



**Partecipazione e Conflitto**  
\* *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*  
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>  
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)  
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)  
**PACO, Issue 10(2) 2017: 569-588**  
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v10i2p569

Published in July 15, 2017

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### IMPOLITIC GAMBLING

#### Chance and inequality in contemporary Italy

**Sabino Di Chio**

*University of Bari "Aldo Moro"*

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**ABSTRACT:** The liberalization of gambling is a measure equally taken and implemented by both sides within the bipolar system that typified Italian politics over the years 1990-2000. For 25 years, the growing number of operators, players and betting opportunities has been blessed as a "necessity", a forced decision that does not respect the reference values represented by the political forces that have in turn been part of the ruling majorities. The assumption of this paper is that the financial and regulatory consolidation path of the "lawful game" provides, both from the governmental and cultural viewpoint, a privileged indication to describe the depoliticization of the Second Italian Republic compared to the conflict that should have raged within it as a competitive democracy.

From the government viewpoint, the elected institutions renounced the political direction of the field to support the neo-liberal axioms that consider the accuracy of public accounting, the encouragement of consumption and the transfer of public assets to private capitals as three indisputable methods to pursue economic growth. From a cultural viewpoint, the silent consensus of Italian voters for gambling seems to reflect a more general consensus for the "chance" factor, the tolerance for uncertainty that deeply permeates Italy as the other neo-capitalist societies.

**KEYWORDS:** Gambling; Depoliticization; Risk; Chance factor; Second Italian Republic.

**CORRESPONDING AUTHORS:** Sabino Di Chio, [sabino.dichio@uniba.it](mailto:sabino.dichio@uniba.it)

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## 1. Introduction

The liberalization of gambling became a measure equally taken and implemented by both sides within the bipolar system that typified Italian politics over the years 1990-2000. For 25 years, the growing number of operators, players and betting opportunities has been blessed as a "necessity", a forced decision that does not respect the reference values represented by the political forces that have in turn been part of the ruling majorities. The assumption of this research is that the financial and regulatory consolidation path of the "lawful game" provides, both from the governmental and cultural viewpoint, a privileged indication to describe the depoliticization of the institutional activity of the second Italian republic compared to the conflict that should have raged within it as a competitive democracy<sup>1</sup>.

From the government viewpoint, gambling growth has been encouraged by the ruling majorities as a rational measure regarding three priority tasks: finding new tax revenues; opening up a previously tied industry to competition; taking market share away from the grip of organized crime. Even though the State is still officially responsible for the regulation, it has in this way renounced the political direction of a controversial activity, in order to support the neo-liberal axioms that consider the accuracy of public accounting, the encouragement of consumption and the transfer of public assets to private capitals as three indisputable methods to pursue economic growth. The potentially negative externalities in terms of education, society and health have been neglected in order to depict gambling as a neutral consumption activity that, just like others, can only be limited by the players' individual fulfilment or ability to control themselves.

From a cultural viewpoint, we examine the undercurrent of beliefs and practices that contributes to a growing silent consensus on gambling, feeding the demand and enabling political forces to make laws in favour of liberalization, without having to face the disapproval related to the regulation proposal of other ambiguous sectors of social interaction, such as prostitution or the sale of soft drugs. As a result, there seems to be a connection between gambling liberalization and the late modern life context, where the only aspect acting as a bond is risk sharing and perception: a sort of "existential gambling" that sees the compulsive challenge to fate as an altered form of planning ability, facing the structural uncertainty that deeply permeates neo-capitalist societies.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is among the products of the first year of research of the project "From promise to bet. Gambling as timeless planning in the era of uncertainty", winner of the "Future in Research" competition, co-funded by the 2007-2013 Development and Cohesion Fund – FPA Apulia Region Research "Regional programme to support intelligent specialization and social and environmental sustainability".

