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The blurred boundaries of policy advice
Varieties of relations in the Italian core executive

Abstract

Policy advice is experiencing increasing differentiation and hybridization between political, bureaucratic and advisory roles within and around core executives, both in Westminster and European countries (Craft and Halligan 2017; Hustedt and Veit 2017). Hybridization can invest both sides in these relations: advisors may act as politicians, but also bureaucrats may play a political role, while elected representatives may act as experts under certain circumstances. What matters is the legitimation of the policy advice, and namely the reasons that bring politicians, bureaucrats and advisors to work together – ranging from personal trust, partisan ties or institutional affiliation, just to name a few (Galanti and Lippi 2018).

The forms of engagement within the core executive of advice among experts, politicians and bureaucrats are changing, and thus the central question for research becomes how advising is bargained and shaped among actors inside core executives. National patterns emerge: while the Anglo-Saxon model is institutionalized with structured roles, the central European model is built upon less defined arrangements between experts and institutional actors. Italy represents a case in point to describe policy advice practices in the light of their hybrid nature, for several reasons. First, the administrative Napoleonic tradition matches with a great variety in the levels of expertise and in the diffusion of policy knowledge at ministerial, but also at territorial levels (Dente 1997). Second, few studies are available on the politicization of policy advice as a specific type of patronage (Di Mascio and Natalini 2016). Third, there are have been recent attempts to create ad hoc policy units at the level of the core executive, thus showing an increasing request for experts' advice available "at arm length". Our paper proposes to shed some light on the changing relationships between the demand and the offer of policy advice in the case of core executive in Italy. It investigates a sample of institutional policy advisors in different policy sectors (namely public research institutes as identified by a recent Italian law, n. 218 enacted in 2016). Documental analysis and in-depth interviews will be used to shed some light on the possible determinants of the different types of advice relations.

1. Introduction

This paper is focused on the differentiation and hybridization of policy advice systems and the relations between Ministries cabinets and advisors. This approach is aimed at describing the variety of relations that occur in the core executive, according to specific contingencies (Connaughton 2010a, b). The focus of the work is specifically on the relation between demand and supply of advice inside and outside core executives.

An increasing number of advisors raised up in the last year and policy advice is increasingly diversified and reshuffled in the light of new requirements from the politicians and the greater availability of knowledge and expertise from experts, professionals, and consultants.

As a result, besides the consolidated evidence of a politicized inner circle of advisors in the cabinets, further occasional entourage acquired space, shedding light on an emerging phenomenon. This trend leaves room for new types of contingent relations and trades off between the core executive and the newcomers. It specifically refers to some specific type of them, like the governmental research institutes, e.g. institute of research funded by the government and traditionally dedicated to pure research and now engaged in more professional advice.

The Italian trajectory of this shift from science to advice is the case in point. Italian Policy advice system is traditionally embedded in the post-Napoleonic PAS system, with a strong degree of politicization of cabinets, but it now stepwise turning into a different pattern thanks to the recruitment of new technical advisors from other institutions and governmental research institute. This widening of the core executive is partially due to the increasing complexity of decisions, to the search of legitimacy by the politicians, and also to the request for funding by the abovementioned institutes.

As a result, a path for institutionalization and de- institutionalization of the PAS system also inside post-Napoleonic countries is depicted in this paper. After reconstructing the theoretical background behind the approach of demand and supply relation, on the one hand, and the diversification of policy advice beyond politicization), the papers focuses on the case study of Italian PAS (section 2). Section 3 and 4 are consequently devoted to explaining research design and first evidence deriving from a sample of (still ongoing) interviews to 17 Governmental Research Institutes (GRI). Hence, Section 5 discusses the evidence and sheds light on the emerging factors: the contingency feature of these innovative and hybrid policy advice relations, on the one side, and the exchange of legitimacy between demand and supply, on the other.

2. State of the art: trends in the study of policy advice, Policy Advisory Systems, and Ministerial advisers

The literature on policy advice has mushroomed in recent years, along with the interest in governance shifts, policy analytical capacities and knowledge utilization in the policy process (Craft and Howlett 2012; Howlett 2009; Weiss 1979). These studies have been developed also thanks to the availability of empirical researches on advisory activities in Westminster countries (Craft and Halligan 2017), while attaining first pieces of evidence in countries with other administrative traditions, such as the Continental and the Napoleonic ones (Hustedt and Veit 2017).

2.1 The externalization of policy advice: the increasing supply of policy advice

The study of policy advice has been developed at crossroads between political science, public administration and public policy analysis, therefore implying an intriguing cross-fertilization between concepts, analytical frameworks, and research questions. In this prospect, there are a couple of concepts that help to illuminate the complexity of this phenomenon.

The first concept relates to the idea that policy advice is better understood as a complex system of actors, showing different features in the different countries and policy sectors, and ultimately depending on the

characteristics of both the political and the administrative systems. This is the original idea of Halligan (1995) who identifies the Policy Advisory Systems (PAS) as "the interlocking set of actors and organizations with unique configurations in each sector and jurisdiction that provides recommendations for action to policy-makers".

The concept of PAS is important because it allows capturing the complexity of policy advice, considering both the number of actors involved and the variety of advisory activities performed in a given context. The focus on PAS also allows moving from the individual characterization of (policy, political, partisan, ministerial) advisors towards a more encompassing view of advice as a complex system of relations. In this view, the PAS is the result of different configurations of actors, and ultimately as the result of the match between a demand and a supply of advice (Halligan 1995; Galanti 2017, 252).

The empirical studies on PAS have highlighted some dynamics of change that illuminate the complexity and the contingency of policy advice. Craft and Halligan (2012) suggest that governance has extended the boundaries of PAS both in space and in scope.

