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An alternative narrative of the Second Italian Republic: a view from the city

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An alternative narrative of the Second Italian Republic: a view from the city
Contributions of American political science to the study of Italian urban politics[1]

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Contents
Page

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1. First narrative: the crisis of the First Italian Republic in the '90s and the foundations of the new, Second Republic

Quite controversial is the thesis – though widespread – according to which, in Italy, we went through a Second Republic in the '90s, in relation to some events that shocked the national political and social system, subjecting the democratic foundations of the Republic to a very hard test. In those years, the profound crisis of national political parties, which were considered the dominant political forces, extremely influential on governmental decisions and pillars of social cohesion and citizens' political participation, flowed into their complete, definite dissolution or into their transformation, and reconstitution into new political subjects. More in detail, until 1987 parties with higher numbers of seats at the House (the Chamber of elected deputies) were: the Christian Democracy ("Democrazia Cristiana": DC), with 234 deputies of 630 seats, the Italian Communist Party ("Partito Comunista Italiano": PCI), sided with the opposition, with 157 seats and the Italian Socialist Party ("Partito Socialista Italiano": PSI), with 94 seats.

The national political system was represented by several other parties, which were smaller but were often necessary to form a five-party coalition, in order to assure governability. It was the case of the Liberal Party ("Partito Liberale Italiano": PLI), the Republican Party ("Partito Repubblicano Italiano": PRI) and the Social Democratic Italian Party ("Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano": PSDI). Other minor but important parties were the Italian Social Movement – National Right ("Movimento Sociale Italiano – Destra Nazionale": MSI) and the Independent Left ("Sinistra Indipendente"), the Greens ("Verdi"), the Proletarian Democracy ("Democrazia Proletaria": DP) and the Radical Party ("Partito Radicale": PR). Since 1948, the proportional electoral law has guaranteed the representation of many political forces in both Chambers of the Parliament, resulting in a multiparty system.[2] At a regional level, in some cases, the alliance between Socialists and Communists was experimented as an alternative to the predominance of Christian Democracy (this was the specific case of Regional governments in Umbria and Tuscany; while in the Piedmont, Liguria and Lazio Regions there were both PSI-PCI and DC-PSI coalitions).

The crisis of the bigger parties was due to several factors, related to their own history and the cycle of their political organisation and to specific internal dynamics, but also depended on external causes.

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2 In the House the proportionality applied at the national level – the electorate was divided in large electoral districts. In the Senate the proportionality applied at the regional level – each of the 20 Italian Regions elected a share of 315 Senators, according to its population.

For instance, with reference to the Communist Party (PCI), in Italy, the fall of the Berlin Wall (an event which meant the breakdown of communist historical regimes and communist ideology) fell in with existing previous conflicts in the party's leadership, which emerged dramatically in 1984 after Enrico Berlinguer's death, adding as a further burden to a situation which started in the '70s, of gradual but long-term loss of consensus. In those years PCI had to deal also with the rapid rise of PSI, under the guide of Bettino Craxi, a new very charismatic leader. Between the 1976 (the year of the big PSI electoral success) and 1987 national elections, the Communist Italian Party lost 65 seats – out of an initial number of 222 – at the Parliament (INI, 1988). In absence of a strong charismatic leader, the party slid over important decisions. Its reforming core, though structured in various parabolas (i.e., from pure social vocation – in terms of social narration and social development – to medium class representation, to State reforms commitment) lost its strength and its hold on the electorate became less persuasive, being distant or even disconnected from the new emerging social demands.

The problem of redefining a leftist political offer, so as to face the failure of welfare policies in Italy, was systematically discussed in the '80s in various contexts. For instance, the "MicroMega" review was born in those years with the object of reflecting upon the future of 'progressive thought'. The problem was how to induce a radical shift of left-wing political culture and a renovation of its ruling class and party apparatus, moving towards new patterns of solidarity, pacifism and public intervention. A prospect, launched at the time, was to reform city politics, from below. Local contexts were viewed as numerous and differentiated, as regards their social composition, economic trends, political life and public policies, and resistant to the homogenising habits of State regulation. Municipal governments had the potential to make effective bridges between politics, the public administration and the citizens' concrete demands.

Moreover, cities were the bulk of "social problem solving" and, paraphrasing Lindblom (1965), their governing was embedded in "the social intelligence of democracy for the resolution of social problems". In others terms, cities were positively capable of autonomous political and democratic projects. This against the widespread idea (and related scientific literature) of democracy as exclusive political construction and prerogative of the State, and against the idea of democratisation mission of the State as a process for building and strengthening local democracy through (political and administrative) institutional State decentralisation at the city level.

The new political project for governing the city of Venice became a symbol of this new orientation (Cacciari, 1987, 1989), and was acknowledged as 'the offspring of true federalist culture'. The Gramsci Institute was particularly committed to this proposal.

Anyway, new ideas about the role of cities and local governments did not penetrate into the national level and into top party hierarchies: the leaders of the Left preferred the adoption of traditional scientific models and instruments of electoral analysis, which were guaranteed by the scientific and cultural authoritativeness of expert knowledge, viewed as a legitimating source (with the approval of interested academic elites, like the group of intellectuals and university professors who revolved around "il Mulino"). In particular, statistics and mathematics models were welcome in the study of electoral behaviour, offering politicians the technical framework for their analyses, thus de facto strongly influencing political estimations and electoral strategies of campaign (Gelli, 2006). More in general, the urban question was not perceived as strategic and current, and was underestimated in its potential for political change.

Within this context, in 1991, the "shift of the Bolognina", brought to the definite scission of the Communist Party into two separate branches. The newborn political organisations, that is, the Democratic Party of the Left ("Partito Democratico di Sinistra": PDS) – a 'social democratic party' – and the Communist Rebirth ("Rifondazione Comunista": RC) – the radical left-wing of the former PCI, struggling to preserve the Communist identity –, obtained 107 and 35 seats respectively at the House in the 1992 election (INI, 1992).

In the words of a politician and 'independent mind' of the Italian Left, Nicki Vendola (several times elected deputy of PCI, then RC, and President of Regione Puglia since 2005, after a surprising success first at the regional primary elections, then at the formal elections): "It was like a murder – in these terms we experienced the end of PCI (…); that was Occhetto's heresy" (reference is to the shift of the Bolognina, led by Achille Occhetto, who first drove the transformation of PCI into a post-communist party, something between communism and social-democracy, and then became the first Secretary of the new PDS). In Vendola's reconstruction, problems inside PCI started at the end of the '60s, when the party lost the opportunity represented by '68 social movements, as it was not capable of understanding the young people's protests and demands for changing radically the status quo. From his point of view, the '68 movement criticized 'mature capitalism' in its premise, attacking the foundation of the established social pyramid, based on rigid value hierarchies and on the affirmation of specific powerful systems of knowledge, perpetuating disparities and imposing stereotyping visions of what the best

future development for people and places could be. For instance, in the case of the South of Italy, the Left-wing national party apparatus and its leaders, were de facto responsible for imposing a vision of the Southern Question ("Questione Meridionale") linked to the frame of capitalistic modernisation, that is, the interpretation of the economic and social problems of South Italy in terms of underdeveloped, or deprived areas, which needed to be 'corrected' and 'mature' in their development, adopting North-central models of development – in other terms, the project of industrialisation, involving working classes; while the South of Italy had a potential for autonomous development anchored in the Mediterranean culture and place resources. The '68 movements were radical in that they refused existing economic development paradigms, in their DNA (Rossi, Vendola, 2005).

That was the beginning of a long transition phase characterizing left-wing political forces. Another example, the Christian Democracy (DC) – the main national party – suffered from the erosion of votes even by means of new political movements, having popular consensus in specific areas in the North of Italy. This happened in 1983 by means of the Veneto League ("Liga Veneta") and in 1992 with the ascent of Lombardy League ("Lega Lombarda").[3] Between 1976 and 1992 the Christian Democrats lost 56 seats – out of an initial number of 262 – on the whole.

That was the beginning of a long transition phase: the end of the Christian Democrats' political organisation had, among other consequences, the uncertain destination of the catholic votes, sometimes dispersed in diverse streams. The idea of reconstituting the catholic and moderate block was a sort of string, harped with different declinations in the following election, and still characterizes the Italian political debate, especially under elections. If reconstituting a successful autonomous "centre area", between the Left and the Right was difficult, it was evident that the votes from moderate and catholic electorates could make the difference, so they were considered significant, as allied forces, by both the left-wing and right-wing parties. Anyway, at the national election in 1992, only the Socialist Party had a good electoral performance, maintaining consensus, with only two seats less. The DC obtained less than 30% of the seats in each Chamber of the Parliament. The Northern League had a big electoral success in the North of Italy, with 55 seats in the House.

However, the main parties' crisis was accelerated and made worse by the impacts of two emerging matters of national interest, which have been identified (by advocates of the thesis of the shift, between 1991 and 1994, from

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3 These political movements interpreted the wide discontent spreading among Northern people, the claiming of autonomy from Rome's central government and administration.

the First Italian Republic to the Second Italian Republic) as the key-factors that marked the end of an era of Italian politics and the beginning of a new phase.

Firstly, radical changes in the electoral rules were introduced by two national popular referenda and subsequently by the law: the electoral proportional system was dismissed for the adoption of a majoritarian electoral rule. The referendum in 1991 abrogated the possibility of expressing preferences for multiple candidates on each ballot for the House. The referendum in 1993 eliminated the proportional electoral rule for the Senate. They were characterized both by large electoral participation and the proposals passed with a vast majority of votes.

In 1994 further changes were introduced by the "Legge Mattarella", with consequences for both Chambers of Parliament. The new geography of the electoral system was made up of 475 uninominal House districts and of 232 uninominal Senate electoral districts. In the House, 75% of the representatives were elected with a majoritarian system. In each district, one representative was elected with a simple plurality rule according to a pure first-past-the post election. Twenty-five percent of the representatives were elected according to the proportional system, among the candidates of those parties which reached a threshold of at least 4% of the votes. So the shift was from a pure proportional system to a mixed system. In the Senate, 232 of the 315 elected members were elected according to a simple plurality rule in the uninominal Senate electoral districts. The remaining 83 were selected according to a proportional system (Merlo, et alii, 2008). The aim was to improve governability, reducing the parties' fragmentation and the power of the small parties, so as to form stable majorities, and to make the elected representatives more accountable to citizens.

Secondly, the judicial investigation named "Mani Pulite" (Operation Clean Hands) between 1992 and 1993 cast a light upon a substrata of patronage, corruption, illicit and illegal practices strictly affecting Italian politics, with ramifications at all levels of decision and policy-making (i.e., bribes related to contracts for public works, supplies, illegal party financing, etc.). Well-known politicians, ministers of the Republic, party and industry leaders, public managers or simple public officials were accused; in some cases, important political leaders or businessmen were suspected and then arrested, or committed suicide as a consequence of being filled with shame, causing great sensation in the public opinion. A severe discovery was the existence of a corrupted social system, not only of amoral political elites; that was called Bribeville

("Tangentopoli"), to emphasize the large network built around city politics[4]. "Italians" became an internationally used expression to allude to a way of doing things and building relationships, lacking transparency, and having an improper mixture of private and public interests. Anyway, the judicial inquiries struck, in particular, the Socialist Party apparatus and leaders, and the Christian Democrats, revealing a sort of feeding chain between economic and political interests, at micro and macro levels.

Left-wing parties, long being at the opposition in government, with few exceptions, did not seem to be involved in significant illicit affairs, apart from some uncertainties as regards the well known Red Cooperatives ("Cooperative Rosse"), in some cases pillars of regional economies. Indeed, left-wing parties governed mostly at regional and local levels, giving origin to the so called "red areas", with reference to the formation of a specific political subculture and community organisation, which differed from the "white areas", the so-called Christian Democrats model of territorial action[5]. Left-wing parties had many defects, to the eyes of the public opinion, but they were considered 'clean'. Their prerogative was to be trusted again and to embody an alternative.

In 1994, new political subjects emerged: "Forza Italia" (FI), led by Silvio Berlusconi, which absorbed many politicians and adherents who once belonged to the Christian Democrats and the Socialist Party; National Alliance ("Alleanza Nazionale": AN, that is, the reconstitution of the former Social Right Movement). They formed the Party of Freedoms ("Polo per le Libertà"). In 1994 former members of the Christian Democracy became a new catholic party: the Christian Democratic Party of the Centre ("Centro Cristiano Democratico": CCD). Other members of the former Christian Democrats converged in the Popular Italian Party ("Partito Popolare Italiano": PPI) and in the "Patto Segni" (Mario Segni was the politician who had promoted the above mentioned referenda). In the 1994 elections, they formed (together with the Republican Party and the Social Democrats) the electoral coalition named "Patto per l'Italia". The left-wing coalition, named The Party of Progress ("Progressisti") included PDS ("Democratic Party of the Left"), RC

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4   The pool of judges based in Milan, who worked on the case, prosecuted more than 3.000 people; 1.254 were convicted, 910 were acquitted.

5   Representations of Italy with reference to existing subcultures flourished in parallel in the political studies. Those representations were probably the most impressive expression of centralistic tendencies and prevailing political-economic-social constructions, dominated by party organisation and by their centralistic territorialisation and anchoring strategies, with some centrifugal signals of counter-evidence. Subcultures rapidly became the language for describing changes in political analysis, with risks of stereotyping effects as regards the centre-regional-local relationships.

("Communist Rebirth"), Greens, and others. The right-wing coalition, led by Berlusconi, ran under two different names: Party of Freedom in the North and Party of Good Government ("Polo del Buon Governo") in the Centre and South of Italy. The electoral coalition included FI, AN, CCD[6]. The right-wing coalition won the election with 42.8% of the votes.[7]

At the national election in 1996, left-wing parties under the coalition named The Olive Tree ("L'Ulivo") increased in consensus reaching a parliamentary majority (INI, 1996).[8] After these events, a very long and up-and-down transition phase started, basically dominated by a few national political leaders and two pre-eminent coalitions. Despite the pervasive moralisation waves and the great commitment to regenerate politics – with the formation of new political subjects and social movements having prominence on media and new popular consensus – both civil society pressures to change and the institutional structural reform initiatives, for the efficiency of the State and of public expenditure, found, in actions, strong resistance. If an epoch of the Republic ended, the reshaping of the political system and the achievement of a new solid equilibrium in the government seemed far from being reached. For instance, as regards orientation toward a bipolar order of political forces, important steps forward were taken and some results were obtained, but traditional, centralising logic of party apparatus still survived, or even predominated the inner life organisation of party decisions, presenting the typical symptoms and style of 'old Italian politics'. The renovation of ruling and political classes consisted, in many cases and, in concrete terms, in 'migration flows' (from dead parties to new parties and political aggregations); sometimes it found easy ways and various 'recycling tactics' of single individuals or groups. Some critics have looked at the renovation of party organisation in more positive terms, highlighting the substantial change in logics of recruitment, with the formation of a new political class.

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6   CCD remained in the "Polo delle Libertà" until the coalition decided, in 2008, to become one party only, named The People's Party ("Partito del Popolo"). The CCD, led by Pierferdinando Casini, is no longer in the government and in the majority (while it is in the majority with the "Partito del Popolo" in the regional, provincial and municipal Councils).

7   Thanks to the new electoral rules received 57% of the seats in the House.

8   The Party List "Popolari per Prodi" obtained 6,8% of votes – which was the hereditable or surviving consensus of the DC – consequently to a new exodus towards the centre-rightist parties.

For instance, FI was seen as

> "a political movement that differed from the past political parties in that the internal organization was less structured, in fact minimal. Berlusconi imported a managerial model, prevalent in the private sector, into politics: the new organization scheme was based on a few hierarchical levels, whose members were mostly recruited among the managers and employees of Berlusconi's companies" (Merlo et alii, 2008, 19).

But, the same selection process in FI was perceived as pyramidal by other observers: the predominant feeling among elected officials was that "their parliamentary careers were almost totally in the hands of Berlusconi, who also controlled entry in the national electoral lists" (Poli, 2001). Again, with reference to new centre-left parties, abandonment of tendencies toward absolute centrality of the party structure was emphasised in the recruitment process (which was part of the PCI model). For instance, the DS proved to be open

> "to larger participation of rank and files members and supporters in the decision process. The 2001 DS statute provided for open primaries, closed primaries and cooptation as possible selection methods, with a very limited use of the latter compared to methods of nomination from below" (Merlo et alii, 2008, 21).