## 2. From the government of gambling to the governance of a lawful game

In Italy, gambling has been for decades merely a public order issue, to be deterred and limited according to strict rituals made of weekly draws, Sunday matches and New Year's lotteries. The balance collapsed in 1992, when the national economy faced a credibility crisis that ultimately brought the Italian currency (Lira) out of the European Monetary System. The Italian structural shortcomings (first of all, a national debt equal to 105.2% of the GDP) became unbearable compared with the supranational currency integration and the speculative power of institutional investors, who were released from any precaution related to risk management as a result of twenty years of maintained financial deregulation (Gallino 2011, 68). From that moment on, Italy turned to a constantly restrictive budget system, aimed at reducing the government deficit and national debt by shrinking public spending and increasing tax revenues. A joint analysis of the legislation<sup>2</sup> and the archive of some major national newspapers<sup>3</sup> shows that the urgent measures for the consolidation of public finances included an increase in taxation on lottery winnings (+ 41.8% of revenues at the end of '92, + 6.9% in July '93), product diversification through the introduction of new games (Totogol in May '93, Scratch&Win in February '94), and bet management automation (launch of the computerized lottery system). Starting from the budget law of summer '93 (La Repubblica 1993), the State has been increasing year after year the share of revenues coming from the challenge to fate, by relying on an apparently inexhaustible demand for the game: gambling spending became therefore a pillar of public financial planning, which also brought about a change of attitude towards it, passing from restriction to encouragement.

The caretaker governments led by Giuliano Amato and Carlo Azeglio Ciampi were in charge of dealing with the financial turmoil and finding a way out of it on behalf of the party system that was under investigation by the court of Milan. They actually set the record for the satisfaction of the need obsession as primary political task, yet the path the emergency governments embarked on was regularly walked thereafter by the coalitions contributing to the two-party framework of the Second Republic. Over these two decades, gambling legislation has been marked by two aspects: the disregard of

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<sup>2</sup> A complete summary of the vast legislative production about lawful game is available on Avviso Pubblico, an online magazine edited by the homonymous Anti-Mafia civic association (<http://www.avvisopubblico.it/home/documentazione/gioco-dazzardo/sintesi-della-normativa-in-materia-di-gioco-dazzardo-e-ludopatia/>)

<sup>3</sup> The findings presented in this section are mainly based on the collection of articles from the online archives of the newspaper La Repubblica, La Stampa, Il Sole 24 Ore.

the values that lead political actions in other fields of social life and the dependency of the most important decisions on a rhetoric of emergency, by which any discordant opinion can be silenced.

### *2.1 Gambling as an imperative*

The list of legislative measures is quite long (detailed chronologies are available on Iori 2013; Pedroni 2014; Fiasco 2016) and shows a constant feature: the liberalization of gambling has always been pursued by government majorities and opposed by a cross-party opposition, based on ethical topics and regardless of affiliations in an apolitical debate useful to preserve the status quo. In 1997, the Prodi government (centre-left wing) introduced the second weekly Lotto draw, SuperEnalotto with its attractive jackpot and sports betting, whereas the D'Alema government (centre-left wing) launched the Bingo halls in 1999. In 2002, the government led by Berlusconi (centre-right wing) had to face an internal faction that, with the help of the opposition, forced twice the withdrawal of the amendments to the Omnibus decree, ruling for the liberalization of slot machines and their installation in Bingo halls. This actually happened for the sake of an "ethical role of tax authorities" (La Repubblica 2002a) and the use of taxation to promote "positive values" (La Repubblica 2002b). The debate shows the concern of some members of Parliament, which was yet silenced by the 2003 budget law that included slot machines in the novel category of "lawful game" (by defining them as games "requiring some sort of ability besides the aspect of chance"<sup>4</sup>). This led to the dissemination of 350 thousand devices in bars, betting offices, tobacco shops and public spaces, managed via data transmission network by private licensees authorized by the State Monopoly.

The birth of the "lawful game" represented a watershed moment for the industry growth, because the presence of several private operators (some listed on the stock exchange) automatically promoted a type of competition that resulted in increased gaming opportunities, the opening of new points of sale as well as a massive advertising campaign. According to Fiasco (2016), taxation comes side by side with the creation of a private company value by means of an "interventionist" approach of the State, that influences and guides the accumulation processes from the top through its direct action.

