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## Boekbespreking van: Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy

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### Boekbesprekingen

Robert D. Putnam with Robert Leonardi and Rafaella Nanetti, **Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy**. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993.

Traditionally, political sociology has sought to identify the social conditions for democracy. After the collapse of the Weimar Republic, political sociologists tried to establish to what extent social-structural characteristics of countries determine the institutional format and how this affects the functioning of political institutions. Closely connected with this problem are the conditions for stable democratic systems. Robert Putnam's *Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy* belongs to this tradition.

In this *instant classic*, Putnam conducts a systematic and comparative study into the similarities and differences in institutional development and performance among Italian regions over a period of 25 years. According to the author, the differences and similarities among regions in effectiveness of government institutions have deep historical roots. The central questions posed in Putnam's book are: Why do some regional governments succeed, while others fail? Does the performance of an institution depend on its social, economic and cultural environment? Does the quality of democracy depend on the quality of its citizens?

While (neo)institutionalists argue that politics is structured by institutions, Putnam hypothesizes that institutions do not always alter fundamental patterns of political behaviour. Therefore Putnam suggests that there are, apart from the (neo)-institutional approach, two dominant explanations for institutional performance in terms of responsiveness and effectiveness. The first, marxist, approach relates democracy with *social economic modernity*. In this view effective democracy depends on social development and economic well-being. In these relatively simple theories aspects of modernization are central. Authors as for example Seymour Martin Lipset, argue that stable and effective democratic government is linearly related with economic development, industrialization and capitalism in general. Stated in simple terms: the higher the level of economic development, the higher the level of democratic development of a country. The second, Weberian, approach relates institutional performance to *social-structural factors, the extent of 'civil society'*. In this tradition of analysis of the politi-

cal culture the work of De Tocqueville and Almond and Verba must be placed. These authors assert that the dispositions of citizens are essential to democratic performance. Of the two explanations for institutional performance of democratic institutions, social-economic modernity and the extent of 'civil society', the latter is most corroborated by Putnam's empirical findings.

After a short description of the development of governmental decentralization in Italy, Putnam typifies the difference in political culture and practice between the North and South. In the South clientelistic and vertical politics (such as private petitions to sympathetic national patrons) dominate, while in the North horizontal collective action (egalitarian political relations and grass-root activity) is more common. Regions with a civic community are marked by a social fabric of trust and active cooperation, while in less civic regions an atmosphere of distrust exists, which makes the emergence of collective action less likely. The explanation of these regional differences are the central focus in this book.

Putnam finds that the extent of civil society, measured by the number of organizations, readership of newspapers, electoral turnout and the number of preference votes, is positively associated with institutional performance. To measure his 'Index of Institutional Performance', Putnam uses twelve indicators ranging from regional cabinet stability, public spending on health and education to policy pronouncements.

The strong relation Putnam finds between the strength of civil society and effective democratic performance begs the question why one region is more civic than others. Putnam suggests that the answer lies in the past. Where a century ago citizens created an active and dense civil society, society is still characterized by 'civic-ness'. This dense network of secondary associations is positively related with effective and democratic government.

Putnam then asks whether the differences in civic traditions explains the present economic modernity of regions. Putnam tests two hypotheses: the first is that economic modernity determines the level of civic engagement, and secondly that the extent of civil society has consequences for the level of economic development. His conclusion is that economic development in the nineteenth century is no guarantee for the emergence of a strong and dense civil society. Civic traditions, on the contrary, greatly influence the present level of economic modernity. Putnam asserts that the claim that civic traditions are simply the consequence of social and economic modernization is no longer tenable. Civic traditions are more stable and durable than economic prosperity. 'In summary, economics does not predict civics, but civics does predict economics, better indeed than economics itself. (...) the contemporary correlation between civic and economics reflects primarily the impact of civics on economics, not the reverse' (p.157). This is much in line with Putnam's earlier conclusion that contemporary civic engagement, not socio-economic development, directly affects the institutional performance of governments. Civic traditions strongly influence economic development and social welfare, as well as institutional performance.