Against this optimistic vision, experience in the popular primary election at local, regional and national levels in the last years has offered a privileged view: on one hand, to the request for more effective participation deriving from active citizenship, on the other, to the quite instrumental use of the primary election. In many cases, parties, stressed by continuous inside conflicts on candidatures and dealing with crucial problems like loss of the electorate's consensus, intended primary elections as a proof to test trends, or a functional expedient to old consensus building strategies; or they experimented primaries as top-down mobilisation, with different tactics (Gelli, 2009). These aspects will be discussed in greater detail in the following pages.

In 1995 the politicians who spoke a new or breaking off language, although starting from different assumptions and according to different aims, were probably Umberto Bossi, leader of the Northern League ("Lega Nord": LN) and Antonio di Pietro. Di Pietro became popular as the judge and Public Prosecutor responsible for the most important judicial investigations in the years of "Mani Pulite", until he embraced political activity and founded a movement named "Italia dei Valori", struggling for a profound renovation of Italian politics and society (Anastasi, Gangemi, 1997). The Northern League was since its foundation organised according to a markedly hierarchical structure, with a

charismatic leader and the affirmation, in practices, of the centrality of the party apparatus. From this perspective, the Northern League has been viewed as a hybrid party "somewhat in between an updated version of the mass party and a *modern cadre party* without a professional leadership" (Morlino, 2001). More in general, with reference to party solutions and institutional attempts, two results were probably far from being achieved in innovative ways: the re-territorialisation of politics (as centralising logics of control and old centre-periphery schemes were prevailing) and the effective participation of people in politics (through channels differing from existing procedures of representative democracy).

This is very clear considering the debate on federalism in Italy, as regards administrative and constitutional State reforms and a more general need for changing of the political system, giving importance to issues of local autonomy and city governance.

2. The federalist argument: local political leaders vs. national party politics

In Northern Regions in particular, the federalist argument took on various slants, significance and political uses. Though Italy has inherited, from its past history, macro-regional traditions of federalism, composing a complex geography of identities and territorial cultural patterns, the federalist debate in those years was monopolised by the northern centralisation of federalist issues, with the creation of a "Questione Settentrionale" (i.e. Northern Question) as opposed to the well-known "Questione Meridionale" (i.e. Southern Question). Northern territorialisation of federalist issues had grounds in the formation of new political subjects (parties, movements or groups) and has found its laboratories at regional and local levels of government.

However, movements, protests and political parties have embraced the cause of federalism to give voice to different pleas and demands. The federalist agenda looked like a laundry list, a miscellanea of intents and projects far, therefore, from constituting a credible way of building a federalist democratic political system. Nevertheless, political leaders endorsing the cause obtained public popularity and mass media prominence.

Under the federalist umbrella we found, for instance, the need for structural administrative and political reforms for the efficiency of the State and of public expenditure (a matter of commitment, especially for reformers of centre-left parties during the '90s); the revival of old racism and North-South discrimination,

and the emerging of new discrimination, towards immigrants from outside Italy; the emphasis on the territorial identity of local communities, by tracing borders and reinventing images of a mythic foundation of the community and of people belonging to a place; the proposal and/or the scarecrow of the scission of Northern Regions, with the consequent frightened perspective of the ending of the Republic's unity (supported by the Northern League party, above all in its first life organisation); the claim of fiscal autonomy at regional and local levels of government, to change the redistribution of financial resources radically, maintaining the constitutional and political unity of the Republic (a leitmotif of the Northern League party and of the politicians' expression of Northern electorates); the list could go on.

Indeed, not necessarily were these ideas new or did they lead to concrete innovations in pre-existing logic and practices.

From a national perspective, federalist ideas were often eyed warily, as a disturbing force and a factor of political instability, even an aggression to State order. The request for autonomy from below was generally mistrusted, colliding with traditional, hierarchical and centralizing logic of national political parties. It was clear enough, in most cases, that the politicians who governed the transition, surviving the end of an epoch (or "First Republic") did not have a federalist culture in their DNA. At the national level, the federalist argument often caused wide dissent and divided, more than associating or aggregating, social and political groups and their leaders.

As a consequence, it is very difficult to identify, in the Italian political scenario of the time, a compact national "federalist coalition". In specific areas of the Country, federalist requests were, in some periods, a reservoir of votes for politicians who interpreted the discontent spread among the Northern people; but, when those politicians were voted for at the national elections, and became national representatives, they had to negotiate and to moderate their federalist projects, with a progressive loss of any revolutionary or even reforming mission. And, they found their job difficult independently of their belonging to majority coalitions. A good example may be the Northern League party, which gave centrality, in its communication and political discourse, to federalist arguments. The Northern League became ineffective as regards its federalist plans whether it was part of the government coalition or sided with the opposition[9] – the League itself was internally divided into diverse streams and expressed different ideas about federalist solutions.

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9   In the majority and in the government in 1994, from 2001 to 2006 and from 2008 to date. In the opposition, from 1995 to 2001 and from 2006 to 2008.

Federalism remained a façade of rhetoric to fuel the Northern Question and to increase people's consensus. Those politicians, who rode separatist tendencies, found easy approval on behalf of wide sectors of the population, which believed to be damaged by the systematic State taxation on their revenues and related mechanisms of redistribution – to balance disparity, in the name of national solidarity – to deprived, low income areas of Italy (mostly concentrated in Southern Regions). Above all, they blamed the inefficiencies of public expenditures and lack of transparency in the public administration in the Southern Regions, suspecting corruption and patronage originating from the Central administration in Rome (the popular slogan was "Roma Ladrona", i.e. Rome the Robber). Social justice was really an ambiguous notion, which referred to the need for guaranteeing welfare State measures for all the people who needed them, and to the need for granting the productive and very developed areas the collective benefits deriving from their higher incomes. As regards the centre-left parties, they were deeply involved in federalist reforms oriented towards vertical and horizontal principles of subsidiarity, which were translated, in concrete terms, into measures of political devolution and of administrative decentralisation.

They had the experience of City Mayors, dealing with local government and public policies, networking at the national level to form a kind of coordination, the so called "Cento Città" Mayors' Movement, which became popular and had prominence on mass media in the mid '90s. The centre-left took up a stand in favour of a reforming process of the Italian Constitution, devolving new authorities and responsibilities to subnational levels of government in important areas of policy-making, recognizing the Mayors' pressures and the strategic role they played in linking local politics and party organisation to territorial demands and to every day administration – also in the attempt to contrast the Northern League's growing popularity, whose commitment to politics was mainly characterized by attention to the people's every day life needs.

The centre-left opened to *de facto* forms of federalism and started the institutionalisation of such political and administrative practices by State reforms. Again, at the end of the '90s, new problems arose at the national level, which resulted in the failure of the "Bicameral Commission for institutional reforms" – a single occasion for federalism, as it had obtained consensus from both centre-left and centre-right parties. Most of the problems were due to division inside the majority coalition, involving the top of Left Democratic Party leadership (PDS), complicated by the intemperance of the

Northern League party, its exit and then re-entry[10]. The Prime Minister and Leader of PDS, Massimo D'Alema, who had responsibility in the reforming process, being President of the Bicameral Commission, turned over a new leaf and dissolved the Commission in a very bureaucratic manner, grasping the opportunity of a new important commitment, as the war in Kosovo required urgent political attention and the Italian State was internationally exposed.

Some years later, in 2001, by constitutional reform (that is, the amendment of Title V of the Constitution), Regions obtained competence and decisional powers in matter of social-health care and services, education and police. Nevertheless, the reforms still occurred without granting concrete fiscal autonomy to the Regions. From the Northern Regions' point of view, the omission of fiscal federalism measures was perceived as the potential strengthening of State government effectiveness at the local level, and of State ability to control peripheries, throughout decentralisation, so that less convincing were the reformers' intentions of establishing conditions of real political and administrative autonomy at the local level. Without fiscal autonomy, the Regions and consequently the Municipalities were very limited in the effective implementation of their policies. In some cases this tension was a renewal of age-old city-state conflicting relationships, in other cases – as a consequence of the devolution of new powers to the Regions – it resulted in the configuration of a stronger regional political and administrative apparatus, diminishing cities' autonomy. Moreover, the centre-left coalition, which in 2001 was the majority coalition at the national government, licensed the constitutional reform during the last months of its mandate, without implementing it or approving the related decrees of execution (the following elected government was the expression of centre-right political forces, having a different position on this matter). Of course this situation weakened and undermined the reforming process.

In summary, we can distinguish, at the basis of the various federalist issues and local interpretations, different ideals, beliefs, scopes, interests, more or less popular or intellectual orientations, or a different degree of knowledge and

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10 After the '96 National election won by the centre-left coalition, the issue of reforming the Constitution in a federalist sense was entrusted to the Bicameral Commission that reflected the party's balance. About seventy, among deputies and senators, participated in the works of the Commission. Some of the contents introduced represented decisive innovation – i.e., the proposal of a "Second Parliament", meant to substitute the Senate, which would be formed by Representatives elected by the Regions over all matters that were not clearly reserved to the State. The Regions were also to obtain fiscal autonomy, and moreover, for the first time in Italian Laws, reference was made to a 'horizontal' subsidiarity (Vandelli 1999, 46-50). The Commission, which was also committed to drafting proposals for reforming the electoral system, was dissolved in 1998.

awareness of Italian past history; the evidence was, however, the prevailing instrumental attitude of politicians and parties advocating federalism, above all at the national level (i.e., to obtain votes, media attention or, locally, to obtain the favour of specific sectors of population and economic groups). Federalist claims were like an intermittent fever. Federalism was typically subjected to being urgently invested with big expectations of changes, and then suddenly dropped, with never serious, in depth, studied solutions – a good example is the fiscal (autonomy) question, many times displayed in political discourses as a priority or 'the solution', only recently a matter of thorough analysis by those interested and supporting it inside and outside political institutions. When, for instance, federalism gave origin to social and political territorial movements, like the Northeast political movement at the end of the '90s, unluckily, it was a short-term experiment. The movement failed, probably without shifting or affecting the local political and administrative culture.

It is at the local level, anyway, that federalism found its more interesting interpretations, in the attempt to build a laboratory innovating politics from the bottom and mobilising social energies. The federalist metaphor was strategically meant by political local and regional leaders to contrast, symbolically, the re-centralising logic of both the national government and the national parties' apparatus; the former logic reducing the innovative potential of State reforms for political devolution and administrative decentralisation, the latter manifesting the resilience of traditional political national parties to abandon pyramidal conceptions of inside organisation, and hierarchical modes of coordination at the territorial level.

3. The proposal for a Northern Party vs. the coordination of Northern Regions

A meaningful example of the affirmation of principles which are at the basis of the federalist project – i.e., a political system and a political culture based on the practice of non-centralisation of powers, as opposed to centralising, top-down logic of control and organisation – may be the recent proposal to constitute a Northern Democratic Party.

The proposal of a Northern Democratic Party was suggested in 2008 by some Italian City Mayors (like the Mayor of Turin, Sergio Chiamparino, The Mayor of Venice, Massimo Cacciari and the Mayor of Genoa, Marta Vincenti), with the aim to create a new political subject, more capable of representing Northern Regions' interests at the national level, under a federalist pact. The

new party was designed to give local political leaders sufficient negotiation powers and more decisional autonomy from the Democratic Party National Secretariat, which was perceived as too centralised and hierarchical.[11] Political leaders dealing with Regional and City governments and having the experience of every day administration and policy implementation pushed for fiscal federalism and for more effective decisional powers in matters of regional and local policies. They considered that increasing their ability to be responsive and accountable to social and economic demands was necessary for the competitiveness of the Democratic Party (PD) in the Northern Regions, above all considering the surprisingly big electoral success that the Northern League Party had at the last national political elections, attracting segments of the electorate which traditionally voted for centre-left parties (like workmen and people belonging to the middle classes, leaders of small and medium enterprises). Besides, they wanted the recognition of conditions of autonomy in recruitment processes and in decisions about local candidatures at the administrative and political elections. Tendencies towards centralisation, in fact, had become too inflexible and constrictive, also because of the effects of the last national electoral reform, which had re-introduced a proportional system, thus attributing extensive power to national party Secretariats in the selection of candidates at all levels.

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11 The formation of the new Democratic Party ("Partito Democratico": PD) was a turbulent process of negotiations, full of compromises, implicating the fusion of existing centre-left parties like the Democrats of the Left ("Democratici di Sinistra": in 1995, under D'Alema's leadership, the Democratic Party of the Left changed their name) and the Marguerite Party ("Margherita"), with all their apparatus. The process was characterized by the emergence of many conflicts among the political leaders guiding the different parties and currents composing the centre-left bloc, both at the level of national secretariats and at the level of regional and local secretariats. Political struggles ended with the non-adhesion of Communist parties ("RC" and "Comunisti Italiani") and of the Italy of Values party ("Italia dei Valori", with Antonio Di Pietro as the leader), willing to maintain their own identities and to have their own candidates run for the elections. Anyway, to the eyes of the people this solution represented a sort of simplification of centre-left political order, reducing the too fragmented and numerous currents and identities, which generally complicated electoral strategies and weakened governmental actions. The Primary election sanctioned the top of party organisation, stabilising a leadership considered capable of identifying competitive candidates for running national elections, despite the existence of different streams and regional constituencies agitating the movement inside and at its basis. In spite of its high expectation and premises, the foundation of the party had not been truly participatory in character and the PD as a political subject did not really represent a new orientation and a shift from the past. More realistically, it was the summary of diverse parts and not the convergence of the different centre-left political forces sharing a common project and aiming at the creation of a new political subject. This may have been the decisive factor explaining the profound crisis of PD between the last months of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, culminated in February with the resignation of its National Secretary, Walter Veltroni.

Contrarily to top party hierarchies, local leaders were aware of the need to cling to territorial interests and demands, programmes and candidates, to gain the people's consensus and to contrast the ascent of Northern League. The reaction of the PD Secretariat to proponents of the idea, launched by City Mayors and local political leaders, of a Northern Democratic Party was the establishing of formal coordination in the Northern Regions, having regional party secretaries as reference point. The Regions that were expected to take part in the coordination initiative were eight, and precisely: Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Liguria.

The term "coordination" as a frame for the action was meant to respond to Northern people's demands, recognizing the existence of an unsolved Northern Question, without losing central control over local and regional decisions but rather strengthening the decision chain into coordination exercised by party officials.

While on the one hand, in particular the Mayor of Venice and federalist thinker Cacciari, strongly opposed the proposal of a coordination, on the other hand, the idea of a North Regions Democratic Party was considered by the party apparatus as too outdated, or a provocation, in any case something claiming further autonomy against the attempt to build a strong national political subject and a centre-left nationally identifiable project, although based on the increase in value of territorial specificity and competence to solve social problems. As regards the functional aspects, coordination was assigned to a regional secretary, lasting six months, and the chair was to go round among the eight regions, thus affirming a principle of alternation. The first coordinator to be designated was the secretary of the Region Lombardy.

Some of the Mayors who were initially sceptical about the idea of a coordination of North Regions inside the PD, like the Mayor of Turin and the Mayor of Genoa, had second thoughts. City Mayors were in fact involved in the formal assembly of the coordination initiative and, as a consequence, thought that the coordination was a practical way to play an effective role within the Democratic Party organisation and to give national visibility to the Northern cause. From their point of view, the coordination table could be a new pragmatic arena for negotiation and exchange involving local and regional politicians belonging to the PD; it could also be the opportunity to share proposals representing, at the national table, the common interests of a large political and social area. Gradually, and on the surface, terms like "federalised, decentralised party" became dominant in communication as the most eloquent slogan in explaining the shift in the Democratic Party's organisation, from

below, and launched by Northern local and regional exponents of the Party. In the end, only the philosopher and Mayor of Venice Cacciari seemed to maintain his critical distance from this solution, as it did not create the conditions for broader party innovation or the birth of a new political subject, representing and aggregating Northern interests. Anyway, the two opposite proposals (the party of the North, the coordination of Northern regions) cannot be understood without problematizing the many troublesome consequences of the "moral question" involving, in those months, the Democratic Party, and seriously stressing national party leadership and political legitimacy.

