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Handing over the Torch in Political Science: Legacies of Past and Present Themes in the Italian Research Agenda

DANIELA PIANA

BOOKS REVIEWED

Berton, Fabio, Richiardi, Matteo, and Sacchi, Stefano (2009). *Flex-Insecurity: Perché in Italia la flessibilità diventa precarietà* [Flex Insecurity: Why Flexibility becomes precariousness in Italy]. Bologna: Il Mulino.

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• Parties • Institutions

Introduction: Issues on the Research Agenda

Over the course of the 20th century Italian political science covered an impressive distance to gain full autonomy from contiguous disciplines and so become a fully fledged empirical science (Morlino, 1992). An empiricist view of social sciences took root in the country after battles with historicist traditions. By the 1970s the post-empiricist turn developing in the Anglo-Saxon world reached Italian domestic scholarship and gave rise to a new emphasis on policy studies (Ferrera, 1992).

For a better understanding of what distinguishes Italian political science it is helpful to consider that over the years the domestic research agenda regularly reflected, on the one hand, the institutional changes undergone by the national political system and, on the other hand, attempts to provide policy-makers with empirically grounded knowledge to improve the government of the country. A recent study sponsored by the National Association of Political Science¹ (Capano and Tronconi, 2005) indicates that, despite the institutional difficulties (Graziano, 2008), Italian political science is now very productive in all the major subfields of the discipline, e.g. international relations, comparative politics, political science *strictu sensu*, policy studies. In this article, monographic works published between 2006 and 2009 and providing far-reaching results both in terms of analytical framework and empirical outcomes are reviewed in order to provide a small sample of what is now available.

Looking at Europe

One of the subfields that has become much more important in Italy over the last two decades is European studies. Scholars engaged in investigating the European integration process and its impact on domestic politics and policies are increasing in number and quality. Among the research projects carried out in this field, two of them constituted the basis of volumes published by Il Mulino in 2006: Donatella Della Porta and Manuela Caiani's *Quale Europa? Europeizzazione, identità e conflittività* and Valeria Fargion, Leonardo Morlino, and Stefania Profeti's *Europeizzazione e rappresentanza territoriale: il caso italiano*. The first volume relies on a comprehensive project studying the European public sphere in seven countries, taking into consideration only the results obtained for Italy. It addresses the following research question: to what extent did the process of European integration have an impact on Italian public discourse and, if it did, in which way and on which type of issues? The volume looks at "the discourse on Europe ... as expressions of symbolic construction of identities and emergent interests," and the authors analyze the process of Europeanization of the public sphere. Here, Europeanization is not meant to be a process of convergence, but rather a process that stimulates the spread of new values, norms, and ideas (p. 209). Although the authors find an increasing relevance of the EU as a target of claims, they also find Europe is still the issue of the elite: local and bottom-up initiatives regarding European issues are restrained in number and occur only when issues involve cleavages already controversial in domestic arenas where Italian institutions have not proved effective. Furthermore, European issues are

discussed in the domestic public sphere only when they have been “Italianized,” that is, phrased in the vocabulary and with the grammar of the domestic political discourse. Europeanization opens a differential set of opportunities for action for domestic actors, especially civil society organizations, the media, and think tanks, but the way domestic actors actually absorb and shape European issues depends on contextual facilitating conditions, such as organizational and advocacy capacities (p. 213). Whereas the empirical analysis of the data does not look controversial and contributes to achieving a better understanding of a seldom systematically investigated aspect of European governance – the public sphere – the prescriptive conclusions suggested by the authors are more questionable. They suggest that European integration needs the “construction of ... at least a level of cultural identity and citizenship able to support principles of social sharing of risks and mechanisms of political decisions” (p. 215). Although the point is reasonable and desirable, the empirical results of their own research suggest its accomplishment is fairly unlikely. Domestic public discourses, and the style and contents of political debates developed in the national arenas are still dominant in the European Union and reasons, claims, and arguments are filtered through them, whether at the elite or grassroots level.

