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SYMPOSIUM/1

SYMPOSIUM IN HONOR OF LUIGI BOBBIO

An Introduction

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Luigi Bobbio suddenly passed away on 9 October 2017, at the age of 73.

The announcement of his death has greatly impressed the members of the Editorial Board of *Partecipazione e Conflitto*. We immediately asked ourselves how we could properly tribute an author who has provided such an important contribution to the debate on topics of great importance for the journal, as the relations and tension between institutional participation and bottom up participation, the role of conflict in contemporary democracy, the transformation of urban policies and the development of new governance arrangements, the role of public deliberation, its locus and its actors.

In its ten years of life, *Partecipazione e Conflitto* has hosted several articles that have addressed, directly or indirectly - and often adopting a critical perspective - the issue of deliberative democracy, starting from the monographic volume entitled "Democracy, Participation and Deliberation", which invited to reflect on the possible tensions and contradictions between participation and deliberation in institutional contexts and the processes of informal and contentious participation and deliberation autonomously developed in the public sphere (Freschi and Raffini 2008). The debate between the advocates and the critics of deliberative democracy with special regard to its framing in institutional deliberative settings, have been very wide and intense in the last 15 years, both at international as well as national level.

Luigi Bobbio, passionate advocate of the virtue of deliberative democracy, is widely recognized as one of the main contributors to this debate. He ever looked to institutional deliberative processes as instruments able to strengthen representative democracy, promoting civic, democratic and epistemological virtues. Accordingly, he firmly rejected the sceptical view of deliberative democracy, which argues that institutional deliberative processes represent a form of institutional engineering that is conducive - and not reversing - to technocracy and to de-politicization, promoting sterilization and anesthetization of conflict, if not more or less conscious forms of manipulation.

Consistent with his approach, although firmly rejecting the most radical - and in his view purely ideological - critical perspective, he openly dialogued with his critics, arguing his reasons. Bobbio has always considered critic extremely important, as a stimulus to deal with the weaker points of his theory.

His predisposition to open confrontation is widely recognized as one of Luigi Bobbio's main characteristics, which can be considered in personal, rather than in professional terms.

The prestige and scientific authoritativeness of Luigi Bobbio, is indeed accompanied by a broad and general recognition of his human qualities: those who worked with him - as witnessed by the numerous speech, tributes and article in its honor appeared in the weeks following his death - remember him as a person always open to dialogue, ready to accept the ideas of others, sincerely engaged in promoting cooperation, with a strong vocation to work in groups. In short, Luigi Bobbio is widely remembered as a person who did not only theorize participation and deliberation, but truly committed to assert its principles and ideas in the job and in everyday relations with colleagues and collaborators. According to a key principle of deliberation, he ever engaged with its critics trying to exchange arguments and to understand the reasons offered by the others. For this reason, he recently responded vigorously to a contribution - published in a French scientific journal - in which the scientific critic to his ideas and his activity as consultant and scientific supervisor of institutional deliberative processes has abandoned the scientific debate to enter the professional dimension of the author, to the point of questioning his correctness and his professional ethics (Bobbio and Floridia 2016).

The leitmotif of his research is to exploration of the dynamic reconfiguration of the relationship between participation - in its various articulations and expressions - conflict and decision. He primary focuses on the policy dimension, and from this perspective he contributes to understand the role of social movements and contentious politics in contemporary society. He has ever advocated for a open, inclusive, transformative conception of democracy. His interest in the theory and in the practice of deliberative democracy, which he has dedicated the last twenty years of his life, has to be understood as

the culmination of his lifelong interest - both as militant and scholar - in promoting participation. Public deliberation, in his point of view, has an indispensable role in improving the quality of decision-making processes, in avoiding disruptive conflicts; in promote mutual understanding and cooperation in the management of highly controversial issues. In sums, it is a necessary precondition of democracy in complex society. Starting from his interest in the transformation in public policies and in the new governance arrangements at the local level, Luigi Bobbio was among the first scholar to bring to Italy the theory of deliberative democracy, then developed especially in the US and in Northern Europe. In the following years he became one of the most influential and recognized experts on the subject at European level. His books and articles, published in Italian and in international scientific journals, were also published in the most important international journals dedicated to the issue of participation and deliberation, such as *The Journal of Public Deliberation* (see Bobbio 2010a, "Types of deliberation") and *Participations* (see Bobbio and Melé 2015, on the "Paradoxical relations between conflict and participation").

