Scientific Committees, Government and Emergency. Some Insights Drawn from the Management of the COVID-19 Emergency in Italy

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The role of expertise in the decision-making process has been traditionally linked to the relevance of contextual knowledge for the decision. In the case of the management of the COVID-19 emergency in Italy, the effect of outsourcing the expertise, compared to the traditional administrative circuit, was evident, as shown by the growing influence of professionals from the medical environment on the institutional decision-making bodies. Politicization, in turn, derives from the possibility that the bearers of technical-scientific knowledge, while carrying out their role as advisers, take sides more or less consciously in policy-making in a partisan way. To investigate these phenomena, an analysis of the decision-making arena during the first wave of the pandemic crisis (February-May 2020) was conducted resorting to the minutes of the meetings of the Technical Scientific Committee (TSC), appointed by the Civil Protection Department (CPD) of the Italian Government. The resulting analysis revealed an 'actor constellation' which included the TSC, the Government, and some agencies. Furthermore, the investigation points out that this 'actor constellation' pivoting on the TSC centralized the decision-making and exercised a permanent influence on the Government, while the circuit of the political representation (national legislature, regional and local government) resulted marginalized.

Keywords: Experts, Democracy, Crises Management, Technocracy, Actor Constellation, Public Policies

"[A] government of experts is admissible in regards to means, not ends"
[Sartori 1987: 423]

Introduction

The reasons that led to the increase in the weight of technicians and of technical knowledge in the political decisions in contemporary democracies have been subjected to extended investigation, and they range from the capacity of experts to gain autonomy from the political institutions, and consequently control over policy areas, to their ability to set the terms of policy problems according to their preferred values (Snow 1961; Meynaud 1969; Gunnell 1982; Radaelli 1999; Bertsou and Caramani 2020; Tortola and Tarlea 2021). There is substantial conceptual agreement that technocracy refers to the overwhelming role in the policy making of unelected experts over politicians, although quite often these experts are co-opted in the 'control room' by the politicians themselves. Normally, this process of co-optation is justified by the need to select the consistent means to a certain set of ends or values to be achieved, assuming that the politicians may

not be competent enough to identify the straightest and most effective means-ends link over a given policy problem. Therefore, the relationship between ends-values and the means or tools to implement them is a key point in any political decision which raises the problem of the marginalization of the politicians vis-à-vis technicians or scientists. One is led to think that the means are objective, therefore not susceptible to ethical evaluation and that they are capable of imposing themselves through a factual analysis. This attitude is the effect of the assumption that the relationship between experts and politicians is somehow 'sequential' in policy-making (Tortola and Tarlea 2021: 1953), that is the former intervene before the decision is made, providing to the politicians with the 'intelligence needs' to come to a correct decision (Lasswell 1951).

However, there is a tradition in contemporary organizational theory, beginning with the seminal work of Simon (1947), which has revoked this assumption and showed how in the decision-making process the relationship between ends and means is so tight and ambiguous as to make the two hardly distinguishable. The selection of the means of a decision assumes therefore an ethical and value character too. The ends-means relationship would seem unproblematic, if one assumed as valid the instrumental distinction between the sphere of politics (selection of ends) and that of administration or organization (determination of means), but Simon has shown that the cyclical interconnection between ends and means signifies that also the selection of means is a political decision.

This article intends to preliminarily clarify the problem of the ends-means connection in the decision-making process and, the next section is dedicated to this clarification. The subsequent section will deal with the problem of the role of expertise and 'technical committees' in the political decision-making. The third section will clarify the methodological tools used in the research, whose objects are the study of the role of the