First, focusing on the boundaries of the phenomenon, they acknowledge that the executives and the civil service are no longer the monopolists of policy advice, which is increasingly diffused also in the society through the policy work of non-institutional actors. Thus, policy advice cannot be considered as a bipolar relationship between the politicians and the civil servants (Craft and Howlett 2012). For example, at the executive level, the tripartite relation involves ministers, political advisors, and civil servants and can be collaborative, gatekeeping, triangulated or hybrid (Zussmann in Craft 2015, 138). Instead, it is a complex web of relations that includes other actors inside and outside democratic institutions, ranging from more "internal" actors such as the ministerial advisers, parliamentary commissions, administrative agencies, and arm's length bodies, to more "external" actors such as universities, think tanks, and research institutes. This identifies a common trend of externalization of the Policy Advisory Systems in different countries (Craft and Howlett 2013), which basically means that multiple actors and relations of advice exist in a given context.

Second, the advice delivered is more and more differentiated in scope. Shifting from the initial view of the advice as "speaking truth to power" towards a more nuanced vision of "sharing truth with multiple actors of influence" (Prince 2007, 179), Craft and Howlett (2012) propose to move from locational towards content models of policy advice. To put it simply, the idea is that the content of the advice can vary, not only according to the resources and position of the policy advisor but also according to the type of knowledge and information.

In particular, the studies on political advisors highlighted the difference between a technical/substantive policy advice, and a more political/procedural one (Eichbaum and Shaw 2008), while others distinguished between "hot" short term/reactive and "cold" long term/anticipatory policy advice, thus organizing the actors of the PAS according to the content of the advice delivered (i.e. pure political and policy process advice, medium to long term policy steering advice, short term crisis advice, and evidence-based policy-making) (Craft and Howlett 2012, 91).

Studies on political advisors further revealed the variety of policy roles of political advisors, thus showing that policy advice is composed of very different tasks in complex policy work (Craft 2015; Vesely 2017). For example, Connaughton (2010a, 2010b, 2015) elaborated a typology of advisors' roles – the expert, the partisan, the coordinator, the minder – looking at the activation of political advisors in different phases of the policy process (the formulation or the implementation), and at the content of the communication delivered (technical/managerial or political). Moreover, Maley (2015) noticed that political advisors intervene in different policy arenas performing different policy works: working within the departments, working across the executive, and working with the stakeholders.

2.2 The politicization of policy advice: the pressing demand for policy advice

The studies on the core executives shed a light also on the relationship between the politicians, the political advisors and the civil service. Here politicization is seen as another trend of change in PAS (Craft and Howlett 2013). Politicization is intended as the attempts by governments to increase political control

and public service responsiveness in the policy process through greater use of appointments, and through 'steering' activities designed to manage policy-making towards desired outcomes. In the administrative traditions grounded in the separation of politics and administration, politicization is thus considered as a sign of increasing de-institutionalization of the advisory systems (Craft and Halligan 2017).

Taking on a more general view, the trend towards politicization reveals that policy makers themselves are interested in shaping policy advice. International scholarship has highlighted that the advice relationships are affected by the dynamics of the political (and partisan) system, and also by the peculiarities of the administrative system (Craft and Halligan 2017). In particular, the Westminster administrative tradition, the politicization is seen as a thread to the traditional separation of political and administrative functions, as appointed political advisors may hinder the free and frank advice from the civil servants (Eichbaum and Shaw 2007; 2008). In so doing, politicization reinforces political responsiveness at the expenses of the accountability assured by the civil service.

In other politico-administrative traditions, the issue of the politicization of the policy advice may signal other problems. In the Napoleonic tradition, the relationship between politicians and civil servants is more integrated (Peters 2008). For example, ministerial cabinets are institutionalized advisors in the executive, and they assure the coordination between the ministers and the senior civil service, being the usual interface between politics and administration (Gouglas 2015). Hence, in countries such as Belgium, France, Portugal, Greece, and Italy, the politicization of policy advice in ministerial cabinets may be problematic when senior civil servants are subordinated to political staff (Di Mascio and Natalini 2013), when patronage becomes the main instrument for the politicians to control the administration (Soutiropoulos 2004), and when the civil service ends up in been less autonomous, less professionalized, and all in all less capable at doing the policy work that goes beyond the legal domain (Gouglas et al. 2017). Hence, changes at the level of the party system and also reforms of the administrative system may impact on the features of the ministerial advice (Di Mascio and Natalini 2013).

All in all, the trend towards politicization signals that the demand for policy advice might be more differentiated now than in the past, and thus that it is matter of empirical investigation. On the one hand, the distinction between the technical and the political is less clear (Craft and Halligan 2012, 87); on the other hand, the boundaries between the advisory work and the political work are more blurred (Craft 2015; Vesely 2017). For these reasons, also the features of the demand and the content of the advisory relations cannot be taken for granted, whereas many channels of advising are possible and the role of each actor depends on the situation.

Therefore, the blurred lines highlight contingency, in the sense that "the role of the adviser is a contingent one, reflecting different and multiple roles and varied influence" (Connaughton, 2010b, Connaughton 2015, 251). In other words, policy advice is fundamentally a relational activity, and that the content of the advice can be negotiated in any single instance (Galanti and Lippi 2018). The possibility of a competition "over" policy advice between politicians and experts echoes the idea of a competition between politicians and bureaucrats highlighted by Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (1981) when describing the hybrid image of politico-bureaucratic relations. The trends of externalization, politicization and (de) institutionalization ultimately signal that policy advice is a relationship corresponding to a different matching between the demand and the supply of advice (Galanti e Lippi 2018).

2.3 The Italian case: multiple arenas of advice

The Italian PAS is a case in point to investigate the externalization, the politicization and ultimately the forms of institutionalization and de-institutionalization of policy advice, not only considering the role of the administrative tradition and of the party system. Moreover, Italy is a suitable case to consider the very recent developments due contextual conditions, such as the ongoing rationalization of the public sector due to austerity policies.