Just a few days before his death, *Partecipazione e Conflitto* published the last article written by Luigi Bobbio, "Neither Completely Political, Nor Completely Unpolitical, The Third Way of Deliberative Arenas" (Bobbio 2017). The goal of the article is to provide a critical balance of the debate on the relation between deliberative arenas and the processes of de-politicization and re-politicization. Deliberative arenas, according to the definition provided by Luigi Bobbio himself (2002a), are participatory arrangements in which ordinary citizens - rather than stakeholders - interact through deliberation - rather than through negotiation or voting - in a structured and temporary way - rather than informally through media, social networks or in the public sphere - and are entrusted with consultations or decisions regarding a public policy. The contribution to de-politicization, a process that can be briefly defined as the removal of the political character of decision-making (Burnham 2001) by which politicians "seek to persuade the demos that they can no longer be reasonably held responsible for a particular issue, policy field or specific decision" (Flinder and Buller 2006: 295-296) would be, according to the advocates of a critical approach to deliberation, the result of a shift from a majoritarian (political) arena to a non-majoritarian (non political) arena, where unelected people tackle it with non-political criteria, promoting a strategy of anesthetization of conflicts.

Luigi Bobbio wonders if "deliberative arenas depoliticize democracy - as stated by a widespread critical literature - or they promote process of re-politicization". He concludes "they can play an extremely useful role in all those situations in which neither the experts nor the politicians are able to cope with complex problems (...). Deliberative arenas should not be seen as an alternative to representative institutions and to politics,

but rather as a complement to them". "They are neither completely political nor completely unpolitical. They instead have a hybrid nature that can counteract the continuous fluctuations between (hyper)politicization and (hyper)depoliticization that are so typical of our times". This latter statement is crucial in understanding the approach of Luigi Bobbio to democracy, participation and deliberation and on the role of the latter in improving and strengthening the former.

Luigi Bobbio, as he had well clarified in previous contributions (cfr. Bobbio 2013), is very careful to distinguish between deliberative democracy - which goal is to integrate and enrich the institutions of representative democracy - from the myth of direct and participatory democracy, conceived as alternative to representative democracy. In his view, imagining the future of democracy, the deliberative model provides a "third way", alternative both to the technocratic solution and the populist drift, as it may reverse the anti-political attitudes of citizens and their growing disaffection toward institutions, strengthen the legitimacy and the efficacy of decision-making processes and promote trust, social capital, reciprocal understanding and transformation of preferences.

We thought this article would be an excellent starting point to invite friends, colleagues, disciples, and also critics of Luigi Bobbio to deal with such an important topic, in relying upon an assumption that his contribution to the field is of the highest values regardless of the different perspectives, we are sure that this would be the best way to tribute Luigi Bobbio.

We have therefore invited scholars from different backgrounds, from different generations, bearers of different points of view and perspective on the subject, to take part in the Symposium in honor of Luigi Bobbio. The article "Neither Completely Political, Nor Completely Unpolitical. The Third Way of Deliberative Arenas" has to be seen as a pretext for a broader comparison on the legacy and the precious interpretations that Luigi Bobbio leaves behind him. The response to our invitation was enthusiastic. On the contrary, we regret not having been able, for reasons of space, to involve other authors who surely would have enthusiastically joined. The symposium is composed by contributions by authors such as Giulio Citroni, Donatella della Porta and Andrea Felicetti; Antonio Florida, Anna Carola Freschi, Francesca Gelli, Patrice Melé, Luigi Pellizzoni, Gianfranco Pomatto and Stefania Ravazzi. Most of them collaborated with Luigi Bobbio, they shared with him experience in the implementation and evaluation of deliberative processes. Others shared with him reflections and ideas in seminar and conferences, besides their publications. Many of them were friends of Luigi Bobbio, beside than colleagues.

Luigi Bobbio has dedicated his entire life, as a militant and as a scholar - always animated by a passion for the expansion of spaces and instruments of participation - to the relationship between participation and conflict and decision-making processes.

Graduated in Law at the University of Turin on March 24, 1972 with 110 cum laude, he was, in the previous years, among the protagonists of the student movement that culminated in the occupation of Palazzo Campana, headquarters of humanities, which officially launched the Italian '68. On that occasion, Norberto Bobbio, father of Luigi, was ideally placed on the other side of the barricades, as Professor at the University of Torino. Bobbio's militant activity continues, after the student movement experience, with the experience of "Lotta continua", of which Bobbio was one of the founders. Ten years later Bobbio wrote the history of the organization (Bobbio 1979).

In 1988, while teaching in high schools and working as freelance consultant and researcher, he obtains a PhD in sociology with a dissertation entitled "Interventions on cultural heritage between State and Region. Analysis of a public policy".

Only relatively late - in the nineties - he undertakes a university career. As a researcher he focuses his attention on the theme of public policies. In 1996 he founds one of the first second level masters in Public Policy Analysis, in the Corep consortium, made up by the University of Torino, the municipality and the Camera di Commercio of Torino. Here he will also hold the position of Director of the Policy Laboratory (LaPo).