As a result of judicial inquiries, it emerged that many left-wing Municipal administrations in different areas of Italy were interwoven with private economic groups of interest, with numerous cases of elected local and regional councillors, public officials, local and regional party functionaries, advisors of politicians, even Mayors accused of or convicted for corruption, involved in illicit affairs, colluding, favouring with crime organisations, having improper exchanges with their clients. The bad surprise was that many of those politicians and public officials, party functionaries and elected councillors, who were involved in judicial investigations, were members of the Democratic Party, contrasting a tradition which excluded important phenomena of patronage and corruption inside the centre-left political subjects. The long-standing suspicion that the city and local areas make up the bulk of the degeneration of politics and society, of the concentration of powers in the hands of local unmoral bosses, controlling politics and economic affairs, has re-emerged vividly[12]. This aspect was used in an ambivalent manner.

On one hand, the PD Secretariat and national leaders wanted to legitimise the strategies that attempted to restore the political control of "peripheries", under the clamour of a moralisation wave involving the whole party organisation. In this perspective, less power to the Mayors and local politicians on local matters and on issues of national importance met the PD secretariat's will to re-establish control over local politics. From this perspective, the constitution of a formal coordination of Northern Regions, despite the guarantee of conditions of regional and local autonomy over political decisions, was in concrete terms the conjuring up, again, of phantoms of hierarchical and top-down logic at the basis of coordination structures. In any case, this solution was far from the bottom-up mobilisation of territorial political resources.

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12   Inquiries regarded Naples, Rome, Florence, Pescara, Reggio Calabria, Potenza, Bari, and other cities, involving entire local public administrations, politicians of the left-wing and entrepreneurs. Even "The Economist" asserted these investigations were a very critical phase of the Italian left-wing and in particular of the Democratic Party under the leadership of Walter Veltroni.

On the other hand, local and regional political leaders of the North – partially as a by-product of the process itself – used the "moral question" to highlight the many responsibilities at the top party levels and in particular to the Leader Veltroni, stating his inability to control local candidates, above all in the Centre and South of Italy, as the case of Naples and of the Region Campania have clearly shown.[13] Anyway, discontent and conflicts increased inside the party apparatus and the centre-left electorate, with a heavy loss of consensus and legitimacy. The afore-judged 'ovation' of the party's Secretary (Walter Veltroni), designated by the centre-left primary election in 2007, was attacked as an untrue competitive election, as other influential political exponents of the party had to renounce to competing because of pressures (to desist), received by the top party hierarchy. Pier Luigi Bersani, former Minister for the Economic Development of the centre-left national government, stated in an interview published in a national newspaper (Repubblica, 6 February 2009) that his renunciation as competitor at the last centre-left national primary elections was due to pressure received from Massimo D'Alema and Enrico Letta. "Last time I was very foolish not to stand as candidate at the primary election", he said, reviling his repentance, getting in open conflict against Veltroni and his leadership, and above all criticising his way of intending reforming strategies.

Regional elections in Sardinia in February 2009 were viewed as a national test for the PD's electoral consensus, as the candidate was Renato Soru, a nationally well-known entrepreneur (the founder of the internet service company Tiscali, based in Cagliari, listed as one of the world's richest people) and influent member of the party[14], who had formerly been President of the Sardinia Region, voluntarily resigned from his position on 28 November 2008, before coming to the end of his mandate, because of the contrasts involving the Majority at the Regional elected Council. He had to deal with problems affecting his leadership at the regional government level, and in particular a strong opposition against the proposition of a Regional Law protecting coasts from property speculating, an initiative of the Presidency adverse not only to economic groups and building sector interests, but also to a wide number of local politicians and regional councillors belonging to the Majority coalition.

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13 Conflicts between the President of the Region, Antonio Bassolino, the Mayor of Naples, Rosa Iervolino, and the Democratic Party Secretariat increased enormously on the occasion of the judicial inquiries which revealed the penetration of corruption, mafia, illicit trafficking at all levels of the public expenditure and of the Regions' and Cities' political system.

14 On 20 May 2008 Soru bought the left-wing newspaper l'Unità.

The President's reassignments caused the dissolution of the Regional Council and new elections. Despite apparent national investiture, Soru was defeated by the right-wing candidate Ugo Cappellacci.

The failure was considered as a further evidence of PD's loss of popular consensus, with consequences on the rather weakened leadership.

4. An alternative narrative: local foundations for a Second Italian Republic

"For 30 years at the national government, we have had people trained at party schools and for 10 years people have been trained inside universities. Within few years there will be at the government people who have knowledge of concrete every day life as they had direct experience with common people's problems, being trained through daily confrontation with them" (Enzo Bianco, Mayor of Catania).

An alternative narrative and comprehension of the structural changes and innovations, which were extremely significant for the Italian political system and governmental practices in the last fifteen years, might come from exploration of the political transition phase at the local level.

The idea of a radical change starting from "the local" – precisely from (the reformed) city's government – despite the fact that it was affirmed by well acknowledged scholars, like Luciano Vandelli (1997), remained basically underrepresented. In particular, effects on the whole political system were underestimated – as it gave origin to a new political class, leaders, knowledge and modes of governing.

Until the '90s, the local government system in Italy was characterised by strong political parties' control over all fundamental matters of decision and administration. Municipal Councils were constituted by a very high number of elected members (with the exception of Communes with less than 5.000 inhabitants). The electoral system at the local level was based on proportional representation. As a consequence, representatives from a wide, fragmented universe of parties and political subjects seated at the Municipal Council. Some were so small that they merited the appellation of "mono-group", to indicate "a group" made of only one person, who in any case had the right to participate in the Committee of the heads of groups ("Conferenza dei Capogruppi")[15], thus having further personal political visibility. The Assembly

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15 Who jointly form a body which had important agenda-setting role.

had to deal with so many tasks, questions to examine, and specific measures or acts to approve, that they voted thousands of laws, amendments, and new rules each year. In concrete terms, this did not mean a concrete extensive power of agenda, as the discretional decisional powers of the "Giunta" (the Executive Body) were numerous, huge and effective. The "Giunta" was formed by Councillors, nominated among the elected Councillors, who had assigned the political guidance of specific policy areas, with full political responsibility on decisions, execution and personnel recruitment and, in certain terms, autonomy from the Mayor's political orientation. They were appointed mostly on the basis of party-loyalty, political career (i.e., long-term experience within party organisations) and political representativeness, being the authoritativeness, specific skills, professional, i.e. technical expertise, prerequisites of minor influence. Cohesion within the Junta's members was often sacrificed to meet the party's interests or to express partisan positions, to the detriment of team spirit and Mayor's leadership. The Mayor's nominee was expression of the Municipal Council and his stability depended on the party's balance. He presided over the Assembly, incrementing the confusion of roles and the deficit of transparency and neutrality in governing, lacking of neutrality above all towards political minorities. In other terms, the Mayor was like a hostage of the parties' will, and parties' decisions in matter of local politics were most of the time controlled by national party apparatus (Vandelli, 1997).

In this sense, cities were considered as peripheries of the political system, with an emphasis towards the moralisation effects of central control on local decisions, as both economic groups and local parties tended to put their "hands over the city" – paraphrasing the famous film by Francesco Rosi. As regards the local government bureaucracy, the administration was subjected to political control in matter of personnel career, recruitment, office organisation, allocation of financial and human resources and administrative procedures. The domain of the "technician" was very restricted by direct political intervention/interference or by the engagement of external experts, supporting political bodies on specific matters. In a system structured in such a way, it was difficult to implement effectively accountability or equality principles in local government and the Mayor's leadership was generally too weak to deal with economic interests and social demands. Zoning decisions and land-use regulation were typically entangled in party politics and private groups' interests.

Anyway, there were strong Mayors capable of affirming their powers and control over the local government and the community, in positive or negative terms. For instance, Achille Lauro in Naples and Giorgio La Pira in Florence represented two very different examples of modes of governing the city.

Lauro (famous owner of the "Flotta Lauro Company", working both with merchant ships and the passenger-liner market) branched out into politics and was elected Mayor of Naples in 1951 and again in 1956 and 1958. He was a key-actor of real estate speculation during the boom years of the '50s and of the corruption this led to. Despite a period of prefectorial appointment of an external commissioner, he continued successfully, maintaining his political style unchanged and increasing his popular consensus, under the protection of Antonio Gava's Christian Democracy and the first Left coalitions in the '60. His administration left the troubled inheritance of a huge debt, as a consequence of uncontrolled growth of loans and employment; the situation was so corrupt that it was calculated that the Junta had approved 16.000 bylaw acts without prior opinion or approval of the Council. Historians and political commentators see in the degeneration of politics and mal affaire of those years the humus for subsequent problems of corruption, patronage and illicit affairs affecting the city administration, like the unsolved garbage question.

La Pira served as Mayor of Florence twice (1950-6; 1960-4). Vice versa, he was particularly committed to rebuilding Florence by investing on public services, job creation, with specific attention to low-income people. To this goal, he started from the revitalisation of neighbourhoods, which in his opinion should be self-sufficient. His intervention, inspired to principles of equality and the preservation of the City's landscape and environment, contrasted by instruments of planning regulation (such as the Master Plan, the zoning) haphazard, when not corrupted, approaches to city reconstruction, which were typical of urban growth after the war.

Changes in local government by State reforms of the '90s constituted a radical shift. The whole Italian local government system was redesigned. Laws 142/1990 and 81/1993, updated by Law 120/99 (Baldini and Legnante, 2000) resulted in the institutional reorganisation of local public administration and local government, with drastic changes as regards the electoral procedures, the relationship between the legislative body and the executive, and the Mayor's powers. The aim was to strengthen local democracy, both in local government and Municipal Administration, with real powers and means to govern cities and with the citizens' participation and involvement in political life. Other State Laws, in the following years, impacted models for organising the provision of public services, by introducing instruments of accountability, and allowing new procedures and taxes for management and programming, for bureaucratic simplification, recruitment and personnel careers. Besides, local politics and policies were a laboratory of innovation, with significant effects at the national

level. Legitimacy of the local government was related to the effectiveness of its policies, according to a scheme of both output legitimacy – i.e., "government for the people" – and input legitimacy – i.e., "government of the people", which refers to models of representative democracy (Scharpf, 1997).

The city Mayors, elected by direct popular vote since the electoral reforms in 1992, became a point of reference and in many cases formed a political and ruling elite, networking at different levels of government. The "Cento Città" Mayors' Movement in the mid '90s was a concrete example of their powerful potential for constituting a new political national class, moving from the cities' government. The Mayors' leadership was the solution presented to respond to a demand of new leadership, to face the cities' fragmentation and dispersion, and to build up local coalitions interested in the realisation of specific urban projects, aggregating and connecting stakeholders and sectors which traditionally acted separately. Moreover, Mayors supported innovative public policy programmes, in various fields of public intervention, like local welfare, urban regeneration and youth policies, immigrants integration, education, etc., giving attention to deliberative and participatory approaches in policy-making (thus, according to the legitimacy scheme of "government by the people").

Quoting Vandelli (1997) the '90s were the years of the foundation of a new mythology, that of the city Mayors for social problem solving and the reconstruction of politics. Mayors seized to their advantage the consequences of judicial inquiries and the Tangentopoli scandal to re-launch the perspective of good government and the importance of political participation. Vandelli's book (1997), entitled "Sisyphus, Tantalus and Damocles in the local administration" depicted in persuasive terms the legislative revolution that resulted in the reshaping the electoral rules and the form of government, creating the conditions for the Italian Second Republic.

New laws introduced a clear separation, between the Mayor and his Executive (the "Giunta"), and the legislature (the Council), a condition that enabled the Mayor to govern more effectively. Basic innovations were: 1) the direct election of City Mayors and Presidents of Provinces, on two ballots in Municipalities with more than 15.000 inhabitants – the second ballot, in case the absolute majority was not achieved with the first ballot; on one ballot, in Municipalities with a smaller population; 2) the reform of the Council electoral system according to majoritarian rules, in order to guarantee a solid majority to political forces supporting the Mayor; 3) the strict interdependency – a mutual surviving imperative – between the Mayor and the Council: with the fall of the former, the latter must be dissolved; 4) no more were parties dictating the formation of the "Giunta", it was now the Mayor alone who had the power

to appoint (and to repeal) its members; the "Giunta" "collaborates with the Mayor" (Vandelli, 2000) and supports the Mayor in the general orientation of policies. The emphasis is on the technical expertise and professional knowledge of members of the Executive: they form a team of 'technical advisers' to the Mayor and are non-elected experts – they should not be elected Councillors at the same time; 5) The Mayor should not be both Mayor and President of the Council.

New Mayors of important cities, like Francesco Rutelli (Rome), Antonio Bassolino (Naples), Massimo Cacciari (Venice), Valentino Castellani (Turin), Enzo Bianco (Catania), Riccardo Illy (Trieste) and Leoluca Orlando (Palermo) were also charismatic and very popular leaders. This provided material for speaking about the personalisation of politics as a consequence of the Mayors-experiment, emphasizing tendencies towards the "Americanisation of politics" (Calise, 2000), meaning the marginalization of political parties, the increased use of electronic media, focus on image and communication, appeal to symbolic policies rather than political content.

No longer were Mayors party-men, they were rather President-Mayors; in the terms of a famous Italian political scientist: "The old style of politics was the politics of organisation, parties and trade unions, the new style of politics is the politics of people and personalisation (Pasquino, 1992, 8).

Ten years from the experimentation of Mayors' direct popular election, and 267 elections in the main towns in Italy, the enthusiastic prognostics and great expectations towards Mayors-party-revolution of Italian politics had some difficulties to reckon with, emerging in the Mayors' leadership and problems of effectiveness – in other words, Mayors were losing legitimacy and a new negative phase in Italian urban history is starting. In 2002, Baldini wrote a book with a very allusive title: "Electing Mayors, ten years later". He observed a decrease in the electoral participation, overturning previous statistics about electoral participation trends: people voted more in the South, less in the Centre, and even less in the North-East and in the North-West. In particular, in Southern cities a phenomenon was observed, which was related to the parties' weight, that is, "the personalisation of Councillors", as Councillors obtained high preferences at the administrative elections. Moreover, the thesis according to which the centre-left electoral coalition (Ulivo) was the strongest at the local level was reviewed, on the basis of results in 1997 and subsequent administrative elections, where both the centre-right and the centre-left coalitions obtained similar performances, above all in the case of Mayors' re-election. This was explained in relation to the formation and re-organisation

of new centre-right parties at the national level, with surprising, landmark events, like the victory in the Bologna and Parma elections, which marked a symbolical shift in the electoral trends.

Coming back to Vandelli's lucky definition, Sisyphus was the metaphor for depicting the work of the Mayor, struggling with great effort to push up a hill an enormous heavy rock which, near the top, inevitably rolls down, overwhelming him. That was to emphasize the difficult task of Mayors – who, even worse, do not have a compact rock to deal with, but thousands of stones – just to mention the expanded activities of local government, to cover further areas of public policy. Tantalus was the emblem of the optimistic attitude towards achievement of the objective, in a continuous challenge and defeat – to allude to difficulties inherent to the output-legitimacy scheme of government. Damocles was the experience of being over-exposed in circumstances of uncertainty, in which it would be better not to hazard interventions – the 'sword' here refers to the Mayors' difficulties in dealing with financial expenditures, in phases where the State cuts out adverse or very competitive markets, which often force financial exposition.

In the same years, one witnessed an interruption, half way through the mandate, by several important Mayors, who were candidates at Regional elections for the Presidency (it was the case of Cacciari in the Veneto Region and Bassolino in the Region of Campania in 1999), or who were involved in national engagements, like Bianco, who had been asked to join (as a Minister) the D'Alema II government, or like Rutelli, who was appointed leader of the centre-left coalition at the national elections in 2001.

The "Cento città" Mayors' movement and pressure-group, along with the growing popularity and influence, at the national level, and on mass media, of Mayors who were leading important cities, were among the factors that prepared the ground for the Mayors' political careers – on many occasions they were chosen by their parties as the best candidates for competitions at higher levels; or they were co-opted for other offices, of real prestige. Their experience in governing and administrating was considered broad and innovative, compared to the traditional formation of professional politicians at schools of party-politics, as their competence at the local level covered strategic policy areas and a wide range of government activities. The idea was of a renovation of political classes, through the introduction of new lymph.

