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# ABOUT THE “CHAIN OF GENERATIONS”<sup>1</sup>

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## *abstract*

*This article takes up the idea of the “chain of generations” formulated by the British philosopher McCormick and has two basic objectives: (a) to offer an examination of the notion in ontology by showing how it is to be understood according to a predominantly metaphorical meaning; (b) to show how the notion of the people, which we propose to replace that of the chain of generations, better serves the purpose, i.e. is more useful for the formulation of an ontology of transgenerationality.*

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## *keywords*

*chain of generations, transgenerationality, future generations, intergenerational justice*

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<sup>1</sup> This publication is part of the PRIN 2022 project “Next Generation Ita. Increasing Trust, Making Future Generations Possible”.

**1. The chain of generations**

In the context of a renewed interest in the concept of transgenerationality, stimulated above all by the studies of Derek Parfit and the formulation of his “non-identity problem”, the concept of the “chain of generations” was used in 2009 by the philosopher Hugh McCormick in the article entitled “Intergenerational Justice and the Non-Reciprocity Problem”. The article comments on two specific issues: non-reciprocity between generations, i.e. the fact that not all generations are connected or overlap, and the idea of justice as reciprocity. This idea states that future individuals may not be able to reciprocate the actions they encounter or bear the consequences of those actions. This fact could leave future generations particularly vulnerable and at the mercy of the decisions of those who have gone before them. In examining two specific circumstances, namely the constant overlap of generations and the fact that older people are dependent on younger people for their survival, McCormick is particularly committed to two aspects: He argues that future generations are not asymmetrically endangered by the actions of those who have gone before them because of the generational chain. Consequently, justice as reciprocity is not susceptible to the problem of non-reciprocity.

McCormick’s argument can be summarized as follows: Since each generation belongs to the same chain, it follows that each link in the chain is “connected” to all the others on both sides – the one to the past and the one to the future. McCormick is thus advocating the idea that, through a kind of transitivity in which each generation has been related to at least the previous generation and will be related to the following generation – but in reality to several previous and several following generations – all generations are ultimately connected to each other. It is this connection that makes it possible for justice to be exercised as reciprocity. Nevertheless, one thing seems clear: even if we accept the idea of the generational chain as a link, it is obvious that if we compare each generation to a link in the chain, each link only has a direct relationship with the link that precedes it and the one that follows it. While the relationship between the individual link and all the others arises through a kind of mediation or transitive property, this seems to limit the possibilities of genuine reciprocity between the generations.

It seems clear that McCormick is concerned with ensuring the possibility of reciprocity through direct relations. If the direct relationship is possible in some form, then justice remains possible as a form of equalization between the parties.

However, there are aspects of this issue that McCormick has not fully explored and that go beyond the question of justice. We would like to point out that there is one issue that we believe is of central importance when it comes to the question of transgenerational

relationships. It is important to bear in mind that there is no clear form of contiguity between generations in certain types of communal action, which we would call *transgenerational social action*. This may mean that the form of compensation mentioned by McCormick cannot be exercised. For example, if the government of a particular state decides to retire its employees at the age of 41 and add their pensions to general state taxation, then it is clear that the consequence of this decision – which will take the form of a series of measures aimed at enacting this law and keeping it in force for as long as all retirees live – will have consequences that go far beyond the range of relationships available to the generation that made the policy decision. In cases involving long and complex intergenerational co-operation, it becomes difficult to apply the concept of balancing by contiguity proposed by McCormick.

We hypothesize that transgenerational social actions are not necessarily based on the relationship of contiguity between the generations involved in the action. Rather, one could say that they take place on the basis of a conscious decision to perform an action or a series of actions, assuming that these will be completed in the future. It is important to note that the position of temporal contiguity does not guarantee anything.

The case of the so-called Rumor Law, enacted in Italy under the government of Mariano Rumor, is an illustrative example. With this law, which became known as the “baby pension”, the state undertook to give younger people the opportunity to retire. One particularly noteworthy aspect was the possibility for women who are married and have children to draw a pension after fourteen years, six months and one day of contributions.