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<sup>4</sup> See "Testo Unico delle Leggi di Pubblica Sicurezza", Royal Decree June 18, 1931, n. 773, art. 110, par. 6

The growth of the product range, constantly balanced by the enthusiastic support of the demand, went on undisturbed until 2012, when another caretaker government decided to curb this escalation. In 2006, the liberalizations promoted by the centre-left minister Bersani (Productivity) and Visco (Economic Affairs) opened the market to foreign operators; in 2009, the Berlusconi government (centre-right wing) introduced on-line gaming and the Videolotteries, new generation slot machines with higher costs (and prizes); in 2011, by means of the "mid-August decree", the government instructed the Independent Authority for the Administration of State Monopolies to determine "all measures relating to public games useful to guarantee more revenues, with the possibility to introduce new games [...] to change the percentage of stake money being fed into the jackpot pools i.e. prize payouts, the extent of the single levy as well as the remuneration percentage for management activities i.e. points of sale"<sup>5</sup>. The decree sanctioned the abandonment once and for all of a political direction of the industry supporting a model similar to meta-governance (Poulantzas 1978; Jessop 2014), which takes the responsibility away from the elected institutions in favour of administrative bodies with a greater concentration of skills and information useful to satisfy the imperative of efficiency fully independently.

The Balduzzi decree of 2012 (named after the Health Minister of the caretaker government led by Mario Monti), has been until nowadays the main political initiative focused on the revision of the approach to gambling also from a social cost perspective: compulsive gambling was included among the diseases entitled to the basic levels of care provided by the National Health System, whereas other prescriptions advocated advertising restrictions, the need to warn about the risk of addiction and the forbidden access to gaming areas for people under 18 years. Later on, the Grand Coalition governments of the XVII legislative period did not change the main framework (taxation and market expansion), by alternating calls for industry rearrangement and concrete actions to protect the production assets: the tax amnesty act of 2013 reduced by 75% a fine received by the licensees for failing to connect the devices to the national network between 2004 and 2007 (Galbiati 2013); still in 2013, the government chose to ignore the request for a 12 month moratorium on online gambling licenses and electronic game systems in public spaces, that was part of an amendment signed by the Lega party yet approved by the majority in the Senate. The explanations provided by the under-secretary for Economic Affairs Giorgetti (Nuovo CentroDestra) on that occasion point out the inhibition of the prerogatives of the legislative assembly in slowing down the government initiative: the motion was "inapplicable" because it was necessary to avoid

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<sup>5</sup> See Decree Law August 13, 2011, n. 138, art. 2, par. 3

disputes with the operators that already had a licence, comply with the European requirements concerning the free performance of services, and discourage players from choosing illegal markets (Custodero 2013). Private economic interests, supranational restrictions and the burden of organized crime frame decisions, and the degrees of discretion assigned to the Parliament as the home of political delegation turn out to be cancelled against the inevitability of events.

## *2.2 Disregard for values*

The short outline provided above shows how gambling legislation actually cancelled the democratic dialectic, by removing the authority of the watchwords used by political forces to stimulate public debate at the same time. The centre-right coalitions turned to voters by setting out the proposal for a "liberal revolution", a reduction of State responsibilities to pursue a development model based on popular principles, that combines competition with the solidarity typical of Christian values. As mentioned, the liberalization of gambling gave instead birth to a new market inspired by government "intervention" and very far from the ideal of free competition. The concentration of profits is actually ensured through shares decided by law and the unpredictable factors related to business risk are easily transferred to the collectivity, as shown in the event of the tax amnesty act. Moreover, the promoted business model is far from the balance between competition and solidarity: it is actually a form of value "extraction", according to the definition of Gallino (2011, 6), which takes money from the productive consumption of income circulating in the territories for the benefit of a passive consumption that directs profit towards financialization, by coldly overlooking the social implications and health risks of the operation. Finally, the consideration of the game as a safe activity clashes with the Catholic vision, which has always condemned a phenomenon that fosters superstition, money worship as well as human arrogance in the ambition to deprive God of the control of time.

On the other hand, the centre-left coalitions promoted a combination between the social roots of Catholicism and reformist socialism in order to speed up European integration, a means to achieve the economic growth that is essential to let development go hand in hand with welfare. Yet, in practice, measures like the expansion of game economy fostered the modification of the State contributory balance, resulting in the consolidation of a regressive form of taxation that mainly penalizes working classes, whose needs should have been voiced by the heirs of the socialist tradition. From a social-democratic perspective, general taxation should actually comply with fairness and

proportionality criteria: gambling as taxation, instead, mainly impacts on the household incomes of lower-middle class families in comparison with upper-middle class ones, as shown by Beckert and Lutter (2008) in England and by Sarti and Triventi (2012) in Italy. The mechanism performs a divarication by stretching apart the initial inequalities. Low-income players are actually the main contributors to the tax revenue in conflict with the "ability-to-pay" principle, whereas the reallocation of winnings via payout is obviously random and therefore unrelated to any realignment logic. Moreover, gambling is a powerful weapon for the legitimation of inequality (Nibert 2006) because it represents an endless pool of new opportunities to achieve individual welfare and, more importantly, without the burden of having to work for it. It actually encourages people to underestimate the inertia of the social stratification everyone is absorbed by.