Political scientists supporting the thesis of a Second Italian Republic concentrated their attention on the analysis of meaningful changes in the recruitment logic of new or reformed parties during the '90s. The parties attempted to offer the electorate a new image of the political game, to overcome

the people's estrangement and blame on politics, after the Bribeville scandals, and the confusion that resulted from the end of political ideologies, pillars for many years of political identities. Within this context, political analysis, both at the national and at the local levels, has focused on the recruitment logic in the frame of the electoral political process and of the formation of a new political class, having more appeal for electoral competition and wider social consensus. More in general, political analysis in Italy has usually focused on party organisation as a channel of recruitment of candidates for (local, regional, national) elections, with general interest in study on the electoral arena and lack of interest in other practices of recruitment. Emphasis is laid on the fact that there are, of course, a few exceptions, but they are not sufficient to produce a critical mass of studies.

Since the electoral and administrative reforms of the '90s, Mayors have become the key-players in decision-making processes related to nominations for local office and the recruitment of political personnel. Although little attention has been paid to analysis of the decision-making processes for nominations in our cities and to the complex web of social and political relations that have characterized recruitment processes – the reference is to bottom-up mobilisation of parties, interest groups, NGOs, civic associations, etc.

Within 45 days of taking office, the Mayor, taking into account the Council's explicit direction, has to sort out the knotty problem of nominations and appointments. These decisions will have a big impact on both the urban political process and policies, and the citizens' lives, as nominations are at stake of those who will be representing the Municipality and the public interest at the Steering and Executive Bodies of local entities, companies and agencies who are in charge of the production and the provision of basic public services and utilities.

Party machinery is a vital part of the above-mentioned context of the politics of nominations. This is still a "province" where parties have been attempting to maintain control over the political urban process. Against the representation and narrative of parties in gradual decay, losing their power and influence on policy-making, perspective on the nominations game allows a view of the prosperous power control by political parties over significant decisions. These aspects should be investigated in the field, exploring different local contexts of decision-making and developing a critical mass of studies. Moreover, changes in the governance of the provision of public services, with the adoption of patterns of public-private cooperation within new contractual policies, and the esternalisation of important segments of service production

and supply, has constituted a factor of expansion of the number and typologies of entities dealing with the provision of services, extending the Mayor's power nomination to different functional areas.

In Italy, services produced entirely by the public sector (in-house) at the local level are still prevalent in sectors like local public transport, water and waste management and different types of utilities. Other modes of public service provision are based on various government contracting arrangements, depending on the percentage of ownership by the Municipality and by private contractors or vendors (other governments, for-profit firms, or non-profit organisations). According to the type of composition, company structures can be divided in "controlled" (when the public municipality owns more than the 50%), "connected" (when the Municipality owns more than 20% but less than 50%) and "minority" (when the Municipality owns less than 20%). This is what has been called "municipal capitalism", to refer to the growing importance, even in the regional and national economy, of in-house, joint or completely contracted out modes of local service production and management (Bortolotti et al. 2007). For instance, the weight of the whole sector above mentioned on the GDP is calculated around 1% on the national average; considering regional economies, above all in the North, it is around 2% of regions GDP (in the case of Valle d'Aosta 6,7%); the number of employees is around 200.000 – of course the impact of State service provision is higher, involving a few but very big firms (in the energy, railway transport sectors etc.) (Bortolotti et al., 2007).

If one considers, for instance, the environmental/social-economic balance of the Municipality of Venice (year: 2007), the description given of the public service provision system consists of 17 "controlled companies" (the Municipality owns 100% of the Casinos, which is a big industry in town, the complete management of municipal pharmacies, and a large share of local public water and land transport, arts & culture services, different types of utilities – waste and water management, etc.), of 8 "connected companies" (for local tourist and industrial development, employment, innovation, specific real-estate shares, etc.) and 19 "minority" (for a segment of the airport, highways systems etc.). Revenues from these sectors can be huge and strategic for the development of other sectors; for instance, a portion of revenues deriving from the Casinos are reinvested to financially support social and cultural services for the benefit of Venetian citizens. Evaluation and monitoring, control of efficiency and the quality of service provision, as well as the satisfaction of citizens, constitute other important areas of consensus and responsiveness, where the Municipal government is particularly exposed.

Mayors are in charge of nominees in all these strategic sectors, and parties have great influence on negotiations. These dynamics are elements constituting city politics and policies.

5. Contributions of American political science to the understanding of the urban political process

Now if, in Italy, we did not have a tradition of political studies specifically focused on the urban political process, American studies on urban politics, which flourished between the '50s and the '70s, would be like a goldmine. They traced a tradition that we simply did not have in Italy.[16] Of course it is not possible, nor is it correct, to remove from its historical context the relationship between politics and policies, with reference to definite periods and contexts of action, but it would be interesting to explore those studies and possibly learn things which can be useful for reflection on the Italian Second Republic, from the viewpoint of the city, and the changes in the local government and political system.

In those years, the American cities experimented: the direct election of Mayors, with the aim to contrast city fragmentation and degenerative phenomena – like too much power given to political leaders, or the unmanageable web of economic interests and political consensus, with frequent scandals which cast a negative light on city politics; after the first enthusiasm and trust in the Mayors' new urban leadership, criticism and disillusion regarding their

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16 A meaningful exception is the theoretical work by Pier Luigi Crosta since the '70s (see, for instance: "L'urbanistica di parte", 1973), and it is not surprising that his work did not impress on the academic discipline of political science, even if it is based on policy analysis, with special attention to urban policies. As a synthesis of his approach, see his enlightening essay on the politics of town planning "La politica urbanistica" (Crosta, 1990b). Therein the city's political system is assumed analytically as a frame to explain the mechanisms that characterize town-planning decisions and to highlight the political dimension of the town planning policy formation. In his words, planning is intrinsically political in that its premise is political, and/or its outcome is political. As a field of governmental activity, it deals with public choice, and it involves politicians; it is plural and conflicting (as diverse, partisan interests are in competition). In planning processes, power relations determine policies as well as outcomes (Crosta, 1995, 109-10). Notice that, the above-mentioned essay (Crosta, 1990b), was published as part of a collection of essays on various "issue-areas", edited by Bruno Dente. As for Dente, he has been acknowledged, among the Italian political scientists devoted to public policy analysis, as the one who in the '80s systematically studied local governments' decision-making and local policies in Italy. Moreover, Dente is explicitly on Lowi's position, sharing "the stubborn conviction that policy determines politics" (Dente, 2006, 243-4). He is also particular critical of the responsiveness of contemporary democratic governments and their capability of achieving expected policy results.

actual power for change, as the new urban leaders encountered difficulties in implementing policy decisions, many financial problems, and political and social instability. Moreover, urban machines had to face, on one hand, a strong competition between solutions and modes of public service production and provision, with the proliferation of agencies, authorities, public-private contracting arrangements, and the growing power of Mayors in decisions concerning the appointment of key-offices; on the other hand, the effects of the implementation of the public service reform, started decades ago, with the emergence of technicality in public policies and the formation of new, powerful elites influencing policy-making.

So the following pages are dedicated to the presentation of this field and phase of American urban studies, and in particular of: "At the Pleasure of the Mayor. Patronage and Power in New York City, 1898-1958", a work by Theodore Lowi, and "Leadership in a Small Town", a work by Aaron Wildavsky, which is an analysis of urban power structures and decision-making processes in Oberlin, Ohio. These landmark case-studies contributed to the definition of two distinct lines of studies on public policies, starting from the analysis of city politics and policies. They were both published in 1964 and featured in their premise Robert A. Dahl's analysis on New Haven, published in 1961. Indeed, both Lowi and Wildavsky studied at Yale University and acquired knowledge from Dahl's exemplar work, "Who Governs?" which, in those years, stood out as a paradigmatic case study on government, community power relations and the quality of democracy in a medium-sized American city. The case studies here under discussion constitute a finishing point as well as a starting point in political studies, in that they go beyond previous understandings and/or radically deconstruct consolidated paradigms, and set the standards for future research. Paraphrasing what Calise (1999) observed about Lowi, these works not only brought innovations into the "mainstream" but also stayed solidly within the core of American political science, dealing with the major issues of the period.

In "At the pleasure of the Mayor", a case-study on city politics, Lowi presented his first formulation of the "arenas of power", based on the hypothesis of a general interpretive scheme for classifying public policies in functional categories, which he developed in further studies on national federal policies. The reference is to an article-review by Lowi published in "World Politics" (1964b) and to another one published some years later on "The Public Administration Review" (1972). These two essays have been frequently quoted in the Italian literature on public policy, in particular with reference to the policy taxonomy expounded therein (see, for instance, Capano

e Giuliani, 1995); while few students have recalled the case study on New York City politics (Della Porta, 1999; Calise, 1999). Thus, the understanding of the "arenas of power", and the suggested typology of public policies have had on empirical grounds the analysis of national federal policies, not of urban politics.[17]

"Leadership in a Small Town" included aspects that announced Wildavsky's distinctive conceptualization of policy (local) implementation as well as the understanding of policies as social processes, which can be reconstructed in "micro" through case-study research and exploration of "issue-contexts". The attempt is "to abstract elements which would facilitate comparisons among the case histories by classifying issue contexts along various dimensions and examining their consequences for decision making" (Wildavsky, 1962, 717). "Leadership in a Small Town" is also a study, which *in nuce* reveals Wildavsky's interest in cognitive and cultural dimensions of policy processes, emphasized as richly ambiguous courses of action.

In both these empirical and theoretical works, the significance of urban politics as a strategic field of research for the understanding of democratic politics is explicitly acknowledged (i.e. how to answer for "the political and social reality of pluralism", for its success and failure). The city stands out as a laboratory of new working concepts of democracy, and clearly shows the inner contradictions and the 'ideality' of the American democratic credo vs. democratic practices and concrete outcomes, in terms of distribution of resources, influence, equality in the potentiality of different citizens to influence the decisions of their government and to control it. By studying the city it is possible to have a privileged view of social interaction processes and of plural and complex political action. Exploring "the urban machine" means seeing how politics and policies are intertwined and how they affect each other; in other words, how the political system works. Moreover, this research-field was the grounds for the development of important insights contributing to the formulation of well know theorisations in political science.[18] In spite of this

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17 Generally speaking, the significance of urban policies and politics as a line of inquiry and a source for theoretical developments has been underestimated in Italian political science, with few exceptions (besides Della Porta, see Sola's History of Political Science, 1996). On the contribution of American Political Science to the understanding of the political urban process, see the meaningful essay by Wood (1963), translated into Italian and published by Crosta (1990a).

18 In addition to Dahl's, Wildavsky's and Lowi's case-studies, see, to quote the classics, Sayre's and Kaufman's previous works (1960) and the works by Banfield on Chicago (with Meyerson, 1955; 1961; with Wilson, 1963); Bachrach and Baratz, (on policies of urban regeneration in Baltimore, 1970); Pressman (with Wildavsky, on the implementation of Federal Aids in Oakland, and city politics, 1973; 1975); Jennings (on decision-making processes in Atlanta, 1964, against

significance, the impression is, that the core of the Italian academic political science corporation dedicated ambiguous attention to the innovative potential of this tradition of American studies, where city politics and urban policies have a place of due respect, both for theoretical and empirical developments.

Unlike the American case, it is not easy to identify the contribution of Italian political science to the understanding of the political urban process. In particular, the political dimension of the city as ground for policy-formation seems to be neglected. If, on one hand, certain attention was paid in terms of conceptual and critical speculation and scientific debate[19], on the other hand less convincing was the (related) empirical research (in terms of concrete products and practices), as the methodology of (single) case-study analysis was not so widely used and the comparative methods of research developed according to a different logic of inquiry. I am referring to empiric developments of Sartori's theories and conceptualization, and in particular to orientation in comparative methods of research, which in some cases brought to the stiffening of theoretical potentials. Case studies were not meant to be in depth field-explorations and the probing of a context by means of inquiry (like the single-case study is); they were rather the proving and verification of researchers' theoretical perspectives and well-defined concepts, formulated ex-ante, through the adoption of a set of operational quantitative measures (indicators), in search of "typicality" or of "generalizing extensions". The empiric evidence was in this sense the confirmation of pre-conceptions, tending toward the "objectivation" of social and political processes, more than the attempt to understand processes and to develop further hypotheses, learning from practice.

Indeed, ordinary, practical and interactive forms of knowledge were considered of no valuable utility and had no scientific dignity in the eyes of Sartori, as he excluded the fruitful potential of (social) practice in terms of knowledge and learning, and also denied the added value of "implementation" in terms of acquiring knowledge (see: "Politica", Sartori, 1979). The practice was considered as a mere realm of the application of theories, and an ex-ante definition of concepts that were essential to scientific knowledge – the reference is to his well-known "ladder of abstraction of concepts". To go into details, eclectic approaches such as that adopted by Dahl (see the next paragraph) would be deemed methodologically unsatisfactory if not operationally wrong.

Hunter's conclusion, 1953); Ostrom, Tiebout and Warren (case-studies on government problems and practices in metropolitan areas, as a branch of studies on federalism, 1961).

19   Priority was given to the controversy between pluralists and elitists, which appealed to Italian political scientists, as the Italian school was founded on a great tradition of theoretical explicative and normative patterns of "power elites".

Analysis of urban politics and the local political system were mostly focused on parties, elections and voting patterns, or on changes in the socio-economic characteristics of the rural/urban populations and the measurement of trends, without serious consideration for policies. Research on local political analysis, probably influenced, to a certain extent, by the same characteristics of Italian urban contexts of the period, focused mostly on studying: the city-as-the-factory, i.e. the place concentrating the effects of industrial settlements and economic development decisions, or the local-as-the-periphery of central political-administrative apparatus, and the place concentrating clienteles and patronage, and corruption, driven by the party system controlling the *electoral arena* (with a simplification of "the general realm" of city politics to the party's electoral politics, and a diminution of the political dimension and generative democratic potential of "local action"). It is not surprising that research carried out in Italy by American students, like that of Banfield focusing on the community of "Montegrano" (1958) and Putnam (1993), had such great significance in the national debate. More recently, studies on urban governance, regimes, and coalitions on the wave of the wide affirmation in the 90's of a new conceptualisation of cities as political collective actors, capable of autonomous policies, determined a shift in research interests, documented by a new production of studies.[20]

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20   After Sartori (1970) and Sola (1996), attention on behalf of Della Porta (1999) was directed toward some American classic works on urban politics with the new governance approach to the study of local politics and policies, and with the peculiar experience in urban movements studies. In her book, contributions by Wildavsky and other students of "implementation" are not mentioned, while Lowi's and Dahl's works are extensively covered. Thanks to Calise, the work by Lowi was broadly revised and divulgated to the wide Italian public.

6. "Who Governs?" (Robert A. Dahl)

As Lowi's and Wildavsky's inquiries feature Dahl's study on New Haven in their premise, it is necessary to explain some basic aspects of his research.[21] Motivation to reread this work is also given in the prevalent interpretation of Dahl as a theoretician of democracy – while "Who Governs?" is a masterful piece of empirical research on the quality of democracy in relation to public policy formation and implementation in a "city" context.

Dahl conducted his theoretical and empirical analysis, which was particularly demanding in terms of time and human resources, in the second half of the 50's.[22] We are faced with programmes of empirical research, which in general require years of dedication to "the field". Case-study research involves, in fact, looking at heterogeneous sources of information and knowledge (as well as cross-checking various sources). Case studies on policy processes involve learning from different types of knowledge (ordinary, practical, tacit, interactive knowledge) and the adoption of both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis and data collection and/or the construction (interviews, surveys, direct and participant observation, press reviews, historical records, statistical data, legal acts, etc.). Dahl, Lowi and Wildavsky were of the opinion that the attention placed on the methodological aspects had significant consequences on research achievements.

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21 Wildavsky was not involved in Dahl's research project while he was at Yale; he indirectly absorbed its problems, results and underlying motivations through Polsby's and Wolfinger's informal reports and descriptions. In the preface to the book he made explicit reference to the determining influence that Dahl's work exercised on the conceiving of his research project on Oberlin. Lowi paid tribute to Dahl's pioneering research, but while he understood that "Professor Dahl's book is unquestionably the most exhaustive study of the politics of policy yet produced" (Lowi, 1964, 229), he also strongly problematized the too specific and too descriptive character of the categories utilized and the lacking of theoretical interest in more generalizable knowledge, with consequent limitations on comparison, as we shall see more closely.

