



New Local Leadership: The Level of Politics

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Abstract

The level of local government in Italy, for about twenty years, is the scene of profound changes in both politics and policy-making. The reforms of the 90s were inserted in a framework of political opportunity-weaknesses that had the most sensational extrication in directionalism: the crisis of the parties and the tools of political mediation; the personalization and the spectacularization of politics; the fiscal crisis of the state; the need to activate accountability processes. The regulatory-structural framework in the local context, combined with new socio-political dynamics have strengthened the centrality of leadership, increasingly unbalanced on the political front of the consolidation of consensus, less and less attentive to the needs of "good administration"; in metaphorical key, prevails the model "a man alone to the command" to the detriment of the figure of the policy entrepreneur. The paper analyses the new types of local leadership in relation to the legal and political changes that have occurred in the local area since the 1990s.

Keywords: local politics; leadership; mayor; personalization

1. Introduction

For some decades, Italian politics has been affected by the wind of change, already from the second half of the 70s of the last century (Donolo: 1977). There has been insistent talk of "Italian transition", almost as a permanent condition (Pasquino: 2000; Tranfaglia: 2003; Ceccanti, Vassallo: 2004). The only political-administrative level where the transition has actually taken place is the local one: especially in the municipal area, also from a normative point of view have changed roles, functions and relationships between the political-institutional actors and, consequently, the degree of accountability. All levels of local political responsibility are imputed to the demoelected mayor, in a dynamic of accentuated directionalism that is difficult to reconcile with the needs and administrative constraints (Vandelli: 1997; Vandelli 2014; Caciagli, Di Virgilio: 2005). The issue is part of the more global debate on urban reform and local government, which has always been particularly fervent in the United States of America (Lowi: 1964; Dahl: 1961; Hunter: 1953; Welch, Bledsoe: 1988; Svava & Associates: 1994).

The recent experience of local government in Italy has undoubtedly highlighted new policy making dynamics that must be framed in the imbalance between research and consolidation of consensus on the one hand, and ordinary administrative management on the other (Baccetti: 1999; Cilento: 2000; Catanzaro, Piselli, Ramella, Trigilia: 2002; Morello: 2007; Canzano: 2012). Agenda-setting; composition by type of policy-making; articulation of the policy cycle: these are the policy sides that have seen the most significant changes at local level in recent decades. Equally important were the innovations of politics introduced in local government in Italy since the 90s of the last century, or spontaneously determined in the local socio-political context: partisan deconstruction; new role of political actors-institutional; new rules and standards; innovative decision-making models. In the analysis of the above processes, the two levels (politics and policy)

cross and overlap in a causal dynamic always very controversial (Easton: 1953; Lowi: 1972; Cotta: 1989). Little has been deepened the role of the leadership as agency variable in the change of the local policies (Capano: 2009). At the local level, political leadership has undergone profound changes: from the "party mayor" (Tarrow: 1979), to the figure of the "political entrepreneur" (Schumpeter: 1954) to that of "policy entrepreneur" (Giuliani: 1998).

The paper aims to analyse the most recent changes in local politics, with particular reference to the changed leadership role of the mayor. The analytical approach is the traditional institutional one, according to which "politics determines policies".

2. Changes in Local Politics and Traditional Leaderships

The literature of the last century on leadership is very articulate and extensive (Regalia: 2012). On the side of our interest, some dimensions of leadership are more relevant because they are more directly related to the policy making side: its individual/collective nature; the contextual nature of the structure and leadership styles; the ways in which the leadership function builds the necessary consensus for action (Capano: 2009). These are dimensions that bring into play capacities and resources both cognitive and institutional and the two plans, in the case of the "new" mayors in Italy, are absolutely central. The institutional plan of local government, since the 90s of the last century, has gone through a series of important changes that have been translated, or have been induced, in/by relevant regulatory measures (Vandelli: 2014).

1. Law 142/1990 on the regulation of local self-government. New subjects are foreseen: metropolitan cities; unions of municipalities. For the first time, municipalities and provinces are granted statutory autonomy;
2. Law 81/1993 on the direct election of the mayor and the president of the province. It attributed to the mayor a strong centrality, with the power of appointing assessors, managers, directors of entities and agencies;
3. The "Bassanini reforms", 1997-1998, on the decentralisation of functions from the State to the regions and local authorities, together with the simplification and reorganization of state administration;
4. Reform of Title V of the Constitution, 2001. Redefining the Autonomies, on the basis of the principles of subsidiarity, and rationalization of administrative functions;
5. The difficult and complicated implementation of the 2001 Reform, linked to the 2006 Reform of the Constitution, rejected by the constitutional referendum;
6. Tax Federalism Act, 42/2009, the implementation of which has proved to be extremely slow and difficult;
7. Measures of the years 2011-2014, included in the financial maneuvers, and aimed at intervening on the levels of vast area, to establish metropolitan cities and resize the functions and organization of the provinces.