Technical Scientific Committee (TSC) appointed by the Civil Protection Department (CPD) of Italian government in early 2020 and of the 'actor constellation' that can be traced in the policy arena invested with the problem of managing the COVID-19 emergency in Italy in the most critical phase (February-March 2020). The recommendations of the TSC did in fact constitute in this phase an essential guide to the action of the Italian government, which resorted to a series of executive decrees inspired by the TSC. The main source of the research were the minutes of the meetings held by the TSC in the period. The methodological approach here employed is inspired by Lasswell's concept of arena of power, later taken up and developed by Lowi (1964) in the context of policy studies. For Lasswell, the arena of power "is the situation comprised by those who demand power or who are within the domain of power" (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950: 78). Lowi circumscribed this definition, making it more immediately applicable to policy studies. For Lowi, "each arena tends to develop its own characteristic political structure, political process, elites, and group relations" (Lowi 1964: 689-690). In this research we will take a less ambitious path, limiting ourselves to trying to define the composition of the power arena that managed the first phase of the COVID-19 emergency in Italy. In the fourth section the findings of the research will be presented, and in the fifth final section of the article some conclusions will be drawn on the role of expertise in the policy process and on the phenomenon of technocracy.

Politics and policy in the scientific approach to decision-making. The ends-means connection

The preliminary question is why the weight of technicians and of technical-scientific knowledge in public decisions has increased. This aspect laid the foundation for what

Harold Lasswell (1951) called the policy orientation of political science. Lasswell defines a "problem" as the perceived gap between certain set ends and the actual or anticipated state of affairs. A scientific approach to solving political problems is possible for the analysis of the alternatives open to bridge this gap, while the selection of values (defined by Lasswell as "a category of preferred events", 1951: 9-10) remains a *political* operation. The values and therefore the ends pursued are obviously implicated in the political choice, as they impact on human relations and transform them. Inevitably, values introduce an element of subjectivity into the political choice, but for Lasswell this does not make the search for scientific objectivity totally impossible, since values can be considered and declared in advance when determining the ends of political inquiry, after which "the scholar proceeds with maximum objectivity and uses all available methods" (Lasswell 1951: 11).[1] Policy science is therefore characterized by dispassionate rationality, as opposed to *political* action which instead implies the human factor, the search for advantages for oneself and the conflict between the parties involved.[2] Nonetheless, can we really eliminate politics from policy?

Simon (1947) provided a negative answer to this question, when he scrutinized administrative behaviour, that is the impact of organizational structures in the decision-making process. For instance, the administration intervenes in connecting the ends of a choice to the means that rationally or scientifically are considered essential for their achievement, therefore a decision is a complex mixture of ends and means. However new

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[1] A similar position is supported by Myrdal (1970). Naturally, the starting point of this reflection remains Weber (1946) who in 'Science as Vocation' argues that the value assumption or the "cognitive value" (*wissenswert*) of science cannot be demonstrated, the "verification facts" and "mathematical or logical relationships" are different from the "value" we attribute to the contents of our scientific reflection. On the "values" for mankind of our scientific reflection no "scientific" comparison is possible to establish priorities.

[2] For an in-depth analysis of this issue, and of the contribution of Harold Lasswell to the policy sciences, see Turnbull (2008) and Ieraci (2020).

social problems are generated even in the apparently aseptic and objective selection of the latter. The lockdown was the "objective" response to reducing the possibility of contagion suggested by the TSC appointed by the Italian government. However, during the lockdown some social groups began to ask for different interventions to face the crisis and in particular to alleviate their ordeal. Economic operators and antagonistic social groups (in Italy, with some public demonstrations; in Europe also with conflicting actions) opposed the lockdown, in order to resume social and economic relations. The selection of a certain means (the lockdown), which presents itself as indisputable on the technical and scientific level (contagion is prevented by reducing or even eliminating social contacts), nonetheless raises new policy problems, with respect to which a new selection of value or goals is required.

The very transformation of means into ends was identified by Simon (1947: 43-44, 47-48), decision involves both the selection of the end and of the means to achieve it, so that in any decision the *value* judgment (determination of the end) and the *factual* judgment (determination of means) are not so clearly distinguished. The administrative phenomenon is characterized by the combination of deciding on the ends and working for them. In a complex sequence of ends-means, given an initial decision-making stage d_0, in the subsequent stages $d_{1 \dots n}$, the previous end has been transformed into a means to a new end.