His activity as a scholar and that of consultant, creator and implementer of participatory processes goes hand in hand. In the nineties he takes part in the Commission of mediation in environmental issues that involves the local administrations and the residents. Later he will take part in several commissions, such as *Non rifiutarti di scegliere* ("Do not refuse to choose"), which goal is to identify an area of the city for a new incinerator. Already recognized as an eminent expert in public policies and in the relations between public administrations and citizens, he became associate professor of Political Science and then full professor in 2005.

In those years, he plays a leading role in an innovative legislative process, the one that, through a participatory process, leads the Tuscany Region - first in Europe - to adopt a law on participation. The involvement of stakeholders and ordinary citizens have one of its central moments in the Electronic Town Meeting, organized by Avventura Urbana, in collaboration with Luigi Bobbio, in Marina di Carrara in 2007.

Also in collaboration with Avventura Urbana, he organizes, in the following years, Deliberative Polls, Citizens Juries and Débat Public, on controversial topics such as the right to vote for immigrants, the bio-testament (2009), and federalism (2011) - in the context of the "Biennale della democrazia". In all these cases the realization of a deliberative process is not aimed at a legislative intervention but for research purposes. The outcome

of the experiments strengthens, nevertheless, in Bobbio the trust in the value of tools such as the *Débat Public* in promoting dialogue and confrontation - as well as the management of the conflict - before the latter turn in irreducible opposition between citizens and institutions and mutual delegitimization.

While the conflict in Val di Susa, opposing local communities, social movements and many local administration to the government, in the realization of the high-speed Turin-Lyon train line, turn stronger and stronger, he wonders what would have changed if the central institutions had opened up to dialogue and confrontation since the initial phases of the project instead of opting for a vertical approach. Could the realization of a structured process of participation and deliberation allow to face this typical example of territorial and environmental conflict in a different way?

In various contributions, Luigi Bobbio addresses the issue of conflicts that arose in the Val di Susa between institutions and No Tav movements, highlighting the profound difference in approaches between the Italian and the French government. The latter implemented a *Débat Public*, allowing to prevent conflicts, discussing the details of the work and assessing the compensation for the local communities. In the Italian case, instead, the conflict radicalized as the result of an attitude of closure and refusal of confrontation by the government, which contributed to generate a conflict with the local administrations, as well as with movements and committees. On this theme we remember the article published in 2006 on *Il Mulino*: "Discutibile e indiscussa: l'Alta velocità alla prova della democrazia" ("Questionable and undisputed: the high speed to the test of democracy") and the book *La TAV e la valle di Susa. Geografie in competizione (The TAV and Val di Susa. Geographies in competition)*, written with Egidio Dansero (2008). On the conflicts opposing local communities and institutions in the constructions of big infrastructure and the development of the "Nymby" (Not in My Backyard) and "Lulu" (Local Unwanted Land Use) syndromes, Bobbio had written in 2002, together with Alberico Zeppetella, *Perché proprio qui? Grandi opere e opposizioni locali* ("Why precisely here? Big infrastructure and local oppositions").

In 2009, thanks to the agreement between the Municipality of Genoa and Autostrade per l'Italia, he is the scientific responsible of a *Débat Public* on the construction of a new highway in the Genova urban area. The deliberative process allows discussing alternative routes to the original project, involving experts, counter-experts, citizens' organizations and residents. This kind of experience is repeated in 2017 in Bologna.

On the scientific side, Luigi Bobbio leaves us some contributions of fundamental importance on the themes of public policies, governance structures, innovation in public administration, decision-making processes, territorial and environmental conflicts, participatory and deliberative democracy.

Limiting ourselves to some of them, we quote here the reflections on the transformations of democracy and its challenges in complex societies, developed in *La democrazia non abita a Gordio* ("Democracy Does Not Dwell in Gordio") (Bobbio 1996). In this volume Bobbio argues that the complexity of interests, values, visions that characterize contemporary society cannot be resolved by reducing or avoiding complexity but dealing with it. Anticipating his dual criticism of populism and technocracy, the author states that the only way to combine efficiency and democracy is to recognize, include and enhance the plurality of interests and points of view, addressing the divisive issues by promoting dialogue, confrontation and interaction in inclusive decision-making processes.

In *I governi locali nelle democrazie contemporanee* ("Local Governments in Contemporary Democracies") (2002c) the attention is focused on the local level, a crucial dimension of the novel multilevel governance arrangements in which the centrality and power of the state tends to decrease.

In the same year, Luigi Bobbio publishes a handbook for administrators which provide a useful guide to the instruments and approaches to be used to promote citizens involvement. *A più voci. Amministrazioni pubbliche, imprese, associazioni e cittadini nei processi decisionali inclusivi* (2004) ("Plural voices. Public administrations, businesses, associations and citizens in inclusive decision-making processes"). The handbook is followed in 2008 by another volume, *Amministrare con i cittadini. Viaggio tra le pratiche di partecipazione in Italia* ("Governing with the Citizens. A Journey within the practices of participation in Italy"), which illustrates and compares eighteen experiences of participation to be taken as "best practices". The Department of Public Administration of the Italian Government publishes both handbooks.