### *2.3 Emergency systems*

Another sign of depoliticization emerging from gambling regulations is the use of technical and rhetorical emergency systems in order to secure provisions and remove them from the public and parliamentary debate. As a matter of fact, it could have aroused disapproval with time and encouraged a deeper consideration of the measures that have shown their impact in terms of social costs over the years.

The gambling topic is an example in this regard: market expansion began as a reaction to the Lira leaving the European Monetary System, a structural alarm condition that basically cancelled the exchange of ideas and required Cabinets of Experts as special commissioners to take over institutions, and then went on through decree regulations motivated by the need to find quick solutions in order to deal with unexpected inconveniences or urgent shortcomings. It all started in February '94 with the introduction of the "Scratch&Win" instant lotteries as a form of direct funding for the employment measures on early-retirement, redundancy fund and mobility allowance, known as "pacchetto Giugni". The Minister of Employment for the Ciampi government actually took these measures in response to a number of labor disputes that even led to public disorder in Crotone. In 1996, instead, the introduction of the second lottery draw was "aimed" at the maintenance and renovation of the impressive yet decaying Italian monumental heritage, therefore entering the collective imagination as a "cultural tax". In 2002, the opposition within the centre-right government managed to stop for a few months the liberalization of slot machines, whose tax revenue had been destined to tackle the drought emergency in the south of the country. Finally, the most revealing case was the Abruzzo Decree of 2009 promoted by the Berlusconi government. It in-

cluded a set of measures to deal with the problems caused by the April 9 earthquake and introduced videolotteries, online poker tournaments with cash prizes and the online Superenalotto.

Gambling regulation in Italy confirms the role played by emergency as the backbone of contemporary political debate, and sets the Second Republic among the government systems subject to an "economic state of emergency" (Scheuerman 2000): western democracies face the impact of globalization as if they were on the brink and find in the downfall threat a powerful legitimizing tool, a way to speed up the decision-making process and adapt it to market needs and requirements, as well as a topic able to put together a scattered consensus, which is increasingly difficult to bring within the scope of constitutional procedures. The contemplation of the catastrophe brings about concentrated powers that were once the exclusive feature of military governments, whereas nowadays they are permanently wielded in a fast policy that "narrows the range of participants in the policy process, and limits the scope for deliberation, consultation and negotiation" (Jessop 2009, 155).

#### *2.4 Anti-gambling movements*

The heart of gambling liberalization lies in the neo-liberal view of betting as a neutral form of entertainment consumption, a market activity that cannot tolerate prohibitions and whose only limit is the consumer self-control. As reminded by Magatti (2008), neo-liberalism finds in the individual "will to power" a formidable ally that sanctifies freedom as the absence of restrictions to the growing opportunities made available by technology. Liberalization supports this view by offering players the full entertainment potential, enabling them to customize when and how to play. Therefore, players have full responsibility for their actions and can only blame human frailty or greed if they are unable to set a limit and respect it, faced with the endless range of services and products supplied. Control is a private question, just like the acceptance of failure while exercising free will that automatically turns the player into a "victim" (Segatori 2016, 174), someone in need of healthcare, an expedient that preserves the full operation of the total freedom system by confirming its basic principles. It is no coincidence that the only kind of restriction introduced by the Italian legislation was the inclusion of pathological gambling addiction among the diseases entitled to the basic levels of care provided by the National Health System (Balduzzi decree of 2012). This decision did not affect the production and industrial set-up of the game nor started any



discussion on the social reasons leading to gambling, by confining State intervention solely within the scope of clinical care.