The unquestionable relevance of the domestic arena in the process of Europeanization is consistently confirmed by the volume *Europeizzazione e rappresentanza territoriale: il caso italiano*. This volume collects and analyzes the results of two rounds of a research project run under the supervision of Leonardo Morlino in the Italian regions to explore the dynamics of the implementation of European regional policy. The central hypothesis is that the reinforcement of local administrations (in particular the regions), a byproduct of the European regional policy, produces a diversification and a localization of demands to which the traditional party organizations are unable to give an adequate response. In other words, there is a decline in the intermediation capacity (aggregation and articulation of demands) on the part of national parties. It appears, therefore, that a circular process is at work in which the reinforcement of the local administration corresponds to a decline in the intermediation capacity of national parties, which, in turn, contributes to the reinforcement of the regional channel. The reinforcement of the regions appears in the first place in interest intermediation and identity creation roles. What characterizes the territorial-institutional channel (regions) is that it is also a policy “arena” (p. 52). On the one hand, the region acts as an input channel toward upper levels of government (national and EU), whereas on the other it assumes a representation function in terms of responsiveness and accountability since the regions are, themselves, a level of government with their own competencies (p. 52). Looking at the more specific Italian experience allows the authors to highlight one of the main goals of this research: the analysis of the formation of a new channel of representation besides the more traditional electoral and corporate channels. There are multiple reasons for considering the volume an innovative and ground-breaking work. To provide the necessary analytical framework, the authors develop a fairly sound and innovative grid to detect the impact of Europeanization on political representation. Representation is operationalized both in terms of the actors who represent and in terms of arenas. Channels of representation are also considered (both party and corporate channels). The research results show that the role of regions as arenas in which political representation has been reshaped. Local actors are empowered by managing structural funds. However, the best endowed institutions are the

ones most able to profit from the changes and thus the new regional policy has produced a low rate of institutional innovation and policy change. It is the actors already empowered by structural funds who are more able than others in the same situation to exploit the opportunities of empowerment offered by the European institutions.

Beyond the Atlantic: International Relations at Stake

Italian scholars are also hard at work studying the EU/US relationship, the EU image in extra-Eu countries, and Euro-Mediterranean policies. Recently two books have been published on the EU/US relationship and on the logics of action followed by actors in international arenas: Vittorio Emanuele Parsi's *L'alleanza inevitabile* and Marco Cesa's *Alleati ma non rivali*. They are representative of two different perspectives co-existing in Italian scholarship. The first book, by Parsi, focuses on the position occupied by the United States in the international arena and questions American hegemony by deconstructing recent events in the Middle East. Unilateralism, exhibited traditionally by American authorities in their external relations and foreign policies, falls short in the case of Iraq or Lebanon. The author makes his point by showing that multilateralism has proved more effective in Lebanon than has American unilateralism in Iraq. European institutions consistently work for a more multilateral approach in the management of crises and conflicts that feature the Middle East. The approach of the author is more descriptive and prescriptive than one of straightforward empirical policy analysis. He suggests that today Europe has a chance to step into the international arena as a global power, although of course there is no guarantee it will be successful in trying to do so. The merit of the book is largely due to the inductive methodology adopted by the author in reconstructing the many different pieces of the international puzzle in which the EU should take a more pro-active position: the function and the organization of the United Nations, the management and the control of the legal instruments associated with the exercise of international penal jurisdiction. Parsi moves from a neoinstitutional view of international relations, to one in which power games can be softened and better managed through multilateral institutions.

