

Nelson Dias ^(ORG.)

HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY

30 Years of Participatory Budgeting Worldwide

Articles

HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY

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Participatory Budgeting in Italy. Towards a Renaissance?

Stefano Stortone & Giovanni Allegretti

Introduction

In the last five years, many changes have taken place in Italy from both a civic and political standpoint. Since 2013, when the 5 Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, or M5S) prevailed in the national electoral arena, becoming the first party (with 25,5% of the vote¹), Italy witnessed a strong reconfiguration of the political panorama. Such a shift was confirmed by recent elections (held on March 4, 2018), where M5S strengthened its role as first party (with 32,7% of the vote²). Electoral results – which at the national level determined the impossibility of naming a majority government – had different geometries at local and regional levels. This confirmed an ongoing cataclysm, the outcome of which is still unpredictable, but which could have a powerful impact upon the future of participation and participatory budgeting (PB).

Indeed, PB has already shown a resurgence. The renewed interest in democratic innovations based on the expansions of civic engagement beyond traditional forms of mere consultation, and the number of PB initiatives in Italy, have indeed increased in the last five years. PB is also expanding and with an improved quality in other environments such as schools. Undoubtedly, the changes in the political panorama could have triggered such a revival, taking into account that the strong discursive centrality of direct democracy in

1 The rate refers to the Low Chamber of Parliament. 47 political parties run for election but 37 of them garnered less than 1% of total votes.

2 In the Low Chamber of Parliament, 28 political parties run for election; only 9 of them garnered more than 1% of total votes. Here M5S was far ahead of the left-wing Democratic Party (18,7%) and the right-wing Lega (17,4%).

the M5S platform also stimulated other political forces – at both the national and local levels – to put more emphasis on issues related to participation and in fostering new experiments related to the promotion of democratic innovations (Gianolla, 2018). One example of this is the reinforcement and extension of the Law of Participation of Tuscany Region by the Democratic Party in the aftermath of the results of national elections in February 2013.³

However, the transformation of the international context also played a relevant role in the change of the Italian PB panorama. Paris and Madrid recently joined other Western global cities already investing in PB (such as Lisbon, Reykjavik and New York). This represents a strong encouragement to the implementation of important initiatives on a larger scale in Italy, as in the case of Milan (2015 and 2017) and Bologna (2017). A third factor which played an important – though less relevant – role in multiplying the number of Italian PBs – in metropolitan cities as well as smaller municipalities – is the spread of new technologies for supporting participatory processes. In particular, open and free projects like EMPATIA (a project at EU level, but based in Portugal) or CONSUL (based in Spain) made it easier for municipalities to involve a greater number of citizens while keeping costs low. This spurred a reimagining of the organizational methodologies of PB experiments according to hybrid models – mixing online and offline channels of civic engagement.⁴

In light of the growing number of local administrations implementing PB processes, as well as their territorial relevance, are we really witnessing a renaissance of PBs in Italy? This chapter's underlying question is whether the experiments that took place and were developed in the last five years represent a new wave of PBs and, if so, what shape and features characterize them, and which direction do they seem to be taking.

The first section of this chapter briefly recalls PB's history in Italy (already broadly addressed in the previous editions of this book). In the

3 The Regional Law 69/2007 was officially expiring on December 31, 2012 – as for the effect of a “sunset clause” which was conceived it as an experiment to be evaluated and eventually continued or amended. After a difficult period in which the Regional Government seemed uninterested in prolonging its life, the national election in March (with the strong growth of M5S) gave new life to the debate around the law. This resulted in the approval of Regional Law 46/2013 that summer, which strengthened some obligations of the Regional Government in relation to participation, as is evident in the mandatory Public Debate procedures concerning regional infrastructures.

4 See: empatia-project.eu and consulproject.org.

second section, we will go through the major changes which occurred since 2013 by means of some data, case studies and by exposing some specific innovations characterising the new scenario, from the role of technology, to methodological evolutions, and the internationalisation of the debate on PBs.

Origin and first transformations of Participatory Budgeting in Italy

The birth of PBs in Italy dates back to 1994, in the Adriatic town of Grottammare (pop. 15,000), where a long and exceptional experience of participatory governance occurred, involving citizens in many different aspects of territorial planning and even in the construction of public-private partnerships (Sintomer & Allegretti, 2009). However, PB as a diffuse practice, only started gaining momentum from 2002, when a large group of progressive councillors, activists and academics, related to far-left parties, NGOs and social alter-globalist movements, joined the second Porto Alegre's World Social Forum (WSF) and brought participation back to the core of the national political agenda. During the WSF, they launched the Charter for a New Municipium and founded an organization of the same name, the Network of the New Municipium (*Rete del Nuovo Municipio*, or RNM).⁵ Referring to the core principles of the Aalborg Charter in fostering processes of Agendas 21 and – more widely – other “new forms of direct democracy,” the RNM network played a crucial role in triggering the promotion of alter-globalist political measures. From this perspective, PB practices were chosen as a sort of metaphoric example of a possible political shift. At the same time, RNM played an influential role in the drafting of the first regional law about participation in Tuscany, as well as on several local financing measures enacted by the Lazio region and the Milan province (Allegretti, 2011; Florida, 2013).

In Italy from 2002 to 2009 initiatives and experimentations concerning civic participation flourished, thanks, in part, to a series of new tools and plans for fostering “integrated development,” which were stimulated by both national government and European Union funding schemes. PB proved to fit in well with this context, starting with a few trailblazing experiences, and then gaining momentum, substance and (mostly) new forms.