The same limit seems to influence the anti-gambling policy action, the initiative against liberalization that currently has two roots in Italy: Catholic associations or the anti-system populist parties. Catholic forces (Abele Group, CNCA, Vita magazine), for instance, base their claims on the fight against compulsive gambling, by keeping a tight watch on the phenomenon and its dangerous relationship with racketeering and extortion. The political motive lies in the experience of the daily care provided to those who suffer the worst consequences of free gambling: addicted players, with their torn families and their impoverished neighbourhoods. By insisting on the wicked effects of addiction, the network of associations, volunteers and trade unions aims at pointing out a conflict of equal rights (health against freedom of business), urging the State to take a stand.

On the other hand, the populist forces (M5S, Lega Nord) promote the independence of territories, the breeding grounds for the indignation against a "banker" state (Pedroni 2014), responsible for an immoral conduct focused on getting rich by taking advantage of the citizens' weaknesses. In this case, the political motive is the condemnation of the State as an irredeemable expression of the interests of chronically corrupted élite groups. The heated conflict is based on the interinstitutional gap between the State and local bodies, with the latter playing the role of opposing and substitute regulators because they are in a better position to identify the social costs that expansion imposes on the territories: impoverishment, greater use of social services, increase in petty crime. "The government gets the profits, the territory gets the problems" in the words of a Lega Nord Lombard politician (Povoledo 2013).

The conflict gap neglected by both experiences seems to be the one between international game companies and players; it is a relationship based on a new kind of voluntary exploitation with, on the one hand, an economic power that extracts value from the illusion of the pursuit of wealth and, on the other, people forced to put their hopes in the game concurrently with the desertification of collective and institutional emancipation channels. This relationship of exploitation is further enhanced by a cultural hegemony that surrounds the control of consensus by showing the challenge to fate as a means of self-realization, a survival strategy particularly suitable for a flexible, dynamic and uncertain context like the global competition *Lebenswelt*. This hegemony should be considered and discussed as an activity fostering the identification of a starting point to overturn the balance of power.

### **3. Consensus for the “chance” factor**

It isn't hard to imagine the goals of game companies, whereas it's harder to understand the reasons pushing people to regularly try and challenge fate, especially in the western cultural context that should apparently base its value system on the importance of rationality. The analysis of the Italian context has shown two systemic factors related to the huge growth of gaming products: the intention of the State to use the game as a means of taxation and the ability of private operators to quickly take advantage of it, aiming at reducing time and space restrictions of the bet. Yet, the systemic factors cannot fully explain the outburst of demand, which meets supply resting on a balance marked by constantly higher expectations in terms of turnover. Apart from the intrusive seduction of advertising, the penetration of gambling opportunities that contaminate places that were once immune, such as post offices, flight travels or automatic vending machines, it is necessary to dig into the reasons that stimulate the hunger for gambling besides the tricks used to drive demand. What expectations, material conditions and views of the world gather around the widespread sacrifice of money for the sake of future winnings?

Gambling consumption has one main explanation in public debate (and by common sense): the economic crisis. A hypothetical cause and effect relationship between impoverishment and betting has actually been pointed out, which implies the wish to achieve a source of income integration through the game in order to fill the gaps caused by the Great Recession. The game as “the opium of misery” according to Balzac's definition, flowing back into the passive fatalism of people witnessing an inevitable reduction in the extent of their prerogatives. Yet, the gambling market began its growth way before 2008, a year that draws a dividing line for the outburst of the sub-prime loans bill and the consequent collapse of global economy. The growth of the market went on across-the-board for thriving macro-economy environments, like Asia, as well as more troubled contexts, like Europe and the United States. In Italy, the industry exploded in the first five years of 2000, back when the crisis and the related rhetoric were still unknown, when the institutional legislation model changed to create a financial economy of the games open to competition among licensees. Before pouring the frustration for the economic difficulties into the game, a high number of consumers turned to slot machines and betting offices with a demand for entertainment free from ethical burdens, thus meeting the supply of an industry managed by a “virgin territory” non-capitalist monopoly of profit extraction for a new branch of entrepreneurship. Moreover, the post-crisis data of 2011/2012 disprove the alleged strong countercyclical attitude of gambling. The income reduction in Italy actually pushed

households to spend less on gambling, whereas the recovery started in 2014 (Tizian, Tonacci 2013).

