

Education and participation of women in politics.

An empirical investigation

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ABSTRACT

This article is the result of a research work on the relationship between education and politics, developed in view of literature, studies and research in sociology and political sciences.

The first phase of the research will be devoted to the collection of documentation and information necessary to the historical reconstruction of the salient stages and the most important dates around which developed the "political action" of the Albanian woman.

It was intended to comprehend the complex phenomenon of relationship between women and politics through a series of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in the cities of Tirana and Durres, addressed to a total sample of 46 women, aged between 18 and 60 years, randomly selected to represent the different types of political participation.

The process of the exposed research is focused on the active, effective and conscious presence of women in society.

Parole chiave: Women - Education - Policy – Participation

Educazione e partecipazione delle donne in politica. Una ricerca empirica

Questo articolo è il risultato di un lavoro di ricerca sul rapporto tra educazione e politica, sviluppato considerando la letteratura, gli studi e le ricerche in sociologia e scienze politiche.

La prima fase della ricerca sarà dedicata alla raccolta di documentazione e di informazioni necessarie per la ricostruzione storica delle fasi salienti e delle date più importanti, intorno ai quali è stata sviluppata "l'azione politica" della donna albanese.

L'intenzione è di comprendere il complesso fenomeno della relazione tra donne e politica attraverso una serie di interviste semi-strutturate. Le interviste sono state condotte nelle città di Tirana e Durazzo, rivolte ad un campione di 46 donne, di età compresa tra 18 e 60 anni, selezionate in modo casuale per rappresentare i diversi tipi di partecipazione politica.

Il processo della presente ricerca è focalizzato nella presenza attiva, efficace e consapevole delle donne nella società.

Keywords: Donne – Educazione – Politica - Partecipazione

Introduction

Talking about the relationship between women and politics allows one to analyze from a certain point of view the involvement of women within the society, taking into analysis those forms of activation concerning interests falling outside the subjectivity and get settled on needs, necessities, wishes that include a collective or intersubjective sphere.

In addition to these objectives, the research on the presence in politics of women in Albania has allowed us to look at the attitude of women in politics from a different perspective compared to the historical date from 1925 to 2011. It is a qualitative view, that is what passes first through a methodology and then a method that, although renouncing an epistemological rigor, employs not only interviews and statistical analysis, but while giving importance to them as a starting point, deepens the field analysis by talking directly to involved subjects, dealing with their motivations and experiences, giving relevance to the story they provide as privileged witnesses of a process and a context to which they belong.

Talking about the role of Albanian women in politics leads us to think around some decisive issues, which have influenced the emancipation and advancement of women not only in the country's political life, but also in the social, cultural and economic one. Having a deep understanding of political culture is undoubtedly useful to refer to the crucial periods for Albanian women. Although the intervention of the Albanian Government, which aims to bridge the inequality between genders by different laws (such as rose quota), the presence of strong and deep rooted patriarchal traditions has led to a new process of marginalization of women in economic, social and political life of the country. The debate on quotas, however, was very strong, especially in recent years, both in public opinion and at institutional level. Making a comparison with other European countries where the quota mechanism is widespread, we can identify interpretative hypotheses useful to reflect on the model adopted by the Albanian government. The quota system can be considered as a first step, but to be more efficient, it must be accompanied by other types of initiatives. Without a more complex operation right on the cultural level, the interventions of rose quotas are likely to be a further element of distortion falling within the more general framework of negative judgment deserved by the system of lists compilation at national level.

A greater number of women in politics can be the ingredient of a transformation of the objectives of policy itself also. It is certain that the feminization of political elites represents a cultural and social change that cannot be reduced simply to the balance of political representation between men and women, but also to the recognition (and transformation) of social and gender relations in an area, where politics has always been the prerogative of male world. The relative subject on women's political participation has achieved recently a strong actuality. The European Union has taken a number of initiatives, involving the individual national governments. Although women in the last century have acquired political rights, they have not been able to join in a substantial measure representative political institutions. This phenomenon involves all countries of the world without any distinction. In Albania also

women are *missing* in the political scene both in terms of representation in decision-making settings, as well as in terms of participation in political life in its broadest sense.

Methodology

We explore the necessity of using qualitative research methods to supplement existing knowledge on women's political participation, focusing on Albania.