⁵ See: nuovomunicipio.net

The first generation of PBs grew between 2002 and 2005 and included approximately sixteen experiences in small and medium-size administrative entities such as Pieve Emanuele and several districts of Venice and Rome (Sintomer, Herzberg & Röcke, 2008). This wave of experiences was strongly ideologically-driven, centring its discourse on the ambition of repeating and adapting Porto Alegre's experience and declaring that "democratizing democracy" was its first goal. A second generation of PB experiences boomed soon after, numbering close to 2005 by 2010. Much more realistic in nature, and less ambitious in its goals, this generation of PBs (which included experiences promoted by a wide range of parties, even some conservative political forces) was stimulated by a growing international interest in the practice and by the means of a juridical and financial support provided by cooperation and development programs shaped at different institutional levels.

A first family of incentives to the development of this new wave of PBs was offered by transnational programs around 2004 to 2005. The programs aimed at fostering mutual learning and institutional exchanges. For example, the European Union URB-AL funding scheme co-funded European and Latin-American cities to develop joint evaluation projects and experimental forms of learning-by-doing. Specifically, the so-called "Network n. 9" focussed its activity on "local finance and participatory budgeting," and included more than 30 Italian local administrations, plus several organisations from civil society and the academic milieu, many of them already related by a common militancy as members of the RNM.

A second family of incentives came from two *ad-hoc* designed juridical tools, in Lazio and Tuscany regions. In Lazio in 2005 a wide policy to promote participation was started up and in the years following (2006 to 2009) a biannual call to fund local participation processes in local authorities was launched (Allegretti, 2011). During that time more than 150 municipalities tested PB, with the possibility of benefiting from a fund of 900,000 euros for support in process-organizing and facilitation, and 10 million euros per year dedicated to co-fund the first priority that emerged from each process. Possibly the most interesting aspect of that experiment is that in 2006, the regional Minister for Finances and Participation also undertook a first attempt of scaling up PB at the regional level, reserving the modest sum of 5 million euros per year to be allocated by citizens through a hybrid structure of minipublic (random selected citizens from different regional areas) in charge of choosing priorities to be included in a specific regional policy (education, environment, new energies, etc.) on the basis of a yearly rotation of topics. The Lazio region also supported the multiplication of

online tools: for example, an experiment was done with some voting-polls stations provided to local authorities, so that – using their health card – citizens could vote for local and regional priorities at the same time.

In the same year (2005) the Tuscany region also took a step towards strengthening the legal right of citizens to be engaged in participation, by starting a wide debate to collectively structure the contents of its first Law on Participation, an organic framework which was approved in 2007. The act established the creation of an independent regional authority for participation (*Autorità per la Garanzia e la Promozione della Partecipazione*, APP) aimed at selecting, supporting and monitoring local participation processes around the regional territory. The law also regulated the so-called *débat public*, a participatory device based on a French national law modified in 2002, which was conceived to involve citizens in the planning and implementation of major public works. The law soon became a case study at the international level and it prompted other regions to follow suit; for example a similar act was approved in the Emilia Romagna region in 2010.

Thanks to the Tuscan law, in the period from 2008 to 2012, out of 40 applications, a total of 24 PB processes were approved for co-funding. A strong methodological imprinting promoted by the Authority (a monocratic agency until the 2013 reform) resulted in most of these PBs sharing a very similar, deliberative approach, using a random selection of citizens to shape decisional panels, and methodologies similar to World Café for discussing proposals (Picchi, 2012). Interestingly this induced wave of experiments by different types of institutional entities (schools, inter-municipal associations, mountain communities, marshes reclamation consortia, etc.) which started experimenting with PB, showing its possibilities on different scales of territorial governance and planning. On the other hand many of them were very fragile from a political support standpoint and ended up being “intermittent” and highly dependent on the existence of regional co-funding to exist (Festa et al., 2013).⁶

Before 2013, the majority of PB experiments were concentrated in Lazio, Tuscany and in areas mainly governed by left-wing coalitions (such as Emil-

⁶ That is why, after 2013, the newly-appointed board of directors of the Tuscany Regional Authority decided to co-fund only a small number of PB experiences that had already been started and could show an autonomous commitment to exist independently from external resources that had to be used mainly for providing a qualitative upgrading of the methodologies and (as in the recent case of the Campi Bisenzio city) a creation of a networking system of coordination with other different processes of social dialogue active in the same administrative area.

ia-Romagna region and Milan's province). In that period, the far-left party – Rifondazione Comunista – represented the PB's main sponsor among local administrations and embodied the alter-globalist approach to PB. Moreover, a small but well-organized fabric of cooperatives and agencies of facilitation and conflict mediators started to consolidate in several areas of the country, also fuelled by the creation of specific master degrees and by the funding of many participatory process. During the period 2005 to 2010 the number of provincial capitals implementing PB – such as Modena, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Arezzo and Bergamo – grew significantly (Sintomer & Allegretti, 2009), and the networking efforts proved to have a visible effect on the spreading, cross-pollination and diversification of methodologies.

The dark side of the moon of this dramatic increase in the number of Italian PBs was – undoubtedly – the fact that several low-quality processes self-classified themselves under the label of PB, and the political commitment to evolve and to be repeated on a yearly basis proved very fragile, especially in Lazio and Tuscany where their number was artificially “inflated” by the accessibility of targeted public funding. This second PB generation also marked a shift from a left-wing political and ideological approach – oriented to look to Porto Alegre's model and spirit as its main reference – to an approach more technically-grounded and more ideologically neutral. Such an approach, somehow anticipated the birth of a third generation

of PB experiences, usually methodologically supported by academic institutions or professionals, and even more oriented to give greater weight to deliberative quality, imagining PB rather as a “tool of governance” in a period of political and social uncertainty than as the metaphor of a “another world possible.”

