettronica) e definizioni*, the St. Simonians believed the telegraph 'a means of universal association, which brings about the communion of the East and West' (*L'idee de democratie electronique: origines, visions, questions*, in P. Perrineau (ed.), the désenchantement démocratique, La Tour d'Aigues, Editions de l'Aube, p. 243); however, the list is much longer: such momentous prophecies have been made about the advent of radio, telephone, television, fax machines and photocopiers, and everything in (all things considered short) period of a century.

democracy and immediately transact to a form of direct democracy. Even if, hypothetically, it would be considered desirable, today and into the immediate future there is no real chance to implement an electronically driven form of e-democracy: the friction of the *status quo* is just still too strong, and there is no real pressure to implement a project like this, other than vague claim about dreamy futures. This do not means that we cannot implement forms of e-democracy, especially on lower levels of government. Given that, we think that a viable forms of e-democracy should let any citizen to express his or her opinion over the issues he or she can understand, in his small community, and through that to lobby the (representative) government.

## **L'A.L.FA.NO.**

The idea of L'A.L.Fa.No. born at the beginning of 2011, inspired by the growing public debate in our country, the possibility of new forms of democracy, and the recovery of a form of direct democracy thanks to electronics; it has been formalized thanks to the stimulus of a competition organized by the University of Bologna in the summer 2011. In writer's opinion, the debate on a Greek agora returns thanks to the possibilities of ICT, going on for years, is biased by an error: to try to find feasible solutions in order to allow as many people as possible to vote as often as possible. Too often people forget that the problem of democracy is not just how many people you take in consideration to have a decision, but also (I would say primarily) in a world as complex as our, the understanding of the problems that the decision maker has. As well highlighted and explained also by Milton Friedman in *Free to Choose*, while if we use as a method to choose the free market all the players in the game can individually consider the absolute best for themselves, benefiting through their choices of decentralized system of prices, but not by influencing the choices of others in any further way, choosing through a democratic process, you are giving up part of your freedom, choosing to pick the choice of the majority, whatever it will be. It is therefore particularly important that the selection of the electoral body choose people qualified to comment on the decision there are asked to take.<sup>3</sup>

From that point of view has born the idea of L'A.L.Fa.No.: to create an instrument able to let selected electoral body (chosen by their capacity to express themselves on the issue) to vote in a free market logic over political issues.

From a technical point of view L'A.L.Fa.No. has been formalized as an app for smartphones, given the incredible ease of use and immediacy that characterizes this media, also supported by a website that would allow to manage the voting system. From the first project of 2011 summer, L'A.L.Fa.No. was later refined and transformed into various other incarnations that have further expanded and refined the methods by which pursues the objectives, increasing the usefulness of the database from the administrator side of the political and public in order to encourage the use and the promotion of the instrument. After being brought to several local governments for a period of experimentation, in 2013 the project won the award, sponsored by the Lions club, for business ideas with high social value: the Lifebility Award in the Transport and Mobility; was later presented to ATM – the Milan Transport Company, and illustrated privately to some local administrators in Milan.

The goal of long-term and wide-ranging L'A.L.Fa.No. aims to achieve is a real, desirable and useful form of bottom-up democracy, allowing citizens to express their views on the problems with different characteristics and levels of complexity such that it makes sense that they express themselves in this regard. Unfortunately, indeed, more and more often modern democracies ask voters to express themselves on highly complex, with different implications that are not immediately visible, issues so that it is at least questionable whether it really makes sense to ask such a question to the common citizens.

How to achieve this objective? The app allows, through a user-friendly GUI, to report problems and issues (roads, local planning, small building and so on, as above) in which any citizen will come across, and to express on the priority to be assigned to the solution of the various issues raised, creating and sorting a database of political issues. The electoral body is automatically selected by the system, through a geographic criteria, considering qualified to vote for all citizens who live in the area where the problem was reported (to let just people who live in the area to express themselves on the issues of that area).