Recession alone isn't actually enough to explain the popular acceptance of gambling, a feeling of participation or compliance that has legitimized liberalization by peacefully welcoming it, without the unrest related to the regulation proposal of other controversial sectors of social interaction, such as prostitution or the sale of soft drugs. It is necessary to look for an additional element within the cultural atmosphere of the years 2000, which has only been partially explained until now: the tolerance for the "chance" factor, the approval that allows risk to recover its place among the elements contributing to determine human events, after the exile imposed by modern vision, focused on the supremacy of causality over chance, determinism over chaos, rationality over fortuitousness. According to Macry (1997, 50), the passion for the game is often associated with modernization processes: the gamble element was present in Imperial Rome, as well as in Venice with its maritime trade activities and the United States during the frontier period. The availability to risk would thrive within dynamic and contradictory contexts, tense social systems in which social mobility expectations are not properly satisfied by power blocks waiting to be overcome. The global society of the years 2000 perfectly fits this definition: it is a fluid society witnessing a technological transition that implies a deep rearrangement of practices, trade and identities. It is an uncertain context, without stable connections, which requires people to become flexible, to constantly reinvent themselves based on the challenges to tackle, and to "get in the game" without hesitation. By following this perspective, gambling diffusion in Italy (as in the other developed economies) can be considered no longer as a consequence of the recession that has been affecting western societies since 2008 but, on the contrary, as a practice rooted in the same cultural environment that led to the financial collapse.

### *3.1 From natural sciences to postmodernity*

"We are all in charge of our own destiny". If it's true, as shown by Berger and Luckmann (1966, 112), that proverbs stand for an elementary form of legitimation, we are here dealing with a maxim that, though born in classical age, entails an ideological cornerstone of modernity: we should all manage to let our condition be driven by the direct and predictable consequences of our own actions, instead of being the result of uncertainty. For this reason, it is advisable to be equipped with the necessary tools to bring back under control as many events as possible, by shedding on them the light of

scientific observation. This is the purpose of knowledge accumulation and transfer: to identify regularities and connections, to classify cause and effect relationships, useful resources to widen the extent of human action on nature, in order to bridge the gap that separates past experiences from future expectations based on them.

The human being is aware of his cognitive limits, yet this awareness does not prevent him from trying to confine ambiguity in a marginal place, and to find the sense of his presence on the earth by constantly pushing forward, to his own advantage, the limit that separates what is under control from what is inevitable. Success and disgrace must be the consequences of a procedure that enables people to find someone to blame. In order to ensure social order and to avoid interaction turning into an ungovernable chaos, nobody can feel excluded and passively accept events as fortuitous or given.

People still use this proverb a lot today, and the idea of one's personal life path as a connection of choices made in the past is still valid. The requirement to play an active role in creating one's best life conditions is an ethical prescription that still supports education and training processes, a large portion of work and the management of savings. Yet, on the other side, an opposing view is taking shape, by which the individual comes to terms with the limits shown by the attempt to arrange existence into deterministic concepts, and becomes aware of the uncontainable dimension of the uncertainty that rules events, which is always redundant no matter how hard one tries to contain it. Technology has always been directed towards increasing human possibilities, including the ambition to rebuild events to be able to predict them, thus widening the extent of human control over the future. Yet, the planning ability loses its meaning by discovering that it is just a little portion of the infinite universe of possibilities. According to Gerda Reith (1999), the topic of the relationship between certainty and uncertainty is currently moving to another phase: whereas in traditional societies the division was marked by faith and in modern societies by reason, we are today in the "age of chance", where chance turns out to be a structural and unavoidable element of human knowledge. The concern about reality is supported by statistics and the quantification of probabilities, in the attempt to shed light on a range of possibilities that can't be no longer standardized into a single body.

Bauman considers natural sciences as the root of tolerance to chance: "Once moved by the belief that 'God does not play dice', that the universe is essentially deterministic and that the human task consists in making a full inventory of its laws so that there will be no more groping in the dark and human action will be unerring and always on target, contemporary science took a turn towards the recognition of the endemically indeterministic nature of the world, of the enormous role played by chance, and of the

exceptionality, rather than the normality, of order and equilibrium" (2000, 136). The Nobel laureate for Chemistry Ilya Prigogine defines it as the "End of Certainty" (1997): thermodynamics laws prove that the universe tends to the most probable condition, i.e. maximum chaos, by means of its spontaneous transformations. Classic science preferred order and stability, whereas the crucial role of fluctuations and instability at every level of observation has by now been widely acknowledged. Social constructs may at most curb the entropy and withstand the events ruled by fate, yet the laws of science necessarily take on a new meaning: they no longer describe nature operation but they express possibilities.