The former research on the Italian case have highlighted some distinctive characteristics of policy advice in the Napoleonic tradition:

- a weakly institutionalized policy advisory system with ministerial cabinets as the main actors and legalistic knowledge as the main content (Di Mascio and Natalini 2013; 2016)
- an isolated civil service keeping a passive role in policy-making (Cassese 1999)
- a de-institutionalized party system particularly after 2013 (Emanuele e Chiaramonte 2017, Chiaramonte et al. 2018)
- an emergency style of policy-making (Dente and Regonini 1989), with growing problem pressure in several policy domains.

Hence, the central and almost monopolistic role of ministerial cabinets in policy advice (Di Mascio and Natalini 2013; 2016) is the other side of the coin for the isolation of the Italian civil service, seen as an "ossified world"[1] (Cassese 1999). In this setting, ministerial cabinets acted as institutionalized advisory structures but also as vehicles of political control (Di Mascio and Natalini 2013, 337): they are wide in size and dominated by professionals from the legal corps (Court of Auditors, State General Attorney, administrative courts and magistracy), who are skilled at legal drafting, but lacking managerial or policy competences.

The central role of ministerial cabinets in policy formulation remained unchanged even after the failed modernization of the Italian public administration in the end of the Nineties[2] (Di Mascio and Natalini 2013, 330). The collapse of previous party linkages further increased the significance of advisors' personal networking in policy advice (Di Mascio and Natalini 2013, 338). At the same time, the failed modernization of the Italian public administration implied only slight organizational changes in the design of the ministerial cabinets, and brought to the overall decreasing professionalization of the professionalization of the appointed cabinet members (Di Mascio and Natalini 2016).

Thus, the Italian case exhibits contradictory trends of both *institutionalization* - intended as a systematic formalization of practices or units within advisory systems - , and of *de-institutionalization* – intended as the discontinuity of previously institutionalized advisory organization or activity (Pierre 1998; Seymour-Ure 1987; Craft and Halligan 2017, 48). On the one hand, an increasing number of institutional and societal actors are invited to provide formal advice through more or less formalized procedures, thus signaling a possible increase in institutionalization. On the other hand, there have been several (unsuccessful) attempts to reform the ministerial cabinets in order to make them even more responsive (Di Mascio and Natalini 2013).

This suggests that "traditional" policy advisors such as the ministerial cabinets are increasingly challenged at the level of the core executive, because of contextual factors that are common to other countries, particularly in Europe:

- The first factor is the fiscal retrenchments due to *austerity* brought to a rationalization of all the Italian public sectors, including the advisory bodies and the public research institutes, and reinforced the prominence of the Prime Minister in the policy-making. To put it simply, ministerial cabinets are no longer the monopolists of policy advice in the country. Signs of this can be found in the recent attempts to re-centralize knowledge and policy advice *inside* the core executive (Criscitiello, 1994).
- The second factor is the deepening of *Europeanization* and "technicization" of domestic policies has made public policies more complex (Radaelli 2003), and has ultimately brought to an increasing demand for *outside* experts' advice. In the Italian case, technocrats and experts are increasingly central and influential actors in the Council of Ministers (from the former Commissioner Mario Monti as Prime Minister, to the numerous academics acting as Ministers

[1] This expression emphasizes the endurance of a reciprocal pact of self-restraint between politicians and civil servants, whereby politicians did not interfere with seniority career patterns of bureaucrats, and bureaucrats renounced to any autonomous and proactive role in policy-making

[2] In their view, the administrative reforms aimed at making the civil service more skilled (and more responsible) came in parallel with the crisis of the Italian party system that brought to the establishment of a fragmented and bipolar political system with government alternation and instability (Cotta and Verzichelli 2007).

from 2011 on) and the (failed) attempts to institutionalize *ad hoc* policy units, for example in the late Renzi.

- A third factor is related to the ongoing *de-institutionalization of the party system*, which again may be *not* an Italian idiosyncrasy (Emanuele and Chiaramonte 2017). In fact, after a period of relative stability in the party system with a "fragmented bipolarism", a sudden de-institutionalization of the Italian party system started in 2013 (Chiaramonte et al. 2018), along with the enduring delegitimation of the political class. This dynamic might have nurtured a growing demand for policy advice not only by the core executive, but also by the Parliament and by other national and sub-national institutional actors. This dynamic can also be seen in the renewed attention of the media for the activities of traditional advisors in the Napoleonic systems, such as the Court of Auditors and the State General Attorney.

Against this backdrop, our present work is aimed at showing that the policy advice in Italy is much more complex than in the past, as the policy work traditionally done by ministerial cabinets is now widespread in a composite policy advisory system with multiple dimensions and arenas (Maley 2015), is diversified in its content (Craft and Howlett 2012), and is ultimately a contingent relationship (Connaughton 2010b).

In sum, our explorative study is aimed at showing that policy advice at the level of the core executive in Italy is changing. Some explorative hypotheses for a more encompassing research program can be presented here:

- Hypothesis I – externalization and differentiation: In Italy policy advice is no more monopolized by ministerial cabinets, but is a more fragmented system of institutional and societal actors; moreover, the content of the advice delivered is increasingly differentiated.
- Hypothesis II – institutionalization: there is a systematic formalization of practices of policy advice also beyond the traditional tripartite relationship between ministers, ministerial advisers, and the (isolated) senior servants, showing different modes of activation; at the same time, informal practices are present in the system
- Hypothesis III – contingency: those practices of advice are better described as a contingent relationship between the advisee (the Minister, the Cabinet advisor, the Civil servant, the Parliament etc.) and the advisor, where each actor can play different roles in the relationship depending on the situation
- Hypothesis IV – increasing demand for policy advice: the practices of advice are increasingly depending on the demand side of policy advice, namely politicians in the executive, in the parliament, in the Regions. These practices of advice are driven by the necessity of the advisors to gain reputation (and secure financial resources), and by the urgency of the political and bureaucratic advisee to control the policy-making and to recast their legitimacy

3. Research design and case selection

In this paper, we present our conceptualization of the changing dynamics of policy advice at the level or the core executive and share some very preliminary evidences from a first round of empirical research on a preliminary sample of institutional policy advisors, carried out done in April and May 2019. Hence, our goal is to discuss the first evidences concerning the governmental research institutes recently rationalized through the legislative decree n. 218, 2016.