The Government has exercised the power conferred on it by Parliament by Article 6 of Law No. 775 of 28 October 1970, in a manner signed by the Prime Minister in agreement with the Ministers for the Organization of Public Administration, for the Treasury and for the Budget, and has received the opinion of the parliamentary committee referred to in Article 21 of the said law: an opinion adopted by both the majority and the opposition. It should be noted that the law was passed with a broad consensus. Inspired by the trade unions, it was supported by both the majority and the opposition.

This political decision was taken in support of a highly patronizing action in which various sectors of political and civil society agreed to grant a privilege (an old-age pension for citizens in their early thirties) at the expense of public budgets and partly at the expense of the well-being of future generations. A considerable number of people in their early thirties were thus given the opportunity to retire. This had several consequences, including the fact that in many cases the retirement period was more than 40 years. In 2011, the total number of pensioners under the age of 50 reached more than half a million. Of these, 425,000 were INPDAP pensioners, i.e. from the public sector. The total annual cost was considerable and exceeded 9 billion euros.

It is estimated that around 17,000 people retired at the age of 35. These people would have received their pension for an average of just over 40 years. In other words, for a significant number of workers, the period in which they received their pension cheque was quite long. It may be helpful to point out that a study by Confartigianato estimates the total cost to the state at around 150 billion euros. In addition, it seems useful to emphasize at least one other factor: Public sector workers who retired between the ages of 35 and 39 are likely to receive a pension for at least three times as many years of contributions, given a life expectancy of 85 years. It seems reasonable to suggest that those who have retired early may receive a pension that is at least three times the amount they have paid in contributions.

It seems obvious that in cases like this, generational affiliation was not a deterrent. It seems that the decision of the Rumor government and all political parties that supported this measure did not fully take into account the potential impact on the balance of public finances,

## **2. Transgenerational social actions**

e.g. in the form of higher public debt. It is perhaps understandable that the consequences of this measure were not immediately recognizable, as they only came to fruition many years after its adoption. In some cases, there is a kind of latency of the consequences that a particular transgenerational measure entails. If this latency is not adequately taken into account, decisions that could have a negative impact on future generations could be taken without sufficient consideration. For such latency creates a space in which individuals and collectives can be held accountable, which in turn can lead to a lack of effective consequences for their actions. It is therefore clear that generational contiguity is not a sufficient criterion to ensure a good level of transgenerational justice.

It is understandable that the younger generations in the 1970s were not thinking about their parents' pensions or the long-term sustainability of their country's pension system. Similarly, those who would be born decades after this measure was implemented were not yet born and therefore did not have the same concerns. This case illustrates that the concept of transgenerational chain or overlapping generations does not necessarily ensure that transgenerational relations are secured by some checks and balances with regard to the principles of equity. Those who should have avoided taking this undoubtedly unjust measure were the same people who had taken it.

However, the case of the baby pensions still raises an interesting point concerning the sustainability of the Welfare system. We define sustainability as a state of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It would appear that the recipients of the pension cheque were of a relatively young age (generally just over thirty) and had an average long-life expectancy (generally over eighty). The consequences of this situation were twofold. Those who had to bear these pensions over time were in part different people from those who had decided on this measure. In other words, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the measure, it would have been necessary for future generations to make a significant contribution. It is possible that future generations had to contribute to the pension benefits of those who had spent more time out of work than in work. This is a consequence of the measure that has helped to increase the national debt. It is also possible that future generations have had to accept a deterioration in their pension conditions and a general reduction in public spending opportunities. This was essentially an indirect consequence.

Given that younger generations have the opportunity to participate in political representation from the age of majority, and that the cohorts of younger people are less numerous overall than those of middle-aged or older people, it seems plausible that it was not they who may have raised the issue of the sustainability of the measure.

