

# A recent Study Conference on the Higher Council of Education and the Government of the University system in the Republican age (Macerata, 30-31 May 2024)

Maria Ortenzi  
Department of Education, Cultural  
Heritage and Tourism  
University of Macerata (Italy)  
mariaortenzi@virgilio.it

Diana Travaglini  
Department of Education, Cultural  
Heritage and Tourism  
University of Macerata (Italy)  
d.travaglini1@unimc.it

**ABSTRACT:** This contribution intends to retrace the results of an important conference held at the University of Macerata on 30-31 May 2024, entitled *The Higher Council of Public Education and the governance of the university system in the Republican era* and organized by CISUI in collaboration with the Center for studies and documentation on the history of the University of Macerata «Sandro Serangeli». This important scientific meeting focused on the role of the Higher Council of Public Education in the creation and modification of the Italian university system in the contemporary age. Thanks to the reports presented, the moments of continuity and significant changes that have occurred since the post-war period to the present were explored in which the Higher Council, has always tried to keep the relationship of the University with the main socio-political and legislative transformations of the country. The two study sessions then highlighted how the Council has influenced and guided educational policies through decades of socio-economic and cultural changes, revealing the importance of this institution in shaping higher education in Italy.

**EET/TEE KEYWORDS:** History of University; History of school; Superior council of public education; Italy; XX Century.

An important conference of studies that starts a serious and rigorous reflection on the role of the Higher Council of Education in the creation and modification of the Italian university system in contemporary age. On 30 and 31 May 2024, at the Department of Cultural Heritage Education and Tourism Sciences of the University of Macerata, the study conference entitled *The Higher Council of Education and the government of the university system in the republican age*; was held an initiative to study and compare the scientific activities planned within the CISUI national research framework, which has seen the participation of distinguished speakers, from numerous Italian universities and experts in the history of Universities and higher education. In particular, the role played by the Higher Council of Education in the republican era was examined with reference to the definition of the broad lines of development of the system and the management of self-government mechanisms, from the relationship between the center and the periphery to the imbalances between universities and the dialectic between groups and trends which characterize teachers<sup>1</sup>.

The proceedings were opened by the institutional greetings of the Rector of the University of Macerata, Professor John McCourt, the Director of the Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism of Macerata, Professor Lorella Giannandrea and the Chairman of the Scientific Committee of CISUI, Professor Gian Paolo Brizzi, who, after having recognized Macerata's role at national level in the history research of the University since the mid-nineties, has gone through in detail the genesis of the project that led to the Macerata conference whose original idea dates back to February 2020 with the clear intention of the proposers to fill an existing historiographical gap.

The first part of the conference was moderated by Professor Guido Melis (Sapienza University of Rome) with a contribution entitled *The Higher Council of Education. Continuity and changes in an institution*. As a rigorous and highly regarded scholar of the history of institutions<sup>2</sup>, Melis introduced the subject by starting from the birth of the Superior Council for Education on 30 November 1847 in the Kingdom of Sardinia, which was initially a regional advisory body, and, following the promulgation of the Statute Albertino, gov-

<sup>1</sup> On the origins and the institution of the Higher Council of Public Education, and therefore on previous studies, we can refer in particular to: G. Talamo, *La scuola dalla legge Casati all'inchiesta del 1864*, Rome, Giuffrè, 1960; G. Ciampi, *Il governo della scuola nello Stato postunitario. Il Consiglio superiore della pubblica istruzione dalle origini all'ultimo governo Depretis (1847-1887)*, Milan, Edizioni di Comunità, 1983; G. Ciampi, C. Santangeli (edd.) *Fonti per la storia della scuola. II. Il consiglio superiore della pubblica istruzione 1847-1928*, Rome, Ministry for Cultural and Environmental Heritage, Central Office for Archival Heritage, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Some of his most important works in this field can be cited: G. Melis, *Storia dell'amministrazione italiana (1861-1993)*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1996; Id., *La Burocrazia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1998; Id., *La Pubblica Amministrazione*, in M. De Nicolò (ed.), *Costituente, Costituzione, riforme costituzionali*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1998.

ernment. It was confirmed by the Casati law of 13 November 1859, article 7 and following, as the body of the central administration of public education of the Kingdom of Sardinia and, since 1861, of the Kingdom of Italy. Composed of twenty-one members, fourteen ordinary and seven extra-ordinary unpaid, all appointed to the Royal Government, it had a consultative role with the Government in education and drew up school curricula.

The talks were continued with the joint intervention of Professor Andrea Giorgi (University of Trento) and Professor Leonardo Mineo (University of Turin). With their rich contribution, entitled *Sources and archives*, the two scholars have deepened and analyzed the issues related to the Superior Council through the files available at the State Central Archive<sup>3</sup>, extending the time frame of research until 1967. There is a clear desire to reform university geography and expand the degree courses<sup>4</sup>. The requests to the Council for a fair recognition of the role of student bodies.