[Fig. 1 about here]

As shown in Fig. 1, assuming an hypothetical $means_0$ (lockdown) at stage d_0 and the relative end_0 (having no people in intensive care) at the d_n stage, other means-ends connections interpose in which the end of the previous stage *n-1* is now the mean to

achieve the end in the next stage *n+1*. The lockdown is the mean to prevent free movement (end), which in turn becomes the mean to pursue the new aim of the prevention of social contacts, this in turn becomes the mean to pursue the aim of the prevention of infections and so on in the other two stages described. In other words, the selection of the means to make a choice is hardly neutral or separable from the search for the given ends. In a decision sequence, what was previously an end is subsequently transformed into a mean for a new end, therefore the means acquires political value.

Technicians and committees in political decisions

Recent researches in the field of public policy analysis have in fact shed light on the growing influence of area experts in policy decisions, especially in cases of emergencies and environmental disasters (Collingridge and Reeve 1986; Collins and Evans 2002; Ieraci 2019). The management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy offers an interesting further verification of the evidence of those researches. In the months of lockdown in Italy, from February 2020 onwards, there was an evident eclipse of politics and the field was occupied by the technocrats of the Higher Institute of Health (*Istituto Superiore di Sanità*) and of the Civil Protection Department (*Dipartimento della Protezione Civile*) of the Italian government.

There are at least three reasons that could explain this transformation of the democratic political process in the event of national emergencies and/or environmental crises. Firstly, the technical complexity of decisions and the collection and management of quantitative data to support them de-legitimize the political class and can make it unreliable in the eyes of public opinion. We need answers of the type “if ... then”, such as those typical of the scientific explanation. In the COVID-19 case we needed a systematic collection of data on the spread of the infection and “definite” answers on how to contain it. Ultimately,

crisis and emergency management favour the implicit transformation of any technical unit into a political unit, as only technical units control the know-how and inevitably end up playing a central and political role in problem formulation and solution. In emergencies, decisions are made on the basis of shared values and are legitimized by technical and scientific information provided by experts, technical committees and other external agencies.

Secondly, the complex constitutional and parliamentary procedures required to pass bills and the times of democracy seem incompatible with the necessary speed of decision in times of crisis. The expert and the scientist do not argue, except with their peers. The expert commands, using his cognitive authority and inhibits criticism in the recipients. In this way, rapid and unambiguous decisions are reached and the suspension of democracy seems necessary to reach effective decisions.

Thirdly, when managing a crisis the political class may be reluctant to expose itself at the risk of failure and find convenient to leave the field to the experts, who speak out of "incontrovertible" scientific authority and technic expertise. In the acute phase of the pandemic crisis in Italy we have witnessed the eclipse of representative democracy and the Government has acted through decrees legitimized by the opinion of experts in the area. In this way, the political class does not assume a direct role in crisis management, any decision is legitimized by the emergency and by the opinion of experts and eventually the political class cannot be blamed for any failure in the electoral stage.

The first aspect recalled (the technical complexity of decisions) is linked to the perspective of Lasswell's scientific policy making. This scientific nature of the decision seems undisputable in the management of emergencies. Technicians and scientists manage complex quantitative data and forecast models. The second aspect is typical of the rational-legal procedures of politics in the democratic sphere. The acts of power are

validated through a predictable procedure and a legal-rationality (as Max Weber called it). These procedural steps are normally subject to administrative control and very time-consuming, but when a health or an environmental emergency is declared, "normal" time-consuming rational-legal practices are not compatible with the request for an immediate solution to the problem. It cannot be excluded, therefore, that in emergency situations the perception of the cost of the decision, also in terms of consent in the event of a failure of the solution, pushes the political class into taking a step back, leaving the field to technocracy and disclaiming any failure.

The technical committees or technocracies, which intervene in defining the scientific contents of the policy, ultimately occupy an internal and crucial position within certain epistemic communities, because they hold the technical knowledge which these communities use to support their value choices. Haas (1992) defined "epistemic communities" as a network of knowledge-based experts who "play in articulating the cause-and-effect relationships of complex problems, helping states to identify their interests, framing the issues for collective debate, proposing specific policies, and identifying salient points for negotiation" (Haas 1992: 2). Epistemic communities can consist of experts from various professions and disciplines, who tend to share a set of norms and principles, an interpretative causal scheme (deriving from their knowledge and research), an intersubjective conception of knowledge validation and, finally, who share practices associated with the problems towards which their professional competence is directed (Haas 1992: 3; Zito 2001; Dunlop 2013). Galanti (2017: 251 and 259) and Caselli (2020) discussed the impact of policy advisory systems in contemporary decision-making, showing both their institutional and non-institutional character and the nature of their intervention, which can be procedural or substantive, of short or long term.