From all this we can tentatively conclude that the metaphor of the generational chain works well on the discursive level, but perhaps less well when we deal with the real problems of transgenerational equilibrium. As we have already said, transgenerational social actions have an interesting structure from an ontological point of view. One could say that these actions presuppose a certain relationship between the different generations. In transgenerational actions, as we have said, there is an actor (or a group of actors) who decides on the transgenerational action and an actor (or a group of actors) who must continue and finally complete the action. It is important to recognize that there is a necessary relationship between the groups of actors in relation to the action. This means that the group of actors who are at some distance in time from those who performed the action may have to co-operate, even if they did not decide to perform the action, in order for the action to be completed, perhaps through a series of related actions. In this case, it seems that co-operation could be a key factor in the success of the action. In the example of baby pensions, had the younger generation not agreed to take on an otherwise significant proportion of this expenditure, and

had they perhaps decided to reverse the effects of an obviously unjust action, it is possible that the consequences of this decision would have led to a different form of injustice and poverty. It could be said that the youngest generation has made a conscious decision not to jeopardize the balance of the welfare state by protecting the ability of their fathers and grandfathers to lead a decent life.

The case of baby pensions offers some considerations that are worth taking into account. First, it is obvious that injustices can be perpetrated against neighboring generations. Moreover, the fear of being harmed by younger people is not a sufficient reason to prevent older people from harming them in certain circumstances.

Furthermore, the question of the implicit consent of a new generation to previously adopted measures raises an important point that we consider worthy of consideration. How might we approach the question of the consent we expect from the new generation in this hypothetical scenario? This is a crucial question because it is on the basis of this consent, or rather on the assumption that it will be given, that transgenerational actions are exercised. It is obvious that a positive answer to the question of the nature of this consensus would be beneficial. We hypothesize that it is an act of will that concerns the political rather than the moral level, since it is the consensus that enables political continuity between generations and thus the preservation of the state. If the generations that contribute to transgenerational actions express their consent to the continuation of actions taken by others, without this consent being the result of obligatory and restrictive decisions, this would indicate that the prerogatives of each generation to fully exercise its political action and sovereignty are protected. If this is not the case, there is a possibility that a generation may feel compelled to reconsider its participation in the social contract.

In essence, the realization of transgenerational action involves, on the one hand, indirect cooperation between different generations and, on the other, the possibility for each generation to exercise sovereignty. In other words: In liberal democracies, every individual has the right to freely exercise their sovereignty and dispose of their political room for maneuver. Therefore, transgenerational action must not have any content that jeopardises this possibility.

In order to better understand this transition, it may be helpful to move from the concept of the generational chain to the concept of the *civitas*.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that other factors play a role in affective dynamics, especially in the family context. It is often the case that the long hand, which should manage the balance between the generations, is blocked. This is because there is no long hand that naturally regulates issues of transgenerational justice. It would be beneficial to bring these issues to the forefront, both individually and collectively, and finally in institutional contexts at different levels. This should enable us to plan specific forms of intervention and regulatory frameworks that are appropriate to the justice needs that concern us.

However, it seems that the metaphor of the chain of generations is not the most effective way to address this issue. It is clear that each generation is linked to those who have immediately preceded it and those who will immediately follow it, but this does not fully capture the complexity of the problem we face. In the context of transgenerational justice issues, it would be beneficial to look at the past and the not-so-near future. It might be helpful to do this in as non-paternalistic a way as possible.

May I ask why we should look at this? The challenges we face in making our world livable and sustainable are significant and complex. It is understandable to feel that we should leave the future to its own destiny, or perhaps even the destiny that future individuals will devise.

To answer this question, it might be helpful to return for a moment to the idea of the chain

### **3. From the chain of generations to the *civitas***

of generations. There seems to be an intuitive understanding that the concept of the chain of generations is meant to capture. This understanding is that each link in the chain forms an element that contributes to its continuation. Ideally, this continuation has no end, provided that the living conditions on our planet allow life to continue. We believe that a broader notion of belonging than that suggested by the chain metaphor could perhaps serve as a solid basis for strengthening intergenerational relationships. One possible way to conceptualize this is through the idea of the people as a socio-political entity, which has a long history in political philosophy. This is sometimes referred to as the idea of the *demos*.