The above-mentioned shift almost overlapped with a more international trend where – in the academic world – the interest in deliberative democracy practices emerged, sometimes opposing more participatory approaches to democracy. In Italy, the main studies on deliberative democracy and mini-publics have been carried out at the University of Turin by Luigi Bobbio (2013) and at the University of Bologna by Rodolfo Lewanski (2016). Their work contributed greatly to the shaping of specific model of PB which was intended to create a higher quality of deliberation. This model uses drawn samples of citizens asked to debate on projects and alternative solutions within meetings facilitated by experts, integrating and alternating these phases with others built on the “open-door” principle, where all citizens of a specific territory are entitled to participate, make proposals and cast votes. A benchmark of this model has been Capannori municipality in Tuscany (pop. 46,000) which, in 2012, structured a PB that gained media attention paving the way to similar experiments in other regions.

The above-mentioned turmoil pushed Italy – for some years – into the centre of the international context as one of the most relevant laboratories for PB world-

wide. However, rather than being a launch pad for a new generation of PB, a period of waning interest in PB ensued, mainly due to the lack of capacity to creatively re-elaborate the links between the participatory practices and the fading political panorama which had generated them. Hence, a generalized conservative turn in local and regional elections – including Lazio region and Milan province – and some structural changes in the local finances framework (as the cancellation of the municipal tax on properties, or ICI, in 2008) generated a rapid decline in the number and pervasiveness of the PB experiences, similar to what happened in Spain after the fall of the Zapatero socialist government. Consequently, in 2011 the number of PB decreased dramatically to only ten or so – many of which were still concentrated in Tuscany.

Within this scenario of decline, a new PB model emerged in the Municipality of Canegrate (pop. 12,500). In this city, located in the Lombardy region, the PB took shape from the ashes of Pieve Emanuele's experience, aiming at giving new life to a Porto Alegre-like approach, but including methodological and technological innovations proposed by the Study Centre for Participatory Democracy (Centro Studi per la Democrazia Partecipativa, or CSDP). A rather simple, viral mechanism of idea competition was designed: the most agreed-upon proposals could progress to an evaluation phase and subsequently be subjected to public voting. The goal was two-fold: pushing citizens (and especially the authors of each proposal) to create new bonds with their fellow citizens, and to bind the proposals of the most active citizens to the consensus collected in their own communities, thus measuring their representativeness. Within this framework, meetings were replaced by individual paper questionnaires and online forms, that anybody could fill out. The results achieved throughout the 2-year experiment (in 2011 participants represented 9.9% of the population, an increase from 4,8% in 2010), and an effective dissemination activity brought Canegrate's PB to broader attention (Amura & Stortone, 2010), so that the model was adopted by other local authorities.⁷

This progress also led the CSDP to develop a software platform, called "BiPart," which could simultaneously manage several participatory processes in all their phases, and therefore support the idea-gather-

7 The municipalities of Cernusco Lombardone (Lombardy region) and Cascina (Tuscany), as well as by the province of Pesaro-Urbino (Marche).

ing phase in a more advanced and easier way than the ballot papers used in Canegrate. Through the software platform, the preliminary phase of proposals collection and filtering changed radically; now a viral mechanism supported by web tools, whose authentication procedures strengthen its security,⁸ although to the detriment of “face-to-face” relations among participants. Other PBs around Italy adopted the platform,⁹ thus favouring a shift towards hybrid models of PB mixing offline and on-line features.

These experiences of hybrid PB were preceded by other experiments and by another prototype of web-based platform for PB in 2008.¹⁰ This platform – called “Quimby” – was also conceived for gathering recommendations and proposals from citizens and ranking them according to their level of support. It was tested for the first time within the PB of the 11th District of Rome. Indeed, Quimby represented a trailblazing project for that time, and possibly because of this, the experiment did not really take root and spread. The decline of PB nationwide did not help to further interest in the platform.

The recent technological and methodological evolution of Italian PBs owes much to the Canegrate model, which appears alongside – but diametrically opposed to – the Capannori one. In fact, while the former was based on a wide citizenry engagement from the very first phase of proposal design and filtering (also by means of emerging web-based technologies), the latter – by sampling citizens to be engaged – focused mainly on the qualitative and face-to-face dimension of deliberation, thus reducing extensive participation in the proposal design phase. Moreover, differently from Canegrate, Capannori tried to reduce the role of the civil society organizations in favour of the direct involvement of “common citizens.” Despite their differences, both models shared a co-decisional nature – refusing the consultative approach to participation which is majoritarian in other countries (such as Germany), and giving citizens the right to cast a final vote on priorities to be funded, usually through the use of electronic polls.

8 The software included an advanced process for registration of citizens, able to validate each account by verifying the user’s fiscal code and sending a confirmation SMS to the user’s mobile number (Stortone & De Cindio, 2014).

9 In a few years (from 2012 to 2015), BiPart managed to grow and provide support to seven PBs, including the cities of Turin, Monza and Faenza, and the Pesaro–Urbino Province, where the software platform was necessary for managing the whole process. See bipart.org

10 Created after a national call for projects launched by the Ministry of Research and Technology, that helped to develop the first national e-democracy platform.

The recent shift and its drivers.