The benefits may occur when using L'A.L.Fa.No. are mainly two: first of all a considerable simplification of the procedure to the citizens for reporting (it's likely that often citizens avoid to report problems that they experience any given day due to the complications, and sterile bureaucracy necessary to do it, as well as for

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<sup>3</sup> See Sartori, G., Una occasione mancata? Intervista sulla riforma costituzionale, a cura di Leonardo Morlino, Laterza, 1998, pag. 106.

the difficulty of understanding who and where to present their grievances, to orient between different competences, different levels of government and myriads of municipal agencies).

## A New Form for E-Democracy?

L'A.L.Fa.No. allow every single citizen to hold a mini-referendum on issues and matters that he or she considers relevant. Furthermore, it allow to create a "market" made of citizens living in the same territory preferences, allowing anyone to select and order by severity the issues. Finally, it brings to the attention of the decisions-makers the amount of citizenship (and thus, from the point of view of the political entrepreneur votes) how many people share the same vision on the severity of the issues.

Probably utilizing the app could help to implement a real and viable form of bottom-up democracy. As Sartori wrote "*In representative democracy, the demos do not chooses the issues, but just decide who should decide. It's not enough? Maybe, but to obtain more it's necessary that any increase of demo-power it's sustained by an increase of demo-knowledge*".<sup>4</sup>

That's exactly what L'A.L.Fa.No. aims to do: it increase the demo-knowledge of the demos, asking to the citizens to express their opinion, directly, on issues that they understand, and on which it has an interesting amount of knowledge.

These mini referendum are particularly significant, because the classic problem of all the forms of electronic democracy so far encountered is the competence of the voter to express himself on the topic. In the case of L'A.L.Fa.No., the electorate knows what to vote and understands and knows very well the problem, which is essential in particular for this specific form of direct democracy<sup>5</sup>. Over all, see Giovanni Sartori, one of the maximum experts of democracy, which said "*Reforms are interesting for who understand it, which is no more than the 10-20% of the people*"<sup>6</sup> and also "*Then of course there is the usual problem of the referendum... They only make sense that those people can understand it*"<sup>7</sup>).

Another problem underlined by the academic debate is that referendum today appears to be a surpassed instrument: to report the feeling of the population it's today done better with demoscopic survey (if done with the necessary institutional guarantee); the other function, the use as instrument of direct democracy, has the same problem of parties influence and movement manipulation "*being exposed to the same mobilization and propaganda agents that affects electoral campaigns*"<sup>8</sup>.

And what can be better understood by the citizens than the problems they encounter themselves, or explained to them by their peers? Not issued motivated by a petition, conveyed and explained, potentially to they own use, by parties or other political movements of different kinds, but reported by ordinary citizens who live and know that part of the territory.

L'A.L.Fa.No. can contribute significantly from one side to develop civic pride, pushing citizen to felt being part of the community, with a convenient and easy to use tool, and to diminish the sense of helplessness in the face of public problems with which they have to do every day. On the other hand the application is intended to help the decision-maker is to have evidence of the problems that insist on the city, both to test the pulse of the people, and therefore the voters, on the same issues.

The kind of problem that L'A.L.Fa.No. proposes to solve is therefore, as has been said the shortage or lack of efficiency of public interventions (mainly urban-type plant-building) in the city, with particular reference to the problems that touch a large number of citizens and while that would be easily solved. At the same time

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<sup>4</sup> See Giovanni Sartori, *Ingegneria costituzionale comparata*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013, p. 231 (freely translated by the author; in the original: "*Nella democrazia rappresentativa il demos non decide in proprio le questioni, le issues, ma si limita a decidere (scegliere) chi le deciderà. È troppo poco? Forse sì, ma per ottenere di più occorre che ad ogni incremento di demo-potere sia sostenuto da un incremento di demo-sapere.*").