22 Dahl's study is part of a broader research project. Indeed, he profited from the collaboration with Nelson Polsby and Raymond Wolfinger who, in those years, were engaged in analysis on New Haven. Polsby developed a comparative study finding that the theory of a socioeconomic elite dominating political life was insignificant when tested against the data on New Haven. In 1961 he published a book on this subject entitled: "Community Power and Political Theory" (which is a revised version of his PhD dissertation). Wolfinger analyzed the activities of political leaders in New Haven in making several important decisions. He also spent a year of "participant observation" in two strategic offices in the City Hall, during an internship at the office of the Development Administrator who, at the time, worked at the Mayor's office as his right-hand man in the implementation of the urban renewal programmes and redevelopment projects. He also had the opportunity to observe from the beginning the controversial drafting of a proposal for a new Charter and its rejection by voters at the popular referendum in 1958.

Dahl's basic hypothesis was to look closely at a single context of local democratic politics by developing an in-depth case study. An empirical study on the systems of influence, leadership and community power relations was necessary in order to take part in the heated debate between pluralists and elitists as regarded the state of health of American contemporary democracy. Dahl pointed out that there was a lack of empirical data capable of demonstrating effective plural and democratic (governmental) contexts of decision making, although the pluralists' theories were successful and prevailing against the elitists' thesis – who denounced a sort of façade democracy, struck by a rhetoric apparatus, that was such a powerfully communicative and persuasive device as to mask the reality of a single socioeconomic elite dominating political life. He started his inquiry into democracy in New Haven driven by the idea of testing the elitists' theories against the data for New Haven, experimenting operational measures of influence. His previous theoretical defence of "polyarchal democracy" (1956) already circulated and his position on pluralism was clear.[23] For various reasons, New Haven was a good context for observation, as it lay "conveniently at hand", it featured a "small human scale of the city" and, in many respects, in comparison with other American urban areas, it was "typical of other cities in the United States" as regards socio-economic characteristics and population trends (Dahl, 1961, 329). Moreover, it presented a significant past history, a strong competitive party system, and was dealing with serious problems of urban decay, with the formation of slums, like many other cities in those years. But, what is more important, New Haven was clearly characterized by the realization of formal conditions of democracy, if referring to assessing criteria in use, as regards the democratic representative political system and body of rules:

> "In everyday language, New Haven is a democratic political community. Most of its adult residents are legally entitled to vote, a relatively high proportion does vote. Their votes are, by and large, honestly counted – though absentee votes, a small fraction of the total, are occasionally manipulated. Elections are free from violence and, for all practical purposes, free from fraud. Two political parties contest elections, offer rival slates of candidates, and thus present the voters at least some outward show of choice" (Dahl, 1961, 3).

Nevertheless when it comes to the existence of formal guaranties of political equalities, there could be problems related to the democratic quality, in that deficiencies of democracy were evident as expressions of increasing social

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23   For definitions of quality democracy, and procedural and substantial dimensions on which democracy may vary in quality, see the work by Morlino (2003; with Diamond, 2005).

inequalities and ineffectiveness of popular control over policy decisions and policy makers. The incremental process of differentiation of capacities, resources, accessibility to knowledge, etc. was the other side of pluralism, its "pathology". The question was whether to exclude the hypothesis of a unique, overpowered leadership *de facto* making decisions in New Haven, and to clarify to what extent pluralism was actually the political way of organizing public life. Basically, the point was: finding a way to inquire into the distribution of influence over decisions in important issue-areas of local politics. The same characteristics of the field of work (New Haven was a city of 160.000 inhabitants) compelled Dahl to limit his inquiry to the study of a few strategic issue-areas – to be realistic, the entire city policy making was too broad and complex for extensive investigation. He decided to concentrate attention and energy on three issue-areas, representing both materially and symbolically important as well as conflicting areas of urban government policy-making, cutting across a wide variety of interests and participants: 1) the urban renewal and redevelopment initiatives; 2) the local education policies; 3) the nomination for local office, and parties' candidate nomination for Mayor.

As for the urban redevelopment issue area, New Haven was subject to significant programmes and decisions. Urban renewal was the greatest innovation in town. Education policy absorbed a substantial part of the local government budget; moreover, in a multi-strata society like the urban American one already was, with its national, ethnic and racial differentiations, the public education system was essential for achieving social integration. The third issue-area, political nomination, was related to decisions of appointment of top political executives, with specific attention toward redevelopment and education policies and in particular toward the Mayor's power in political nomination, against the literature that emphasized the Mayor's weakness in facing economic interests. To determine the pattern of influence, Dahl deliberately adopted what he defined "an eclectic approach" to operational measures of influence, "in order to take advantage of the existence of a very wide assortment of data" (Dahl, 1961, 331). Different methods for assessing relative influence or changes in influence were used in the study. In 1957 and 1958, with the help of Polsby, he conducted forty-six interviews – lasting up to six hours – with people who were involved in key decisions on the three above-mentioned issue-areas (they were businessmen, public officials, top party leaders, etc.). The exchange of information with many of the people interviewed continued as they were asked to read sections of the manuscript and to give their comments and remarks to the researchers. Besides interviews, historical records, documents, press-reviews, direct and participant observations, surveys

(a questionnaire-interview to members of political parties, of committees, commissions and boards involved in redevelopment and education policies, and to public officials working on these issue-areas) were the fundamental sources of information in two aspects: 1) the reconstruction of important decisions for detailed study, dating back to 1950; 2) the understanding of the distribution of influence among participants in the three strategic issue-areas, by considering, for example "successful initiations of proposals" or "defeats", or "vetoes" by each participant, individual or group. This should have permitted the identification of what kind of people were the most influential in local matters and whether there was a single predominant elite or multiple groups of interests and forms of active participation and mobilisation of citizens.

An extension of Dahl's explication of urban redevelopment policies in New Haven has been suggested because it shows that these studies open a perspective on the City, as a line of policy inquiry. In Dahl's analysis, the City is conceived as a political environment, i.e. a context for political decisions, policy formation and power relations; cities are also places for the implementation of urban policies, i.e., governmental programmes of interventions designed to solve specific social problems and to improve urban life. As regards this last point, Wood (1963, in Crosta, 1990a) is very effective and sharp when observing, with reference to the political urban process, inconsistency in the input-output scheme, that is, in the pattern according to which various social pressures are perceived, aggregated, and transformed into "political demand" (of services, resources distribution, regulation, etc.), meaning into concrete decisions associated to definite choices of programmes of intervention and government activities. Actually, the political urban process is less "rational" and, when driven by project coalitions with precise intentions, the realisation of pre-conceived goals is highly exposed to failures and/or adaptations, even significant changes, which occur in the course of action. More likely there is a divergence or a separation between the processes of social mobilisation "in the name of real needs", and decisions and solutions adopted by the political system, with the only exception of conflicting issues, which instead trigger the immediate interest and direct intervention of governments, for consensus, and political and social stability. For instance, according to Wood, decisions on urban renewal in many cities depended on the implementation of federal ad-hoc designed programmes, and on the opportunity to utilize federal aids, or on the activation of a political entrepreneur and the temporary convergence of a coalition of interests, to promote decisions of intervention. Rarely were decisions made directly in answer to existing social problems and social pressures.

In this context, the Mayor-as-a-political-entrepreneur became a frequent subject of the literature of the period. The urban political, usually mayoral, leadership was viewed as a key-resource to deal with the problem of city "governability". The reconstruction by Dahl of the urban redevelopment policy in New Haven revealed how the new politics and leadership of a Mayoralty Democrats candidate (whose name was Richard Lee), elected and re-elected two times in the 50's, deeply reoriented this area whose governmental activity as well as strong private pressures and initiative were, in the past history of the city, influenced by a few leaders. The redevelopment policy which had for decades featured a divided public opinion, failures and indecisions – mostly because of problems of political and social consent, due to the high financial costs of public interventions and the high social costs of inhabitants' displacement – "acquired a non partisan aurea" (Dahl, 1961, 118), with both the Republican party and the Democrats giving their political support, making it an issue of popular consent. Mayor Lee made redevelopment the central policy of his administration, blending it with his image and leadership, and acquired state-national political notoriety. The city administration regained legitimacy in the eyes of citizens and organized interest groups that, in just a few years, managed to obtain and spend an enormous amount of federal money, as the Federal Government had, in those years, launched specific programmes to support financially cities committed to renewal projects[24]. Moreover, the Mayor appointed a new "development team", consisting in three people, at the established Redevelopment Agency.[25] They were selected according to professional and technical skills and according to the Mayor's personal trust. The staff of the redevelopment Agency contributed to the implementation of major decisions together with the City Plan Commission, and other offices and departments of the City administration. Mayor Lee pushed for an integrated approach and for coordination of the physical transformation of the city to avoid fragmentation of related areas of administrative activities, which were numerous, the proliferation of new agencies and bureaucracy and the rise of intractable controversies among the many players and stakeholders involved. More importantly, the Mayor realized that the redevelopment policy needed

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24 Although, a couple of years later, Wood (1963) observed that trust that people had in City Mayors, who were widely considered as the new urban leaders, encountered the difficulties that the Mayors' policies and projects had to face, in surviving implementation processes. He mentioned the case of Wagner in New York, Daley in Chicago, and even Dilworth in Philadelphia and Lee in New Haven.

25 Among them was the Development Administrator, a key top manager, whose office Wolfinger stayed at during the year of his internship.

democratic foundations to maintain popular approval. Wide participation in the decision-making process was guaranteed through the creation of a new body, the Citizens Action Commission, which included various committees in specific subject-matter lines, involving nearly five hundred citizens (people belonging to the local economic community, to civic and neighbourhood groups, to professional associations, the University, trade unions, etc.).

The redevelopment policy was conceived as an area of aggregation of interests, democratic participation and negotiated decisions, through the centralization of activities at the city government level. Negotiations and agreements between the administrative-political machine and the social and economic organized interests, the federal agencies, the professional communities, the parties, the ethnic groups, etc., were conducted by the Mayor and his staff at the Redevelopment Agency. In order to assess the true character and the effectiveness of such a plural constituency around the redevelopment policy, Dahl applied his operational measures in the distribution of influence. Analysing the important decisions on redevelopment and renewal between 1950-58 he discerned those individuals (or agencies, units of institutions) who successfully initiated proposals that were adopted or defeated, or those who successfully or not vetoed the proposals of other individuals. He found that half of the successful actions could be attributed to the Mayor and to the staff he trusted at the Redevelopment Agency, while "the rest were widely distributed among twenty-three different persons or agencies" (Dahl, 1961). Moreover, the number of defeats of the top-chief executive himself was significant, demonstrating the effective existence of other sources of influence and the plural organisation of interests.

In conclusion, this specific case study revealed the Mayor's and the public officials' powers against literature augmenting the weakness of the Mayor and of the local public administration in general to face (socio-)economic interests organized in a single elite dominating political life in cities. At the same time, it was clear enough that this wasn't a case of over-powerful political leaders against socio-economic or professional interests, but that it was a case of complex negotiations among different stakeholders. The coexistence of different political and social visions, beliefs, volitions, and value systems appeared as the very essence of pluralism. The maintenance of this potential of differentiation was important for the democratic quality of decisions, and the question shifted to problems of governability (solutions of integration, coordination). The work by Dahl suggested that:

"pluralism was actually also a description of how the American political system worked. A few would suggest that Dahl's famous study on New Haven politics was not so much an implicit endorsement of pluralism as a normative theory of democracy" (Gunnell, 1995, 20).

According to Pressman (1972, 511), Dahl's analysis, besides those of Banfield (1961) and Wildavsky (1964) of the period, offers an insightful view to the "mayoral leadership" and the "political entrepreneurship" model, in progress in a modern American city. The model of the Mayor as "the broker-entrepreneur (…) mediating disputes, serving as a line of communication, and suggesting integrative function" (Pressman, 1972, 511), represented the model of effective political leadership: the pluralistic dispersion and fragmentation of power in democratic cities could be used by the Mayor-as-a-political-entrepreneur to increase his own influence. The emphasis on investigating mayoral (successful, or unsuccessful) leadership as a unit of analysis for looking closely at the working of urban democratic political systems is re-presented by Lowi, in a dedicated case study.

7. "At the Pleasure of the Mayor" (Theodore Lowi)

Lowi's explanatory study, "At the pleasure of the Mayor", focuses on making out the web of political and social relationships that characterised urban government recruitment and appointment decision processes in a big and growing city, that is, the city of New York. The study of conditions, practices and recruitment logic allows a view of the urban political system with a specific focus on the interweaving of the political and governmental apparatus and social mobilization, as

"it is particularly clear in urban political systems that corporations, interest groups, and many other organized social units perform the dual function of defining problems that public policy must deal with and recruiting and grooming political personnel" (Lowi, 1964a, viii).

From this perspective, it follows that: 1) the study of recruitment processes is not different from the study of policy decisions. Appointment decisions (procedures of candidate selection, negotiating, etc.) can be associated to "problem-setting" processes and, in their implementation, to policy implementation processes; 2) if public policies are governmental decisions, it is also true that parties, non-governmental groups and social and economic organisations

can influence decision-making processes by taking part in politics mobility; civic society organisations, for instance, can be active in setting standards for political personnel recruitment, or in controlling the execution of procedures, becoming the watchdogs of government performances. In this way, bottom-up mobilisation, which runs in parallel with the formal democratic electoral process, can also give voice to their expectations and values system, and also push to fit issues they care about into the political agenda; 3) as for political analysis, studying recruitment processes is strategic in that it allows a view of community power relations and of the urban democratic system "in action". It is a privileged source of information on the dynamics of pluralism, clarifying the state of health of local democracy. Identification of the power structures clarifies to what extent there is an effective pluralistic political and social organisation or a static system of corporative privilege.

The City Mayor is a key-player in decision processes related to nomination, i.e., in the appointment and removal of a significant number of public officers non elected by the people – this also explains the title of the book: "At the Pleasure of the Mayor", which was a recurrent expression in the City Charter, to indicate the Mayor's discretionary powers in appointment decisions and other matters (such as a share of authority over the expense budget). As he collected empirical data, Lowi reconstructed the dynamics of appointment decisions involving all the elected Mayors within the historical period considered in his analysis (from 1898, that is, the first year of government under the new City Charter, the creation of the "Greater City" with the unification of the five Counties, to his days) and in the scenario of administrative reforms and big urban social changes. Through the years, the number of appointments at the pleasure of the Mayor increased to a maximum of 170. The Mayor of New York was by Charter the top chief executive, not to mention one of the highest paid and most powerful public officials in the US.

To this regard, we must make a digression in order to understand some focal points about appointment processes related to problems of the representative electoral democratic system under discussion, as US history differed very much from ours.

In a pamphlet published in 1915 by *The National Short Ballot Organisation* ("The short ballot movement to simplify politics") we read that

> "in New York the number of elected offices in State, City, County to be filled by popular vote in a cycle of four years is nearly five hundred (…) In Chicago there were six thousands nominees in a single recent primary election; Philadelphia although smaller than these cities, elects more officials than either".

Here the reference is to "long ballot", i.e., to the customary practise of electing offices by popular vote, which was subjected to uncontrolled expansion, so people had to vote for an enormous number of heterogeneous public offices, with evident lack of information and awareness about candidates, and the consequent impossibility of real examination. The apparent "democratisation effects" of the long ballot method led, in daily life, to confusion and disaffection on behalf of the electorates, who could not express a well informed opinion, and to inefficiency and high politicization of public services and democratic institutions. The "short ballot movement" (which, among other things, was supported by President Woodrow Wilson, initially a distinguished scholar dedicated to the study of public administration for a more effective public government) was committed to changing rules through a reform simplifying the electoral process, introducing a drastic reduction in the number of public offices to be subjected to popular vote, according to criteria of relevance for direct public examination.

To the reformers' movement, practise of the short ballot should limit the power of both local bosses and corrupted politicians, de facto controlling election by manipulation of the electorate, and political specialists, who too easily detected the monopoly of knowledge of the political process. The aim was to improve the quality of democracy through the enhancement of "free and intelligent making of original tickets by any voter and the facilitation of adequate and unconfused public examination of the candidates" (The New York Times, 14/12/1913).This reform ran parallel with the request of more regulation of direct primary elections. The expected improvements towards more efficiency of the democratic government depended on giving more jurisdiction and responsibilities in appointments as well as in policy decisions to the chiefs of the executive, both at the city and at the state levels. Thus, the high number of appointments at the pleasure of the Mayor of New York can be understood within this big reform movement, as a new democratic orientation and a gradual shift in government institutions and public administration functioning.

