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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS:
*The Left-Right schema:
representations of political space in Europe and Italy.*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to analyze the meaning, the role and the functioning of the left-right opposition in Western Europe Democracies.

In this work, the left-right opposition is conceived as a social representation of political space which realize a synthesis of the main values conflicts of European societies. In this way, the left-right dimension allows every actor of the political system to evaluate his position in relation to the position of others actors, to establish his identity and to perform correspondent actions. This conception of left-right opposition is closely related to the emergence of modernity: indeed, such device to ordinate the political conflict become necessary in a pluralistic society, where the political fight is focused on the desirable end-state of society.

This conception of left-right opposition was elaborated after an analysis of the way the two terms were conceptualized in literature. In Chapter One, indeed, was accounted the three main ways. First, in philosophical and historical studies, this couple of concepts inclines to be conceived as a classification of political ideologies and movements, in which the distinction is reduced to a logical opposition between two essences. A second tradition, ascribable to the cleavages theory of Stein Rokkan, conceives the left-right opposition as a socio-political fracture between capitalist and workers. A third way, following the economic theory of political competition by Anthony Downs, describes left-right opposition as a cognitive structure which helps the meeting between offer and demand, based on the notion of issue. Every of those ways to conceive the opposition, we argue, are bad-drawn and bring to conclude that the opposition has no meaning.

In chapter two, it was tried to conceptualize the left-right opposition in a different manner combing some elements of cleavages and economic theory. From the economic theory we took the idea of left-right dimension as a cognitive structure shared by all the actor of the system that synthesize the main political conflicts. From the cleavages theory we saved the conviction that this kind of

conflicts are deeply related in social structure. The two theories were unified through the notion of value conceived as cognitive representation of desirable end-state elaborated from the subject's condition of existence. So differences in condition of existence related to social structure could be translated in conflictual dimension of value and the system of oppositions created by different value dimensions could be synthesized in a unique cognitive structure. Moreover, different combinations of values in opposition generate system of values. We distinguished between political culture at mass level and ideologies like instrument elaborate by political elite to mobilize specific public. Referring to social representation theory by Serge Moscovici we concluded that the left-right opposition could be intend as a social representation of political space. Social representations are usually defined as form of knowledge, socially constructed and shared, about some relevant object for a group or society, that allow people to orient in social reality giving a code for communication and social exchange. The structure of social representation is usually conceived as divided in a central core where are organized general and abstract elements, which constitute the essential framework of the representation, and in a peripheral area where are related more concrete elements. We argue that the symbolic device left-right constituted a social representation of political space where the central core is compound by the main value conflicts rooted in a society and the peripheral area by concrete political objects. Analysing the literature, we conclude that in western Europe, the central core of this social representation is constituted by three common dimension: tradition/emancipation values; economic egalitarian/economic individualistic values; materialist/post-materialist values.

In Chapter Three, we tried to verify empirically our assumption using World Value Survey data. First, we observed the relation between auto-collocation on left-right scale and the score on value index correspondent to the value dimensions of our interest. After that, through a cluster analysis we verified if the combination of the different value dimensions give rise to different cultural profiles and if they are coherent in their distribution on the left-right spectrum. Finally, through a multiple correspondences analysis, we observed the relation, in term of proximity or distance in a Cartesian space, among structural condition, value orientation, left-right position, affiliation to a particular cultural profile.

In Chapter Four we focused our attention on Italian case to observe the relation between mass belief, the cultural and value connotation of the different position of left-right scale and the ideologies used by parties, comparing the score on value index of electorate with parties programs. The main aim of this chapter was to verify if the consensus collected by Italian parties could be mainly related to the ability to prospect a certain worldview. Our result seem to confirm that Italian

electorate orient his political behaviour following his everyday value, determining a very stable and rigid structure of political position in left-right terms.

In conclusion, this work demonstrates that the left-right schema is a fundamental device that mediate and represent the relation between mass belief system and ideologies. Therefore, left and right have a specific, even if mutable, meaning in the context of western Europe democracies, related to deep structure of our societies. Moreover they define the field of possible political conflicts and they are the main instrument through actors of our political system perceive the space of their reciprocal oppositions and orient their behaviour.