The idea that political decisions are influenced by non-primarily political actors (i.e. by actors who formally do not occupy power positions) has been naturally inherent in group theory since its inception and has branched out in the directions taken by the analysis of public policies, briefly referred to above. Collingridge and Reeve (1986) already noted that the use of experts and scientists in decision-making processes is linked to the continuous growth of the complexity of the issues. Haas (1992) similarly observes that some global impact problems (very often the environmental problems) present increasing elements of uncertainty and technical complexity. Decision makers may therefore not have the knowledge and skills required for the solution of the technical-scientific problems posed by the decision. The concept of "epistemic community" and similarly that of "advocacy coalition" (Sabatier 1988, 1993, 1999) certainly contribute to giving connotations to the idea of the network of actors, public and private, which is also evoked by policy network approaches (Rhodes and Marsh 1992; Smith 1992; Giuliani 1996). Ultimately, in the case studied here, the technical-scientific content of the decision forced the Government to select a committee of experts to whom to delegate the content of the decision (definition of the cause-effect link, definition of the risk thresholds and consequent behavioural constraints). The case presented here shows how the technical-scientific content of a decision and the use of expert committees can marginalize the representative political institutions (government and parliament). The management of emergencies, sometimes in the environmental field, lends itself very much to highlighting the role of expertise (Collins and Evans 2002). In these areas, in fact, expertise leverages the principle of competence, and scientific knowledge comes into play to define the positions of value of the political and social actors. The relationships that are established tend to be asymmetrical, as the authority of the experts is cognitive and draws a boundary between science and other forms of culture. Ultimately, in many decision-making

processes with a high technical-scientific content, expertise tends to establish itself as the exclusive principle of legitimizing a decision (Collins and Evans 2002; Pellizzoni 2011: 16-17), but thus sometimes removing it from the political debate and to some extent depoliticizing it. Weiss (1980) already underlined how scientific knowledge can provide decision makers with a background for empirical generalizations and ideas that insinuate themselves into policy deliberation. These traits will be easily recognizable in the description of the COVID-19 emergency management in Italy.

The research and its methodology

The methodological assumption of this research is behaviourist and linked to the perspective of actor-centered institutionalism:

> The basic idea is that the solutions (identified by substantive policy research) to a given policy problem must be produced by the interdependent choices of a plurality of policy actors with specific capabilities and with specific perceptions and preferences regarding the outcomes that could be obtained (Scharpf 1997: 69).

The concept of "actor constellation" developed by Scharpf (1997) is central in the methodological approach here employed. The actors can be individual or collective, they are involved in the policy process and their choices determine the outcome of the process, as each actor is "characterized by specific capabilities, specific perceptions, and specific preferences" (Scharpf 1997: 43). Therefore, "the constellation describes the players involved, their strategy options, the output associated with strategy combinations, and the preferences of the players over these outcomes" (Scharpf 1997: 44).[3] Although this schematically outlined approach implies a formalized analysis of these strategic options and combinations of strategy, here as elsewhere (Ieraci 2019) we have

[3] An application of the actor-centered institutionalist approach is offered by Kriesi and Jegen (2001).

adhered to a more behaviourist and traditional interpretation of the network of relationships between actors within an arena of power.

Groups and actors are part of decision-making interaction systems, to which reference is made in the analysis of public policies (policy network analysis, policy subsystems, issue networks, policy communities, advocacy coalitions, to name a few very widespread approaches: Heclo 1978; Sabatier 1988, 1993, 1999; Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993; Howlett and Ramesh 1995). This research tries to account for the network of relationships and influences that have manifested themselves during the decision-making process: How were the contents of the Government decrees for the management of the first phase of the COVID-19 emergency determined? What was the actor constellation that most influenced the policy content of the Government decrees?