From this perspective, the strategic significance of political analysis in the studying of appointments decisions in a big city like New York will also be clearer.

The roles of appointed officials could vary among commissioners and head of departments, high bureaucrats, members of deliberative bodies, etc., who were in charge of specific policy areas within the City administration and/or Agencies, etc. "The top political executives constitute an important segment of personnel (…) the 'theoretical class' called the 'ruling elite' set the tone

of Mayors administration (…) And, the administration on the City's mayoral departments and agencies has a direct impact on practically every citizen in the community" (Lowi, 1964a, 5-6). As the nomination of top political executives covers the most important policy areas and government activities, the study of appointment decisions is also a good strategy for closer observation of the urban political environment and of problems of the democratic leadership. It has been said that Lowi carried out his inquiry into urban power structures over a sixteen-year period (1898-1958) of history in New York City's government and the Mayors' changing leadership. In this sense, his study is "a historical-descriptive study", as the data have "an institutional as well as historical context" (Lowi, 1964a, viii). What's more, "the time dimension" is important for understanding power structures, to distinguish whether "a given cross-section of time is normal or a peculiar departure from the norm" (Lowi, 1964, 231), i.e., to identify the main characters and significant changes in the urban political leadership, the value systems and value allocation, the juridical framework, etc. In other words, the question is not understanding "who gets what", as pointed out by Lasswell (1958), but "who got what a considerable period of time" (Lowi, 1964, 231).

"Case history" together with "time series" are essential means "for discovering new 'laws' of politics and testing old ones". "We need a very clear understanding of the sequence of events before imputing to them any notion of relationship" (Lowi, 1964, 231). This approach is strategic as well as functional also to develop knowledge for another central question, that is, "What are the conditions for rule?" – indeed, Lowi's wish was that future case studies assumed more extended time dimensions.

Lowi depicted the difference between the old and the new administration of New York City's government, with reference to the most significant changes from a time in which functions of government were relatively simple to a time in which functions of government were becoming more and more complex. To be Mayor of the City of New York meant to dealing with growing pressures by social and economic groups; the problem of Mayoralty was finding a balance among the different and, sometimes, conflicting interests, taking into account their wishes and, at the same time, preserving the Mayor's autonomy of intervention. "The Mayor is not a mute pawn, but neither is he a free agent". What's more, "not only must a Mayor see in these appointments a means for running an efficient operation, he must also view them as a means for effecting adjustments among the competing demands and expectations around him" (Lowi, 1964, 3). The exercise of "democratic" Mayor leadership is influenced by the political and governmental structure of the cities, by social forces but,

at the same time, the Mayor's performance depends on his personality, the introduction of increments of innovation and his ability to promote, within his constituency and the wider political system "a process of constructive dialogue between diverse groups which would contribute to harmony in the city" (Pressman, 1972, 512).

> "Non governmental groups – groups aligned with or hostile to the party, 'money-providing' and 'service-demanding' groups, ethnic and religious groups, and, not least, the parties as interest groups – all see in the top appointments a recognition of their worth and a means of making increase in real power" (Lowi, 1964a).

Jurisdictional and financial staff resources are important conditions for Mayoral leadership.[26] Behind these constraints, mayoral political entrepreneurship and "brokerage" function, the capacity to control parties and relevant City departments through the nomination-game, or mobilizing non-governmental groups in the community, are important conditions for exercising leadership and building consensus in strategic issue-contexts and areas of local government policy activities. Political leadership implies improvisation – one eye on strategic design, on pursuing specific goals, and the other one on unwanted or unexpected effects, and this goes with the indeterminateness of city politics and the "incremental rationality" of the policy process.

If appointments are political transactions, they also represent important exercising of civic virtue and an expression of prevailing system values and influences in the community. Thus, the study of significant appointment decisions from 1898 to 1958 not only depicts the New York urban society, but also shows the great changes in the "status" and "social order", as new ideas and values gained consensus. The dwelling neighbourhood origin, the socio-economic, ethnic and religious composition of city populations are important aspects, as

> "the structure of society is reflected in the political representation (…) and in the policy-and-decision-making machinery of government, which must reflect adequately the diverse interest of the population (…) with maximum effectiveness and popular satisfaction" (Lowi, 1964a, 17).

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26 For instance, in Pressman analysis, significant pre-conditions would be: city jurisdiction and Mayoral jurisdiction within the city government in social and economic development program areas (education, housing, redevelopment, employment, etc.); financial resources in terms of salary for the Mayor (to enable him to spend full time on the job, etc.) and of city government budget; human resources and competencies in terms of staff supporting Mayor's activities like planning, intergovernmental relations, etc. (Pressman, 1972, 512).

The socio-economic stratification of population and the increasing diversification of ethnic and religious components (mostly depending on immigration flows) complicated the work of nominations, as many new problems and conflicts arose around the democratic representation of minority groups and, at the same time, the guarantees of democratic rights of the majority in decisions concerning the composition of political and executive bodies of government, and, more in general, the control of public decision-making processes. Questions about the representativeness of candidates became central, involving the Mayor's role.

Lowi's analysis of the local education policy system in New York, and of changes in the composition of the Board of Education through the years, and in the organisation of the City Department of Education as well, is exemplar to this regard. He exposes the dynamics involving the Mayor jurisdiction in the field, as defined by the City Charter and by the Law of the State, also focusing on the mobilisation of bottom-up pressures for changing rules, as a by-product of the growing ethnic awareness and the consolidation of some national groups in the local urban society. As Lowi concludes, in 60 years of city history the big change in New York local politics was in "the number and types of characteristics that leaders feel they must accommodate" (Lowi, 1964a, 34). But, other relevant changes are observed in the structure, organisation of the party system as well as in the influence of political parties on city politics.

In the last decades of the Nineteenth century, party organisation was the strongest channel of recruitment, deeply embedded with values tending to "personal", "in-group norms", i.e., "party loyalty" and "service". The city was governed by "a very diffuse and heterogeneous elite that included elements of the old aristocracy (elite of status and mercantile wealth) as well as professional politicians" (Lowi, 1964a, 216). That was the period of the "(old) urban machine". After the First World War, with the rise of large and effectively organised interests groups, pressing on political access and control, the party system became weaker. New ideals and values for recruitment prevailed, as the growing complexity of society[27] and of public administration[28] required more efficiency and specialized knowledge. The "traditionally, 'capable' appointee: a generalist" (which, for most positions, was a lawyer), was not adequate for many new tasks of government and management. The prevailing orientation was toward the recruitment of more "job-oriented skills", i.e., technicians "who were equipped specifically by their training and career".

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[27] "Industrial development and universal public education have created a vast middle-income skill group" (Lowi, 1964a, 217).

[28] Employed within the city public administration passed from 33.000 to 246.000. The City government extended its regulation and interests over many areas of public life.

These men were considered more capable of maintaining the "neutrality" of the civil servant, embodying the civic virtue of the professional, specialized administrator. This went also in the direction of (civic, economic) interest groups' biases for recruitment, which tended to be focused on the definition of standards and types of persons, i.e., to be "impersonal or objective", according to a wider shift towards the "rationalisation" of politics and administration. A consequence was that public officials had to deal more and more with interest groups' pressures:

> "The departmental bureaucracies grew and became highly politicized – but not in party terms (…) Eliminating parties does not 'depoliticize' or 'deorganize' politics; it only alters its form toward interest-group politics. Elimination of party from departmental affairs usually throws the administrator into the arms of his clientele" (Lowi, 1964a, 223).

Lowi recalled some crucial insights by Woodrow Wilson's well acknowledged study of administration-in-action (1887), although with a different perspective toward the efficiency of government action. For Woodrow Wilson there was a need to know more about city politics to improve local government and administration performance. The point was to identify "what government can properly and successfully do with the utmost possible efficiency and at the least possible cost either of money or of energy" and, as for power: "Who shall posses it?" (Wilson, 1887, 198). For Lowi the question of "efficiency" of government action had to do with questions about its concrete responsiveness and accountability, within the rule of law, i.e., the quality of the democratic political system. The very question, in a period of widely extended urban government activities and responsibilities, as well as growing social demands, was: "What things are to be gotten from government?"

Woodrow Wilson strongly asserted the principle of separation of the administrative sphere from the political realm, and the unpartisan nature of public office. To him, administration was "the special office of the technical official" (Wilson, 1887, 210); the promotion of a civil-service reform and the rectification of methods of appointment were indispensable means of "clearing the moral atmosphere of official life".

Lowi's analysis of New York City was conducted in later years, when many of the effects of those democratic reforms were visible. Lowi's research field is the evidence of the plural as well as fragmented character of city politics. To Lowi, pluralism could be used as a good descriptive category to represent the complexity and richness of the political and social environment of his days, but not automatically should pluralism be used as a normative category for defining

the characteristics of democratic government. Diminution of the elective responsibility and increase of functional representation, with the weakening of party systems and the flourishing of social and economic interest groups, led to significant consequences in terms of accountability, "accountability being not to electorates but to professional ethics and organized clientele" (Lowi, 1964a, 226) as well as of responsibility: "The parcelling out of increasing responsibility to the functional areas reduces the area of collective responsibility, the *sine qua non* of self-government" (Lowi, 1964a, 226). While a "viable party system is integrative", and may balance all functional areas together. Moreover, pluralism is not participatory democracy as too many citizens are spectators in the game of politics; and, elections and interest groups offer limited channels for popular influence. He claimed there was scarce interest, in the studies on community leadership, in taking governmental structure and activity into account. From this point of view his inquiry into a limited segment of the political process, that is, recruitment and appointment decisions (pattern of appointments; characteristics of the appointees and appointing authorities; political and social transactions), supported by meticulous empirical data within a defined period of the history of New York city politics, was strategic "to cut across practically every aspect of government activity", as appointment decisions are indicators of broader social and political forces (Lowi, 1964a, 227). By studying recruitment and appointment decisions, in fact, Lowi formulates his first elaboration of the "arenas of power", which is based on the identification of specific recurrent conflicts within urban politics, and of defined constituencies (formed by party organisation, the officials of specific City departments, the Mayor, etc.) around areas of government activity, each having a distinct power structure. These areas are, in other terms, the function of government seen in an attempt to abstract from single issue-areas, according to a strategy of analysis which is very different from that of Dahl (1961). In Lowi's view, in fact, Dahl's issue-areas are in their nature "transitory and unique", "too specific".

The consideration of differences in the impact on the political process of the type of decisions made in each area brings us to the identification of various areas of government activity (and related arenas of power): redistributive, regulative, distributive (and constituent). In "At the Pleasure of the Mayor", Lowi studied the characteristics of leadership and recruitment processes within these areas of government activity, focusing on the difficult job the Mayor had in making nomination decisions in such conflicting areas, dealing with the problem of maintaining a bipartisan spirit. To this goal, neutral professional public officials could be the last trick in the bag. The exposition of the (four) arenas of power is not needed here, as it is widespread and well known. Just

to give an example, in order to bear in mind his reasoning, Lowi pointed out that there was a persisting, almost institutionalised, conflict in New York urban politics between two polarized groups, the "money-providing" (bankers, builders, landowners, and other people who have and/or can mobilize a large amount of financial resources, besides personal prestige, influent relations, etc.) and the "service-demanding" (health and welfare councils, religious, voluntary and non- governmental associations, sectors of the City bureaucracy employed in welfare and service areas, etc.). The arena of struggle was, in fact, that of service and welfare policies (education, parks, health, etc.), i.e., the area of government activity characterized by decisions of a *redistributive* nature. Conflicts in the welfare area were highly politicised and, dealing with questions of redistributive justice and class disparities, had a big impact on public opinion and represented a problem for political consensus. *Attributes*, i.e. management and technical skills of political personnel having responsibilities in the welfare and service area-policy, were considered at the basis of recruitment; but, at the same time, it was also important to balance technical competence with the religious and ethnic issues, and to take into account interest groups' demands and proposals.

8. The problem with case studies: challenging policy studies as a science of government

Conceptualisation of the "arenas of power" in "At the Pleasure of the Mayor" is only the first version of further empirical and theoretical developments.

In an article-review dated 1964 Lowi problematized the inadequacy and weakness of case-studies carried out on the basis of both pluralist and elitist approaches to provide knowledge of a theoretical kind and to furnish generalisations in the form of models for comprehending and explaining power politics, i.e. their problematic insufficiency to formulate theory of power and policy-making (Lowi, 1964b). We have to consider that, at that time, a surprising amount of single case studies was available in the field of American political science, but lacked general research-guidelines and significant attempts at cumulative results (and knowledge).

"Each is, if anything, a self-validating standpoint; the pluralist approach suggests what to look for and the elitist model suggests perhaps what not to look for" (Lowi, 1964b, 686). In particular, even empirical works carried out according to pluralist interpretations of the democratic political system entered a vicious circle as their "findings are directed by the approach itself"

(Lowi, 1964b, 681); in other words, the results of the research were influenced and misled by the initial hypothesis with its apparatus of beliefs, values and presumptions. Researchers moved between descriptive and normative levels of analysis and their findings lacked explanatory validity and theoretical (generative) potential. Among the case studies mentioned, are the masterful ones by Dahl (1961), Bauer and his associates (1963, "American Business and Public Policy") and Wildavsky (1962b, "Dixon-Yates: A Study in Power Politics").[29] In short, limitations of single case-study analysis are related to:

- the capacity of producing valid generalisations. Knowledge acquired is context-dependent and specific of the field of inquiry; findings are not cumulative and cannot be assumed as the basis of theorisation (they are "self-directing" and "self-supporting"). Most of these studies are simple "storybooks" (Lowi, 1964b, 686). Consequently, the state of the art of (disciplinary, theoretical) knowledge of the policy process does not advance. The question is: "how to improve processes of policy-making without generalizable knowledge of conditions for governing and impacts of government decisions (i.e., knowledge of the outputs)?"
- The problem of uniqueness is "the one debilitating handicap of all case-studies" (Lowi, 1964b, 686), as it leads to overly ephemeral research-products.
- Most of these studies are based on the local community and cannot offer adequate theoretical knowledge about national political processes; while there is need for systematic studies of national decision-making and policy processes.

In "At the Pleasure of the Mayor", developed for urban politics, we have seen Lowi's first formulation of a general interpretive scheme for classifying public policies in functional categories; such an analytical framework is proposed to provide a distinction among classes of cases. Against the prevalent

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29   An exception is made for Schattschneider's case-study analysis (1935, "Politics, Pressures and the Tariff"). To Lowi, it possessed a high theoretical potential for pluralist basic assumptions, although it was subject to misleading interpretations as supportive of pluralists' political analysis. It stressed the myth of "coalitions organized around shared interests and shared attitudes (…) well defined stakes (…) as the unique form of political interaction". "His arena was decentralized and multi-centred but relationships among participants were based upon 'mutual non-interference' among uncommon interests" (Lowi, 1964b, 680). The idea of the "uncommon interests" at the basis of mutual agreements, calls to mind future theoretical developments by Lindblom – i.e., the affirmation of" (coordination trough) partisan mutual adjustments" and the contestation of consensus as the conditio sine qua non for democratic government.

representation of urban politics as the locus of dispersed and overlapping powers, Lowi theorized that it was possible to distinguish a limited number of types of public policies in the forms of government activities, to which a specific configuration of power and of the political process could be attributed. From this perspective it was also possible to attain generalizable knowledge about public policy and identify major categories of public policies, amounting to the formulation of a general taxonomy of government action, an interpretative scheme which is

> "a basis for cumulating, comparing and contrasting diverse findings. Such a framework or interpretative scheme would bring the diverse cases and findings to a more consistent relationship with each other and would begin to suggest generalizations to be sufficiently close to the data, to be significant and sufficiently abstract and to be subject to more broadly theoretical treatment" (Lowi, 1964b, 688);
> "One of the virtues of the policy scheme is that it converts ordinary case studies from chronicles and teaching instruments into data" (Lowi, 1972, 300).