A different approach is adopted by Marco Cesa. Relying on a neorealist background, *Alleati ma non rivali* addresses the issue of how, why, and through which type of development alliances may emerge and endure. What conditions facilitate the consolidation of alliances? What factors are responsible for their decline? Finding the traditional mainstream neorealist approach too reductive and simplistic in explaining alliances' behaviors on the basis of the degree of competition that exists between two actors in the international arena, Cesa seeks to discover the systemic and structural conditions of alliances. According to the neorealist mainstream, either two countries are allies or they are rivals. *Tertium non datur*. Cesa demonstrates that as a matter of fact a plurality of cases are not covered by this simple bipolar typology, as there are many alliances in which one ally tries merely to constrain the other or to preserve the power of the other only to the extent to which it does not threaten the status quo. In general, then, a new typology seems to be needed for the description of the types of situation that exhibit a differential degree of symmetry in the power within the alliance and the capacity of the alliance to fit and confront the challenges of the

external environment. Exchanges in terms of power – and resources – are possible within the conditions given by each type of alliance. Cesa puts forth four types: the symmetric and homogeneous alliance, in which members cooperate with reciprocal benefit; the asymmetric and homogeneous alliance, where all members benefit from the cooperation, but the rules of the cooperation are set down by only one of them; the asymmetric and heterogeneous alliance, which is the case of hegemony; the symmetric and the heterogeneous alliance, in which all members have equal force. Conformity and the compliant behavior of allies are ensured endogenously, within the alliance. The dilemma of collective action, which is traditionally solved by the hegemonic situation in international relations, finds here a possible different answer, that is, an endogenous type of control used by the allies in order to make the alliance durable in its present form (although the author maintains that an alliance may shift from one type to a different one). This typology is used to reconstruct and analyze the alliances created during the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe. This part of the volume verifies the empirical adequacy of the hypotheses that may be inferred from the typology. Case studies provide evidence to adapt and to revise the hypotheses themselves. At the very end, the volume turns out to be fairly balanced between the attempt to offer a new theory of alliances in international relations and the historical reconstruction of the cases considered. Despite his conviction that his typology works well, the author suggests some nuances should be introduced to take into consideration the type of action situation confronting allies. Given the fact that this is a contingent and variable condition, only empirical research can reconstruct the situation and make it intelligible.

The Analysis of the Domestic System

The Italian political system is still challenging to Italian political scientists as it continuously offers opportunities to reconsider leading theories and approaches considered sound by the bulk of the discipline. As the country emerged from the First Republic in the early 1990s, the pillars of the political architecture went through a comprehensive process of change. Institutions were reshaped by means of ordinary politics (without any constitutional changes). During 1993–4 electoral reforms were adopted that greatly changed both the party system and the electoral system. The former was transformed under the turmoil of the clashes within the political elite, and the second was intentionally retailored to push the country toward a bipolar party system. Furthermore, by means of *grandi inchieste* (“great investigations”) brought about by leading figures in the judicial system, judicial institutions gained impressive visibility and influence in the political life of the country. These radical changes are reflected in the research agenda of social scholars, whose attention is mainly devoted to understanding the mechanisms driving political processes and the specificity of the political setting as it emerged in the Italian Second Republic. The works by Alessandro Chiaramonte, *Tra maggioritario e proporzionale: L’universo dei sistemi elettorali misti*, Rosa Mulè, *Dentro ai DS*, and Patrizia Pederzoli, *La corte costituzionale*, all published by Il Mulino in 2007 and 2008, provide a variegated reading of the Italian political system and throw light on some of the distinctive features of domestic democratic processes: electoral competition, intra-party competition and culture, and inter-institutional accountability. In his work, Alessandro Chiaramonte deals