Lastly, as data on this phenomenon has not been regularly tracked, qualitative methods are necessary in understanding the reasons of women's low participation in various levels of government and in the Albanian political world. The first phase of research was dedicated to the collection of necessary documents and information for the reconstruction of stages and highlighting the most important data around which is developed the Albanian women's political action. The second phase, it is intended to comprehend the complex phenomenon of relationship between women and politics through a series of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in the cities of Tirana and Durres, addressed to a total sample of 46 women, aged between 18 and 60 years, randomly selected to represent the different types of political participation. We used the random sampling techniques (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011, p. 146), choosing from the beginning representatives of various social groups, women of different age groups, with different levels of education, with various occupations and we apply the "semi structured interviews", (Crespi & Mucchi Faina, 1988, pp. 13-27), in order to guarantee to the interviewed person a large degree of freedom in setting up the discourse and hypotheses that one can move forward.

The interviews were aimed at representative women holding active roles in the Albanian political world and at "represented women" (Carrera & Persichella, 2010, pp. 26-27).

To obtain the qualitative results we used the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Using a systematic coding and categorizing approach we have explored a large amounts of textual information unobtrusively to determine trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships, and the structures and discourses of communication (Mayring, 2000; Pope et al., 2006; Gbrich, 2007).

The explanatory factors of the poor representation of women in political life

The under-representation of women in institutions is a clear sign of the failure to resolve old problems, but also of a more general socio-cultural and economic crisis that involves *in primis* the political representation (Raniolo, 2008).

This crisis is expressed generally by requiring more and better reflection of the actual conditions of life in the political arena. The crisis of traditional political representation is combined, therefore, with new demands for social representation of inclusive kind, since the

general interests of the country and in particular those of gender seem no longer to be able neither to find an adequate expression, nor to have the ability to influence the political agenda.

In Albania, despite frequent planned statements and intents of political parties, women are struggling to make their way in politics and this is a clear sign of a general crisis of political representation, which is usually expressed by requiring a greater and better reflection, i.e. sociological representation of the facts of reality. The demand for a greater presence and a more adequate representation of women in politics is in fact indicative of a social “emergency”. Therefore ascertaining and settling for just “how many” women are present in the institutions would be a simplistic solution in itself, since it is instead necessary to specify in what terms a more substantial presence of women in politics can make a difference and give precedence to a different planning policy.

It appears useful to trace the factors that can influence the quality and quantity, but also the forms of lack of women presence in Albanian politics, emerged from the interviews analysis. And, as we shall see afterwards, different opinions emerge on the attitudes, values and behaviors of respondents, about the lack of female representation. On one hand are revealed historical-cultural factors (the macho culture), on the other hand, the psycho-social factors (self-exclusion of women).

The masculine mentality in politics (historical exclusion from politics and political leadership)

There are plenty of women affirming that the masculine mentality of the Albanian politics and society still manages to stop the implementation and application of the right of women to decide in the same way as men do.

The Albanian society is a male-dominated society, just as politics, and for this reason I have not even thought about participating.

(Sample: student, worker, housewife, graduate)

I wanted to participate in politics, but they do not allow us to take part. The Albanian politics is “miserable” and sexist.

(Physician)

The investment in Albanian politics is rarely considered as an opportunity for Albanian women. This mentality, very often, has incised in the social life of women and has created on the one hand the foundation for cultivation of a deformed socio-cultural model, which recognizes as normal the status of marginalization of women in political participation and on the other hand the cultivation of other mechanisms of career that are deeply cooptative. The power is homophile, meaning that it promotes those equal to themselves. That is when there is a political reality, in which there are no precise rules, the selection mechanisms are fatally cooptative. The one who has the power, accepts those equal to himself. That's why for twenty years, the Albanian politics is considered a "job" for men only, as the woman, because of her fragile nature, cannot participate.

Unfortunately, the Albanian politics is the domain of males.

(Teacher)

I do not want to participate in politics, because Albanian male politicians are dominating politics more and more.

(Sample: teachers, workers)

The manner in which politics in Albania is conceived, designed and carried out, is also a result of total lack of civic sense, brutality, offenses, as we often hear in the floor of the Albanian Parliament, which become a serious barrier to consider politics as a natural, social and appropriate for women. This is due both to factors deeply rooted in Albanian culture, attributable to the representation of female figure often portrayed as a weak subject and in need of protection, as well as to more markedly political factors, strongly reflected on the permanence of many problems caused by the difficult reconciliation of women's roles at work, family and politics itself.