The collapse of certainties announced by natural sciences impacts on philosophical thinking, jeopardizing the confidence in human persistence in building up reality. The leitmotiv of the postmodern period lies in the exhortation to disintegrate the grand universal narratives whose representatives occupy privileged positions in history, in order to sink into the contemplation of uncertainty without finding any purpose, direction or necessity in the course of events. One of the main representatives of the skepticism that pervades postmodern cultural sensitivity is the German philosopher Odo Marquard, who engages in the "apology of the accidental" (1986), an enemy of human freedom and dignity, which becomes instead a worthy sign of the finitude of existence. The failure of the great modern project to "remove the uncertain" and to achieve the absolute human being, i.e. free from the shackles of contingency as a product of his own rational choice, makes it necessary to recover the awareness of the mixture of action and event that moulds human life. We can't choose where we are born nor where we die; we accidentally inherit traditions, customs and habits that shape our path together with chance and its whims, which represent a category of events far from being marginal.

### *3.2 From flexible accumulation to everyday life*

The cognitive foundations of certainty are by now undermined and the contemporary individual faces daily life subject to a "peculiar synthesis of knowledge and unawareness" (1996, 216) that Beck talks about in "Risk Society Revisited". A circular relationship between risk awareness and growing degrees of uncertainty about what to do, resulting in the inability to know and, consequently, to decide. If it's impossible to predict the effects of an action and every step forward is surrounded by a bunch of undisciplined collateral deviations, "Everyday life thus becomes an involuntary lottery of misfortune" (id.), a context in which every additional information makes the situation

more uncertain, by crossing out at the stroke of a pen the authoritativeness of the experts, the constructs of rationality and the reliability of the rules of conduct.

Cognitive and material uncertainty are interdependent. The postmodern "condition" described by Harvey, i.e. the deep change in the structure of fragmentation perception, does not take place in the social, economic or political vacuum. Since the actions and casual representations are perceived as repressive or delusive, pragmatism becomes the only possible principle of action for the postmodern individual. "Action can be conceived of and decided only within the confines of some local determinism, some interpretative community, and its purported meanings and anticipated effects are bound to break down when taken out of these isolated domains, even when coherent within them" (1990, 52). Neo-liberal production contexts are imbued with this kind of pragmatism; they don't actually focus on connecting value creation with the search for a meaning, and let the latter coincide with the market mechanism. By turning trade into a self-sufficient ethics, leading all human actions, neo-liberalism holds that social good can be maximized by increasing the extent and frequency of business transactions and tries to bring all human actions within the scope of the market.

The "flexible accumulation" regime relies on the disintegration of the Fordist model in the name of production decentralization and the importance of financialization. Both aspects are moved by an active principle based on the "chance" factor: flexible organization can change the production sequences at will, to promptly react to the contradictory market stimulations that it is no longer required to understand. According to Sennett "this is task-oriented rather than fixed-function labor. Linear development is replaced by a mind-set willing to jump around" (2006, 48). The result is the "casualization" of labor: employees on a short-term contract can be easily moved to different roles and contracts can be adapted to the changing activities of the company. In turn, the company can be downsized or rapidly expand, by firing or hiring "casual" staff.

Moreover, financialization brings the risk at the core of value determination. In the stock market, according to Taleb (2007), knowledge accumulation is a nuisance, the control of past scenarios, the talent in interpreting them to efficiently plan future actions and achieve before others the kind of innovation that ensures advantages over the competition. The free market works well because it allows people to be successful by acting aggressively and by trial and error, instead of relying on skill-based incentives. The winning strategy consists in trying to collect the "black swans", that is to look for the improbability and be ready to bet on it. It is necessary to keep light: as explained by Michèle Leclerc-Olive (2005), changes are unrelated and independent within an uncertain context, and the best estimate of the future course is the current one. What matters the most is knowing how to dodge unexpected and unmeasurable dangers, which

is an instinctive and irrational skill supported by a contingency and individualistic approach.

A system based on transitoriness, which refers to the unpredictable series of temporary aggregation forms around changing goals, selects a specific anthropology for its functioning, made of individuals who wear the mask of "players", as suggested by Bauman (1996, 31-32): "The player's world is the world of risks, of intuition, of precaution-taking. Time in the world-as-play divides into a succession of games. Each game is made of conventions of its own; each is a separate province of meaning - a little universe of its own, self-enclosed and self-contained. Each demands that disbelief be suspended - though in each game a different disbelief is to be suspended [...] The mark of postmodern adulthood is the willingness to embrace the game wholeheartedly, as children do".