<sup>5</sup> See Sartori, G., *Democrazia. Cosa è?*, Rizzoli, 2011, pp. 86 and following.

<sup>6</sup> See Sartori, G., *Una occasione mancata? Intervista sulla riforma costituzionale*, a cura di Leonardo Morlino, Laterza, 1998, pag. 3 (freely translated by the author; in the original: "*Le riforme appassionano chi le capisce, e cioè non più del 10-20% delle persone*").

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/06/08/referendum-il-voto-degli-italiani-allestero-per-sartori-e-unenorme-assurdita/116792/> (freely translated by the author; in the original: "*Poi certo rimane il solito problema dei referendum... Hanno senso solo quelli che la gente può capire*").

<sup>8</sup> See Sartori, G., *Elementi di Teoria Politica*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1987, p. 412 (freely translated by the author; in the original: "*Essendo esposto agli stessi agenti di mobilitazione e di propaganda che intervengono nelle campagne elettorali*").

L'A.L.Fa.No. also aims to improve the sense of citizenship in the community, and therefore to increase their active participation.

## The Works of the App

The app aims to achieve the objectives outlined above by providing an instrument primarily for citizens and a public decision-makers and stakeholders in general. After the installing of the app on a mobile phone any citizen can, in a matter of seconds and with a few simple clicks, report back to his own community an issue common to all. This creates a database of geo-localized issues, with different priorities identified by citizens who live and attend those territories (and thus plausibly are the first to suffer hardships for those specific problems).

For example, a citizen could simply taking a picture with his cell phone, reporting the not working of a road traffic light, the presence of a hole in the street, the danger of a rusty bench, or even the lack of pedestrian stripes in front of a school or in any area where it would serve. Small, well known to the population and simply solvable problems, too often overlooked by the public administration, or lost in the maze of bureaucracy. Problems on which, too often, citizens are limited to chat at the bar, without reporting to whom it may concern, since they do not know where to turn or are discouraged about the possibility of an effective intervention by the administration.

Thanks to L'A.L.Fa.No. however, any citizen could report problem of any nature, without having to juggle between different powers and jurisdictions of various municipal companies.

Already in article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of the United Nations has been affirmed the right of every person to freedom of opinion and expression:

*"[...]Is to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."*

And, as Stefano Rodotà wrote in *Il mondo nella rete* [7]:

*"The Internet is the largest public space that humanity has known, where he is also a great redistribution of power. A place where everyone can speak, acquire knowledge, generate ideas and not just information, to exercise the right to criticize, to dialogue, to participate in community life, and build a different world so that everyone can equally be said to be citizens."*<sup>9</sup>

Probably L'A.L.Fa.No. can facilitate the achievement of both these noble goals.

A citizen who has installed on his phone L'A.L.Fa.No. simply has to shot a photo and write a few words to further clarify the problem (for example, he or she could take the picture of a broken lamppost and write "*streetlight electrocuted: road completely dark at night*"). With this simple, comparable in difficulty to sending an MMS, operation, L'A.L.Fa.No. acquires significant and useful information.

Indeed it can create an entry for its common database of reports, containing:

- description of the problem entered by citizen (useful to better specify the issue);
- descriptive photos of the same place by the citizen (useful to immediately display the issue);
- date and time of the message obtained automatically (useful for a history of the problem: how long after they fixed, how many times has come back, etc.);
- user that report the issue proceeds automatically (useful to establish the trustworthiness of the user, and to remove him from the project if it does not seriously use it);
- address where you experience the issue proceeds automatically (in fact, thanks to the integrated GPS in the mobile phones of the latest generation, L'A.L.Fa.No. can easily geo-locate the signal, giving a clear direction to the picture taken by the citizen).