I would like to put forward a solution that has been discussed in the literature<sup>1</sup> and that I believe could be a useful way of conceptualizing the transgenerational totality as a unit whose members are important regardless of their historical location. In other words, if a certain *demos* has the capacity to transform itself into a people, then all individuals who become part of that *demos* enter into a relationship with the totality.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on this passage. You could say that since the 19th century, written constitutions have become an important instrument for guiding political change. This means that since the 19th century, different groups of people, united by different characteristics such as culture, language or ethnicity, have initiated the constitution of a political body by means of a written document setting out the fundamental values and goals of the community. This political body is “the people”. If we look more closely at the concept of the people, it becomes clear that some caution is required. Perhaps it would be helpful to consider what is meant by the concept of the people. Indeed, it is not immediately obvious how to answer this question. It is often assumed that the people are the section of citizens who make up the electorate, in other words, the voters. A broader and more politically sophisticated interpretation of the term is centered on the concept of citizenship. It could be argued that the French and American Revolutions were instrumental in associating the idea of sovereignty with the people. From this, the intuition may have developed that the exercise of political power must shift from the monarch to the community, which can be seen as the centrepiece of the democratic process. Gradually, the common people gain access to universal suffrage and thus become the people. It is precisely this process of development that leads to a certain tension between the concept of the people as the author of the constitution and the living part of the population configured as the electorate in the regular democratic process and as the holder of a secondary power of amendment (Ferrara, 2023, p. 146).

In other words, this process creates an obvious tension between the part of the population that has the power to exercise electoral power and those who, although part of the *demos*, do not have that power. So in what sense can one be part of a *demos* and at the same time be excluded from exercising political power? The answer is actually quite simple. It may be that each individual who is a member of a political community passes through different stages of life, with which different forms of power are associated. For example, the right to vote is not necessarily associated with minority status, so people may not have full political agency until they come of age. It is therefore obvious that the components of the people are not all equal. It seems reasonable to consider the people as a large and complex entity consisting of different parts. If I may try to explain this in more detail.

So far we have gained an insight into what the people are not. It is not limited to the electorate, because that would have certain consequences that we would rather avoid. This point emerges clearly from an intense exchange between two of the fathers of the US

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see (Ferrara, 2023).

Constitution, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.<sup>2</sup> While Madison was intent on reasoning about the American Constitution, Jefferson raised an important issue: he believed that each generation should be free of the constraints that could result from decisions made by previous generations. It could be said that each generation should be free to write its own history and believe in its own values, which would be the only way to fully exercise freedom.

Madison responds to his friend's argument in a direct manner. If Jefferson's argument were valid, humanity would start over after each generation, which would make this choice very consumerist. On closer examination, it becomes clear that neither absolute competition, which would lead to a return to the state of nature, nor a model of limited co-operation, as Jefferson proposes, is a viable option in the context of social reality. Perhaps it would be best to consider a form of co-operation that extends over a longer period of time and in which each segment – i.e. each part of the demos at the stage at which it exercises political power – can play a role in providing for itself and those who came before it and those who will come after it.

The people is a collective entity that extends over time. This collective includes everyone: the politically active electorate, the politically active segment, the ever-growing segment that has actively participated, and those who will actively participate. While each generational segment is identified by a historical location, the people as a whole can be seen as a unit that transcends the historical localization of parties and encompasses all historical situations.

This way of understanding the people, which follows the Rawlsian indication (Rawls, 1993, it. trans. 210-211), avoids two fundamental pitfalls. Firstly, it avoids the temptation to equate the people with a particular segment, namely the active electorate, as mentioned above. It is perhaps not surprising that the people are often identified with the active electorate, given that it is the active electorate that delegates political power in western democracies. If we consider the people in the extended sense we have proposed, it seems that it cannot be regarded as the holder of political power. Rather, it seems that this is exercised by a part of it, namely the electorate. It could be argued that the people are also responsible for exercising constituent power, which could be defined as power that is constitutive in the first phase and conservative in the subsequent phases. In this sense, the people can be considered to endure, while the electorate is the portion of the people that is constantly renewed. However, it could be argued that the electorate is able to exercise its proxy to represent it because it belongs to a people that founded the political community and maintains it. In Ferrara's view, the people can be understood as the "transgenerational author of the constitution in force in the polity" (Ferrara, 2023, p. 1). It could be said that while the electorate is vested with ordinary power, the people are vested with constituent power.