Instead of a more institutional explanation, Putnam finds the explanation of the regional differences in Italy in the social-cultural factors. He concludes that civic tra-

ditions do not explain everything, but they do explain why some regions can adapt better to changes in the environment than others. The question then remains: Why are civic traditions such a powerful explanation for the differences in present performance of democratic institutions? For this explanation Putnam uses concepts from the rational choice and game-theoretical approaches.

After a short discussion of the dilemma's of collective action and the problem of coercive enforcement by institutions, Putnam concludes that the 'social capital' in a society explains the differences in performance of democratic institutions. Social capital remains a vague concept in Putnam's argumentation, which seems to be related to social trust (an even vaguer concept). Social trust, according to Putnam, derives from two sources: social norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement. The denser the networks in a community, the more likely citizens will cooperate for mutual benefit. Dense social networks increase the costs of defection, facilitate communication, internalize social trust and institutionalize cooperative behaviour. As individuals base their behaviour on past experiences, prior experiences of successful civic collaboration will generate a sphere of social trust and cooperation. Negative experiences with collective resolutions will result in the opposite.

According to Putnam, this leads to two stable social equilibria: one in which the dominant strategy of the participants is to 'never cooperate' and another of 'brave reciprocity', a situation of stable cooperation. The history of a society determines by which of these strategies its civil society is characterized. Surprisingly, Putnam concludes that, while history determines the level of civic traditions, it is necessary to 'build social capital' which 'will not be easy, but it is the key to making democracy work' (p.185). How it is possible to build something in the present that, as argued extensively by Putnam, is constructed by past events is beyond any logic. Neither is it clear how and by whom social capital and civic traditions are to be 'build', under what conditions this will be more or less successful.

In my view the conclusion that the roots of the differences in civic culture between the North and South have to be found in the 14th century is somewhat hastily drawn. First, the problem has only been shifted. Now an explanation has to be found why in some regions these developments did occur in the 14th century and not in others. Secondly, Putnam's description on the origin of civic tradition leans very heavily on the historical work of Hyde and Waley, without referring to alternative historical explanations. Besides, if the historical context is so overwhelmingly important, why are only 27 pages of the book concerned with these developments. Thirdly, high correlations alone do not convince the reader (although they are very impressive indeed), but they need comprehensive theoretical argumentation. I suggest that Putnam should have explained the changing social structure as a consequence of *the pace and type of economic development, the redistributive effects of social welfare and the structure, strength and autonomy of the state apparatus.*

The early economic development and early development of a state apparatus for example in the northern region of Piemonte may have had very different effects on the social structure than later economic development elsewhere. Early development of a state apparatus, which intervenes in the economic and social processes affects the

type and extent of economic and social interaction. Furthermore, the type of economic development, agrarian related products or industrial products, may well account for differences between regions. Putnam does not pay attention to these factors.

Furthermore, Putnam's analysis of the character of civil society is underdeveloped. There is widespread consensus, at least among political sociologists, that the power relations between social groups in a society strongly influence the structure and performance of democratic institutions. Evidence suggests that the middle and working classes have been the most consequent pro-democratic forces in societies. Lipset and Rokkan and Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens assert that the differences in class-relations between the North and the South have been of vital importance to the development of democracy and democratic culture in these regions. Political institutions, however, are not simply reflections of societal power relations. Different interests need articulation. Putnam sells the (neo)institutionalists short, when he neglects *in what manner* social interests of different groups are articulated. The character of civil society depends largely on the character of the institutions that articulate these interests, political parties, unions and religious organizations. Putnam does not pay much attention to the agents of articulation of societal demands and the institutional translation of these demands. The type and functions of political parties are barely discussed. The type of political party, for example, (a mass-integration party, a cadre party or an elite-clientelistic party) determines to a large extent how citizens participate in the articulation of their interests. Thus, in the type of civic networks. Political parties are therefore an important variable in the explanation of the development and consolidation of democratic institutional performance. Putnam himself admits this implicitly, as the only party that enters into the study, the PCI, is positively related to democratic performance. Lacking is a thorough analysis of the history and role of the most important Italian political actor, the Democrazia Cristiana, especially in the south.