With the reports of any citizen, interested into reporting either because it's inexpensive in terms of time and effort and because it's related to problems and inefficiencies that lives every day, L'A.L.Fa.No. creates a database. For every neighborhood in every city the database lists the reports made by various people, with the various items described above for each of them. It is also important the funny side of the app, similar to a

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<sup>9</sup> Freely translated by the author; in the original: *"Internet è il più grande spazio pubblico che l'umanità abbia conosciuto, dove si sta realizzando anche una grande redistribuzione di potere. Un luogo dove tutti possono prendere la parola, acquisire conoscenza, produrre idee e non solo informazioni, esercitare il diritto di critica, dialogare, partecipare alla vita comune, e costruire così un mondo diverso di cui tutti possano egualmente dirsi cittadini"*.

"treasure hunt" of reports, to be done around the city, which could contribute to the success of the using and in this way to increase the database, especially in certain segments of the population.

The second aspect of the idea is the list of priorities. Upon registration, L'A.L.Fa.No. prompts the user for the address of his residence and of his work. Each user is therefore reported problems (loaded into the database by each user) in the database within a radius of 3 km from both the addresses (i.e. the two parts of the city that, realistically speaking, the citizen knows and frequents the most, as well to likely be the one on who he is more interested in maintaining the best), and in the path between the two addresses (which presumably is what runs through the city on a daily basis).

In addition, therefore, to be able to report problems everywhere in the country, including all reports in the database the citizens will be called upon to express, ordering its priorities troubleshooting, from those who probably knows best and feels most damaging of his freedom.

This leads to the creation of a real political agenda, with a list of problems (constantly updated thanks to reports) sorted by citizens who are entitled to overriding the severity (or to express their views on that are causing discomfort) and available both the Public Administrations (which may capitalize the data in the reports to increase his efficiency), and local governments' politicians (who can assess what impact each little social disruption has, or at least as a specific issue is felt by citizens in a specific area), and in any case also stakeholders third parties (such as voluntary associations, foundations, charities, and so on) which will be organized to take action on the problem.

The software only have to store a set of data, process it, and return a set of answers.

Specifically, for each user the app will store:

- user ID (user identification, required);
- password (user authentication, required);
- gender (useful for segmenting the issue, optional);
- age (useful for segmenting the issue, optional);
- qualification (useful for segmenting the issue, optional);
- residential address (needed to determine on what problems the user may vote);
- work address (needed to determine on what problems the user may vote);
- usual daily commute between home and work (the software can easily obtain it via Google Maps, which offers an alternative is a walking, one with public transport by car, and then stores this data automatically after inserting the two addresses, but the user can change it by specifying how you move from one point to another, by what means and what route, thus obtaining a more accurate figure);
- the various problems that the user reports (necessary to establish who reported what, to avoid spam or other users who do not work in favor of the system);
- the ten problems that must be solved according to the user first, in order of priority (among other problems present in the database in an interesting area for the user, they must choose ten and have to be ordered from most to least urgent).

From these data, the software can obtain such issues are within the user's interest (i.e., what the problems are reported, by anyone, geographically located within 3 kilometers from the address of residence or from the user's work, as well as those on the journey between the two points). These problems will be reported in a separate screen to the user, who can then sort them, making known his list of priorities.

For each problem, however, the software will store:

- description of the problem proposed by the user who reported it (useful to better specify the issue);
- descriptive picture of it (useful to immediately display the issue);
- date and time of the message (useful to have a historical problem: how long after they fixed, how many times has come back, etc.);

- user that report the issue (useful to establish the user's trust, and to remove him from the project if it does not seriously use it);
- address where you found the problem (thanks to the integrated GPS in the mobile phones of the latest generation, L'A.L.Fa.No. can easily geo-locate the signal, giving a precise address of the photo taken by a citizen);
- priority score assigned by the citizens (i.e. how many times the problem is in the "issues' top ten" of different users; the software assigns a score of 10 for each person who puts him in first place, 9 for each user puts him in second, and so on, until one point for each person who puts him in tenth place).