This position takes a different view to the idea of the sequence of segments that, when juxtaposed, would constitute the totality. Rather, it seems that the underlying assumption is that the people emerge from the segment of the population that is capable of self-regulating itself through two operations: firstly, by imposing a legislative and regulatory code to be adhered to, and secondly by elaborating a perspective and value narrative. It might be suggested that the founding process, as summarized by Giambattista Vico in three key words – nuptials, courts and are – encompasses the civil, legal and symbolic dimensions. "Constituent power, instead, needs a sovereign actor endowed with singular intentionality. In a democratic context, it is setting in place of a stable regulatory *terms of cooperation* among free and equal associates, in the form of a written or unwritten constitution. The subject

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<sup>2</sup> For details we refer directly to the correspondence between the two: (Jefferson and Madison, 2021).

possessed of it is by definition ‘the people’ as many constitutions declare” (Ferrara, 2023, p. 137).

In order to avoid the potential issues that could arise from sequencing, it is important to note that constituent power cannot be exercised in a single instance. This is because, as both Rousseau and Jefferson have rightly observed, the exercise of sovereignty should not be limited. This would be the case if only one generation, the one that founds the state, had the power to determine or influence the determination of the state’s value and normative assets. In this context, Rousseau was quite perceptive in pointing out the paradox of the founding act: where does the founding power come from, he asked himself? Could I ask what the source of its legitimacy might be?<sup>3</sup> Answering this question is particularly challenging for at least two reasons. Firstly, the source of legitimacy is unclear, as it does indeed seem bizarre that the people can legitimize themselves. Secondly, it is not entirely clear what the people is and who it is composed of. In this sense, it is evident how the ontological problem is closely linked to the problem of legitimacy. This means that it is not possible to separate the two issues and that, on the contrary, they must be addressed together.

It seems that the various theses that have been discussed in literature have ended up avoiding the question of legitimacy precisely because it has become somewhat difficult to define. It could be argued that the people in question may come to encompass the whole of humanity, or it may be defined on the basis of certain criteria such as belonging to a national, cultural, economic or social context. However, the fundamental issue is that there is no overarching criterion to determine the specific criteria. It could be argued that there are a number of different criteria that could be considered, including those that we have mentioned or others. Many philosophers, such as Rawls, Walzer, Benhabib and Smith, have reflected on these issues and developed the belief that the people are the basis of legitimacy. The most common thesis is that a people is first formed in whatever way this may be, and that this people will then pose the question of the legitimacy of the political institutions it founds. This position, however, does not fully address the initial question we posed, namely how it is possible for a people, which must legitimize itself in order to exist, to implement actions that are politically legitimate.

This act, which is both constitutive of a people and foundational of a nation, has been explained in a variety of ways, mainly using the idea of agreement, or the social contract. It could be said that Thomas Hobbes (2011), John Locke (2000) and Rousseau (2001) are perhaps the staunchest advocates of this solution. The idea, as is well known, is that individuals in the state of nature do not form a political body that endows itself with a government; rather, it is the mutual agreement that they enter into with everyone that allows them to leave the state of nature.

As has been pointed out extensively, this position has at least two elements of fragility. Firstly, it is entirely theoretical, since the very modalities of the stipulation of such a pact – involving the agreement of all with all – is largely implausible. Moreover, on the basis of this model it is extremely difficult to legitimize new entrants into the pact. It is challenging to envision how individuals other than the original contracting parties could become part of the body politic, given that the delegation of rights to a third party, the state, envisages that certain fundamental rights, such as the right of force, are delegated by all simultaneously. In this sense, it could be argued that the people would be a once-and-for-all entity that may find it challenging to accompany the historical and social transformations that a state necessarily undergoes in full legitimacy.