These governmental research institutes have never been subject of empirical investigation. They were recently attributed advisory functions by law, and are formally external to the core executive while being strongly linked to it. Hence, studying the governmental research institutes is a way to widen the knowledge about the composition and dynamics of the Italian PAS beyond the core executive, but still building upon the few studies available on ministerial advisers in the core executive.

In this sense, our research design envisages different stages, each involving the inclusion of additional groups of advisors. The first and present stage of our research focuses on the institutes who have been

recently rationalized and downsized because of austerity. The next stage will be to widen the scope and to include other traditional advisors as named by the Italian Constitution (such as the National Council of Economics and Labour – *CNEL*; the State General Attorney for implementation matters; the Court of Auditors). Subsequent phases will be to investigate the other sides of the relationship: the Ministries, their Cabinet offices, and the Civil servants.

As said, the present stage of our inquiry is focused on the governmental research institutes (GRI) whose advisory functions have been recently formalized with the legislative decree n. 218, 2016. The legislative decree enlists the institutes and establishes a common organizational framework for the public research. It introduces a new form of coordination, the College of the Chairmen of the institutes (in Italian: *Consulta dei Presidenti*), performing brokering functions toward the core executive. Furthermore, it establishes *inside* the Presidency of Ministers a Committee of Experts, with advisory and monitoring tasks.

The research institutes enjoy organizational and managerial autonomy, but it is the supervising Ministry that approves the fundamental acts, including strategic addresses and budget, and that yearly decides on the ordinary funding. Moreover, the government propose the appointment of the Chairman every four years. The Chairman officially represents the Institute also in the Parliament, the General Director directs the activities.

Each institute is organized according to the type of knowledge produced, with some institutes also performing important regulation and implementation tasks for the Ministry. In some instances, the research institutes are charged with the responsibility of monitoring and evaluating single pieces of legislation, and to report the evaluation to the Parliament.

It is important to notice that almost all these public research institutes were originally created as public bodies (in Italian *enti pubblici non economici*), but that only few of them remained stable and gained solid reputation. Most of them are the result of organizational restructuring and merging of different bodies. This implies quite different features in terms of size and in terms of organizational complexity (with some of them having decentered structures). As for the functions, while some of them have traditionally performed advisory functions, most of them are increasingly involved in the function of giving technical/scientific advice[3] to the government as part of their institutional mission[4] shifting to a governmental function. All of them have been reorganized in line with the goal of fiscal retrenchment. This further implies that not only are the GRI supervised by one Ministry (usually the Minister of Education), but they are also monitored by the Prime Minister.

[3] In Italian: "funzione di supporto e consulenza tecnico-scientifica".

[4] Few of these research institutes were included in the decree only for downsizing purposes, and are seldomly involved in policy advice. Therefore, they are not analysed in the first stage of the research: Area di Ricerca Scientifica e Tecnologica di Trieste - Area Science Park; Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici; Stazione Zoologica "Anton Dohrn".

Table 1 – The public research institutes according to the Legislative Decree n. 218, 2016.

Name	Year of establishment	Supervising Ministry	Budget in euro (year)	Employees (year)	Territorial offices (Yes/No)	Policy domain	Organizational restructuring (Yes/No)	Advisory function	Advisory function in the statute (Yes/No)
1. ASI	1988	Ministry of Education	814.145.372 (2017)	217 (2017)	Yes	Space	No	Traditional	Yes
2. CNR	1923	Ministry of Education	909.756.383 (2017)	8.164 (2015)	No	Multi sector	Yes	Traditional	Yes
3. INAF	1999	Ministry of Education	164.134.332 (2017)	1.214 (2017)	No	Astrophysics	Yes	Recently acquired	Yes
4. INDAM	1939	Ministry of Education	5.206.186 (2016)	10 (2016)	No	Mathematics	No	Recently acquired	Yes, though not explicit
5. INFN	1951	Ministry of Education	449.664.068 (2017)	1.808 (2017)	Yes	Nuclear Physics	No	Recently acquired	Yes
6. INGV	1999	Ministry of Education	114.604.852 (2017)	748 (2016)	Yes	Geophysics, earthquakes	No	Traditional	Yes
7. OGS	1999	Ministry of Education	44.850.377 (2018)	214 (2018)	Yes	Oceanography	No	Recently acquired	Yes
8. INRIM	2004	Ministry of Education	36.775.382 (2017)	217 (2017)	No	Engineering	Yes	Recently acquired	Yes
9. Centro Studi e Ricerche "Enrico Fermi"	1999	Ministry of Education	3.881.511 (2017)	8 (2017)	No	Physics	No	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
10. INVALSI	2004	Ministry of Education	27.287.370 (2017)	42 (2017)	No	Education and evaluation	Yes	Recently acquired	Yes
11. INDIRE	1925	Ministry of Education	161.859.493 (2017)	243 (2017)	Yes	Education	No	Traditional	Yes
12. CREA	1999	Ministry of Agriculture	242.930.490 (2017)	1.983 (2015)	Yes	Agriculture	Yes	Recently acquired	Yes
13. ENEA	1952	Ministry of Econ Development	343.255.586 (2017)	2.361 (2017)	Yes	Energy, research and development	Yes	Recently acquired	Yes
14. INAPP	1972	Ministry of Labor	116.968.562 (2017)	323 (2017)	Yes	Labor and welfare	Yes	Recently acquired	Yes
15. ISTAT	1926	Prime Minister Office	228.012.369 (2017)	2.493 (2017)	Yes	Economic and social statistics	No	Traditional	Yes
16. ISS	1941	Ministry of Health	284.949.109 (2017)	1.968 (2017)	Yes	Health	No	Traditional	Yes
17. ISPRA	2008	Ministry of Environment	112.217.152 (2017)	1.211 (2018)	Yes	Environment	Yes	Recently acquired	Yes

Source: research institutes' statutes; official documents on personnel; budgets; institutional websites.