In 2002, in one of his most quoted articles, Bobbio defined the characteristics of deliberative arenas, analyzed their diffusion, explored their relationship with the representative institutions and the role in the production of social capital (Bobbio 2002a). Several subsequent contributions have been dedicated to the analysis of the dynamics activated in individual deliberative experiences, many of which were realized by the same author. We refer to articles such as "Come smaltire i rifiuti. Un esperimento di democrazia deliberativa" ("How to dispose waste: an experiment of deliberative democracy"), published in 2002 (Bobbio 2002b), and which has as its object the decision-making process related to the assumption of a decision regarding waste treatment (an incinerator and a landfill) and as "Il dibattito pubblico sulle grandi opere. Il caso dell'autostrada di Genova" ("The public debate on big infrastructure: the case of the Genoa highway"), of 2010 (Bobbio 2010b).

In 2013 Luigi Bobbio is the editor of the volume *La qualità della deliberazione: processi dialogici tra cittadini* ("The quality of deliberation: dialogic processes between citizens"),

aimed at investigating the dynamics actually occurring in deliberative settings. The volume, which involves many of the scholars who have dealt with the topic in recent years in Italy, takes stock of a first season of participatory-deliberative experiences in Italy, and ideally opens a new season of research, in its attempt to shift the focus from deliberative setting to the assessment of the effective transformative dynamics occurring in deliberative processes.

Which kind of indicators may we use for assessing the quality of the deliberative interaction? Which are the effects of deliberation in terms of widening of knowledge, transformation of preferences, production of social capital?

In 2013, together with Franca Roncarolo, Bobbio turns his interest toward the role of mass media in reporting how public policies, highly influencing the life of citizens, are framed and reported. The analysis offers an original perspective to look at the deliberation environment surrounding the decision-making processes. Deepening the analysis of different policy fields, and comparing the Italian, the French and the Spanish case, the interesting conclusion is that Italian newspapers pay an exorbitant attention to the "politics" dimension (alliances, inter-and intra-party conflicts) while the attention given to the "policy" dimension is very limited.

Finally, a few days after the disappearance of Bobbio, the handbook *Le politiche pubbliche. Problemi, soluzioni, incertezze, conflitti* ("Public policies. Problems, solutions, uncertainties, conflicts") is published. The handbook is co-authored with his two main students and collaborators, Gianfranco Pomatto and Stefania Ravazzi (2017). The book systematically defines and investigates public policies and explores their main actors. The tools implemented, the different phases of implementation and evaluation processes are deeply explored. A particular attention is placed on the decision-making process in condition of conflict.

Among the recent public contributions of Luigi Bobbio to be quoted are his observations to the debate in occasion of the Constitutional referendum of December 2016 and on the absence of an effective strategy of involvement of citizens during the reconstruction of the areas of Central Italy affected by the earthquake. In both cases Luigi Bobbio laments the absence of a reasoned and conscious public debate, which reflect the persistence of an approach - among politicians - that sacrifices participation in name of a - not actually achieved - decision-making efficiency.

We conclude this brief introduction to the symposium in honor of Luigi Bobbio going back to the dilemma raised by him in the article on which we have called colleagues and

friends of Bobbio to the debate: is a third way, characterized by the centrality of deliberation and the involvement of citizens in informed choices, possible? Or should we resign to the inevitable deterioration and restriction of the space and the quality of deliberation, between the thrusts imprinted by technocratic neoliberalism, the depoliticized approach and a populist response, equally suspicious towards confrontation and exchange of arguments? The reflections made by Luigi Bobbio in his last contributions tell us that a long way is to be passed through. What we are sure of is that the work of Luigi Bobbio remains of fundamental importance and will continue to support scholars, activists and citizens interested in widening and deepening the quality of democracy and participation. What it is most important is that Luigi Bobbio is a major point of reference, not only for those who share his trust in the virtue of institutional deliberative arena, but also for those who express a more critical position toward the "mainstream" approach to deliberative democracy, in which Luigi Bobbio can be included, and even for those who express a more sceptical view on this respect, and are more likely to find the solutions in the informal dynamics of deliberation and participation taking place in the (counter) public spheres and in contentious politics. All find in the theory of Luigi Bobbio, in his refined, competent, and passionate arguments, a highly valuable stimulus. If it is true, as we are convinced, that the value, the talent, the competence, the seriousness of a scholar is proved especially by the appreciation and the estimation of those who do not share his view, the contributions here recollected provide a clear and undoubted confirmation of that: every author, whatever her or his position on the deliberative democracy debate, contribute to highlighting the importance of Luigi Bobbio's teaching.

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