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3 This is the problem addressed by Sofia Näsström (2007).

If this is indeed the case, it would be beneficial to consider a different theoretical strategy. Could I ask you to consider under what conditions, other than the stipulation of a pact, unmovable and contracted by all with all, it might be possible for a few individuals to create a political institution capable of legitimizing a government?

In liberal democracies, for instance, it is generally accepted that an agreement must be made between free and equal individuals. The means by which equality is guaranteed may vary, including natural law, a specific form of freedom, or God. Furthermore, in liberal democracies, it is commonly understood that individuals are motivated by diverse, sometimes conflicting, and even incompatible goals and aspirations. It is also possible that the values held in common by citizens may be quite diverse and include values that are, at least to some extent, contradictory. Finally, it is reasonable to assume that our species is driven by both reason and the instincts of self-preservation. It is important to note that the form cannot be that of the covenant of all with all. It is clear that the “all” who must be included in this sort of alliance for (good) governance cannot only be those who formally adhere to the covenant. On the contrary, this sort of alliance must remain open because societies are complex systems that last over time and span many generations. Furthermore, it is important to note that this alliance has a political character. This means that it must ground and maintain the legitimacy of successive governments and institutions over time.

We believe that this is the main reason why the concept of the chain of generations does not serve the purpose of building a society that has among its aims the pursuit of transgenerational justice. In order for this to be effectively possible, it is important to recognize that the ethical issue cannot be separated from the political issue. This implies that while we believe there are compelling reasons to prioritize transgenerational justice, we must also be dedicated to the means of achieving this goal. The second step is to consider how we can equip ourselves with practices and institutions that are fit for purpose. The idea of the chain of generations involves the systematic and open assumption of a certain idea of solidarity. After all, it could be argued that between generations it is advantageous to assume an active solidarity. The two extremes of human life, birth and death, are associated with conditions of substantial weakness and fragility that require active collaboration. It would therefore be beneficial to consider the concept of solidarity, as we may find ourselves in a position where we require the support of others. It is therefore important that, when it is our turn to offer solidarity, we do not shirk the task. However, it is important to recognize that our reasoning may not always be entirely accurate when it comes to weighing up the costs and benefits of a situation. In order for this active exercise of solidarity to truly have an impact, it is necessary to move away from the spontaneous choices of individuals and instead regulate and transform it into practice through institutional arrangements. It is only through the actions of agents with political capacity that this type of action can be activated.

In other words, this type of action is permitted to the people, that is, to that nucleus of individuals who constitute the state and have endowed themselves with a set of background values that guide their coexistence and action. From where, then, might we consider the people to derive their legitimacy? In essence, it is derived from the people themselves and their own actions, which are foundational and remain open over time. This implies that, in contrast to the social contract, where a covenant is established by the group of people who have made it, the foundational act performed by the people allows for constant change as the generations change. It is evident that this action serves to sustain the body politic and also enables the parts of the agreement that guide the way the people live together to be amended or rewritten.

The object we are defining is identified by a number of peculiar characteristics. Among the most important is the fact that it has a particular type of agentivity, which is concentrated

and limited to the segment that coincides with the electorate. This naturally leads to the conclusion that, since we have introduced the idea that the people is a complex and articulated unit that extends over time, the segment that has agentivity in some way must also take on the representation of the other parties. It is important to note that this practice is not as straightforward as it may seem. There are instances where a part of the people no longer exists or does not yet exist, which means that they cannot be represented directly. It would seem that the representation of ancestors and, perhaps even more so, of future individuals might require different approaches than those suggested by the classical contractualist approach. One possible avenue for consideration could be the power of amendment (Ferrara, 2023, it. pp. 420ss.). It may be that the people, constituting themselves as a people, have both the power to establish the body politic and the power to amend specific parts of the original agreement, which are generally expressed in the constitution. It is important that the people recognize themselves in the constitutional charter and the set of values and principles that govern their individual and collective behavior. "It is almost as if the electorate, thought its residual rights to initiate and ratify constitutional amendments, retains some of its original authority to choose the nature of the political regime, to lay down the ground rules of subsequent decision making, and to establish the limits and legitimate aims of government action" (Levinson, 1995, p. 276).