At present (June 2019), the empirical evidence is given by several primary sources. For each instituted we have (i) collected and coded the Statute, (ii) the organizational charts, (iii) the Plan of Activities (a 3 years programming document approved by the Minister), (iv) the last available budget, (v) the last available information about the number and type of employees (including managers). Additionally, we have conducted 13 semi-structured interviews to managers who are responsible for the institutional relations of their institute, formally those to whom the advice is requested and from whom the advice is delivered. Those interviews cover 12 up to 17 advisors in our first sample. They have been conducted face-to-face by one or both authors, as a means to clearly identify the object of our scientific investigation given that the function of policy advice is not coded as a professional figure nor coded in the Italian public administration. Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow to reconstruct the network of actors and the informal practices**.** Each interview lasts 1 hour at minimum, and interviewees are anonymous. A list of the interviews is reported in the appendix.

4. First empirical evidences

4.1 The products of advice and formalized and non-formalized practices

Policy advice can be delivered through a differentiated range of products. These products are different in their degree of formalization: some of them are codified and repeated, some other occasional and less codified; some of them are formal, some other more informal (see Table 2).

The delivery of formal advice is institutionalized and regulated by law. It is envisaged in the mission and in the status of the GRIs and produces reports and official deliverables. Procedures and institutional ties between each GRI and the corresponding Ministry or the Cabinet have been set to regulate the supply of these products. They can be directly addressed to decision-makers, or to the Minister's staff, as well as to bureaucrats.

Informal advice is more nuanced and entails very informal provisions grounded on networking and nudging. It deals with written or oral notes addressed to the Cabinets or to politicians. The investigated research institutes are often urged to deliver this type of advice in the light of a specific need of knowledge. The contents of these informal products are more oriented on consultancy and suggestions.

All the investigated GRIs are commonly invited to produce both types of products. In general, formal and informal advice is delivered at the same time and separately according to different needs and requests. Formal products are required by the statute or by law. The GRIs provide the ministries with official written reports about the policy targets and the emerging topics concerning the scientific mission of the institute. These reports are generally perceived as due bureaucratic fulfillments by researchers and managers of the institutes. This formal engagement includes also the participation at the parliamentary activity. It prominently deals with hearings explicitly focused on the expertise held by the researchers of the institutes. The hearings are called by the Parliamentary Commissions. Some institutes are regularly invited to present evidence about specific policies; in particular, those policies strictly related to the institutes' scientific background. During the hearings, the researchers are expected to highlight the policy focus with technical expertise and to address the members of the parliamentary commission with expert knowledge. Implicitly, the speeches by the research institute supply legitimacy to the Parliamentary Committee and its decisions. Consequently, some institutes are invited more than others because of their field of expertise (i.e. statistics, health, earthquakes) and their prestige, e.g. their potential of legitimacy toward politicians. Contents and duration of the advice are directly negotiated by the president of the parliamentary and the staff of the institutes. Additionally, sometimes, some research institutes are also called by each Ministry to provide information and evidence to answer to parliamentary question-time proposed by the Member(s) of the Parliament (MP). These very formal documents are delivered just in time for each question and following a specific request by the Minister.

Other less codified products are likewise influent. This is the case of occasional written notes on policy topics. In a large number of cases, these are directly required by the Cabinets and staffs, but the most frequent applicant for written notes are the Directors-General of the Ministries or some of their offices.

Written notes are the most frequent type of policy advice product. They are delivered just in time with regard to specific needs and questions. For this reason, they are often written with a high degree of detail and scientific background. These 'just in time' advice are more informal than formal, but they are usually considered as a formal one since short reports or drafts are officially sent to the head of the department of the Ministries. Rarely, these notes are spontaneously produced by the GRIs to nudge cabinets on specific topics and urgent issues they repute particularly relevant. In rare circumstances, written notes are also requested also by the staff of the members of the parliaments.

Infrequently, only when the government was supporting relevant reforms, institutes have been invited to revise law proposals and drafts. This happens only when the government is proposing reforms on very incisive policy target.

More informal products than written notes, such as emails, SMS, WhatsApp messages and phone calls, are very common products of advice adopted by the head of the department of the Ministries. In these cases, bureaucrats invite the institute to deliver some urgent and informal addresses about very specific aspects in the light of the opportunity and the political circumstances of the decision making.

Finally, the GRIs dealing with applied science recently started to issue patents and to actively engage in technological transfer towards universities and also to private firms. These products are actually sold in the market, and still represent a small – though growing – part of the activities of the research institutes. Interviewees highlight that technological transfer and patents are increasingly important to sustain their research mission, especially during austerity. In fact, the supervising Ministry still cover the costs of the personnel for the institutes, but the resources to finance the research activities are strongly diminished, so the institutes are often forced to find resources elsewhere, thus entering in the market.

Table 2 – Types of products delivered by GRIs

	Codified	Not codified
Written	Official reports	Occasional notes, Legislative proposals, Policy Memos, Emails
Oral	Hearings, Question time	Phone calls, sms and whatsapp messages

4.2 The differentiation of the contents of the advice

Hence, GRI are involved in policy advice through different types of deliverables**.** An additional evidence concerns the content of the policy advice according to the different role played by the advisors. The observed content of the advice is as heterogeneous as sharp, and can be organized in a continuum between a proactive advice, on the one hand, and a passive one, on the other.