From these data, the app will first ensure that the same problem reported several times (if a new problem is geo-localized within a radius of 30 meters from a problem that already exists in the database, the software warns the user that is reporting the problem of this entry already exists in the database, asking him if it is the same and therefore it is useless to report it, or if on the contrary you need a new signaling because it is a different problem). In addition, it's possible to create a ranking of the issue by area: that's nothing less than the (local) political agenda, proposed by people who live and works in those specific places. How it has been done it's very simple: the system knows, for each portion of land, cropped as the user prefers, what problems have been reported, and the priorities assigned by the citizens who live (or who are resident or working in a radius of 3 miles away, or passing through on a daily basis for work) there. Receiving an input from any website visitor, it's possible to return as an output the problems reported in the area, ranked according to the urgency for citizens residing there. For each problem, is also available the user that reported it, and when he did (and so consequently how long, as a minimum, that issue exists).

It is also possible, by adjusting the database mask, to further profile the issues. It is possible to ask the system to give back the issue in a given geographical area, ordered according to the preferences of not all the voters but only (let's say) the men in a given age group. This can be useful to segment this "issues market", and allow both political entrepreneur to specialize its offer, that stakeholder and member of the third sector to better understand the problems of their specific target.

But how to prevent users token or non-existent problems to be having fun loaded into the database issue totally unnecessary or not relevant or functional to the system? The users themselves will be the ones to clean up the database: in fact, everyone will have the ability to report that an issue in the database is not really such (for example, a user who feels particularly witty, may have loaded a picture of his ex-girlfriend, signaling it as a social problem) with a click, marking it in his list of priorities. After three reports signaling the inadequacy of the problem, by three different users, the software sends to ten users, randomly chosen from among those residents or workers close to the problem, and by excluding from this draw those who have it flagged as inappropriate, the extremes (i.e., the photo and description), asking if it is spam or otherwise inappropriate and therefore if they want to delete it from the database, or if the issue in question is a good one: if six of these ten signal the problem as spam, it is deleted from the database.

The same signaling procedure, with a different button, can be made to indicate that the problem has been resolved. Even in this case, received three reports, the software asks to ten users random drawn from the residents and workers in an area useful to control the effective resolution of the problem, if it was actually solved. On reaching six positive reports, the system stores the reported problem as solved. In this way, the software can also compile a list of issues resolved after insertion into the database, listing for each user in the first report, the number of users who have done it, and what was considered serious by the citizenship, creating a different "ranking " of issues, useful to measure the output of the software in terms of utility, and to feel useful, and therefore in a sense to reward the citizens. This will prove to be another incentive for the use of the app. In addition, the database is useful to check what are the street-level administrations more efficient on the street, neighborhood and city, as well as how often one problem occurs again, and then perhaps suggest alternative solutions to those adopted (and apparently ineffective).

## Similar Projects

It seems that until now has never been attempted such an approach to encourage citizens to be more active and public administration to be induced to work more efficiently. I'm excluding from consideration the different "referenda" and similar forms of direct democracy organized by the "MoVimento 5 Stelle" (such as "polls - primary" held for the election of the candidate President of the Republic of the movement, or the "parlamentarie") in Italy because, by definition, an instrument faced to subscribers of a party can not be considered democratic (the demos is self-selected and limited). Neither these tools, aiming simply to the

highest possible enlargement of the demos (or to put it in the manner of statisticians, the "population") solve the question of competence to choose the one who does the choosing.

There are several projects that propose to implement forms of e-democracy: the most famous are probably the 1994 Minnesota Electronic Democracy Project (<http://www.e-democracy.org/>), a website where you collect the programs of the candidates and a moderated forum for discussions, and the 1996 UK Citizens Online Democracy (<http://www.democracy.org.uk/>), a forum with a structure divided into three levels of discussion: open to all, private associations and reserved for politicians. Those projects, although precursors and pioneers in the field, appear to be very different from L'A.L.Fa.No. Moreover, they are hardly comparable: a forum is a useful tool to move on a virtual platform a discussion, but does not aggregate demand, and does not provide a visible surplus to the decision.