with one of the most controversial and relevant topics addressed by comparative political scientists, the mechanisms and effects of electoral systems. He focuses on the gray zone represented by mixed electoral systems. The constitutional (or legislative, as in Italy) engineering that tailors the electoral system has been – and still is – strongly debated in the country. Majoritarian options and proportional solutions have been compared by mixing up ideological and technical arguments. In the volume by Chiaramonte, the *tertium genus* of the mixed electoral system is first described in its key distinctive features and then unpacked by means of an alternative typology to point out its main components. He points out the importance of the percentage of the seats that are needed by a single party to gain a position in parliament. In this respect, the typology is based on a slightly different ratio from that commonly used in the literature, that is the dynamic of the electoral system conceived as part of the dynamic of party competition (p. 43). The work of Chiaramonte falls within a fairly well-developed tradition in Italian political science, since the lessons of Sartori (1976). The second part of *Tra maggioritario e proporzionale* explores the probable impact of adopting a mixed system on both the behavioral patterns of citizens and the level of competition between the parties. The analysis makes it clear that the various maneuvers affecting electoral systems cannot provide cures for political fragmentation and instability. According to the author, mixed electoral systems should be considered as a world apart rather than as a combination of the best aspects of two different worlds, i.e. the majoritarian and the proportional (p. 237). *Dentro ai DS* came out at the end of the most controversial and critical stage in the transformation of the Italian left party, nowadays called “Partito democratico.” Rosa Mulè, relying on a dataset of surveys carried out among young partisans and supporters of DS, makes an important contribution to understanding the mechanisms that led to this transformation “from within,” starting from the intra-party political culture that emerged in the last decade. According to her research, DS supporters embrace an anti-American view which accommodates anti-capitalism and traditionalism, and young people are the most intransigent voice of the party. They express a clear preference for ideology, for a value-oriented way of thinking about politics and political strategies.² However, this orientation seems to clash with the instrumental and functional behavior of the party’s leadership, which is trying to reestablish the party in the new political landscape and regain a consensus and legitimacy among its supporters. Demands for integrity and firmness from the base do not make a good match with the flexible and adaptable strategy proposed by the party leaders. The book is also part of an important stream in the Italian political science tradition of analyzing the evolution of the party organization. The author complements this scholarship with profound insights into the intra-party culture, as well as with analytical instruments that combine the organizational approach and more traditional lenses to map and assess the political culture. In addition to the deep and radical transformation of the party system, the distribution of power among the main branches of the State was profoundly reshaped during the consolidation of the First Italian Republic and then by the shift into the Second Republic. One of the institutions to benefit has been the judicial system. Patrizia Pederzoli describes the role played by the Italian constitutional court in the consolidation of Italian democracy and thereafter in the transformation of the Second Republic. The constitutional court was introduced in Italy with mixed motivations: on the one hand, it was expected to check and ultimately block the power of the democratically legitimated institutions, and,

on the other hand, it reified the view of a formalist, positivist approach to the conception of law, which placed the constitutional court in a sort of competition with the Court of Cassation (the highest level of the court system to which it is possible to appeal a decision issued by lower courts). The volume by Patrizia Pederzoli covers the whole Republican period and shows the interpretative strategies and the shortcuts the Constitutional Court adopted to put itself in a position to be able to take decisions. Using a comprehensive dataset that covers all the sentences of the Court in all fields of public policy, she shows how it has expanded its *de facto* power in the interstices left open by the Constitution. The book makes an important contribution to the international debate carried on in recent years regarding the effect that constitutional justice has on the quality of democratic governance. A large part of the contemporary scholarship associated with the judicial activism and the anti-majoritarian dimension of advanced democracies considers the constitutional courts as pivotal actors in the process of transformation of democracies. Patrizia Pederzoli masters this debate with balance and distance. She shows that the Italian constitutional court acted as an activist institution in some cases, when the costs of transaction with the other branches of the State, especially when exercising its veto against the Parliament, were not exorbitant. She provides confirmation for the neoinstitutionalist hypothesis found in the wider scholarship that constitutional courts can and do perform as actors of democratization.