Since 2013, a gradual renaissance of PB has been taking place in a new political panorama with different protagonists, and thanks to a diversified involvement of web-based tools and social media in the political and civic activism spheres.

New political geographies as a catalyst?

Undoubtedly, the slight change of the PB geography can be partially connected to the consolidation and expansion of the electoral base of the M5S. Since 2013, this party has been stabilizing its position within national and local political arenas, winning in 45 municipalities, including some important cities such as Rome and Turin (2016). PB represents a strong discursive reference – together with quorum-free referenda – for many councillors and activists of M5S, and its presence in local government initiatives (proposals, institutional interrogations, etc.) as well as in the debate on social media has been growing visibly in the last five years, although the “mutual emulation” among concrete practices forged by M5S has been occurring at a much slower pace.

Even if the process is hard to track due to the lack of specific studies,¹¹ this convergence of different advocacy positions for fostering a new wave of PB experiments represents a new feature in Italian politics, in relation to the past decade. In several cities, elected members of M5S have been active in advocating and then, concretely supporting PB from the opposition to ruling majorities, helping to reinforce the (often marginal) components of left-wing coalitions which proved more committed to the struggle for the start up and consolidation of PB experiments at the local level. To convey the impact of the M5S, the PB experiments in Turin, Monza, Milan and Bologna were, in part, a result of their interest in institutionalizing the kick-off of PB initiatives.

The centrality of PB in the M5S discourse was perhaps most felt in Sicily in terms of scale and impact. In fact, in 2014, the M5S introduced an amendment to the regional framework on local finances, stating that every year a minimum 2% of regional funds devoted to municipalities be allocated by consulting with citizens through forms of participatory democracy. The preliminary results of this law – which poten-

¹¹ For example, there is no mention of this in recently published books on PB, as in Benedikter (2018) and Bassoli (2018).

tially affects 390 municipalities with an amount of approximately 7 million euros per year – are controversial. Indeed, more than 75% of the municipalities documented had already implemented participatory processes, and the term “participatory budgeting” is now part of the Sicilian and, more broadly, of Southern Italy’s political debate. However, unlike the experiences in Tuscany, Lazio and Emilia Romagna, Sicilian law does not provide any funding to train local governments for implementing their processes, looking at it more as a burden rather than an opportunity for local authorities. Without a capillary control of the processes’ quality and an aid for training and facilitation, many initiatives rely on simplified and merely advisory tools – hardly consistent with a real PB process (simple proposal submissions via email, una tantum public assemblies, etc.). Moreover, in a situation similar to what happens in Poland with the Solecki Funds, very few municipalities allocate any resources beyond the mandatory 2%, which sometimes corresponds to only a few thousand euros. Despite good intentions, PB risks being depotentiated and seen as very diluted or “decaffeinated” versions¹² of the original concept that had appeared in Italy in the aftermath of World Social Fora in 2002.

A similar initiative that was approved in Sicily has been adopted by the M5S at the national level in 2017. In fact, a national bill was proposed aimed at allocating 2%

of municipal and regional budgets to projects which emerged and were designed through participatory processes, and at defining a substantial budget towards developing a software platform. The proposal was not enacted into law, and maybe this was not necessarily bad news, considering the need to properly evaluate the scale of the Sicilian contribution in expanding PB; that is, which conception of it has been spread around and how is it to be protected by nepotistic and clientelistic traditional political practices.

While the role of the M5S in spreading PB narratives and visibility is unquestionable, its contribution in experimenting and disseminating PB practices through the example of the local governments directly administrated by the movement has been much less impactful. In fact, the numbers of real processes of participatory budgeting directly implemented by M5S are quite low, considering the centrality that PB has had in the discourse of that political force. As a matter of fact, in several cities it leads, M5S never engaged in PB formally, and relies on different geometries and formulas of participatory decision-making.

In some cases, PB was just a standard call for projects which are then examined by a technical commission (as in Pomezia, pop. 62,000), while in other cases (as in Mira, pop. 38,000) a vision of PB as a “self-organized process with no costs for the public sector” led to a rather sim-

12 See Fung (2015) in pbnetwork.org.uk/decaffeinated-participation-where-has-the-social-justice-in-participatory-budgeting-gone/

plified Capannori-like process. A more solid and mature approach is displayed in Venaria Reale (pop. 34,000), where a working group has been set up to screen PB cases nationwide and choose the best-performing model before seeking experts' advice to implement the process and learn from them. In some M5S strongholds like Livorno there is no trace of the practice, while Turin's administration has only maintained the experiment started by the previous left-wing administration, and presently has no plans for future expansion.

For 2018, the Municipality of Rome is shaping an experimental hypothesis of PB in order to implement a point of the new reformed Metropolitan Statutes, approved on January 30, 2018¹³ and where participatory budgeting is quoted as a central tool of direct democracy together with prepositive, consultative and abrogative referenda and online petitions. The administration now has three years to implement the reforms to which it self-committed: a deadline that coincides with the new municipal elections.