The brilliant intervention of Professor Mauro Moretti (University for Foreigners in Siena), *The reconstruction 1945-1955*, aimed to highlight the difficult years of post-war reconstruction with the distant views between Council and Ministry on sensitive issues such as free teaching, the establishment of new faculties, as well as the heated and perhaps never entirely extinguished debate on the autonomy of the universities that has already developed within the Constituent Assembly<sup>5</sup>.

The following period from 1959 to 1967 was taken up by Professor Francesco Bonini (University of Rome LUMSA). In his detailed report on the reform plans 1959-1967 clearly captures the anxiety of renewal that pervaded in the period coeval Italian University and the role taken by the Superior Council in expressing its position between self-government needs and “hot” issues the admission of those from technical institutes to university studies, student participation in academic government bodies and the establishment of new universities campus in regions lacking such cultural and power centres<sup>6</sup>, repeatedly claimed by the local ruling classes. In the background, of course, the prepara-

<sup>3</sup> For the details of the fund, please refer to the link: <<https://patrimonioacs.cultura.gov.it/patrimonio/1d8f29f4-3932-4453-9f7b-348cf52ba345/fondo-consiglio-superiore-della-pubblica-istruzione>> (last access: 23.09.2024).

<sup>4</sup> On the subject, for example, see M. Moretti, *Sulla geografia accademica nell'Italia contemporanea (1859-1962)*, in L. Blanco, A. Giorgi, L. Mineo (edd.), *Costruire un'Università. Le fonti documentarie per la storia dell'Università degli Studi di Trento (1962-1972)*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2011, pp. 59-100.

<sup>5</sup> On the administration of universities: M. Moretti, *Sul governo delle università nell'Italia contemporanea*, «Annali of the history of Italian universities», vol. 14, 2010, pp. 11-40.

<sup>6</sup> See F. Bonini, *Storia costituzionale della Repubblica*, Milan, Il Giornale, Biblioteca della libertà, 2018; Foundations Giacomo Matteotti, *La Costituzione italiana alla prova della politica e della storia, 1948-2018*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2019.

tory work and parliamentary events of the failed bill devised by minister Luigi Gui that occupied much of the 1960s<sup>7</sup>.

Professor Giovanni Focardi (University of Padua), in his report, *Prosopography of the members of the Superior Council of Education*, at the end of the first day, he finally focused on the composition of the Superior Council and the very widespread practice in the 1960s and 1970s characterized by the precise will of the ministers of the time to include in the Superior Council of the Education cultural and political close to them. Almost completely non-existent female presence with few and isolated appearances of the fair sex in an organ for a long-time appanage of men, as indeed the entire Italian academy. Maria Emilia Lucifredi Peterlongo was one of the few exceptions of women present in the Superior Council while others tried the same way but without luck.

The second day of the conference, moderated in the first part by Professor Anna Ascenzi (University of Macerata) and in the second by Professor Annamaria Monti (State University of Milan), both satisfied with the ability of the conference in Macerata to initiate a new historiographical reflection on a topic as complex as relevant as that of university policies in Italy, thanks also to the peculiar role played by the Higher Council of Education in the process of renewal of higher education during the republican years, was opened by the intervention of Professor Salustri (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia). In his speech entitled *University policies between the centre and the periphery*. The activity of Felice Battaglia in the Higher Council of Education, the scholar focused on a prominent figure within the Higher Council of Education, that of Felice Battaglia<sup>8</sup>. Professor, jurist of great culture, respected philosopher of law and several times rector of the University of Bologna, Battaglia held important positions within the Higher Council of Education, in which he joined (in the first section) of 1948. These were the years when delicate issues such as that of the reintegration of university professors discharged from the service for purge and which, having fallen out of the fascist regime, had to be resumed. On this subject, as well as on others, Battaglia had a leading role between the various events that saw him as the protagonist but also an uncomfortable character.

The sixties and university policies of a particularly complex period for the Italian higher education system was instead dedicated to the rich contribution of Professor Luigiaurelio Pomante (University of Macerata), entitled *The work of the Ermini Commission and the opinions of the Superior Council of Education and the National Council of Economy and Labor*. The task of introducing the political and institutional climate of the time with the renewed

<sup>7</sup> On the subject, see in particular the recent work by L. Pomante, *L'Università della Repubblica (1946-1980)*. *Quarant'anni di storia dell'istruzione superiore in Italia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2022, pp. 72-96 and D. Gabusi, *La svolta democratica nell'istruzione italiana: Luigi Gui e la politica scolastica del centro-sinistra*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> S. Salustri, *Felice Battaglia e l'università del dopoguerra*, «E-Review», n. 5, 2017.