Crafting the State

Public policy analysis has become a pivotal component of the domestic scientific debate (Ferrera, 1992). Among the several volumes published between 2006 and 2009 two touch directly upon major issues for the international debates too: Matteo Jessoula, *La politica pensionistica* and Fabio Berton, Matteo Richiardi, and Stefano Sacchi, *Flex-Insecurity: Perché in Italia la flessibilità diventa precarietà*, both published by Il Mulino in 2009. Matteo Jessoula addresses the historical developments and transformations that took place in the 20th century in the pension sector. In Europe models initially based on one pillar pension scheme (public) were incrementally transformed and hybridized under the effects of exogenous forces – such as the decrease in the economic development rate and the increase in the average age of the employed population – but also, as in the case of Italy, under the effect of endogenous processes of change that affected the dynamic between the left and right wings in the political arenas. The incorporation of non-public actors as subsidiary providers of social services for elderly people has accompanied a radical reconfiguration of the pension systems (“fondi pensione”). The first part of the volume reconstructs the pressure exerted by the process of economic and monetary integration that took place in the European Union, as national governments were forced to compromise between domestic entitlement legacies and the new constraints placed by the Maastricht Treaty on public expenditure. As the overall outcome of the manifold processes of change, European pension systems now exhibit a multi-pillar aspect in which private and public actors co-exist (pp. 82–3). The detailed background provided by the author proves very helpful in casting brighter and clearer light on the Italian case, and enables us to see with different eyes the path followed by the Italian pension system in the course of the 20th century and the effects brought about by recent reforms (1992–2006). Whereas Jessoula addresses mainly the evolution of the Italian

pension system and reframes the domestic debate on pension schemes – one of the hottest issues on the agenda of recent governments – *Flex-Insecurity* assesses the Italian labor market against the background of the international debate on flex-security strategies. Flex-security has been defended by international organizations (especially the OCSE) and European institutions as a promising solution that accommodates the need to support the pace of modern economic development by creating a more flexible labor market, as well as the need to provide employees with guarantees of social security. Internationally, the debate has grown more heated in the last two decades and incorporates new political and technical reflections on the sustainability of the minimum wage. The volume by Berton, Richiardi, and Sacchi touches upon these delicate issues, starting from the experience of Italy, and rephrases innovatively the main terms of the debate. In laying out their analytical framework, the authors introduce key distinctions between the concept of a “non-standard,” or “atypical,” worker (*lavoratore atipico*), which properly refers to a legal status related to the type of contract the worker is hired on, and a different definition used more or less properly in the scientific and political debates as a synonym, that is, the “insecure” or “precarious” worker (*precario*). According to the authors, the atypical status of the worker stands among other factors that may – depending on how they interact with each other and with the external institutional environment – be responsible for the conditions of precariousness confronted by workers. Precariousness (p. 23) is the *outcome of an open and not predetermined process*. As the simple legal status of “atypical worker” does not in itself explain the existence, the magnitude, and the critical aspects of the precariousness, all systems whose strategies and institutions address, more or less directly, the position of an employed person should be taken into consideration. This methodology allows the authors to displace the relationship between flexibility and precariousness from the level of general and a-priori assumptions to the level of empirically based conclusions. The main thesis of the volume is that flexible positions in the labor market are not by their very nature intrinsically associated with conditions of precariousness and weakness. If this is the case, then the responsibility of policy-makers is even higher than might be expected from the current debate in the domestic public discourse. Flexibility produces precariousness only if other conditions are fulfilled, in particular when social security schemes and legal provisions that regulate the access to and exit from temporary employment positions produce, as an aggregate effect, an unstable set of opportunities and high costs for employees confronted by employees seeking to reallocate their competence and skills in the labor market. Exploring this idea, the authors offer a thorough deconstruction of the other institutional tools of the welfare state, touching upon pension schemes and social security instruments in the Italian model of welfare (as it looks nowadays after decades of reforms and radical transformations).