Today, Turin constitutes the largest and most interesting case of the slow action of the M5S movement in promoting PB. In November 2011 (and then again in April 2012), two M5S councillors¹⁴ presented an official motion to test PB on a borough-scale, and their collaboration with the Budget alderman (of the former left-wing governing coalition), the University of Turin and the consultancy firm CSDP made it possible to test a new model of PB. The latter was termed a "deliberative budget" because it was aimed at focussing on the quality of drawing alternative projects through gender-balanced planning committees, whose members were randomly-selected within a larger group of self-mobilized citizens of the district (Ravazzi & Pomatto, 2018). The experiment was developed over time, and was twice repeated between 2014 and 2016 in three different boroughs. Paradoxically, despite good results in terms of number of participants and quality of alternative proposals that emerged, the continuity of such experiments was put at risk by the delays in delivering the promised resources for implementing the PB choices when the new political majority (M5S) was elected in 2016, with all boroughs governed by members of the left-wing coalition. In 2018, the problem has been

13 The Statutes were approved with 27 favourable votes (and only 6 negative) – see: www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/01/30/roma-capitale-approvato-il-nuovo-statuto-targato-m5s-ridotte-le-quote-rosa-si-al-referendum-propositivo/4126783/

14 Chiara Appendino (recently elected mayor of the city) and Vittorio Bertola.

addressed, but the restart of a new PB process expanded to other boroughs proceeds slowly, and does not appear coordinated, for example, with a new process of PB for Youth that is being promoted by Turin as part of a European project called *Com'On Europe*.¹⁵

Digitalization for internationalization: a new role for Italian PBs?

The most recent Italian generation of PBs came to light around 2014, while the international panorama was starting to experience PB in large cities, with the decisive support of new web-based platforms which spread in small/medium cities as well.¹⁶ At the time, in Italy PBs were similarly lacking support: they were still developed mostly offline and in small/medium cities. In 2014, BiPart was the only active platform, hosting three new PBs (Turin's district 7, Monza and Faenza), while most of the other PB initiatives still set up informative websites and basic online forms – or email addresses – to upload proposals; some still voted only on paper ballots. Today, most of the Italian PBs continue to feature very light technological solutions: for instance, Rescaldina municipality (pop. 14,300) developed its own website with Google suite, while Venaria Reale (pop. 34,000) managed e-voting through the open source software Limesurvey. Campi Bisenzio (pop. 47,000) is one of the exceptions among medium cities since it created its own proprietary platform for connecting PB and other participatory processes. Few cities use digital platforms, which are mostly managed by few consultancy agencies.

The synergy between the CSDP, the Department of Informatics of the University of Milan and the Milan Civic Network Foundation (*Fondazione Rete Civica Milano*, or FRCM) for redesigning the BiPart platform¹⁷ was productive in anchoring the new Italian PBs to international counterparts such as EMPATIA¹⁸, a European project studying and developing civic technologies to support participation – specifically PB – and favouring a dialogue with (and a modular connection to)

15 See: comune.torino.it/torinogiovani/vivere-a-torino/progetto-com-on-europe

16 “Your Priorities” in Reykjavik, “CONSUL” in Madrid, “DECIDIM” in Barcelona, “Lutece” in Paris, “WireMaze” and “Libertrium” in many cities of Portugal, just to name the most important ones.

17 The CSDP platform “BiPart” was investigated by the University of Milan, then redesigned and redeveloped in collaboration with the Fondazione Rete Civica Milano (see: opendcn.org). The platform was then used in the second edition of the Milan PB. BiPart later became the name of an innovative start-up as a CSDP spin-off and of another software platform.

18 See: empatia-project.eu

pre-existing or parallel projects interested in relating civic technologies and participatory devices. It is thanks to a link with EMPATIA that, in 2017, the city of Milan started the second edition of its PB in close relationship with three other pilot cities in other countries.¹⁹ Instead, Bologna – which in the same period started its first PB within a larger framework of social dialogue established by the Plan for Civic Imagination²⁰ – chose a more local strategy, valuing the long experience of its civic network Rete Iperbole but counting on its well-connected international experiences and the possibilities they offer for permanent mutual-learning exchanges with other cities.

Interestingly, in both Milan and Bologna, when they decided to rely more solidly on the use of technologies for guaranteeing the involvement of a large metropolitan audience, they also decided to strengthen the relations between PB and the local boroughs, the physical places and administrative institutions where a daily dialogue on the quality of life happens and which had been substantially weakened by the national legal framework in the last few years (Allegretti, 2011). In Bologna, 1 million euros out of the 41 million put under discussion in the first PB through the Neighbourhood Laboratories, were from funding sources related to decentraliza-

tion (so, spread around the territories of the six boroughs), while the remainder was sourced from a metropolitan fund (PON)²¹ and concentrated in eleven spaces (often under-used buildings on the outskirts of the city) that needed to be re-purposed for better use. This strategy – managed by the Bologna Urban Centre, then transformed into a Foundation for Urban Innovation²² – aimed at hybridizing PB through balancing online spaces and events for collaborative face-to-face planning, but also at creating a body of resources of different origin which could be used together with other tools of social dialogue more centred around the daily shared management of city facilities, policies and equipment (as the Ruling Document for the Common Care and Regeneration of Commons²³).

In Milan, the radical transition from the first to the second edition of its BP was also focussed on the new role given to the boroughs, which had been partially boycotting the process in 2015. In 2017, the PB fund was reduced from 9 to 4.5 million euros (opting for reusing part of the difference for decentralization), but this time the nine boroughs were formally involved in the implementation of the process, also establishing a “bonus” to reward proposals that could better fit in with their local plans of action. Moreover, while the first Milan PB was based mainly

19 The cities were Lisbon (PT), Wuppertal (DE) and Říčany (CZ).

20 See: comune.bologna.it/pianoinnovazioneurbana/

21 See: comunita.comune.bologna.it/bilancio-partecipativo

22 See: urbancenterbologna.it

23 See: urbancenterbologna.it/images/collaborarebologna/Strumentidicollaborazione_ESE.pdf

on face-to-face meetings and made use of a simple Wordpress website and an e-voting proprietary platform, the second edition featured a relevant technological device for supporting each PB phase.

