

The social fabric under stress

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[Public Sociology] Report: Workshop on Democracy and Lobbying (University of Perugia, 10-12 May 2023)

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A residential workshop of the Standing Group on Interest Groups Studies of the SISP (Società Italiana di Scienza Politica/Italian Political Science Association) was held at the University of Perugia between 11-12 May 2023. It was organized by Marco Mazzoni, Associate Professor of Lobbying and Public Relations, who formerly took part also in ESA RN 32-Political Sociology initiatives. The three sessions of the workshop hosted a rich interdisciplinary debate among the Standing Group members, introduced by the two coordinators. Alberto Bitonti (Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano) stressed the need to regulate lobbying tasks and consider their activities in order to understand public decision-making and policy processes more clearly. Renata Lizzi (University of Bologna) focused on agri-food and energy issues as crucial themes for future analysis, especially from the viewpoint of climate change. This aspect was also raised by Leonardo Morlino (LUISS University, Rome) in his keynote speech on 'Interest groups and democracy', during the presentation of *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Interest Groups, Lobbying and Public Affairs* (Springer, 2022), edited by Alberto Bitonti, Phil Harris (University of Chester Business School), Craig S. Fleisher (Aurora WDC, Madison, USA) and Anne Skorkjaer Binderkrantz (Aarhus University, Denmark). Morlino asserted the relevance of interest group studies applied to inequalities related to climate change and environmental issues. Referring to Duverger (1972), he maintained that pressure groups can prove more effective than political parties, especially when decision-making processes have global range and involve supra-national actors (like the European Union). In the following debate, Mazzoni

relaunched the contributions by Milbrath (1965) concerning lobbying as a communication process in political participation, and by Cobb and Elder (1972) on the notion of agenda-building, going back to the works by David Truman, Robert Dahl and Theodore Lowi. The role of agenda-setting was discussed by Federico Toth (University of Bologna), while Andrea Pritoni (University of Turin) underlined the importance of networking between organizations. The goals of the 2020 UNO Agenda for Sustainable Development were then brought up by Edoardo Amato (University of Florence). Finally, deliberative democracy and its applications in Ireland were described by Michele Crepez (Queen's University, Belfast), who focused on bottom-up rather than top-down processes, following Bachrach and Baratz (1962). Further contributions to the discussion were given by Claudia Mariotti and Luca Fiorelli (University of Rome 3), Chiara Fiorelli (La Sapienza University, Rome) and Adriana Salaris (University of Pavia). Overall, the workshop was a good occasion to debate issues of common interest for the participants, with a clear reference to the need for cooperation among disciplines (sociology, political science, management studies, organization theory).

References

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