Proactive advice concerns a strictly influential contribution oriented to define problems and issues. In this case the GRIs are defining problems, designing policy and formulating instruments. Their contribution is grounded on scientific knowledge, expertise and prestige. According to the interviews, the proactive advice is oriented to give cognitive support and legitimacy deriving from competence and reputation of the advice. This type of advice gives the research institutes degrees of freedom and prestige. Advisors are co-opted in the core executive along with political bodies, cabinets and staffs.

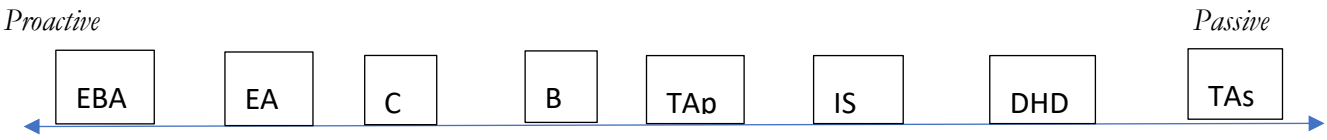
On the contrary, passive advice is essentially subordinated to needs and requests by politicians and the ministries. In this case, GRIs are supporting decision makers in a complementary position to accomplish goals and function that imply expertise and skills the core executive misses. This role can be played specifically in the implementation, but it has been also registered in formulation and decision making. As a consequence, the passive advice is totally depending on core executive's needs and requirements. Any specific room for manoeuvre is left to the advisors that stay in a subordinated position getting legitimacy from the core executive.

Both proactive and passive advices are played by the institutes almost at the same time Nevertheless, some research institutes, e.g. the more prestigious and the bigger ones, are mainly involved in the proactive role, but they can also perform tasks of a passive advice. Similarly, small and peripheral institutes can also be co-opted in the inner circle of decision making as well.

Proactive advice can be scrutinized in three types: (a) evidence-based advice (EBA); (b) expert advice (EA) and (c) consultancy (C). In a more nuanced position, farer from pure proactive advice, there are other two types of contents: (d) brokering (B) and (e) technical appraisal (TAp). Passive advice entails two other three specific contents: (f) Information service (IS), (g) on demand help desk (DHD) and (h) technical assistance (TAs).

Figure 1 synthesizes the continuum between proactive and passive advice. The eight mentioned categories have been classified according to the claims of the interviewed people. Although they have been conceptualized as independent, in the researchers' accounts they were more blurred and partially overlapping, especially inside the categories of proactive and passive.

Figure 1 The continuum between proactive and passive advice



Evidence based advice (EBA) is the most proper type of influence the GRIs crave. It consists of a role of 'ex cathedra' influence the advisors implement looking at the shared image of 'pure science' as their job: advice is intended as the transmission of scientific results into policy making (e.g. atomic energy). It explicitly concerns all the institutes working in hard sciences (physics, maths, geology, medicine, etc.) where advice is perceived as a consequence of laboratories. This advice is reputed as not jeopardizing the integrity of the pure scientific mission. It also seems close to high prestige advisors and a limited set of contingencies.

Expert advice (EA) is the most frequent content registered in the interviews. It deals with 'knowledge in use' the advisors put into practice explicitly referring to a need or a contingency the core executive calls for. Research Institutes are committed on EA at national and supra national level and it is reputed as the most viable and coherent involvement of scientists in the policy making. As said, they never use scientific research, but their scientific research applied to a specific context or goal coming from the core executive.

Consultancy (C) is less frequent and more generic, and concerns all the situation where a GRI has been committed to support a cabinet or a Ministry about specific decisions or designs. In the accounts of the GRIs it particularly happens when they are involved by other not monitoring Ministries. Consultancy is a content of advice where the scientific content gives the institute occasional prestige and the chance to influence the policy making from a strong position of prestige out of its scientific mission and gaining visibility and influence.

Brokering (B) concerns a content of advice where the GRI connects cabinets and ministries' staff to others private or public institutes, universities or international research centres. The brokering particularly pertains to the role of bargaining with respect the monitoring Ministry. The case in point is provided by the CNR (National Center for Italian Research) that provides the ministry of education with specific contacts with specialized laboratories or departments for each problem. The documented frequency of brokering is relatively high (twice a week, on average).

Technical appraisal (TAp) is a content ruled by procedures and concerns all the circumstances when a research institute provides expert appraisals invited by specific committees of the Ministries. It specifically concerns committees for health, earthquakes and volcanos, environment, civil protection risks, pollution

and energy. This is an expert concern with a political relevance relatively low and a great responsibility with respect the legal framework and the bureaucracy.

Both Information service (IS) and on Demand Help Desk (DHD) are not regulated by procedure but discretionary, in particular the second one. IS includes specific knowledge performance the core executive asks the GRI to get expert supervision or acknowledged competence. It means the GRI stands at Ministry Cabinet's disposal to deliver all the competence it requires. On Demand Help Desk is still more discretionary: the GRI provides the Ministry with information, data, report (often by email). This is an advice at arm's length. When it takes place occasionally, it deals with an on Help Desk.

Finally, Technical Assistance (TAs) is not a real advice, but a substitute of bureaucracy. This contribution concerns the delegation of high expertise pieces of procedures the bureaucracy awards to the research institutes. This type of content is frequent and entirely delegated by the monitoring Ministry. As said, it pertains to the search for high qualified personnel to implement challenging tasks, often in English, but it doesn't imply a real advice, but a technical support.

4.3 The relations of advice: contingent matching of demand and supply

The interviews further reveal that the varieties of products and of contents of the advice match with different types of relationships between the research institute as the advisor and a number of institutional (and non-institutional) actors as advisee. These relationships are differentiated in who is asking for the advice; how formal or informal is the request; how frequent and how urgent it is; and what the relationship is aimed at.