In this context, the policy has its own responsibilities for the low level of women's participation in the parliament and beyond. This reality produces also an effect of no confidence that women feel towards their own potential, which leads to self-exclusion.

The self-exclusion of women

The women interviewed (the majority) report a sort of weakness of the historical significance of women's exclusion. On this perspective, women have to contend with the heavy legacy of the past that did not allow them to gain the necessary experience to participate in the political

world. A political commitment to women in particular is likely to become the third role, after family and work, thus making it very difficult for women to be present in the world of politics.

One of the additional mechanisms that one can assume, in some cases, is that of a real lack of confidence on the part of women themselves to politics. Women have lower self-confidence about getting involved in electoral politics. They say that have more productivity in the social and business world in contrast to a lagging productivity in the political sphere.

The policy has disappointed me a lot. I participated actively in politics for several years and then I retired. I was part of the Democratic Party, where, however, I saw that there was lack of democracy, autonomy and freedom of thought. (University lecturer)

I participated in the social and political life, but it was very difficult to participate fully, because the representatives of the Albanian politics do not allow speaking up and exercising the own rights. I can also say that the most important factor of low representation of women in politics is the lack of a culture and tradition of doing politics, and this not only among women. (Teacher)

The under-representation of women in politics, in addition to being the result of discriminatory action, is also linked to some difficulties they experience in performing their political career, and that leads to their self-exclusion. (Pojaghi, 2010, p. 164)

But why do women exclude themselves?

In part, women are less engaged because they are simply less interested in politics than men not surprisingly, because they do not see politics as their world. The under-representation of women in politics, in general, seems to be attributed also to the tasks of care to the family, especially to the children, “as confirmed by the surveys” (ISTAT, 2010), that still fall mostly on women and do not allow them an easy access to the world of political representation, especially if they’re accompanied by professional commitments at work. In addition, the election campaign requires a great commitment outside home, a commitment that the family burden on a woman does not always allow.

I would have liked to participate in politics, but the family conditions and commitment to my children will not let me. (Housewife)

Women do not participate, because they have no time for politics. (Sample of working women and housewives)

Women have a strong sense of mission to increase women's presence in politics (Mitsui, 2003). The majority of them believes it to be driven by a civic duty, that politics is a duty for which one should be well prepared and that politics, beside being structured for men, is nevertheless compatible with the women's life.

A problem reported especially by women possessing a good educational level is that they have the ability to act fully in politics, but they feel on their shoulders the weight of a traditional foreclosure.

I always had the desire to participate actively in politics, but for lack of time and perhaps a lack of tradition in politics, I have never been able to be a part. (Student)

I was not invited to join any political party or to participate. (Worker)

The interviews show clearly also the lack of a political culture and tradition. This is linked also to consequences of recent and imperfect democracy, where the imperfectness is due to the combination of political, economic and cultural factors, and the discrepancy between the active sectors of society and the power system.

The fact that only a few women are elected, is related to the fact that in the Albanian culture is still strong the image of male politician as a "model role", while a model of political leadership for women has not yet been created. In fact, this political reality prevents women from participating actively (Carrera, 2010, p. 143). Currently women who want to succeed in politics ought to adopt the model of rude and loud male. A model, however, which bears no resemblance to what they wish to be. Because it conflicts with their feelings as a woman. This is another psychological barrier, for those feel themselves women, to become part of this political context.

Another aspect to be highlighted is the generation gap: right among the under 30, in fact, there appears a lack of that enthusiasm that should instead characterize the new generations. The main motivation of politics is linked to the effect of disappointment, but among the first ones persists, with some relevance, the loss of interest.

I have no interest in politics. Albanian male politicians are giving an increasingly negative image of the way of doing politics. (Degree in psychology, 25 years old)

I do not care to participate in politics, but even if I did, it is almost impossible for a woman to participate in the Albanian “masculine” politics without being manipulated by men. (Secretary, 21 years old)

I am very disappointed by politics. We see that our politicians care more and more for themselves, and not for the good of citizen and the country. (Hairdresser, 29 years old)

On the one hand, the interviews reveal that the presence of women in politics brings that entirely personal approach, typical of the female world, purely programmatic, as it is known that women are very concrete in the management of “res publica” and determined to achieve the objectives they pursue, and certainly less accustomed than men in the frantic search for positions of power, as well as the use of the latter for purely personal gratification

On the other hand, female political participation depends to a large majority of the representations that subjects have about state and politics, and those representations get fed on the path of political socialization experienced by each of the images conveyed to the same subjects by the political information in a broad sense. (Carrera, 2010, p. 178)

Although recognized as citizens, Albanian women are now to demand rights already obtained, starting from the socio-economic ones, jeopardized by the economic crisis and devalued because of new political pacts that exclude them from both public as well as private “business”. And the danger is now so evident the more visible becomes an increasing permeability and contiguity between business world and representative bodies. A small proportion of women show a bleak picture of the status of women in Albania.