An interesting aspect is that the new open and free platform was built starting from the end of the process, thus structuring the tools for monitoring the implementation of the first edition of PB. In fact, the implementation of the winning projects of 2015 had been overlooked and put aside during the electoral process of 2016 and the first year of the new administration, thus jeopardizing a consistent part of the social capital and the political trust which PB had aimed to shape in the previous edition. Having a complex platform accompanying the whole new PB cycle proved very useful to the Milan alderman in charge of Participation and Open Data; allowing a “just-in-time” readdressing of some distortions in the demo-diversity of participants. In fact, when the ongoing monitoring of registrations and first proposals revealed a high average of educational skills and a social polarization of participants, the local administration could immediately readdress its communication campaign and open face-to-face spaces in the boroughs to rebalance the different typologies of participants and their age groups, with ad-hoc measures that proved very effective and contributed to increasing the quality of participation.

Which reconfiguration for the PB panorama?

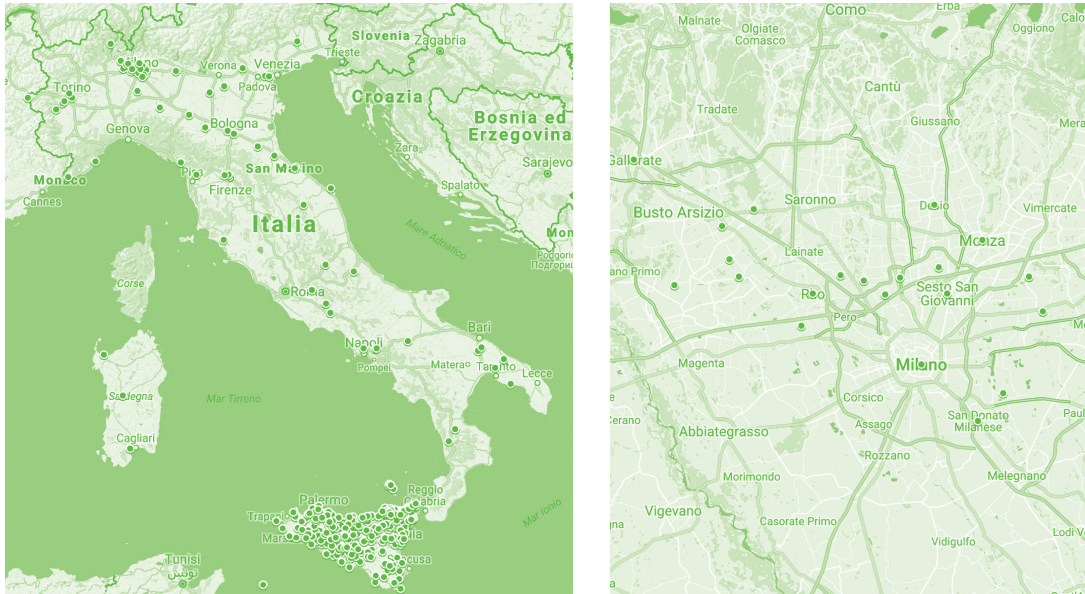
Unfortunately, to date, there has been no in-depth research addressing the transformation of PB in Italy, thus there is no way to assess the overall quality of these many and diversified processes, or their coming out from an “experimental” approach to a consolidated capacity of acting as a central tool for the local government action on the improvement of the quality of life and the planning of urban and metropolitan milieus.

The most consistent studies with a large scope date back to a decade ago (Sintomer & Allegretti, 2009). There is also some recent mapping limited to some areas in Central Italy (Picchi, 2012) or Northern Italy (Stortone & De Cindio, 2015), the latter being mostly focused on the assessment of the relation between online and offline participation. However, the infographic we present below clearly shows the sharp increase in the number of municipalities implementing PBs in relation to the panorama of 2013 which was offered by Allegretti &

Stortone, 2013.²⁴ Geographically, the majority of PB experiences are located in Sicily because of the above-mentioned normative act, but we have no data to demonstrate how many of them really represent effective PB processes according to the most accepted international definitions (Sintomer et al., 2012).

Apart from these initiatives, Lombardy appears to have the highest concentration of PBs (24), surpassing Lazio, Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna which up until 2013 were the most active regions due to the provision of regional funding to foster and consolidate PBs. What is clear is that, in general, PBs appear to be more evenly distributed around the country today than in the past.

Figure 1 A mapping of PB experiences in Italy from 2014 to 2018 (with detailed zooming in on Milan area)



Concerning the Lombardy region, most of the PB initiatives seems to belong to the Milan metropolitan area (18 out of 24). Also, in the past, the contribution of the Milanese territory has always been evident and appears to be long-standing and path-dependent. The high degree of PB-related activities in the city of Milan, as described so far, has positively affected this scenario. Indeed, one of the first

²⁴ The infographic is the result of three different research activities started in 2016 (Pittella 2016; Giulietti 2017) and then improved for this chapter.

Italian PB was born in 2002 in Pieve Emanuele – in the far outskirts of Milan. Moreover, the highest number of consultancies, cooperatives and facilitation agencies working on implementing PB are hosted in Milan.²⁵ The University of Milan has also been active in training and their IT department established a specific research group on hybrid PBs in 2012, being then partner of the EMPATIA project.