Obviously the legislative measure that had the greatest impact on local governance, as well as on internal and external relations to the municipal administration, was undoubtedly Law 81/1993 that introduced the direct popular election of mayors. As a result, profound processes of change have taken place that have contributed to redefining the role, especially political, of the mayor. The most effective representation of the role of the mayor before the 1993 reform is undoubtedly attributed to Tarrow (1979). Tarrow highlighted the typology of the "notable mayor", who bases his power on personal and family prestige but, already after the Second World War, in Italy the figure of the "mediator mayor" is affirmed: "while the notable mayor builds his role in the community by surrounding himself with a dense network of personal relationships, and the mayor administrator is inspired in his work by the principles of good governance, the ombudsman mayor adapts his strategy to the constraints imposed by the political system (...). He is a local political mediator who due to the patronage nature of the resource distribution system is forced to establish a network of political relations to obtain funds for his own community" (ibid: 180). We can speak, in this regard, of real "political entrepreneurs", with a wide network of contacts both in the local and national political system, who use their membership of parties to obtain resources for their municipalities. The main consequence of that state of affairs was the total degree of irresponsibility that can be

found at any level of local government, both political and bureaucratic, tacitly harmonized by the link of party. As Recchi claims (1996, p. 88) "the inertia of the parties, at least at local level, in providing elements of evaluation and management to their representatives, also obliged the elected to try to establish a fiduciary relationship with that political-administrative class that controls economic resources, legislative, useful techniques and information in the formation of municipal policies, acting as a hinge between the different fractions of the local elite". Recchi's considerations are supported by his observation of the differences existing in the role-set of Italian mayors before and after the 1993 reform: the term role-set refers to the "Complex of the role relations that individuals have as occupiers a particular social position" (Merton: 1968, 107). Recchi's analysis shows that the post-reform mayor is *primus et solus*: weakens the network of collaboration with other holders of power resources and consequently the mayor is more alien to the rest of the local political world and personally inserted in a large network of citizens-voters. If for the past Tarrow had outlined the figure of the "mediator mayor" concertative and consociative, in the era of the "new mayors" Vandelli coined different metaphors related to Greek mythology (Vandelli: 1997): Sisyphus (the labours of the administrator), Tantalus (the goals that move away, frustration), Damocles (responsibilities and risks, insecurity). The mayor, starting from the 90s, if on the political level he is increasingly a king, must rise to the role of hero in the titanic enterprise of conducting the administrative management of the local authority: you can safely say "the king is naked!".

A further classification of the pre-reform types of local government is that elaborated by Goldsmith (1991), according to which three idealtypes must be highlighted: "1. The patronage or patronage model, for which the main function of local government is the distribution of benefits to individuals or groups of particular individuals; 2. The model of economic development, which sees the role of local government in promoting economic growth and ensuring the necessary conditions for market forces to operate without constraints, even if not necessarily without rules; 3. The welfare state model, for which the role of local government is more closely linked to the provision of redistributive services" (p. 23).

3. New Types of Local Leadership

The real watershed in the definition of the role of local government and mayor, especially from the empirical point of view, is the phenomenon of the crisis of political mediation determined by party destructuring (Morlino: 2006). At the local level, partisan deconstruction was evident from the 1980s onwards, weakening the widespread pervasiveness of parties, both in the social and institutional spheres, which had been strong around the mid-1960s; the strong role of the parties was found above all in the selection of political personnel (Tarrow, cited above) based, almost exclusively, on criteria of party affiliation, with mechanisms only relatively different within the three main Italian parties (DC, PCI, PSI). "Local government had considerable stability and professionalization, being completely impervious to any personality who was not produced or recruited by party circuits" (Vandelli: 1997, 8). More and more the processes of personalization and professionalization were affirmed: "In Italy the party activist is not a militant who operates isolated in a political subculture, but a political entrepreneur who manages a variety of political contacts with his allies and his opponents, both locally and at the central levels of the political system" (Tarrow: cit. 193-194). Since the late 70s, signs of strong change have been affecting the entire Italian political system (Mair : 1992), including the local level: the first indicator of this is the weakening of traditional political subcultures (Diamanti: 2003) and the vote of belonging (Parisi and Pasquino: 1977). The connection between the centre and the periphery of the system is compromised. "The degenerative aspect of the personalization of politics intersects with the growing role of the political entrepreneur, now out of any party control that works only for itself, because now the party back off in these competitions, leaving room for figures (..)" (Canzano: cit.) and "subgroups that decide on everything but are not able, nor are interested, to elaborate a real government project for the community. The entrepreneurial councillor of politics feeds the process of personalizing political power to the maximum degree because he is in competition with opponents, with party comrades, with the junta colleagues" (Bettin: 1992). The dynamics of political micro-personalization (one by one), which act as a ballast to the phenomena of macro-personalization (one by many) increasingly widespread in

post-modern political society, are affirmed and consolidated (Calise: 2010). The real breakthrough, as anticipated, came with the introduction of the direct election of the mayor who in turn appoints the junta, not necessarily chosen among the councilors, indeed, especially in the first post-experience 1993, which tends to be composed of persons outside and outside politics. The traditional source of legitimacy of local power is no longer the party, but the electorate.