The only app on the market that openly seeks to do something for active citizenship and democracy, is the *Do It Yourself Democracy*, from the Prometheus Institute. The app provides a collection of the U.S. federal and local laws, a list of email addresses of politicians, and a forum to discuss with other users. Even in this case, therefore, the parallel with L'A.L.Fa.No. is difficult.

A parallel with L'A.L.Fa.No. is possible by the use that some local governments make of Twitter, such as the Transport Company Milanese. This uses the well-known social networks to receive feedback from users, find out inefficiencies, and release real-time information on the problems reported by users. The advantages L' A.L.Fa.No. has in place of this system are many. First, unlike Twitter, which is not designed for this specific use, L'A.L.Fa.No. provides data in aggregate form. When dozens of citizens reports the same problem, they create dozen of clones, as currently happens for municipal utilities that convey the feedback through Twitter. Otherwise the L'A.L.Fa.No. system will allow, thanks to the geo-location, to aggregate multiple threads. In addition, it's very likely that the white noise would be much less, since while Twitter is a social network designed to a social use, L'A.L.Fa.No. focus has shifted on reporting and cataloging of problems. Is therefore, for this particular use, more proactive and helpful. In addition, in Italy many non-municipal companies, and very few governments have staff who dedicate to the collection and evasion of feedback that their users convey via social networks. So part of the citizens' protests are lost in the maze of the network. In contrast, L'A.L.Fa.No. Would convey it all in a single database, potentially usable by any public administrator is interested in improving his services, and giving a far better overview of what is obtained by viewing million fragmented and disaggregated criticism, written also in the emotional moment, to a company that provides a public service.

An interesting online platform for electronic voting is LiquidFeedback. It is an online platform open source, which is certainly as pertaining to one of the components that have helped the growth of the policy *Piratenpartei* (the German Pirate Party), and since December 2012 is also used by the Italian Pirate Party. To enter in LiquidFeedback an user must join the party (then again we can not speak of a real demos) and get the "certification" of another member of the party. This authentication is done by the exhibition of an identity document. In this way the platform intend to resolve the issue of anonymity on the Net. The inability to express their views in a certified and certifiable, in fact, is one of the greatest limitations of online queries<sup>10</sup>. However, on the platform of the "pirates" an user can still decide not to show up with name and surname. It is certain that, any nickname you choose, however, corresponds to a distinct and specific and identified user, which means an equally precise and identifiable entitled to one vote.

Anyone on LiquidFeedback can make a proposal and then submit it to the judgment of others for a certain period of time. In addition, the platform also allows you to delegate another user (a very useful function when someone it's considered more competent in a particular subject). These proxies can still be revoked if the user does not feel more represented by the person initially selected. The absence of any form of restraint, and at the same time the lack of any limit to the kind of proposals questionable, and even of a sort of address or at least leitmotif given by the creators of the kind of problems to be discussed on the platform, leads to a sort of extreme version of the concept of democracy. In Italy, the MoVimento 5 Stelle evaluated in some areas of the use of LiquidFeedback, however, has not yet officially used. So when the platform does not seem to be a viable solution to pursue an ideal of e-democracy, being an instrument still too tied to a representative logic, and which, although interesting, does not solve nor directly addresses the crisis of representative democracy.

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<sup>10</sup> For instance between those who work in this way there are firmiamo.it and avaaaz.org, where any voter can vote several times.

## Macro-Environment and Objectives

The most positive aspect that could lead to the success of the app, in the current socio-political Italian context, is the extremely widespread perception by the public of the role and limits of the politics. The lower and lower turnout in political election, the rise of anti-political movements, the success of publications against the political "caste", clearly show a tendency to want to regain possession of the decisions from citizens. At the same time, the only level where this is feasible, in a complex world like our, it is the local level, where the views of citizens is certainly an informed one and very probably also authoritative. At the same time, the spread of Web 2.0 technologies at different levels generational helps shape this project.