Several of the above-mentioned consultancy agencies have played and continue to play an important role in the spreading of PB in general – especially in the area surrounding Milan – but also in the consolidation of specific organizational models. In fact, despite the high number of experiences and actors involved, in the last five years a polarization between two paradigms grew stronger, due to the networking effect and the “professionalization” of PB experiences. Thus, on one side, there is a model centred on a “deliberative approach” (initially exemplified by the Capannori example, and today by the Turin example). On the other side, a “participatory” model exists, which tends to navigate in hybrid waters mixing offline moments and increasingly central online tools. The latter is exemplified, historically, by the city of Cane-grate, and today by the city of Milan.

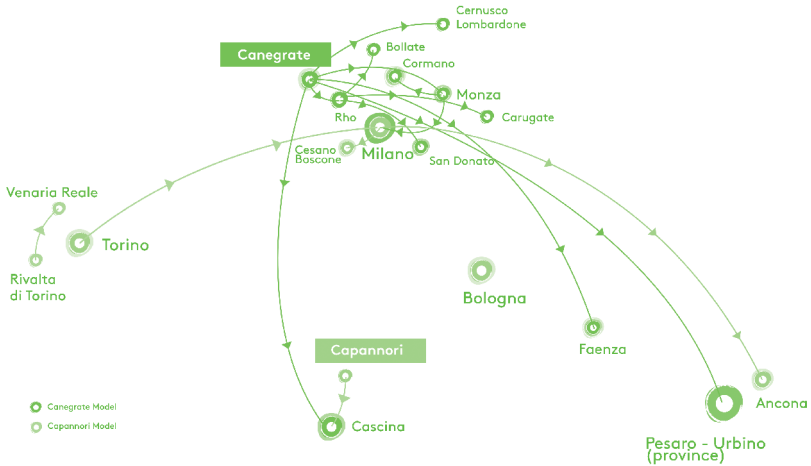
Following Stortone & De Cindio (2015), we could say that – in their differences – the two poles of the Italian development try to represent the ideal proceduralism and the systemic approach to democracy respectively (Mansbridge et al., 2012). If the spread in the use of “minipublic” formats within PB began in 2012 in Tuscany, it then migrated northward, being implemented in Turin’s district 7 (2014) and in Milan (first edition PB, 2015), followed by Rivalta di Torino (from 2013 to 2017), , Ancona and Cesano Boscone (2016), Venaria Reale (2017 and 2018).²⁶ The second reference – coming from CSDP experiences and repeated in later cases by the spin-off

25 Among the main consultancy firms located in Milan, it is important to note: ABCittà, BiPart, Centro Studi per la Democrazia Partecipativa, Fondazione Rete Civica di Milano, Istituto di Ricerca Sociale, Refe. Mesa Verde was a cooperative (now closed) which supported many of the first generation PBs. In Pavia the Fondazione Romagnosi is active. Organizations based in other regions are: Avventura Urbana, Centro Studi Sereno Regis (Torino), Retesviluppo and Sociolab (Firenze), Antartica (Bologna).

26 All these cases were designed according to the same methodology used at the University of Turin and the research group related to Prof. Luigi Bobbio, one of the major Italian contributors to the deliberative approach to democracy.

BiPart – was also adopted by other consultancy firms in municipalities like Rho (from 2013), San Donato Milanese (2016), Bollate, Sesto San Giovanni (2017), Carugate (2018) and, finally, in the city of Milan (second edition of PB, 2015). See Figure 2.

Fig. 2 – The diffusion of the two main PB models in the last ten years in Italy



In reality, today there is a diffuse trend to a further hybridization that increases with the mix of different funding sources, such as the case of Bologna and the new Youth PB in Turin. Bologna – where the PB final vote represents the first online consultation in the city’s history – has shown that is possible to shape a particular model of PB while transforming a long tradition of practices of social negotiation, and creating PB dialogue with other forms of participatory planning which combined, represent an innovative strategy for valuing the contribution of “social imagination” to the city’s strategic planning and its daily management. Similar to what Madrid does with its Media-Lab Prado, Bologna has bet on investing in the improvement of internal technological skills, to support its multiple channels of participation and gradually coordinate them through an innovative design, the setting of very clear goals and the creation of an external role of “guarantor” of the quality of participation. Bologna has been actively involving local university departments and has received added-value from some national and international consultants and a wide network of exchanges with other cities worldwide.

A final aspect to be stressed about the last wave of PBs in Italy is that – in line with international trends – their methodology is being adapted to different types of institutions of public interest, beyond local and regional authorities. For example, in 2017 PB was used in a high school for the first time. The Institute for Higher Education Cremona in Milan (*Istituto di Istruzione Superiore Cremona*)²⁷, allocates 10,000 euros to implement projects proposed by its students but unlike other experiments, the school showed autonomous will to experiment, and was not involved in a municipality-led PB. In this experience, pedagogic aspects are emphasized. For instance, collaboration between students is pursued by admitting only proposals coming from groups of a minimum of three persons. Moreover, the role of class representatives has changed radically thanks to the PB process; they are now asked to facilitate their classmates' participation rather than replace them in the collective decision-making process, as traditionally was the case. This first experiment was followed by two more institutes shortly after: the *Istituto Vittorio Emanuele II* in Bergamo, Lombardy, (with a budget of 15,000 euros)²⁸ and the *Istituto di Istruzione Superiore Capriotti* in San Benedetto del Tronto (Marche Region, with a budget of 1,500 euros). In 2017, a regional authority also authorized the experimentation of the first PB in a prison: name-

ly, the penitentiary of Bollate (in Milan province). The main challenge of this experiment lies in the design of a process able to effectively tackle the structural features and the rules and restrictions regulating inmates' daily activities. The whole process will be disseminated outside through a storytelling production aimed at crowdfunding the budget necessary to implement projects and activities resulting from the process.²⁹

An open conclusion

The analysis of PB experiences undertaken in Italy in the last 16 years reveals the existence of four different generations that faced the “democratisation” of choices, transparency, citizen autonomy, inclusion, technical coordination and responsiveness of the experimenting entities with various tools.