Moreover, another important achievement would be to define the limit types and number of functions that governments can perform, according to its coercive power. This exigency can be understood within the uncontrolled expansion of (local) state-national policy-making, with a tendency on one hand toward the "Europeanization of American politics", that is, the *statalization* of society, and on the other hand, toward mechanisms of delegation of an increasing number of government policy functions and competence to professionalized, administrative agencies, and to various ad hoc destined bodies. The fragmentation and sectored division of the government public action makes the rule of law more and more uncertain, i.e., the principle of the democratic responsibility of government, with a loss in responsiveness and accountability. Agencies are structures of power, in the sense that they make highly important decisions, deal with clientele groups which have access to policy-decisions, an so on; but their proliferation is fragmenting public action into a myriad of channels, which are not subject to the effective control of any higher authority and political power. As Lowi synthesized well in "The End of Liberalism":"In the city there are many publics but no polity, therefore there is little law" (Lowi, 1979, 185).

9. "Leadership in a Small Town" (Aaron Wildavsky)

As regards the methodological orientation of the research in "Leadership in a Small Town" Wildavsky (1964) made a very different choice, in comparison with Lowi's (60-years) "time dimension". He concentrated his analysis of Oberlin's (Ohio) city politics in a period of three years (the empirical research was developed between 1958 and 1961), although some historical information and data on the socio-economic characteristics and trends of the population had been collected and considered since about 1833, year of the city foundation, obtaining available information from secondary sources.[30] The approach was that adopted by Dahl (1961), with a substantial difference, due to the small dimension of the city (Oberlin at the time was a community of 8.000 inhabitants, with a population of 2.000 students at the college, located therein), a factor that allowed the analysis to cover most of the significant "issue-areas" of government activity.

The study is also an experiment on university-city relations by action-research. Oberlin was, to a certain extent, "adopted" by researchers, in that Wildavsky formed a large team, working in collaboration with other colleagues and younger assistants, involving research students of his course on "State and Local Government", and the city "adopted" the researchers, in that hundreds of citizens from Oberlin were variously involved as key-informers, observers, and interviewed, even several times, and asked to fill in questionnaires, to read sections of the research reports, etc. In this regard, in the introduction to the book Wildavsky reports ironically the citizens' auspice for the future:

> "Their plaintive cry – 'no, not again' – as hordes of students descended upon them for the 'umpteenth' time was as understandable as their unfailing cooperation and courtesy was remarkable" (Wildavsky, 1964, xiv).

I put emphasis on this specific aspect of the research-production process for two reasons: firstly, because the method implemented inaugurated what became a distinctive quality of Wildavsky's work (think of the following, more structured experiences, like the "Oakland project"), according to a tradition

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30   Oberlin, evidently, was not the widely studied case of New York City, or even of New Haven, and Wildavsky had to arrange solutions with limited historical information, above all about public policies. As for the period between 1927 and 1957 the basic source of information was local newspapers; from 1833 to 1927 there were even less information available. Anyway, Wildavsky reconstructed essential information about City Mayors, focusing on year 1927, which determined the transition from a strong City-Mayor leadership to a Council-Manager administration. Key-players became those who had executive power, so the interest shifted to collecting data about them.

of university-city partnership, related to a practice of defined methods of education, logic of inquiry, and to forms of political interaction; secondly, because Oberlin was a college-town, Oberlin College being a big property-owner in the city and a fundamental source of employment and of economic development. The College community also had had an essential function in enhancing democratic principles and practices in Oberlin, since its foundation. Evidence lies in the existence of a Black community, which in 1860 already made up 25% of the total city population, and whose civil, religious, political rights were respected, although the community tended prevalently to stay on the margins and to delegate political decisions to the white leaders. At the same time, the College ruling class represented a powerful elite of intellectuals based on very idealistic positions, influencing politics orientation and values-system. For all these reasons, the presence of the College in Oberlin was a peculiar as well as a determining factor that influenced city politics and community power relations in time.[31] In particular, students were asked

> "to prepare case studies on events going on at the time, to spend time observing the activities of key participants, to administer and analyze questionnaires, and to conduct historical inquiries. In this way a substantial body of data on Oberlin, including over a thousand interviews, was accumulated". (Wildavsky, 1964, xiii)

Many case-studies were written in the form of case histories (for studying community power and leadership in Oberlin, from a historical perspective, in specific area-issues, i.e., case studies focusing on significant decisions involving the city government as well as the local community) and role studies (when evidence was found on the determining role and influence of specific leaders, such as local activists and the city manager; for this reason, participant observation at the Mayors' and City managers' offices and other places was essential). Wildavsky re-interviewed key-observers and identified leading participants, to develop specific aspects and to resolve conflicts on account of events. Surveys were developed in parallel to collect data on citizens' degree of participation in local affairs, their democratic attitudes and democratic values-system, and on their expectations of local government performance. These data were also finalized to define a more general strategy of participation on behalf of citizens in local public decision-making processes, which is explained in a

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31 Data about citizens' participation were clear in this regard, as a distinction emerged between the well-educated citizens' willingness to dedicate time to local affairs, and medium-law classes, which had to deal with constraints related to economic, social and cultural limitations.

dedicated chapter of the book.[32] Other surveys were directed toward learning about the citizens' and participants' perception and opinions on power systems, leadership, leaders, and distribution of influence in Oberlin. These data were compared with findings of case studies and were discussed in order to achieve comprehensive knowledge of different coexisting views of city politics and urban political processes.

Historically the political party that prevailed in elections was the Republican Party. Until the '30s few leaders dominated most of the significant decisions in town. Economic expansion in the following two decades, and the realization of important public works according to modernisation projects, facilitated the rise of new local leaders, such as businessmen, and the strengthening of certain departments of city administration (as, for instance, the City Planning Commission, which was responsible for zoning). Moreover, controversies arose, originating from decisions of economic development, with the mobilization of segments of the civil society, local associations, activists and the wide public opinion, organised in movements and protests against specific decisions, and giving way to many petitions. These groups asked for local referenda and for more effective involvement of the citizens in public affairs, and struggled to defend their partisan interests, to draw attention on specific issues, and to have voice in the agenda formulation. Although some leaders were distinguishable as those who had more power, the case-studies analysis on the distribution of influence in major decisions – following in many regards Dahl's procedure of measurement[33] – showed that "a pluralist political system, fragmented, competitive, open and fluid", enhancing opportunities for individual citizens, characterized Oberlin's urban political process (Wildavsky, 1964, 8). Business groups, the College, the newspaper, various and ad-hoc citizen groups, individual activists, associations, all too involved in conflicts and decisions, sometimes losing, sometimes winning. In some cases it was observed that there was a tendency toward overlapping and un-coordinated interventions, in others stubborn conflicts over specific issues polarized public

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32 Dahl's categories were utilized to explore citizens' participation and to understand who the active citizens were in Oberlin, and in what ways, and to develop a hypothesis of a citizen strategy for better participation.

33 A "Leadership Pool", "consisting of all those who participated in a particular decision and could conceivably be candidates for leadership", was set up. "Then we separate out those who lost, who got nothing of what they wanted. This leaves us with a Leadership Elite – those who in some way helped secure an outcome they deemed to be favourable. Within this broad category, we seek to distinguish among those who initiated, vetoed, or gained consent for a policy proposal" (Wildavsky, 1964, 253-254).

opinion. Empirical findings were interpreted according to democratic, rival theories reported in the first chapter of the book (like theory of mass democracy, elitist theories, etc.).

Pluralist conceptualization, according to which "power is fragmented among many different individuals and groups and quite extensively dispersed (unequally, for sure) in the community" was found capable of explaining Oberlin's political system. Case-studies were carried out to cover seven issue-areas, analytically defined – housing, utilities, welfare, industrial development, zoning, education, nominations and elections. Some issues, like "The Great Water Controversy", generated "considerable passion and participation", others, like "The Light Plant", were resolved by the specialists elected and appointed to deal with them, or like "The Housing Co-decisions", had a greater impact on many people, and were very exposed to public view.

Wildavsky's case-analysis is extraordinary, on the analytical as well as narrative level, in that it is an in-depth, micro exploration of political and social interaction and is a meaningful description of the dynamics of the policy process. Attention is dedicated to policy-formation, i.e., problem setting and definition, motivations and perceptions of participants, individual and institutional cultures, identification of stakes, but above all to the implementation and to policy impacts – to the desired and unwanted, "good" and "bad" effects that policies generate. Indeed, in Wildavsky's view, case study analysis and case narratives are essential to policy understanding and to learning about policies.[34] In the analysis of issue-contexts, in the study of decision-making, Wildavsky was motivated by two main research-goals, which are in tension. One is to explore a range of situations in which choices are made, and implemented, and to find decision-making patterns that are consistent with the different issue-contexts. In his words,

> "to abstract elements which would facilitate comparison among the case histories by classifying issue contexts along various dimensions and examining their consequences for decision-making" (Wildavsky, 1962, 717).

The other is to inquire into situations in which choices are made, to observe the formation and transformation of participants' preferences, beliefs, perspectives by interacting with other participants, making sense, individually and collectively, of unexpected and unplanned changes in plans, or of events

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34   In his research-career he developed policy case studies usually in collaboration, as he was particularly convinced of the benefits of working with other researchers, even from different backgrounds (Wildavsky, 1986). The training of young political scientists was based on such research-works.

occurring through the implementation; in other words, learning-by-doing, with different degrees of reflection and awareness. This perspective is very "pragmatist" in that it acknowledges the significance of practice and of "gathering experience" as a fundamental source of knowledge, as well as the significance of interactive, practical, ordinary types of knowledge for problem definition and solution.

Wildavsky shares, from this point of view, Lindblom's theoretical doubt, and analytical perspective:

> "What consequence does the process itself have in forming and reforming – perhaps for inventing or discovering – interests or values?" (Lindblom, 1965)

For both, the policy process is creative social problem solving. Stakes, problems and goals can be redefined through interaction or as a consequence of unexpected changes; new solutions can be found as new information and resources, become available, or new actors activize. In other words, the formation of, as well as the change in, preferences, beliefs and volitions can result as a by-product of the process and, in any case, is to be considered endogenous to the process.

In an article-review published in 1970 (see: *Public Administration Review*), Lowi strongly argued Lindblom's "non definitional", "too permissive, all-inclusive" approach to policy (Lowi, 1970, 318). Various are the points of controversy:

1) Lindblom assumes that policy making is decision making: "policy is any output of any decision maker (…) and is an outcome of any process", whether decision makers are governments or non-governmental groups, or the process is a political compromise, or the implementation of a well-defined program of interventions, or something that may simply happen (…); he tends to operate "as though the substantive character or level of that output is of no consequence to the process by which the output becomes an output" (Lowi, 1970, 317). While, the character of choices made is relevant for understanding expected impacts.[35]

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35   Lindblom conceptualizes policy making as "social problem solving". In complex pluralist contemporary societies and in democratic political systems, the participants in social problem solving are "people" (…) "many people – of diverse opinions – who have informed and thoughtful views on how to do it well". They are: "ordinary citizens, politicians, and other public officials, heads of private organizations, opinion leaders, and experts of various kinds, including for special attention, social scientists" (Lindblom, 1990, x; vii). Social problem solving activates processes of inquiry and forms of professional and non-professional knowledge, of an "un ended" and interactive kind "for we do not first probe and then act but continue to probe and learn in every action we take" (Lindblon, 1990, 30). In previous works (1980) Lindblom had explained basic

2) "Operating on the assumption that substantive policy – the institutional level – is part of the *ceteris* that are *paribus* leads not only to the ideological position of the technocrat (…) but also to logical and empirical impossibilities" (Lowi, 1970, 319). Lowi acknowledges that Lindblom's theoretical works offer other interpretations to this last point emphasizing his deep understanding of how policy-making operates in democratic political systems, in particular with reference to the strategy of "disjointed incrementalism"[36]; but, he also highlights academic ideology itself, which his approach endorses, typically reflecting liberals' and democrats' ideas prevailing among the social scientists of the time, who are trustful of the potential that both (policy) analysis and the active citizen possess for better policy making, and improvements in the quality of democracy and the quality of life. Basically, Wildavsky's perspective on policy-making is similar, as the experience of implementing and evaluating public policies is in itself an occasion and a condition for "learning to learn", for both the decision makers and the participants, and the policy analyst. This approach limits the significance of an *a priori* definition of characters, properties of each kind of policy, and of conditions for making public policies, and makes the determination of specific consequences or the impact of policies on the political system insignificant. Lowi, instead, demonstrated that it is possible to identify major differences between types of public policies, associated with quite distinctive political processes. In this sense, for instance

> "since most case studies of the policy-making written by political scientists, especially in the 1930's and '40's, were on regulatory legislation, it is little wonder that they thought they were able to generalize about the whole policy-making process. And it is also no wonder that they described the whole system as shifting, coalitional, pragmatic, bargaining, and one in which the outcome is a vector product of interacting forces" (Lowi, 1970, 323).

This last critical observation by Lowi is particularly fraught with consequences. If we review Wildavsky's case studies as developed in "Leadership in a Small Town", and follow Lowi's interpretative scheme and the public policies taxonomy therein formulated, we realize that those case-studies are prevalently case-studies of regulatory and/or redistributive types of public policies.

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concepts of his theorisation about social problem solving and the intelligence of democracy.

36   Lindblom's anti-technocratic posture, a stance that is reflected in his distinctive reading of Dewey (Torgerson, 1995), is broadly acknowledged. His view to the policy process as "partisan mutual adjustment" excludes the misleading notion that policy is "the product of one governing mind" (Lindblom, 1965, 4). "He seeks to undercut the pretensions of a professionalism claiming the authority of a special, abstract knowledge designed to inform 'the decision maker'" (Torgerson, 1995, 243).

Thus, we expect (if Lowi's scheme works well against empirical data) those case studies to be: the description of pluralized and high fragmented socio-political contexts, characterized by high "clearance" and numerous "decision points" (to use Wildavsky's definitions, introduced by the author in "Implementation", 1973, to analyse complex policy-making processes) rich in ambiguity as regards the multiplicity of policy effects; and/or the description of stubborn conflicts, characterized by polarization between actors participating, around a stake, within a context rich in mobilization and activation of different kinds, where eventually new entrepreneurs, events or unexpected changes, fatigues of bargaining and strategy of negotiations can lead to a redefinition of almost institutionalised positions, or to agreements.

The case studies collected in the book are of such a kind.

We should conclude that Lowi and Wildavky went through two different courses and reached similar empiric findings, and that basic differences lie in the difficulty in reaching generalizations through Wildavsky's way. Besides, it is not appropriate to theorize the "general democratic potential" of public policies by looking, basically, at regulatory decision impacts, as they are highly pluralized and differentiated in nature. Nevertheless, Wildavsky's argument, at this point, would be consistent with his policy approach: that participants have plural opinions and perceptions regarding problems and problem-definitions, as well as the stakes, etc., and that those differences are constitutive of the social plurality and, on a cognitive level, of man's mind. Thus, what, for a participant, may be intended as a redistributive impact of policy decision may, for another, be of as a regulatory kind. And, according to their different frames and understandings, they (the various participants) make choices, and act, and agree or conflict. That is to say, policy implementation and policy evaluation lead to plural sense-making: interacting is a necessary pre-requisite for social and institutional learning. This is a good reason for inquiring into public policies as processes of social interaction. Moreover, the democratisation potential of public policies should be regarded as a (possible) by-product of the policy process, and improvements in the democratic quality cannot be expected exclusively as planned output of too rational and engineering top-down solutions.

10. Conceptualizing city politics and urban policies

Further developments in conceptualizing the urban political process are expressed by Lowi in a dedicated chapter of his masterful work "The End of the Liberalism" (1969, 1979) and by Wildavsky in his milestone work on policy implementation (with Pressman, 1973) as well as in the empirical work "Urban outcomes" (1974).

In "The End of Liberalism" cities were viewed as part of a more general "American Tragedy", and in a negative phase of American urban history, that of the big "urban crisis", i.e., the inability of cities "to sustain themselves and their citizens" (Lowi, 1979, 167). In particular, Lowi focuses on two aspects: the weakening of the urban governmental structure, caused by various factors that he analysed, which in many cases leads to cities' incapability of dealing with modern social problems; the lack of reflection on the governmental structure itself. Among factors of urban crisis: the moving of the population from city centres to peripheries, and consequently the spreading of populations, the formation of de facto metropolitan regions as well as the proliferation of many governmental jurisdictions and suburban areas, each defining its own taxation, zoning policies, and providing public services, regardless of the concrete sustainability of economic costs and of political integrative social function, which historically was a distinctive feature of American cities, to the point that "for several decades the U.S. had been an urban nation". Social conflicts exploded during the '60s in the form of riots, aggravation of urban poverty, urban social exclusion, the deterioration of social cohesion and the crisis of fragmented urban governments having to deal with demanding groups and problems of popular consensus.