Law 81/1993 was based on two different levels: political and administrative. As regards the first aspect, the processes of personalization and strengthening of the mayor's leadership have been formalized, only partly due to the introduction of direct popular election; in relation to the second level, they attributed to the head of the administration greater possibilities to influence the functioning of the municipal bureaucratic machine. These two levels of innovation reflected two specific trends of contemporary politics in general: the accentuation of the degree of responsiveness and its ever-increasing attribution to individual political personalities, generally the monocratic top executives; a new business model of administration. The concentration of new and greater powers in the hands of the mayor has focused on his person all the expectations of municipal public opinion and related responsibilities for the performance of the body. The demo-elected mayor becomes the mayor of all citizens and no longer just the expression of a party or a coalition: and it is to the entire citizenship that he, without any filter or intermediation, will have to answer. For the new mayors, to put it to Vandelli (1997), he foreshadowed the role of superman. Its ability and ability to respond to the demands of the city community will depend on the possible reconfirmation of the leadership of the municipality; no longer, as was the case previously, by decisions and agreements between the parties or within them. In the age of demo-elected mayors it was inevitable that relations between the new heads of local administrations and the parties would change. If the first administrative experiences after the reform were marked by a clear anti-partisan matrix, in the following years the parties rehabilitate themselves on some fronts: in the selection of candidates for mayor; in the composition of the juntas; in the distribution of the offices (Mr Vandelli: 1997). "While the figure of the mayor is strengthened by the demo-election, it is weakened by the lack of political cohesion. Are we back to the mediator mayor? Certainly not, but surely the mayor decision-maker out of the reform, strong of his personal resources, must reckon with political forces endowed with organizational resources whose interests are not always convergent" (Canzano: cit., p. 42). More generally, the hottest and most critical fronts of the action of the "new" mayors turned out to be: relations between juntas and majority parties and those between juntas and councils; relations with the municipal bureaucracy; relations with interest organizations.

Two other constraints of considerable importance have affected the action of the "new" mayors: the time factor and the financial one. With regard to the first constraint, it was immediately apparent, in the eyes of the "new" mayors, that the enormous work of reorganizing the offices and the municipal bureaucratic machine would have required a very long period of time, certainly well beyond the four years, then become five, scheduled for the expiry of the trade union mandate. In addition, the reorganization and rationalization of the municipal machine was a meritorious policy, but little suited to the needs of consolidating popular consensus to which the mayor directly invested could not escape. The benefits of such a reform would be felt in the medium to long term and would thus have no immediate response in the short term, for a positive assessment of the work of the mayor functional to his re-election. The other critical factor is related to leverage: the progressive reduction of budget transfers by the central government to local authorities, with the abolition, in recent years, of a series of municipal taxes, have increasingly forced mayors to cope with the scarce resources of the territory, of a private nature, or to fund creativity in devising interventions and policies at no cost (Pasotti: 2010; Catanzaro, Piselli, Ramella, Trigilia: 2002; Morello: cit.).

As mentioned above, we try to identify the nature of the leadership that has come to be realized in the local context. For this purpose we use the analytical grid indicated by Capano (2009a). First, should the leadership of the "new" mayors be defined in individual or collective terms? Although the prevailing literature tends, in general, to the collective identification of the leadership (Carson, Tesluk & Marrone: 2007) and to the desirability of the establishment of a «leadership network» (Wallis and Dollery: 1999), ie a distribution of leaders at all stages of the policy process from agenda setting to implementation (Capano: 2009a), the case of the first mayors

put to the test immediately after the reform seem more like the leader "only in charge", exclusively focused on his potential and personal resources, refractory to forms of party conditioning or specific social sectors/interest groups. But the obvious disproportion between the high popular expectations and the inadequate resources and tools available to the mayor, has brought into play, especially since the late 1990s, the validity of the collective dimension of leadership, as an indispensable condition for the political success of the "new" mayors.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the alternative between the "situational" or "contextual" dimensions of the leadership of mayors must be taken up, that is, whether the historical and institutional context predetermines the style of action of the leadership (individual or collective), or, if not, whether the margins of discretion granted to the leader are such that the outcome and course of action are unpredictable. In the case of demo-elected mayors, having to parametrize the variables of institutional context, the second hypothesis clearly prevails: "to be understood leadership needs deep and detailed reconstructions of contexts and situations, because it is in the everyday of policy-making that the leadership function operates, is transformed, produces new ideas, directs new individuals to explore possible opportunities for action" (Capano: 2009a). In the case of mayors, the different level of consensus that they have obtained, depending on the case, strengthens the hypothesis that they are jointly situational and contextual dynamics, but definitely individualizing.

Given that leadership is a "relational" and not "positional" concept (Edinger: 1975; Blondel: 1987), and therefore "the leader is identified as the one who is able to modify the actions of others" (Regalia: cit., p. 392) The instruments by which this effect is exerted must be identified. In the case of mayors, the dynamics in question fall both in the field of hard power and soft power (Nye: 2009). The restoration of legality as an essential condition for any form of civil coexistence has made it necessary, in many cases, to resort to coercion; the revitalization of civil society and civic spirit determined by factors of strong popular identification in the values and principles of which the "first citizens", are the result of a work of conceptual and value reworking that aims to create and consolidate a common vision and mission.

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