It seems reasonable to suggest that the amending power, which aims to amend the constitution or the set of norms that stand in its stead, in a sense derives from the constitution itself. It could be argued that the living segment of the people, which has the power to intervene by amending the constitution, can only do so insofar as it belongs to the larger whole of the people and within that context actively participates in defining the normative components that regulate its life and behavior. It may be said, then, that all members of the people hold two prerogatives: firstly, they can participate in political practice; secondly, they can participate in amending the constitutive and regulatory rules that make up that practice.<sup>4</sup>

It may be helpful to consider that the living segment of the people can be said to inherit both the regulatory rules and the constitutive ones. This suggests that, through a process of discussion and socialization of the results, there may be scope to modify these rules. Should they be accepted by all those involved, they could enter into force and replace the previous ones. It is also important to note that the composition of this process is not a foregone conclusion. It extends beyond the living segment and includes those who have already been part of the legitimization process and those who are likely to be part of it in the future. In other words, the legitimacy of the legitimization process is ensured by the particular ontological structure of the people, which stipulates that it not only corresponds to an extended form but is also open to accommodate new subjects. The intricacy of this structure means that the people can never be fully sovereign, since it is never all present at the same time. This composition naturally affects the way in which its decisions are accepted. How might a subject whose parts are partially absent express the decision made by one of its parts representing the whole, i.e. the transgenerational people? It seems that two conditions must be met for this to be possible. One of these is necessary, while the other is sufficient.

Thus, the attestation of the consistency of the will of the living segment of the people and that of the entire transgenerational people can only be a *necessary* condition. [...] What than is a *sufficient* condition for the will of the electorate to count as that of

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<sup>4</sup> On the distinction between regulatory rules and constitutive rules we refer to the now classic text by John Searle (1995).

the people? The answer is a *temporal continuity*, or not being rejected by subsequent generations of the same people. When the amending will of the electorate, over and being validated as consistent with the will of the people inscribed in the constitution and represented by its highest juridical interpreter, is explicitly or tacitly *accepted* by subsequent generations of the people, then the will that has modified the constitutive rules can be legitimately attributed to a subject larger than the electorate (Ferrara, 2023, p. 251).

Ferrara makes a valuable observation that the sufficient condition for the exercise of the amending power can only be temporal continuity that unfolds without generations deciding to interrupt it. In other words, the transgenerational exercise of sovereignty is only possible on the condition that all the generations that make up the people recognize themselves in the transgenerational bond. This would entail recognizing both the transgenerational structure of sovereignty and the normative and legal devices that make its exercise possible.

In this article, we have discussed the concept of the generational chain, which has been widely used in the context of reflections on transgenerationality and transgenerational justice. We have shown that the concept, although broad and adaptable to different contexts, may not be the most effective solution to transgenerational problems. While it encompasses the biological sphere of transgenerationality, it does not necessarily extend to the political sphere, which is also crucial when we think about consensus. It would be beneficial to take this reference into account if we want to effectively use transgenerational tools to strengthen transgenerational justice.

In the second part of the article, we present arguments that suggest that the concept of the people, despite its philosophical roots, may be preferable to that of the generational chain. If we look at the concept of the people properly, we can see that it represents a unity that extends over time. This unity recognizes the electorate as the subject that exercises sovereignty on behalf of the other segments that compose it, namely the present and future generations. It could be argued that the people are only legitimized to exercise sovereignty if they are considered as an ontological whole, since they have legitimized themselves through an act of founding character. Furthermore, it could be argued that the people are only capable of exercising sovereignty in representation of the segments that compose it if they are considered as a transgenerational entity, as this allows for continuity over time.

#### 4. Conclusions

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