In Lowi's words, "suburbs are fiction, legal fictions (…) parasites". The various annexation efforts caused further problems of integration. In addition to these dynamics, in those years another significant aspect is the definitive fragmentation of "the old machine" (referring to the organisation and characteristics of the political-bureaucratic urban government) replaced by reforms with the "new machine", highly efficient and capable of good management (the reform of civil service leading to a new class of neutral-professionals and specialised administrators and bureaucrats) but politically irresponsible and affecting the city government's institutional capacity of making laws. That is, "the crisis in the cities has been one of governmental inefficiency and governmental illegitimacy" (Lowi, 1979, 185). The urban crisis provoked federal government intervention, consisting in the design and

support of different kinds of urban or urban-oriented programs (the federal involvement in urban life occurred systematically since 1957), which had to be sufficiently

> "vague, as to jurisdiction, methods, scope, objects, and any other dimension, in which an administrator requires guidance (…) trying to achieve their generality by delegation rather than by definition or categorizations" (Lowi, 1979, 189).

Consequently, complete discretion in dealing with local situations was necessary, leading to different solutions and a differentiated outcome. On this premise, and within this frame, Wildavsky's research-work (1973) was directed to analysing and evaluating the implementation of new, experimental Federal programs in a specific urban context, that is, the city of Oakland (CA). The story of the difficult and, in the end, especially unsuccessful implementation of an expected virtuous and successful program of urban development and regeneration, even simple in appearances, led to the demonstration and explanation of the significance of implementation factors, of unforeseen consequences, underestimated aspects and unwanted effects, and of the extraordinary multiplicity of decisions and interdependence that an expected "simple" program could involve. From this perspective, learning emerged as the key-resource for organisations as well as for individuals involved in processes of policy implementation. Moreover, analysis of city politics pointed out the effects of the separation of politics from administration (first theorised by Woodrow Wilson). The City of Oakland was managed with a Council-Manager form of urban government (and not, Mayor-Council pattern)[37], according to which:

> "In theory, the Mayor leads public opinion, the council formulates policy, and the manager carries it out. But in practice, the relationship between politics and administration in Oakland is strongly affected by the personalities of the men holding city offices and by the wide disparity in the level of resources available to the politicians on the one hand and the administration on the other (…) Armed with his considerable advantages, the city manager defines 'policy' and 'administration' in such a way that 'administration' turns out to bulk very large and 'policy' very small" (Pressman, 1972, 514-5).[38]

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37 For cities in Oakland's population group (250.000-500.000), the council-manager system is the most popular form of government.

38 The City Manager's annual salary was more than four times higher than that of the City Mayor (who, consequently, could not dedicate full-time to the job); the City Manager's staff was composed by numerous officials, while the City Mayor was supported by a few officials; etc.

11. Conclusions: why the question of democracy is crucial to our analysis

In conclusion, to the serious students of the Italian urban political process, further consideration may be of interest.Descriptions and explications of urban politics and local policy-making developed by American political scientists during the '60s and the '70s focused on the comprehension of the fundamental aspects of the political game and of political participation, with a view to both the role of political and administrative institutions, parties, economic and political elites, and the bottom-up mobilization of civil society on matters of the specific groups' interest and of general interest. The study of the City (its complex web of relations, dynamics of change, resources and self-governing potential) was, within this perspective, strategic to the understanding of the making of democracy and of how politics and policies are intertwined and how they affect each other – we have discussed in what terms Dahl's, Lowi's and Wildavsky's works were meaningful to this regard and traced a method for political analysis. The social construction of conditions of local democracy emerged as a distinctive feature of urban politics and as an antidote to the too easy homogenizing habit of State intervention for social problem solving and social betterment.

Probably, in the American political life, the hegemonic vision of representative democracy, generally assumed – with its systems of rules, apparatuses, mechanisms of governing – as a prerogative to the consolidation of democratic culture and to the quality of democracy was less predominant, compared to what emerged in the Italian political and scientific debate of the period and in political practices, in the years of the so called First Italian Republic and of the expanding of welfare State politics. The pragmatist orientation toward democracy and the democratic experience, emphasizing social intelligence for social problem solving and the self-guiding society (Lindblom, 1965, 1990), de facto offered a way to overcome the narrow view of democracy as an exclusive product of "the State". Pragmatism shifted the attention to public policies as processes of social interaction and learning, questioning the nature of "the Public, and its problems" (Dewey, 1927), in consideration of the partisan nature of interests and of the complex reality of contemporary plural societies (as they say, the definition of "the Public" in relation to "the State" seemed too simplifying a perspective, referring to problems and solutions, to actors and stakes, forms of knowledge, etc.). This perspective is very different from the view of public policies as the output of governments' decisions, according to the input-output scheme of the political

demand, which endorses a binary logic that sanctions the dichotomy between "the governors" and "the governed" (Crosta, 1990a). That logic, embedded into models of representative democracy, is also functional to responsiveness and accountability principles as developed in relation to the State government's decision-making and policy-making (as the ideal of the responsive government, "political decision-makers must be responsible and accountable as regards the effects of their action on the people"), with the contradictory, consequent impairing effects on civil society, on one hand, and on the other, the promotion of participatory processes, involving citizens into politics, to contrast the apathy of "the governed" and people's disengagement from politics, or for consensus-building (to prevent or manage conflicts). A consequence of this input-output scheme is the abstracting from concrete social action and the removal of (social, political) differences that are considered problematic or the possible cause of conflicts.

In the American democratic thought and practices, if the social construction of democracy has been an important characteristic, the "local" roots of democracy are equally essential – that is the long-term conceptualization and experience of federalism as a political system where the principles of self-governing of communities, self-rule and shared rules, are structural elements of the federal polity and constitutive of the political culture (where the term "local" does not refer to a level of government as it is, typically, in models of representative democracy). Association among equals, and the coming together of people for common purposes, both public and private, emphasize the opportunities of an active political society functioning independently of the State – paraphrasing Alexis de Tocqueville's thesis in "Democracy in America". City governance allows forms of "independent interdependence" (this fruitful expression once has been coined by Daniel Elazar) and is a living laboratory of forms of alliance of individuals, groups, and institutions. In this sense, cities are capable of "political inventions".

The study of democracy was central to American political science and to the definition of its identity as a discipline and a body of knowledge, though with an ambivalent tendency as regards the finalization of its competence and contribution. On the one hand, the inclination was to the specialization of professional and expert forms of knowledge, to create a science of the administration dedicated to good government; on the other hand emphasis was placed on the importance of initiatives dedicated to educating both the citizens and the governors to democratic principles, with the aim of disseminating democratic culture. The main question was how to do it; pragmatist orientation suggested that gaining experience (in the association and sharing of powers,

in participating in decisional processes, in democratic institution organization and functioning) was a concrete way to learn about democracy and to socialize democratic culture. So occasions should be created and promoted in order to allow such experiences.

The elaboration of important contributions to political theory starting from the study of city politics and urban policies (in addition to Dahl's, Lowi's and Wildavsky's works, we mentioned an entire tradition of American studies on urban politics) was in many aspects linked to the focus on (local) democracy and democratic quality.

The First Italian Republic was totally different in that, it was a great effort and commitment towards the construction of the (democratic) State and the national government, at the political level, and the studying of the State and the national political system, at the scientific community level. Italian political scientists, in particular, were asked to offer analyses and explications of the political phenomena and to find technical solutions and devices for improving electoral systems, or to furnish instruments for improving government according to the prevailing reformist paradigm supporting projects of State modernization, each time, to respond to new social demands, for consensus building, to increase the efficiency and the effectiveness of public action, etc. In other terms, attention was directed to the consolidation and the strengthening of representative democracy, at all levels of government, and of the administration of the State (also with the creation of new institutions like the Regions, and various reforms for the political and administrative decentralization of the State).

In 1989 Angelo Panebianco, a distinguished Italian political scientist, edited a volume entitled "L'analisi della politica" and sharply depicted the two trajectories inspiring Italian political science. On the one hand, the development of scientific and expert knowledge to support the government's demands for better electoral rules, public policies, and all the "machinery" of representative democracy, in other terms, a political theory and a predictive political science which could be applied to the solution of concrete social and political problems, by means of "State engineering". On the other hand, the development of more context-dependent knowledge for better understanding of the circumstances, with attention to promotion of the public debate, socialization of problems related to specific groups or categories, related to specific issues, conflicts which would become of general interest by means of public and social inquiry. The point, in fact, was the emergence of a deficit of knowledge for problem solving, due to the underrepresentation or impairment of social competence for social problem solving. To infer this latter orientation Panebianco made reference to Lindblom's democratic theory as the possible starting point for future analysis.

Panebianco did not refer to Sartori's position, but it is evident that Sartori's assertion of the minor dignity or value of ordinary and interactive forms of knowledge for political and social problem solving and in particular the denial of the fruitful potential of (social) practice in terms of knowledge and learning (practice being the mere application of well defined theories and policy design) was completely against the bulk of Lindblom's democratic theory. From this perspective, we can understand the core of the Italian tradition of democratic analysis, based on a tradition of studies which, in academic political science, has been largely based on Sartorian assumptions, and its conceptual distance from the pragmatist understanding of democracy.

Regardless of the type of Italian politics, for sure its representation was bound to be completely different.

Viewed at the national level, the shift from the First to the Second Republic was basically the shift from a kind of modernization project, based on distributive and redistributive policies and construction of the welfare State system, to new modernization projects dealing with the failure of the previous State model of intervention, and the search for solutions to the widespread corruption and to degenerating interpretations of political work, with a new commitment to more accountable, efficient modes of government.

At the time of the First Republic, corruption was to a certain extent a product, on one hand, of the politicization of civil society and of organized interests (involving party organizations, professional associations, enterprises, etc.), implemented by means of State government distributive policies and, on the other hand, of broad socialization of distributive politics, at all levels. The political and the social sphere within the mechanisms and logics of distributive politics had grown, with the result of incorporating one another, from systems of representation to all points of decision-making.

The Second Republic and its moralization waves kept embracing regulatory and constituent policies, accompanied by ad hoc redistributing measures. But, constituent policies in some cases ended up endorsing old distributive logics, to balance conflicts and to survive the many pressures, thus reducing their potential for change and innovation – we have seen how reforms for building a federal system were affected by such tendencies. In a similar ambivalent way, old centralizing logics inspired the constitution of new political subjects and their core decisions (with evident examples in Left party organization).

Shifting the view from the State level to the "local", we must ask whether the Second Republic, considered in relation to profound changes in city governance and to the many important reforms of local government we spoke about, meant a true change in the democratic construction, going from

various practices of State intervention "on society", or "in favor of society" for the resolution of social problems, to the recognition and enhancement of self-organizing capacity of local societies and of the social intelligence for social problem solving, allowing a dynamic set of interactions among people, governments, groups. If cities are new actors of political intervention and laboratories of new democratic ideas and practices, and if local societies really take part in this construction, we have probably had the experimentations of forms of democracy, political leadership, policy-making which are diverse from the "representative model" of State democracy and the modernizing projects and reformist approaches to State intervention, which were typical of the First Republic. This might be the innovative contribution of the Second Republic and a reason to look with renovated interest in the contributions of American political science of the '60s and the '70s, as they were focused on the analysis of conditions of local democracy, government and democratic quality at the city level, while, we have said, Italian political science lacks competitive developments on some matters and aspects related to urban politics (some interesting developments come from urban studies and social movements studies, but we are still far from having a critical mass of analyses).

Of course, all that glitters is not gold, and the experience of governing cities highlighted problems and contradictions. Here we find many reasons to re-read the American literature we discussed rethinking the Italian case. The Growth Coalition Theory, for instance, highlighted strong urban power structures successfully attempting to city control, with the complicity of city Mayors, and other studies focused on battles between community-base organizations, activists, Mayors, on the one hand, and a strong corporation of interests on the other, with eventual success of the former. American urban history is characterized by phases of crisis and renaissance. Wood was illuminating, when he stated that, in the urban political process, those who interpreted social demands and who decided on the general interest were represented by different and separated centers of power, each operating without real knowledge of the other. As Sayre, Kaufman, Dahl, Banfield and the political scientists who followed have demonstrated, the urban political system looks like a "laundry list", i.e., a random list of items – due to the multiplicity of participants and policy interests, beliefs and goals. And, coalitions continuously converge, lose and reorganize (Wood, 1963, in Crosta, 1990, 70-94). That is to say, the lesson we can learn from studying the city is that we should give less intentional power to politics or less rationality to policy decisions and effects, and try to think of political strategies without necessarily tracing back the effects to "one strategist" in particular. This is another, probably intriguing turn in the

view of policies as processes of social interaction, which generate intended and unintended consequences, even new problems. To this regard, we discussed, for instance, the too high expectations on city Mayors (in different years, both in US cities and in Italy) as the new urban leaders who had to solve – having much power – the urban problems, and a decade later in both cases criticism and disillusion regarding their actual power of change, vis-à-vis the complex web of urban politics and, above all in Italy, the still strong center-periphery frame of political action.

We spoke much of parties as the leading institutions of the Italian First Republic – initially being the pillars, then in their crisis, decline – and, in the shift to the Second Republic, in their various attempts to be born again in renovated forms and programs. The general debate on parties has focused on their weakness, reduced power and influence, and difficulty in surviving to new political processes or trans-political governance institutions and leaders. The end of parties' control on significant matters has been evoked many times.

Yet, a view from city politics, with a perspective on local governance, allows a different knowledge of party machinations on matters of general interest. In particular, the close, mobilizing and control-preserving strategies enabled by political parties emerge in appointment decisions and recruitment processes, not only with reference to electoral campaign or the recruitment of political candidates, but with regard to appointment decisions for public offices. We have explained how city Mayors have become key-players in decision-making processes related to nominations. Moreover, changes in the governance of public service deliveries, in social demands, cost variables, economic pressures and European regulation, have led to a more complex structure and organization of major urban areas of public utility and public goods, with different solutions and new entrepreneurs emerging in the urban scene, the creation of ad hoc bodies and agencies. These changes contributed to the expansion of the Mayor's power nomination in different functional areas. Party machinery emerged as a vital part of the context of appointment politics. That is a "provincia", we say, where parties can have strong power control. We learned this was true in a period of US urban national history (as Dahl's and Lowi's case-studies clear demonstrate), and we can easily find evidence of party mobilisation and influence on appointment decisions in contemporary Italian city contexts. Appointment politics is also an area of conflicts and Mayors sometimes have a very difficult job, dealing with the problem of maintaining a bipartisan spirit. In Italy, Municipal Councils should have precise responsibility, defined by City Charter, in monitoring and evaluating the quality of public services and in orienting decision appointments establishing criteria for candidate selection

and recruitment. Indeed, their political weakness to counterbalance decisions of the Mayor and the Executive Body in many circumstances is a reason for their lack of effectiveness in control, and lack of accountability.

More in general, the analysis of appointment decisions allows a view on urban power structures and city governance, as the mobilization of economic actors, civic society groups, high education and research centers, etc., is equally great and intense on such matters. Lastly, personal powers of the Municipal General Manager and of bureaucracy increased and, in some cases, public officials and technicians are important points in decisions and relationships, forming an arena of exchange and negotiation (of information, contacts, resources) which moves in a way that is parallel to the electoral arena and formal bodies of representation.

As we have a lack of scientific literature and empirical analysis, advantages to further research developments could come from explorations of appointment decision processes which arise in urban contexts, studied as policy decisions, taking into account, for instance, Lowi's methodology of research.

Besides appointment decisions, practices of social problem solving and self-organisation, stressing democratic institutions and consolidated routines, and enhancing new ways of participating in public life, should be subject of more specific observation, as to inquire into how "the intelligence of democracy" works in the urban political process. In particular, studying social practices is a good way to deconstruct, analytically, the input-output scheme of the "political demand", which leads to a vicious circle, attributing an overly "rationalistic" character into the relationship between the social mobilisation processes and the decisions and solutions adopted by the political system.

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