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In Memoriam: Bruno Dente

Public Policy: Vision and Mission

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I wish to thank Joan Subirats for agreeing to publish Bruno's lecture in this journal. I am very grateful to Gloria Regonini for writing a piece that is so heartfelt and personal in its recollections, yet at the same time so realistic and dispassionate about the present state of policy analysis. Thanks to Simona Piattoni for proposing and co-organizing the panel on "Empirical constitutionalism: Bruno Dente's intellectual legacy" at the 2022 meeting of the Società Italiana di Scienza Politica in Rome, and to the participants in this panel.

This special section in our journal features Professor Bruno Dente's legacy lecture. This lecture was delivered as his acceptance speech at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona when he received his Doctor Honoris Causa award in 2019. The lecture is accompanied by an original article by Professor Gloria Regonini. Her article delves into the political and scientific context that shaped the beliefs of Bruno's generation of Italian policy researchers in the field of social sciences and democracy. It also takes a contemporary perspective by looking at the present times and comparing the state of policy evaluation in France and Italy.

Let's begin with Bruno. The man who was the *maestro* for generations of policy researchers passed away on 13 January 2022. Among his close colleagues and friends were names such as Patrick Le Galès, Peter Knoepfel, Yves Mény, Jeremy Richardson, Joan Subirats, Vincent Wright, and in Italy, Gloria Regonini. Bruno's early career transitioned from law to public policy analysis, influenced by the emerging European implementation research scene championed by Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf. However, Regonini underscores that his intellectual foundation was deeply rooted in the US, from Dewey to Lindblom and Simon, and extending to his close relationship with Vincent Ostrom.

What I first learned from Bruno was that these luminaries of the social sciences not only shaped the breadth and scope of policy research, but also provided a framework for the empirical assessment and normative evaluation of democracy, federalism, and the nature of the state. It was a genuine vision of the role of public policy research in society and politics.

In his legacy lecture, Bruno undertakes an ambitious task: distilling the essence of this vision into a few pages. These are insights from a life devoted entirely to policy research, both in terms of knowledge creation and of its application in society, i.e., 'knowledge utilization'. There are

several key take-aways in this lecture, ranging from the precise (and often misunderstood) role of institutions in explaining public policy, to the adoption of intellectual humility recognizing that oversimplifying complex questions and multidimensional issues is not only unwise (or 'stupid' as Bruno puts it) but also dangerous. Finally, Bruno insists on the need to embrace complexity rather than fear it.

Regonini's article captures the link between policy research and the monumental question of how to manage complexity while fostering democratic and policy innovation. She vividly recounts the intellectual climate of the first generation of Italian policy scholars—Bruno and Gloria's contemporaries. These scholars were politically left-leaning, but looked to "America" rather than the Frankfurt School. I would characterize them as Italian libertarians—they embraced non-orthodox ideas about individual rights, liberation, and political creativity. Interestingly, unlike the hippies of the time, they did not go east to find themselves; they went west, leveraging Lindblom and Simon's analyses of the individual to inform the meso and macro levels.

In the second part of her article, Regonini masterfully juxtaposes these intellectual attitudes and expectations with the current reality of Italy. She does so through the lens of policy evaluation – an arena that, according to Bruno's legacy lecture, defines the scope of policy research alongside decision-making and implementation analysis. Evaluation perhaps best encapsulates the convergence of intellectual endeavor and civic commitment, aligning with Dente's vision, as well as that of the pragmatists and Wildavsky.

In comparison, Italy lags behind in the institutionalisation of policy evaluation, with tangible consequences for the implementation of reforms such as the EU's Next Generation projects. Regonini draws lessons about the dangers of neglecting interdisciplinary approaches and the challenging task of balancing civic engagement with rigorous research that acknowledges the intricate complexity of policy issues. These lessons pave the way for innovation and the consolidation of policy research on a global scale, beyond Italy. Can we really embrace multidisciplinary? If so, in what directions? Can we envision the mission of public policy in a way that encompasses our understanding of individuals, the complexity of policy problems, and the interplay between micro-individual, meso, and macro-political levels? All this while improving our daily lives as citizens, intellectuals, public servants and our collective democratic existence.