Some methodological questions have to be raised as well. First, the cases have not been selected randomly. Initially, five regions were selected in 1970. A sixth region was added in 1976 to 'include a region in which there was a dominant Catholic subculture' (p.187). Thus the selection seems to be based on the inclusion of different types of subculture. After 1976, however, several other regions were added on the basis of a different criteria, namely because regional governments invited the researchers to include their region in the study (p.xii). Secondly, not all the definitions and indicators are beyond dispute. Taking choral societies and especially football clubs as an indicator of civic engagement may be problematic. Participation in many of these types of associations are quite passive and almost completely unrelated to the political process and its institutions.

Finally Putnam seems to miss an important feature that distinguishes the North from South Italy: their geographic location. North Italy is situated in central Europe, close to major economic powers and centres. Southern Italy, on the contrary, can be said to be located on the periphery of Europe. No doubt this has influenced its economic and social development as well as the structure of its civil society. Putnam could have found some inspiration in the world-system approach or dependency theory. The development of democracy is, to authors in this tradition, largely ex-

plained by the position of a country (or region) in the (trans)national economic power structure. Consequently, the fact that Southern Italy has for the larger part been dependent on support from the North may add some additional explanation to the low level of civic engagement.

All in all the combination of different data (surveys, case studies, interviews, et cetera) and of different theoretical perspectives (political sociological, rational choice and historical analysis) makes Putnam's book a very original and comprehensive analysis on how democracy works and how it is maintained. It is deservedly a modern classic.

André Krouwel

Antonio Cassese, **Human Rights in a Changing World**. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990 (paperback 1994).

Antonio Cassese is hoogleraar in de rechtswetenschap aan de Europese Universiteit in Florence. Hij is tevens oud-voorzitter van het Europese Comité tegen Folteringen en tegenwoordig voorzitter van het Haagse Tribunaal dat is belast met de vervolging van degenen die zich schuldig hebben gemaakt aan oorlogsmisdaden in het voormalige Joegoslavië. Hij is bij uitstek gekwalificeerd, om een boek te schrijven over de problematiek van de rechten van de mens.

Zijn oorspronkelijk in het Italiaans verschenen boek, *Human Rights in a Changing World*, bevat een analyse van de betekenis van de rechten van de mens in de wereld. Het boek bestaat uit drie delen. Het eerste deel behandelt de vraag in hoeverre de mensenrechten universeel van aard zijn; deel twee gaat over de belangrijkste vormen van schendingen van de mensenrechten: genocide, martelingen, Apartheid, verdwijningen in Argentinië en een rechtszaak tegen de Zwitserse concern Nestlé, omdat dit nalatig zou zijn geweest in de verspreiding van informatie in de Derde Wereld over een hygiënisch verantwoord gebruik van melkpoeder. Het derde en laatste deel bespreekt toekomstverwachtingen.

Het boek heeft in de vier jaren na zijn verschijning nog nauwelijks aan actualiteitswaarde ingeboet. De enige thema's die zijn achterhaald, zijn de verwijzingen naar de debatten tussen het Westen en de socialistische landen over aard en betekenis van de mensenrechten en de beschouwingen over de Apartheidsproblematiek. Maar nog geheel van deze tijd zijn Cassese's beschouwingen over de betekenis van de rechten van de mens als 'new ethos'. Zij geven nl. de mogelijkheid, om staten aan te spreken over de wijze waarop zij hun eigen burgers behandelen:

Thus, human rights are based on an expansive desire to *unify the world* by drawing up a list of *guidelines* for all governments. They are an attempt to highlight the *values* (respect for human dignity) and *their opposites* (the negation of the dignity) that all states should take as paramets for assessing their actions. In a nutshell, human rights are an attempt by the contemporary world to introduce a measure of reason into its history. (blz. 158)