

# **ITALIAN POLITICS & SOCIETY**

***THE REVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE  
GROUP ON ITALIAN POLITICS AND  
SOCIETY***

**No.63 Fall/Winter 2006**



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Italian Politics and Society is published twice yearly, in the spring and fall. Proposed contributions should be sent to Jonathan Hopkin at the above address.

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## BOOK ESSAYS AND REVIEWS

**Allegretti** on **Bobbio's** *A piu' voci. Amministrazioni pubbliche, imprese, associazioni e cittadini nei processi decisionali inclusive*, **Piazza** on **Caciagli and Di Virgilio's** *Eleggere il sindaco. La nuova democrazia locale in Italia e in Europa*, **Barisione** on **Calise's** *La Terza Repubblica. Partiti contro Presidenti*, **Chiarini** on **Capano and Gualmini's** *La pubblica amministrazione in Italia*, **Attinà** on **Cotta, Isernia and Verzichelli's** *L'Europa in Italia. Elite, opinione pubblica e decisioni*, **Drake** on **Gardner's** *Mission Italy: On the Front Lines of the Cold War*, **Cento Bull** on **Iaccarino's** *La rigenerazione. Bagnoli: politiche pubbliche e societa' civile nella Napoli postindustriale*, **Tronconi** on **Mastropaolo's** *La mucca pazza della democrazia. Nuove destre, populismo, antipolitica*.

**Luigi Bobbio**, *A piu' voci. Amministrazioni pubbliche, imprese, associazioni e cittadini nei processi decisionali inclusivi*  
Napoli: Edizioni ESI, 2004, pp.152,  
ISBN: 88-495-0925-1.

Rarely was a title so well-chosen. In fact, this book edited by Luigi Bobbio (professor at the University of Turin), shifted from the idea of a handbook to a sort of plural symphony. It targeted a specific group of readers, being funded and strongly supported by the Department of the Public Function and by the Ministry Council Presidency (curiously at the time of Berlusconi government), and dedicated to public administrators developing inclusive decision making processes. But, also due to his democratic distribution (it is downloadable from many websites of institutions adhering to the “*Programma Cantieri*”) it was immediately redirected to, and appreciated by, a wide variety of different social actors. No doubt that the language helps, being simple and understandable by different competence-holders. The handbook-structure and the clear editing multiply the attractive effect.

The book reflects a point of view on ‘social dialogue’ that is likely to be shared by its supporting institutions and by the main targeted readers: the idea of stakeholders’ participation to decision-making as ‘tool’ of a ‘governance’ approach to the urban and territorial management. But, beyond and between the lines, there is space for other and different points a view. That possibility emerges because the volume structure is also plural, studded with dozens of ‘voices’ reported in more than 50 special boxes through interviews and short case-study tales. This framework allows alternative visions of social dialogue to emphasize the political dimension of an ‘epochal change’ that sees shared government as ‘ordinary practice’ (rather than exceptional). There is even space for more “eccentric” perspectives, presenting popular participation in policy planning as an educating tool for all involved actors.

The book opening celebrates the paradigm of complexity. It argues that increasing resource scarcity requires a shift in thinking about local policies, and observes that techniques introduced in recent years (like management control by objectives, strategic assessment, customer satisfaction, benchmarking and so on) have

been targeted to improve the service delivery, to control and modify the 'output' of local institutions' performance.

Yet, local authorities do not develop public policies only to deliver services, but also to set rules, redistribute resources, stimulate social actors to change behaviours and adopt different perspectives. This complexity reflects the fact that 'public policies' are set not only by public institutions, but increasingly by private or third sector's actors dealing with public interests in "unconventional forms".

In this setting – where the system of progressively outsourcing public services is not even put into discussion, but accepted as a quite natural event - the accent of inquiry needs to shift to the organisation of decision-making processes, with a focus on novel approaches to outputs and methods. Following the metaphor that Bobbio uses: to create a "negotiation or participation table", *a table* is not always needed. And sometimes, also *the chairs* could be counter-productive in trying to stimulate new relationships between social actors...

As a result, Bobbio's book includes the 'soul' of a handbook, but it is mainly a tool aiming to help readers to pose themselves the "right questions". When is it worthwhile to begin inclusive processes? How can the appropriate participants be identified? How can a positive interaction among participants be reached and which is the most appropriate way to solve conflicts? Which are the professional skills required? What steps need to be taken to transform informal choices into administrative decisions? How can social conflicts promote further understanding? Which results should one expect, and how should these results be assessed?

The handbook answers these questions proposing approaches, techniques and methods that are currently being applied in Italy. It also contains some useful examples and case studies based on the experience of local authorities.

In sum, this work by Luigi Bobbio is a handbook, because it offers some answers, instruments, examples, and

possible solutions. It is also more than a handbook, because the wide variety of nuanced answers is used to reflect on the need of contextualisation. It has been honestly conceived, explicitly presenting the perspectives of the author and supporting institutions, but also leaving an open space for readers to elaborate in the perspective of what David Osborne and Ted Gaebler have named "catalytic government". Hence, it presents a tool that could be improved and revisited in future versions with even more 'plural' work. Behind this work lies the implicit but clear idea that local institutions share a duty to continuously "experiment" because on them and their constructive interaction with society also depends the destiny of larger institutions, like states and supranational organisations.

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**Mario Caciagli e Aldo Di Virgilio** (a cura di), *Eleggere il sindaco. La nuova democrazia locale in Italia e in Europa* Novara: UTET, 2005, pp. 210, ISBN: 88-7750-971-6.

The reform of local government institutions in Italy, characterized by the introduction of direct mayoral election in 1993, undoubtedly represented one of the newest elements in the political-institutional system. The new *demoelected* Italian mayors, nevertheless, are not an isolated case in the European panorama, because also other countries of the Old Continent introduced this change in the '90s, and others experimented or proposed it.

The book edited by Mario Caciagli & Aldo Di Virgilio is composed of a collection of essays about eight European countries: it contributes to local power studies by providing "a cognitive contribution to the «mechanisms of selection and choice of the political personnel», in particular to the way of election of the first citizen" (p. 191), and