The analytical richness and the innovative character of the framework consist in unpacking the commonly mixed up triad composed of the concepts of “atypical” status, precariousness, and “flexibility.” As the authors note, policies matter in this respect, as they predetermine how the first and the third factor (atypical status and flexibility), combined together, may end up, under certain circumstances, in precariousness. They then offer an empirical assessment of the policies that enter into the broad analytical picture depicted in the previous chapters: rates of pay,

minimum wage, public unemployment insurance, and social security instruments. The case of Italy proves extremely interesting for the international debate as well, inasmuch as it represents an experiment *in vitro* of a radical change of labor policies starting in the 1980s. The economic crises and the neoliberal stream eroded the guarantees offered to the employed and the potential unemployed and opened a policy window for a more aggressive, liberalized, and flexible labor market. The process of change dismantled, at least formally, some obstacles that employers had confronted for decades when they wanted to dismiss employees. However, at the same time new legal types of contract of employment appeared in domestic labor law without being associated with adequate and forward-looking instruments of social protection.

The analysis of the aggregate effect emerging from these processes of change shows that at the present time the Italian labor market exhibits a high degree of precariousness of workers not merely because of the increase in the flexibility or the number of atypical contractual relationships found in the market, but rather because of the interplay between labor market and social security institutions. The authors have successfully addressed a highly technical topic using the instruments of both political economy and political science, based on the deductive approach adopted in the first three chapters (devoted to disentangling the conceptual relationship flexibility/precariousness) and the inductive approach applied to the analysis of the Italian labor market. In this respect their volume is an interdisciplinary contribution that stands at the moment fairly alone and as an *unicum* in the spectrum of Italian policy studies.

(On) the Shoulders of Giants

Outstanding scholarship in sociology, social and political theory, and social epistemology has not disappeared from the landscape of Italian political science. *Il velo della diversità* by Alessandro Pizzorno and *L'automa e lo spirito* by Angelo Panebianco both address, from different perspectives, the issue of the relationship between the micro and the macro level in explanations developed and put forth by social scientists. Both authors confront the issue of how collective actions and social phenomena emerge from individual actions and exhibit macro properties not immediately reducible to micro ones. The ways in which the two authors seek to solve this classic puzzle in the social sciences are different. Alessandro Pizzorno puts forth a subtle and convincing analysis of how recognition enters into social processes and social actions. Recognition is a relational property, says the author, that characterizes a social context and comprises the mutual expectations actors have about the beliefs of others. Search for recognition is also – according to him – a key motivation in social action. Correctly, Pizzorno says that many goods we may enjoy if we are in a collective environment are deprived of their value if we enjoy them in complete and absolute solitude. The notion of recognition – a social tool by means of which individuals overcome differences and behave as individuals with some key characters (workers, clients, users, citizens, members of an association, environmentalists, etc.) – proved to be very effective in analyzing the dynamics of the Italian political system in an earlier book by Pizzorno (*Il potere dei giudici*).

Whereas recognition and social expectations are put forward by Pizzorno as the properties that bridge the gap between micro and macro phenomena,

Panebianco follows a different path and ends up with a fairly different conclusion. *L'automa e lo spirito* is composed of two parts. The first represents a comprehensive and critical overview of the social theories that have been constructed on the basis of the theory of action. Starting from the rational choice model, the author outlines which solutions are offered by each theory to the dilemma of how micro and macro are tied together or rather how the macro emerges from the micro level. According to Panebianco, rational choice explanations fall short in accounting for the differential patterns of interaction that exist between the two levels. He argues that a slightly different but still relevant limit characterizes the theory of rationality developed by Raymond Boudon, who takes a pluralistic view comprising several different models of rationality, but does not enter into the mechanisms that govern the shift from one model to another and permit individuals to stop thinking instrumentally and start thinking normatively or in a value-oriented way. Panebianco recognizes that this way of addressing the emergence of individual rationality represents a step forward in the development of a more adequate theory of social action, as it incorporates into the model of the individual actor characteristics that refer to the richness of individual social cognition (i.e. the capacity to think according to different logics of action, a traditionally Weberian theme). The second part of the volume is the most innovative and seeks to apply the considerations developed in the first part to the analysis of political phenomena. To test its analytical proposal (the “pudding,” p. 7) the author translates the explaining schemes put forth by leading scholars in political science – Charles Tilly, Mancur Olson, Douglas North – on the basis of a strictly individualist methodological approach. The key notion here is the broker, i.e. the actor who bridges between two contexts and creates the opportunity for two organizations, institutions, rules, or countries to interact. However, the main criticism that can be leveled at these scholars is the weak and partial account they provide of how individuals change ideas in reaction to and/or in relationship with institutional changes. Whereas such changes take place at the macro level, cognitive changes occur at the micro level. Exploring this connection is crucial for the further development of scholarship in political science.