Negative aspects that might otherwise affect the diffusion of L' A.L.Fa.No. are the growing disaffection of citizens towards the *res publica*, and a pervasive sense of helplessness toward any initiative that proposes to change things. In addition, the digital divide typically Italian, and the typically Latin suspicion for everything that has to do with politics, are potential threats. Potentially, the project is of course expandable up to become global.

It is believed that, in launching a pilot in the province of a large Italian city by at least one million inhabitants, it can reach 100,000 users within the first year of operation. For instance, Napoli with its province has over three million inhabitants<sup>11</sup>, and according to Eurispes in 2012 the figure for the spread of smartphones in Italy said that 47% of Italians owns one<sup>12</sup>. So there are at least (EURISPES data are older than two year now, and these figures increase fast) one and a half million pool of potential users. Assume now that the capital city of the South is below the national average in terms of the spread of smartphones (which is not known at the time for lack of data about it, and that would also be flawed as refutable hypothesis, but it does feel real this reasoning to have a very conservative estimate), and that of course not all smartphones are owned by citizens who fall for age, personal and civic culture, and personal interest in the target (eg children under 14 years of age, holders technologically or politically illiterate and chronically disillusioned by politics). Therefore instead of a million and a half of the catchment area (i.e. mere smartphone owners potentially interested in using L'A.L.Fa.No.) there are only a million. If the 20% of these (200,000 users) will be intercepted by the hype (institutional, word of mouth or guerrilla marketing) in the first year, and that half of those intercepted agree to become a member by downloading an app, that should be free to be used.

## Possible Effects Result From the Use of the App on Public Administration

Thanks to the creation of a database containing the different issues reported by the citizens, every administrator has several potentially available data. First, the administration will have a complete and updated reporting (voluntarily and in real time) of inefficiency, as well as a mapping of all the problems in the city within its jurisdiction. This is a first datum very useful, when you consider that the authorities today do not really know what the situation is on the ground. Hardly a citizen not touched seriously and personally by an issue will take the trouble to understand first to who and then how report an issue of public importance. This happens because it's very expensive in terms of time to do that, because there is a perception of being a useless effort, and so the opportunity cost is very high. On the other hand, to take a picture with a mobile phone and to present it to the other members of the community as a problem, with is the kind of "treasure hunt" in search of the problems the app aims to, might have a lower opportunity cost, in terms of easiness, time effort and usefulness perception. This is a first result available to the managers, which in hindsight also entails a saving in terms of resources spent on monitoring and control: actually administrations are forced to spend several resources to monitor and have the pulse of the situational territory, and the results are not so good.

However, the output which I imagine will be seen in Public Administration from the implementation of the idea go well beyond. There is the possibility that public administrators can use L'A.L.Fa.No. also to better organize their businesses. The database of L'A.L.Fa.No., in fact, it is also readable by the interested administrator to interpret the will of the people in a given area, circumscribed. Resorting to a trivial example, if several people consider as a priority the repair of a street lamp electrocuted in a given way, probably the lighting in general, regardless of the single streetlight, is insufficient in that area, and he should evaluate an intervention to increase the lamps. Or even if it is repeated from time to time the signaling of the same problem, such as the occlusion of a sewer for debris as a result of rain, it is probably useful to consider an extraordinary intervention rather than continue to maintain a system that periodically has proven to not work.