As shown in the session on the contents of the advice, the GRIs are asked to do a number of activities besides "pure" policy advice. This variety is both due to the tight relationship with the supervising Ministry, but it is also due the increasing demand for knowledge coming from both the national and regional institutions, and sometimes from the international level, the regulatory agencies and the society.

This variety appears in the number of advisees for each institute. As said, the supervising Ministry is the main "client". Furthermore, the institutes with more reputation and stability often receive requests from other Ministries or directly from the Prime Minister's Office. Similarly, the institutes dealing with crosscutting policy sectors are solicited by more than one Ministry.

Most importantly, the prevalent interlocutor inside the core executive for the institutes varies considerably. In most cases it is the head of a ministerial department or the Director-General of a division (civil servants), but there are cases were the requests arrive from the head of Cabinet or from the Minister's personal secretary. Those requests are usually received and answered by the General Manager of the institute. It also happens that the political representative (the Minister or the State Secretary) directly and informally addresses the Chairman of the institutes with specific requests.

It is noticeable that, apart from the core executive, the parliamentary Commissions are increasingly asking for the advice of the institutes. All interviewees see this as a growing tendency if compared to the past. As described in session 4.1, the formal advice of the research institutes is directly requested by the Commission (hearings), and sometimes by single MPs (question time). It is not infrequent that the Supervising Minister delegate the institute to respond to hearings and question time on his behalf. There are also cases were the research institutes are asked by law to issue periodically a report on a specific theme (as in the case of ISTAT), or to monitor the implementation of a law (INAPP), or to evaluate the law and report it to the Parliament.

Depending on the type of policy sector, another important client may be the Regions (mostly the executive) and the territorial agencies. The Regions might also channel their requests of advice or data through their representative bodies at the national level (e.g. the Conferenza Stato Regioni).

Finally, most of the institutes who produce applied research are increasingly acquiring a proactive role: they offer their knowledge (through policy briefs, notes, reports, and in some cases even legislative drafts) not only to the supervising Ministry, but also to specific MPs that might be interested in it. As said in

section 4.1, these institutes are increasingly selling their knowledge outside, in the form of technological transfer and patents.

As far as the modality of activation, we have seen in section 4.1. that they might be formal, or informal. Regards formal practices of policy advice, only some institutes have developed a proper archive of the formal acts (e.g. conventions, appointments, formal delegations) establishing the advisory activities (e.g. data production and diffusion, expert opinion, report answering hearings or question times, technical notes). Furthermore, the institutes bearing more technical expertise (for example in environment, health, agriculture) are sometimes delegated as technical experts to represent the Ministry and the country at the supranational level: this is typically the case of technical committees or panels of the European Commission, the OMS, the FAO.

Besides these formal modes of activation, informal requests are often formulated directly from the Minister to the Chairman, while informal preparatory meetings are a common practice between the general managers of the institutes and the dedicated ministerial department. The level of informality strongly depends on the personal relationship between the advisor and the advisee. As for the frequency of these informal contacts with politicians or cabinets, sometimes they are be very frequent, whereas in other cases they are sporadic and purely ceremonial.

Another interesting aspect of the modes of activation of the advisory practices is that they are larger in number and more pressing in timing: irrespective of the topic or policy sectors, all the interviewees describe the practice of "receiving a phone call from the ministerial offices on Thursday, to be ready to respond to a parliamentary hearing on Tuesday – if not before". Some interviewees emphasize these practices as a mix of improvisation and urgency (of the Cabinets, but also of the civil servants) that perturbates the ordinary business, but that is nonetheless inevitable, given the financial dependency from the supervising Ministry. The institutes capable of coping with this overwhelming number of requests are those who are more stable and skilled (such as in the environment and in the health sector), those who have a solid scientific reputation (such as in the physics and other natural sciences) and finally those who are substantially independent (such as the national statistical institute).

This multifaced demand finds different answers in terms of the content of the advice (see section 4.2). The matching between demand and offer of advice is described in the interviews as "depending on situations", thus as a contingent relationship that depends not only on the personal relations between individuals, but also on the need of the advisor to gain or reinforce its reputation, in terms of scientific credibility, and also in terms of policy capacity. As claimed in the interviews, it a matter of the strength of weak ties and the skills of networking to get legitimacy and money from the Ministries as a trade-off for their support. As a consequence, the GRIs can be involved in networking inside the core executive at a different degree according to their strategy and the leadership of the Chairman. As in an interview, i

Therefore, the matching of demand and offer of advice translates into different evidence of relationship according to the circumstances.

- Lobbying: here the advisor exerts a proactive role towards the executive or the parliament, by nudging policy-makers and civil servants with evidence they believe could represent an opportunity and benefit specific shareholders.
- Bureaucracy/hierarchy: the advisor simply answers to the requests of the Ministry because he has a formal obligation to do so, and because its financial prosperity is increasingly depending on the willingness of the Ministry to finance research. In this case, the type of relationship is driven by hierarchy.
- Expertise: the advisor is asked to provide an expert opinion, to provide a technical advice on the functioning of a policy or of a certain (physical or social) phenomenon. In that case, the institute just provides evidence, rarely influence the definition of the problem, and ultimately is left out of the decision.
- Decision: finally, there is the possibility that the advisor not only delivers an expert advice on a subject matter, but is also involved in the elaboration of policy solutions, in the negotiation of

political compromises, and ultimately in decision-making. This seems the case of the informal advice or of the involvement in decisional venues at the national and supranational level.

While lobbying emerges clearly in just two cases of research institutes mustering applied research (energy and earthquakes), bureaucratic relationships are common relationship to all the cases (except in physics), but it is more frequent in the case of "young" institutes. Significantly, in only one case (physics) these relationships are almost absent. Relationships of expert advice are very frequent in the case of institutes with long stability and high reputation (statistics, health, environment, geophysics and earthquakes). Finally, the involvement in decision-making is more likely when there are either established relationship with the ministerial offices (e.g. education, environment), or in cases of supra-national policy design (e.g. in environment, health, agriculture and education). Personal knowledge facilitates the latter type of relationships.