Politics does not give one the opportunity to be part of. Today, the majority of women are unemployed and this leads to their lack of interest to participate actively in politics. (Small entrepreneur)

Most of the Albanian women are unemployed. First of all women should have an employment contract, and then we can talk about political participation. (Under contract)

As reflected in the interviews, poverty predominantly affects women not only because they bear the burden of the effects of unemployment, but also because of discrimination in terms of wages compared to men.

Attitudes, values and behaviors of privileged witnesses

By the indices reported by the *Global Gender Gap Report* (World Economic Forum, 2012), the comparisons between Albania and other countries are remarkable, as Albania can certainly not be regarded as an equitable society, especially due to the growing gap between men and women in terms of unemployment, as well as of employment discrepancy on top positions. Such a crisis is expressed generally by a larger request and a better reflection of the actual conditions of life in the political arena, or a type of “sociological” representation to describe the true status of a given society.

Historically, the political arena has always been under the domination of men, not only in Albania, but throughout the world. The history is a story of men power, but in the last century in Albania there is a growing women’s movement to participate in politics. This is a natural fact knowing that human society is divided equally between males and females. It is a historical injustice that due to many factors, such as cultural and social prejudice and attitudes, women have never been part of the political power, which has always been dominated by men. (Political activist D. Çuli).

For several decades, it was a rare thing to see a female in leadership of the Albanian politics, for they were men who dominated, but it seems that this mentality is changing.

We can mention here the former President of the Albanian Parliament, Jozefina Topalli, as the first woman in the history of Albania having held this role. Jozefina Topalli Coba became a president in September 2005 after serving as Vice President of the Albanian Parliament in the two previous legislatures (1997-2001, 2001-2005). She, like the majority of women currently involved in Albanian politics, has a past as a university lecturer.

The question arising is why these women have decided to “abandon” their profession and to become a part of politics? The Honourable Member Topalli answers:

It may seem strange, but it happens to make decisions without necessarily wishing them. It was the year 1996, as the Democratic Party was looking for a greater representation of women in politics. At that time I was working as a lecturer at the University of Shkodra. I felt professionally realized and I had big dreams for my future. When I was asked to run for deputy in the Albanian parliament, at the

beginning it seemed strange to me and I refused. They were my friends who convinced me. To them I responded with a determined “Yes”.

Despite the remarkable increasing of women’s representation in the parliament, this is still not to be noted in the government.

It is true that ours is a men-dominated society, which does not allow you to easily join the political world, and especially in senior positions, but also women themselves are uninterested in politics. (Honorable Member J. Topalli)

Legislature	2005-2009		2009-2013	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Prime Minister	1	0	1	0
Deputy Prime Minister	1	0	1	0
Ministers	12	2	13	6
Vice Ministers	21	7	28	6

Table 1 - The participation of women in government during the past legislatures (INSTAT, 2009; 2013)

In the meantime, there is an entirely new phenomenon; many more women do not come from a political activity. We can mention Vasilika Hysi, former head of the Albanian Committee of Helsinki, parliamentarians such as Rajmonda Bulku and Luiza Xhuvani, both actresses, or Rudina Seseri and Albana Vokshi, who have never been occupied earlier with politics.

The Honourable Bulku, one of the most famous faces of the Albanian cinema, decided to participate in politics:

I have always been a supporter of the movement for the fall of the communist regime. At that time I was still very young and I had many projects in regard of my profession and family. Now that the family circumstances allow me, I decided to enter politics. In fact, I decided this also after to many requests made by the Democratic Party to increase the proportion of women in the parliament.

By the behavior of privileged witnesses, it is noted that, rather than their own desire to participate actively in politics, it was by the will or request of politicians that, in order to

achieve their goals to increase quotas for women in the parliament, they have “convinced” women to join the Albanian political life.

In fact, this form of representation, just to increase the percentage of women in Parliament, is a substitute for political representation. The “mere (physical) presence” of women in politics does not exhaust the problem of representation. That should make us reflect on what it is misleading to treat the problem of women representation as merely a “quantitative” one or, worse, as a simple “formal” determination related to quantity and not quality of democratic representation, although it is important to support the principle of equality.