The first generation, more closely related to the Porto Alegre example, developed from a few scattered cases to mark a “discontinuity” with the past, but was unable to leave a real imprint on Italian political practices: islands in an ocean, these first generation PB experiments were unable to build formulas and strong elements of resistance and originality to avoid the dramatic participative crisis of the subsequent years. The second generation of Italian PBs set less ambitious and more realistic objectives with regard

²⁷ iiscremona.gov.it/attivita-e-progetti/bilancio-partecipativo/

²⁸ vittorioemanuele.gov.it/bilancio-partecipativo/

²⁹ bipart.org/bp-carceredibollate

to local contexts, by placing limits on expenditures which had to be discussed and linking them to pre-existing participatory paths. There was an attempt to articulate the goals with the administrative decentralisation, but this was done precisely at the time when the decentralized boroughs were being suffocated by the central government's impositions. This generation of PB felt the weight of the national setting as a burden, which obliged municipalities to waste energy and creativity to survive the budget cuts, stricter rules and the rigors of the EU Stability Pact.

With less confidence in the citizen's creative role, these experiments advanced cautiously through attempts that "rehearsed" results – expanding much more gradually than in the past. The collaboration with associations, consultancy firms, research institutes and universities accentuated the sense of "experiment" and "pilot tests," unlike the more intuitive and improvised practices of the past.

While this PB generation was consolidating, the economic crisis and the new political panorama acted against it, making the role of supra-local administrative entities central in the consolidation of experiments. The "jump in scale" of interest in the third wave of participatory budgeting has had positive effects on the consolidation of less cohesive political will and has reinforced the boldness and the quality of experiments. Unfortunately, it also fuelled a series of intermittent processes, which did not guarantee an annual continuity to PB cycles. Provinces and regions – co-funding municipal experimentalism – also played a role as 'transmitters' of innovations tested at the local level, to modify the political-administrative culture and transform legislation.

A fourth new generation developed around 2014, rising from the ashes of a general stepping-back of previous experiments which occurred around 2008 to 2010 – at the height of the financial crisis that in other countries had fuelled the multiplication of PBs to face shrinking budgets in a collective way. This new wave arose in a different political panorama, where new political forces started emerging and consolidating; one of them (the 5 Stars Movement) contributed to a goal of fostering more opportunities for citizens to exert direct democracy, thus making reference to PB as a central tool for expanding the citizens' role in the joint-decision making of public policies.

This last generation – which offers a variety of different methodologies – is still ongoing, through experiences that still show an

“experimental approach,” sometimes trying to balance the use of online and offline spaces of social dialogue, sometimes replicating standard and traditional mechanisms. They do not yet appear stable in terms of political motivation and vision, financial dimension and sources to be involved in the funding of the processes. There is the doubt that several of these new experiences (such as has been occurring in Spain since 2015) are proposed by new political alliances, which seem uninterested in looking to the history of Italian PBs before setting their experiences; often the only guarantee for not reproducing past mistakes is in the memory of consultancy firms or universities which are involved in the setting up of each experiment.

As a matter of fact, most of these PBs often seem like the “discovery of hot water” for newly-elected public officials, in a political environment where training and capacity building are very rare investments for parties. Despite the important role of “connectors” with other international experiences that the external skills involved in the new Italian wave of PBs are playing, undoubtedly there is a strong tendency to outsource a huge part of PB processes, which carries the risk of flattening the capacity of public institutions to develop their own autonomous project-design skills. Today, the Emilia Romagna region is one of the few administrative environments where there is no significant development of external consultancy agencies, and PBs (including the innovative model of Bologna) tend to be built and managed using internal resources and investments in the training of local administrative personnel.

To date, it seems that this last wave of Italian PBs suffers from a political fragility, although it tends to be more careful in self-assessing and gradually improving the quality of deliberation and the inclusiveness of the process, as well as in critically facing the risks brought on by a new extended role of ICT technologies in the overall process. Unfortunately, the lack of a networking structure among new PBs (as in the earlier RNM) does not facilitate either mutual learning or the possibility of collecting similar data in each process and promoting comparative analysis of functioning, effects and impacts of Italian PBs.

Undoubtedly, while measures to promote “gender equality” are improving, as well as the creative forms of outreach to address

the participation needs of weaker social sectors (particularly, immigrants and disabled people), objectives of “social justice” are still limited and rarely made explicit, especially because participatory processes seem to be quite limited in their capacity to create and maintain a new generation of technical and administrative structures more sensitive to the need to directly involve citizens in decision making.

However, there is hope that new opportunities to reverse and integrate the above-mentioned concerns could be provided by the ongoing integration of PBs with other forms of shared planning (on topics such as urban redevelopment or sustainable development), by the experimentation of the PB methodology beyond the local communities (like in schools or prisons), by the growing role of universities, civil society organizations and social enterprises in strengthening and spreading this practice, as well as by the growth of multichannel “hybrid” experiments which have been taking shape over the last four years.

At the moment, there is no certainty around the survival of PBs in Italy and even less likelihood of significant expansion in the long term. But there is no doubt that any experimental innovation that will integrate them or replace them in the future will find a profound richness of materials with which to work, and certainly many examples to learn from.

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