5. Discussion

The empirical analysis in the previous sections allows to better describe the ongoing features of policy advice around the core executive in Italy. This also allows to start to respond to our broad hypotheses about the transformation of the PAS in Italy, and to refine those hypotheses for the next steps.

First, the analysis suggests that the GRIs are increasingly emerging actors in the Italian PAS. Not only they build scientific knowledge on policy matters: they are progressively involved in advisory practices that were once upon a time exclusive of Cabinets and ministerial offices. Their advice is requested not only by the politicians (the Ministry) and the ministerial advisers (the Cabinet), but also by the Prime Minister's Office and, most importantly, by the head of ministerial departments and Directors-General (the civil servants). Moreover, the demand for advice is formulated by not only by the core executive, but also from the Parliament, the Regions, and, seldomly, from agencies.

These aspects seem to support the first hypothesis about the externalization of the policy advice, especially considering the number of advisors not just inside, but also around the core executive. Clearly, a more reliable proof of this cannot be provided without an analysis of other key advisors in the Napoleonic systems, such as the State Attorney and the Court of Auditors (just to name a few advisors to be investigated in the future). But the increasing importance of governmental institutes as brand-new advisors is a novelty in the Italian system. Interviews also confirmed that such an advisory role is not perceived as such by some of them (particularly by those in rocket sciences).

Moreover, the content of the advice delivered is very differentiated, not only along the classical "technical vs political" dimension, or along the more catching "substantive vs procedural" distinction. Our interviews emphasized differentiated advice content also along a proactive vs passive continuum, and along a short-term/reactive vs long term/anticipatory dimension. Interviews suggest that this differentiation of advisory contents depends not only on the features of the demand of the advice (see infra), but also on the need for the GRIs to gain credibility and, most importantly, to secure financial resources for scientific research in times of austerity. In other words, the differentiation of the content in policy advice also tells something about how governmental policy advisors thrives to survive in periods of economic crisis. As mentioned, the GRIs are shifting from a pure science role to an advising one in the light of a need of legitimacy and financing due to austerity cutbacks: in some cases, it deals with a *malgré lui* emerging advisors.

Second, there are both signs of institutionalization of new advisory practices, including the increasing coding of several advisory products, and of de-institutionalization, in the sense of the frequency of informal activation of policy advice at multiple levels.

Third, the interviews confirm that the configurations of actors in Italian policy advice are highly contingent. Politicians and civil servants tend to cherry-pick the advisors needed, and can easily do so thanks to the supervision of the Ministry. Personal knowledge and the continuity of the senior civil servants might facilitate the advice relationships.

Fourth, the interviews revealed that also the demand for policy advice is changing, being now more frequent and pressing than in the past. This seems particularly evident in the very last years, a period where the national institutions experienced the entrance of new political parties and an overall de-institutionalization of the party system (Emanuele e Chiaramonte 2017). This is particularly telling if we consider the characteristics of the Italian politico-administrative system: this increasing and differentiated demand for policy advice could be driven by the need of the politicians to deal with the complexities of policies, and ultimately to legitimize their action. This could also be true for the civil servants, given the traditional lack of other expertise than the legal one. Hence, there is a search for legitimacy inside the core executive both at the political and at the bureaucratic level.

The reciprocal need of the governmental advisors to be acknowledged and of the politicians to find legitimation for their action shapes different relationships in terms of modes of activation and of goals. In these relationships, the scientific content is vehiculated, but the policy content of the advice is sometimes negotiated between the political advisee and the institutional advisor: this happens more frequently between much credited institutes (with organizational stability and scientific reputation) and specific ministerial departments. In other words, our study suggests that these pressures contribute to the hybridization of roles between politicians and advisers, where the technicians play the role of the politicians and vice versa (Brunnson 1994; Lippi 2012). Policy advice itself might be object of competition among politicians and experts, and can be better understood as a role-playing game (Galanti and Lippi 2018).

6. Conclusions and further steps

This paper picks up and describes some preliminary evidence coming from a strategy of data collection through semi-structured in-depth interviews and document analysis on a sample of 17 Governmental Research Institutes acting as advisors for the core executive in Italy. As a research paper, it highlights some emerging phenomena and calls for further steps of investigations.

Regarding emerging evidence, the first round of interviews confirmed the four preliminary hypotheses about externalization, institutionalization (following rationalization by austerity), contingency and increasing demand for the supply of expert advice. This fact suggests that an increasing hybridization of the former and consolidated PAS grounded on the tripartite approach among politicians, cabinets and civil servants are increasingly taking place. At the same time, it displays a changing landscape, where some newcomers are contaminating the core executives with new roles, practices, and motivations. Finally, it hints that there is reciprocal attention of both policymakers, bureaucrats, and experts to recruit and to be engaged in the core executive.

Next steps of research must consequently be devoted to a look for confirmations. This implies two different rounds of interviews. The first one would investigate a second milieu outside cabinets but inside the government, looking at those institutional bodies, like attorneys, courts, accounting offices and the like. They also play a significant role of advice outside/inside the core executive, in a not dissimilar way from the GRIs. A second one implies a limited round of interviews to core executive members inside the cabinets and the top management of Ministries.

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8. Appendix

Table A – list of interviews, phase 1 (April-June 2019)

n.	Date of the interview	Policy domain
1	1/04/2019	Social and economic statistics
2	1/04/2019	Energy
3	4/04/2019	Physics
4	16/04/2019	Multi sector
5	16/04/2019	Education
6	16/04/2019	Agriculture
7	16/04/2019	Agriculture
8	16/04/2019	Environment
9	16/04/2019	Labour
10	24/4/2019	Physics
11	6/05/2019	Geophysics
12	8/05/2019	Education
13	17/05/2019	Health