In Bauman's view, the player does not aim at bridging the gap between present and future through his planning ability, by living in a state of episodic temporality in which the present has nothing to learn from the past nor from the future. Every match is a story in itself and every bet can be the decisive one; therefore, it is necessary to use every weapon available, including those provided by the "natural lottery": the position in social stratification as well as the physical and behavioural traits at one's disposal. Rawls (1975) states that the liberal interpretation of the principles of justice aimed at mitigating the influence of social circumstances and chance on wealth distribution. A mechanism that seems blocked in "flexible postmodernism" (Harvey 1990, 336), heading towards the consolidation of inequalities.

#### **4. Conclusions**

At the end of this excursus, the political model of the Second Italian Republic appears to be threatened in its democratic core by the neoliberal pressure on two different sides: on the one hand the elected institutions, which lose power to global markets primacy and are forced to invest rapidly on the enlargement of gambling opportunity to support public treasury; on the other, the voters conscience where, in order to address the growing complexity stemming from market expansion at global level and the dismantling of the mediation systems, the individuals are urged to give up investing in long-term practices (work career, education, savings, political participation) and encouraged to be open to chance ("Risk everything" as suggested in the commercial by Nike) to achieve personal goals. This is actually an essential attitude to promptly tackle the conflicting stimulations of production and relational contexts marked by impon-

derability, "casualization" of labor or the extreme volatility of the digital capitalism of networks. Stephen Lyng (2005) calls this approach "edgework", attendance of the limit. The acceptance of risk in everyday life is based on two apparently contradictory requirements: on the one hand, it facilitates the escape from the routine of a standardized and disenchanting life; on the other, it is a reaction to the main imperative of the emerging social order. In both cases, the neo-liberal context favours the production of a subjectivity affected by "existential gambling", the internalization of ideal behavioural traits to thrive in fragmentation: the lack of time continuity, i.e. the adaptation ability that turns into knowing how to erase what was created in the past if it can't be used to react to the stimulations of the moment, and the tolerance of chaos, namely being at ease within the regulatory and administrative mess of an endless reconstruction. Yet, in uncertainty there is also a state of permanent unrest, an anxiety that needs to be tamed. The success of machine gambling, according to the well-thought opinion of Natascha Dow Schüll, has nothing to do with the thrill of chance, yet it comes from the ability to act as a tranquillizer, to transform the player-machine combination into a protected "zone" in which solitary, constant and rapid betting turns into an indolence that leaves out the instability of everyday life: "If you can't rely on the machine – in a dealer words - then you might as well be in the human world where you have no predictability either" (2014, 25).

It seems reasonable to conclude that the tolerance for the "chance" factor can contribute to the "naturalization" of gambling, a cultural background that legitimates the gambling growth legislation. The current perpetual transformation process allows the approval of the thrill of the game in everyday decisions or the search for a "breakthrough" in life (Lo Verde 2013) through betting, as a quick strategy to connect the current condition with future improvements, considering the inhibition of the slowest and hardest paths of education, training or political commitment. This drafts a vicious cycle about depoliticization: the lack of political engagement by existential gamblers, the need of fewer restrictions to their pursuit of an aleatory happiness, affects the delegation and representation system, contributing to its dismantlement.

Be it a conformist action or an escape, and besides understanding it only as a deviant behaviour, the interpretation of gambling as a strategy to adapt to the structural uncertainty and the imperative to "get in the game", emerge at the moment as a social theory topic. Next step will be to verify it on an empirical terrain of inquiry as further stage of the research path in the field.



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#### **AUTHOR'S INFORMATION:**

**Sabino Di Chio** is a Researcher at the Department of Political Sciences of the University of Bari "Aldo Moro". His main research areas of interest in the field of Social Theory and Sociology of Cultural and Communicative Processes include: the representation and perception of time in late modern society; the digital revolution and its conse-

quences on social stratification; cultural and political issues about gambling as a mass phenomenon. In 2015, he published “Tempo Irreale. Il restringimento dell'orizzonte temporale della tarda modernità” (Liguori).