Crucial to emphasize is the demand for more qualitative presence of women in politics, as well as a quantitative representation, which is indicative of a political, economic and cultural “emergency” for the Albanian society, and it must be addressed as such. Even if:

For a woman it is much more difficult to participate in politics, because women have much more important commitments, such as children, home, and they have also a key role with regard to the basis of society, the family. It is equally important to note that woman in Albania undergoes very often verbal the violence of male-dominated society. (Honorable Member M. Kodheli)

I believe that politics in Albania is degenerating into a policy of mutual offenses. It is a policy poor of topics and opportunities for the future. The rude and brutal language used, in my opinion, harms not only people to whom it is addressed, but also the entire Albanian society as a whole. (Honorable Member V. Leskaj)

Discussions

The factors of poor political participation are multiple, many of the testimonies heard from represented or representing women show mainly two types of problems. On the one hand, the lack of confidence in Albanian politics. Trust in political institutions is considered by many an indicator of the health of democracy. In Albania, the trust appears with varying intensity depending on the subject or institution considered: it is certainly high for the family, significant for the institutions and low for the protagonists of politics and political parties in the first place. Women have lower self-confidence about getting involved in electoral politics. They say that have more productivity in the social and business world in contrast to a lagging productivity in the political sphere.

On the other hand, the role of obstructionist men hindering women's desire for leadership and participation is highlighted. This interpretation is especially relevant by women who participate as totally distant citizens and women, which clearly allocate to this factor the low presence of women in politics. The majority of them believes it to be driven by a civic duty, that politics is a duty for which one should be well prepared and that politics, besides being structured for men, is nevertheless compatible with the women's life even if "the majority of women from Eastern Europe are therefore convinced that the women's movement [...] is not an appropriate instrument to introduce changes. Women [...] prefer the individual strategies of self-actualization typical of professional women" (Bútorová, 1996, p. 131; Jalušič, 1998).

It seems appropriate to point out that much less popular are the remaining hypothesized reasons for the low participation of women in politics, namely that: women are not brought to politics; an alleged handicap of women in politics related to the special role played by women in the Albanian society; also very few women, especially those "in career", blame the temporary deficit handicap as an obstacle to participate in politics.

In order to facilitate the participation of women in the political sphere, or to facilitate the entry of women in fields that for a long time were male prerogative, there are two main strategies: policies for equal opportunities and policies of affirmative action. The first is the commitment on the part of political leaders to promote a system of political representation, recognizing the equal opportunities between men and women, without legal implications. Albanian women are underrepresented in almost all relevant decision-making bodies in our society. We need to pay particular attention to the issue of the participation quotas of women in government and various decision-making bodies.

On the other side, the positive actions, however, represent the most significant strategy to encourage the participation of women. There must be a sensitization of public opinion on this issue, and a change of a political culture that, even today in Albania, considers man the legitimate protagonist of the state management. In addition, we need concrete measures to promote women's political participation, because all those social and political systems in which women are under-represented are to be considered as democratically "uncompleted".

Conclusions

The problem of women representation is, therefore, a crucial issue to be addressed, because it calls into question the founding principles of civilized life. Women, although they were the protagonists of the most significant processes of social transformation in the last decades of the history of Albania, still have no access to or actual weight in that part of public life which decides and controls the future of society. The lack of women in political life signals also a disconnection between political and civil society, where women have taken on a growing role.

The issues of representation and political participation of women in Albanian politics must deal with a series of nodes and issues: first, the fact is that, as it emerges also from the interviews conducted for this study, most of experiences of consultation or representation proposals to women in different contexts have guaranteed to the elected women neither a representation, nor a greater progression in the acquisition of political rights.

Creating the conditions for increasing the number of women in decision-making issues is also and above all a task that women must carry in person, through a full and conscious confidence in their abilities, even if in logic and methods of political representation there are some other obstacles that make more difficult the access of women in institutions.

The reasons for this phenomenon are various and linked both to crisis of representation, as well as to socio-cultural factors. One of these is also the type of majoritarian electoral system, which in itself tends to exclude minor political forces and young people who today are on the margins of politics. In the basic structures of political parties and trade unions, as the women are not present to a considerable extent, has not been created a political movement for women, able to establish itself as a point of reference for electing and elected persons.

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