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.google.it/search?client=opera&rls=it&q=popolazione+napoli&sourceid=opera&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&channel=suggest>

<sup>12</sup> See [http://www.eurispes.eu/getfile.php?file=2012\\_rapporto\\_italia\\_0.pdf.html](http://www.eurispes.eu/getfile.php?file=2012_rapporto_italia_0.pdf.html) o anche <http://newwebmarketing.blogspot.it/2012/02/ma-quant-cellulari-hanno-gli-italiani.html>

Another, interesting, output seen is rather to the empowerment of Public Administration. For instance in Italy, as popular television programs like “Striscia la Notizia” and “Le Iene” taught us, the Public Administration is moving much better when exposed and prodded by public opinion in the media. With this in mind, L'A.L.Fa.No. is a powerful tool: through the messages you have a firm date on the outage, and through the database that measures the amount of citizens who consider that issue a priority, there is a social pressure from citizens towards the resolution of the problem. The public administration can not pretend to be unaware of the problem, as the public database is accessible to them, and will have to account for, at least to public opinion, the discrepancy between the priorities highlighted by his actions and those reported by the citizens. If a huge slice of the residents of a place, publicly, claims as a priority to repair a traffic light reported as broken two weeks ago, why the maintenance manager didn't done it?

It is believed that this could be an interesting stimulus to prod the efficiency of public administration and municipal companies and to force them into a higher responsiveness about the quality and appropriateness of their actions.

### **Possible Effects Result From the Use of the App on Politicians**

It is expected that, in addition to the officers and managers of the Public Administration, L'A.L.Fa.No. can also get feedback from the members of the political class.

First of all, at a first, simple level, L'A.L.Fa.No. is a powerful tool for the politician who wants to take the pulse of their target constituency. Thanks to the possibility to profile the issues regarding the priorities the users gave to them, L'A.L.Fa.No. allows the political entrepreneur, to understand the political questions laying on the electoral market. And, of course, to intercept a particular instance from voters with its offer, and then to have the results of a market analysis on the agenda to be taken. Data that the politician can crop at his pleasure, by selecting the right college or at least the part of the city of which he is interested to know the preferences. This is particularly useful for politicians who are applying or are charging to a local level of government, where there is a more direct relationship between agendas and vote, and the ideology plays a minor role. And where programmatic platforms count probably much more to the choice the voter will take the urn from the levels of government further away from the city, such as the regional and national levels, more linked with ideologies and parties. Every single political will, thanks to L'A.L.Fa.No. profile the preferences of the electorate in a given area (conceivably his college, or a part of this that is of particular interest to him), and by age group (perhaps because the political entrepreneur might be interested to recall votes between between the young or the elderly) and gender (because maybe interested retrieve votes among women voters for whom he knows to be disadvantaged), which combinations of these. All this undoubtedly brings benefits to politicians, which today are often willing to pay, at least at a national level, given that the cost of such services is still quite expensive, specialized companies in the polls that "shot a photo" to the reality and report preferences citizens to customers. Why not provide this service without the filter of a statistical interpretation? If at a national level is easy to see that this would no doubt be a complex operation, and the side that easily lend itself to bias and other errors, at a local level, the operation could be carried out without major problems.

Simply allowing citizens to express themselves and to order one's own choices, in fact, in an area well-defined and not too large would remain a level of significant value by aggregating the opinion of the citizens live. On the other hand there would be no privacy issues for the individual user, as the data would be provided to the user in question, which in this case we imagine to be the political entrepreneur, only in aggregate form. In addition, in today's world, it is a daily fact the profiling of person from data much more sensitive than those given by the ordering of their priorities on actions to be carried out on the territory. Last but not least, an important consideration is that of course there is always the option to register using aliases or nicknames, which would maintain their opinion anonymous, and that is to not allow anyone to connect the user to a physical person, while keeping intact the statistical validity of the data.

Finally, what was said to be valid for the general public, it is of course also valid for members of this particular class: L'A.L.Fa.No. could become a powerful tool to check against possible abuse of the Public Administration can also be used by politicians, who very often have a knowledge gap in relation to bureaucrats, and fail to deal successfully with them due to the lack of data. To have on their side the aggregated opinions of citizenship living individual districts of the city, might be a given (which, we remember, it would be independently certified and third, then fair) profit to better understand how to address effectively the intervention the public machine.

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