The most interesting and challenging contribution of the Panebianco volume is in the attention the author devotes to the so-called “third class” of mechanisms, the relational mechanisms. Explaining mechanisms is – according to Panebianco – the distinctive aim of the social sciences. One example of a relational mechanism is brokerage, that is, a process that ties together two or more social contexts (two or more constellations of actions).

Finally, it is to be noted that the last two books discussed both consider as pivotal and partly underexplored the set of relational properties found in social processes. They are related to the meso level of social phenomena, whose dynamics are of the utmost importance in the comprehension of the interactions between political actors and institutions.

Playing in the Future

What paths will Italian political science take in the very near future? The volumes presented are linked by a common thread. They all address more or

less directly a domestic-driven issue: how do the manifold and varied forces that affect domestic political systems today impact upon Italian politics and policies? To what extent might a deeper understanding of these forces help us achieve a better comprehension of the mechanisms that are fundamentally responsible for the transformation of Italian democracy? All the volumes, by way of empirically based reasoning or a comparative research design, attempt to get over the n+1 case syndrome and to assess the case of Italy against a more general background. In this respect, all the empirically based research described here undertakes a promising dialogue with the international debates that are presently going on about European integration processes, party politics, judicialization of politics, electoral hybridization, transatlantic relationships, the labor market, and welfare. The authors contributions may be summarized as follows: they verify the relevance and the adequacy of an institutionalist approach in explaining the dynamics and the pace of development exhibited by Italian politics and policies, even though a balanced mix of neoinstitutionalist explanations and historical institutionalist accounts seems to be required to fully understand the basic mechanisms of institutional and political change (Fargion et al.; Jessoula; Pederzoli); they reaffirm the importance of analyzing politics and policy together by providing a timely and comprehensive account of how structures and formal rules curb the objectives aimed by policies and how these last reshape and sometimes subvert formal rules themselves (Pederzoli; Chiaramonte); deductive approaches are fairly uncommon, with the partial exception of Berton et al.'s work; and finally, they reframe the case of Italy in a global perspective focusing on the dynamics exhibited by advanced democracies and, in doing so, they seem to avoid the risk of analyzing Italy as an isolated case.

Italian scholars who are working on different issues than the ones mentioned here and whose works have not been reviewed ultimately seem to converge on these final points. Research conducted on migration policies (Caponio, 2006; Campomori, 2008), on health-care systems (Toth, 2009), on gender policies (Donà, 2007), on European policies and their impact on the domestic system (Piana, 2006; Ferrera and Giuliani, 2008) bears witness to the necessity of combining elements of neoinstitutionalism and concepts provided by historical institutionalists. A multi-faceted methodological approach thus seems preferable. Works that deal with topics associated with the development of the politics of a particular country make relevant points for the understanding of advanced democracy (comparison is in this respect always in the background of the research designs): party politics (Bardi, 2006) and intra-party organization (Baccetti, 2007; Tronconi, 2009), constitutional politics (Barbera and Fusaro, 2006), and administrative reforms (Natalini, 2007). Another very promising research topic now occupying the agenda of Italian political science is the quality of democracy, addressed by Almagisti (2008). All these texts, as well as those covered in this article, point out patterns of development that are not exhibited only by Italy, but can be found more generally in most advanced democracies.

Notes

1. <http://www.sisp.it>.
2. During the last five years, Italian scholars devoted much attention to the transformation of the political parties. Baccetti (2007) explores the evolution of the elite and of the DC.

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