demand from the political class to initiate a possible reform of the national training system. Hence the establishment of a Commission to investigate the state and needs of public education in Italy. The Commission should have sent a detailed report on the state of development of Education in Italy to the Minister for Education at the end of its work. The presidency of this Commission was entrusted, as is known, to Professor Giuseppe Ermini. It was therefore provided a very detailed picture of the educational and university situation in the country, and various proposals were made concerning teacher training, structural and didactic modernization of the school and university, and school construction. The Commission's proposals were obviously passed on to the Board of Governors and the Centre, who after a generally positive initial assessment, came up with numerous criticisms. As well explained by Pomante was the minister Gui to have considered the proposals of the Ermini Commission and the comments of the Superior Council and Cnel to arrive at the final formulation of his elaborate but unfortunate ddl n. 2314 that, in fact, if approved, would radically renew the Italian university<sup>9</sup>.

Professor Andrea Mariuzzo (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia) refers to the work of Luigi Gui and even earlier to that of Guido Gonella in his speech on *Degrees and training paths for research: the discussions in Superior Council from Gonnella to Gui*, which focus mainly on the debates of the 1950s and 1960s within the Superior Council on teacher training, The legal and economic treatment of these institutions and the value of the diplomas awarded by the Italian universities, a topic which is very interesting and topical<sup>10</sup>.

Professor Marianna Gaetani (Polytechnic of Turin) also gave a very original speech entitled *The building problem (1956-1968)*, in which, she with rigor and punctuality in the data, The building problem that existed between the end of the fifties and the beginning of the following decade within the Italian University was examined<sup>11</sup>. Despite the constant and considerable increase in

<sup>9</sup> For the work of the Commission, see: *Relazione della Commissione d'indagine sullo stato e sullo sviluppo della Pubblica Istruzione in Italia*, 2 vols., Rome, Palombi, 1963, Vol. I *Testo della relazione presentata al Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione il 24 luglio 1963*; L. Pomante, *Dall'università d'élite all'università di massa: luci e ombre sull'evoluzione dell'istruzione superiore nell'Italia del secondo Novecento*, in A. Ascenzi, R. Sani, *Inclusione e promozione sociale nel sistema formativo italiano dall'Unità ad oggi*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2020, pp. 102-128, in partic. pp. 108-112.

<sup>10</sup> Precisely on the topic of recruitment, Mariuzzo has published: A. Mariuzzo, *Il reclutamento dei docenti universitari*, «Il mulino. Rivista mensile di attualità e cultura», vol. 66, n. 1, 2017, pp. 135-144.

<sup>11</sup> On this topic, the scholar has specifically investigated the case of the Polytechnic of Turin in the contribution: G. Gaetani, *I progetti e la costruzione della nuova sede del Politecnico di Torino in corso Duca degli Abruzzi: una cronologia (1939-1958)*, in *60: il Politecnico di Torino e la costruzione della città nel Novecento: la sede di corso Duca degli Abruzzi nel sessantesimo anniversario della sua inaugurazione*, Turin, Politecnico di Torino, 2018, pp. 12-94.

students due to the advent of mass higher education, Italian universities struggled to adapt their structures, mainly because of the scarcity of funds available and above all because of an adequate and reasoned planning on which the Board of Governors had insisted on several occasions in its deliberations.

Partly related to the report of Gaetani, also the contribution *Debates and deliberations on the establishment of new faculties and degree courses in relation to technical-industrial development* of Professor Stefano Morosini (University of Bergamo), who was entrusted with the task, The challenge of linking and justifying the establishment of new faculties and degree courses with the changed economic and social context in Italy during the 1960s. Hence the emergence rising, sometimes ‘wild’ and without a precise organic plan, a considerable number of courses that would certainly have satisfied the instant coming from the audience but at the same time would have forced the Italian university to rethink its structure and organization in a decidedly irrational way.

At the end of the conference, the interesting speech by Professor Alessandro Breccia (University of Pisa), entitled *The Higher Council of Education in the face of the emergencies of the long ‘sixty-eight’*, in which the expert scholar has stressed how in the period “hot” and demanding of the ’68<sup>12</sup>, made of pressure and heated dispute, the Superior Council played a leading role in the face of the difficult situation in which the Italian university system was forced to live, but demonstrating a ‘tolerance’ until then never seen.

The conference in Macerata, therefore, offered with originality and methodological rigor, a detailed and multidisciplinary analysis of the role of the Higher Council of Education in directing the Italian university system in the republican era. The various reports have shown how it, between ups and downs, has nevertheless influenced and guided educational policies through decades of socio-economic and cultural changes, effectively shaping higher education in Italy.

<sup>12</sup> A. Breccia (ed.), *Le istituzioni universitarie e il Sessantotto*, Bologna, Clueb, 2013; A. Breccia, S. Salustri (edd.), *Le Università in Emilia-Romagna dal dopoguerra alla contestazione del ’68*, Bologna, Bradypus, 2018.