In decision-making with a strong technical-scientific content, the identification of the actor constellation reveals the importance of the role of experts and scientific committees in determining the objectives of the policy. Ultimately, the illustration of this role is the main result of this research. Experts and scientific committees offered an immediate "technical" answer to the problem, which the Government took into account when formulating the decrees.

To define the actor constellation that managed the COVID-19 emergency in Italy, we resorted to a combination of positional and decision-making criteria. A positional criterion was used to identify the actors in the constellation and their relative potential for influence. The regulatory provisions, in fact, attribute a certain position to each actor in the decision-making process and define the limits of their intervention. The static picture that emerges from the positional survey was combined with the decision criterion. The TSC was set up by the Italian government as an advisory body meets 83 times during the selected period of observation February-May 2020, which was the most acute phase of

the crisis culminating at the end of the first lockdown. All the minutes of the TSC meetings were analysed, noting the presence of or reference to other actors, the content of the recommended actions and their targets.

The basic assumption of this decision-making perspective was that the references to other actors in the minutes of the TSC, or the presence of other actors in its meetings, could be considered a proxy indicator of the incidence of those same actors in the decision-making circuit. Subsequently, the recommendations of the TSC were compared with the content of the Government Decrees (Decrees of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, DPCM) in the same period, in order to detect the degree of correspondence between the DPCM and the recommendations themselves. In this case, the basic assumption was that the higher the correspondence between the recommendations of the TSC and the DPCM, the more influential and decisive the action of the TSC could be considered.

The actor constellation of the policy arena over the management of COVID-19 emergency in Italy

Crisis management in Italy has its operation center in the CPD, which is a structure of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (the Italian government). The CPD was established in 1982 and starting from 1992 strengthened its position and role, becoming a sort of central co-ordinating agency for the National Service of Civil Protection.[4] The enactment of the Civil Protection Code in 2018 centralized in the CPD the management of all national resources useful for ensuring assistance to the population in the event of

[4] Over the decades, many environmental emergencies in Italy had shown a lack of coordination between civilian structures (firefighters, police forces, forest guards, doctors and health facilities) and the military in the initial stages of rescue. This criticality had emerged in all its gravity on the occasion of the earthquake in the mountain area of *Irpinia* (Campania) in 1980 and was the impetus for the creation of a structure that would deal permanently with civil protection.

an emergency. This centralization of powers and resources has been the subject of controversy over the years.

On January 31, 2020 the Italian government declared a state of emergency, for a duration of six months, as a result of the health risk associated with the spreading of COVID-19.[5] The initial reaction of the Italian government was characterized by poor coordination and a rather limited capacity for policy response (Capano 2020). The Head of the CPD was entrusted with the coordination of the interventions necessary to deal with the emergency on the national territory. At the beginning of February 2020 the spreading of the pandemic was clearly manifest in Italy, and several meetings followed between the Prime Minister at the time, Giuseppe Conte, the CPD and the competent ministers. The particularity of the emergency, which was not environmental, i.e. connected to climatic events or geophysical phenomena as in the experience of the earthquake, made it necessary to mobilize new skills in the health, scientific and medical fields. This was the situation that on February 5, 2020 prompted the Head of the CPD to establish a Technical Scientific Committee (TSC) with the competence of consulting, supporting and coordinating the actions in order to combat the epidemiological emergency due to the spread of CVID-19, although the TSC was not the only task force established by the Government to cope with emergency (see Galanti and Saracino 2021). The TSC was made up of experts and representatives of the State Administrations, who were recruited on reputation and with the task to provide consultancy and advice (Galanti and Saracino 2021).[6]

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[5] The state of emergency has been subsequently extended with the following measures: decree-law of July 29, 2020 (until October 15, 2020); resolution of the President of the Council of Ministers of October 7, 2020 (until January 31, 2021); decree-law of January 14, 2021 (until April 30, 2021); decree-law of April 22, 2021 (until July 31, 2021); decree-law of July 23, 2021 n. 105 (until January 31, 2021). With the Council of Ministers of December 15, 2021, the extension is set for March 31, 2022.

[6] Its original composition (26 members, see Galanti and Saracino 2021: 281) was established with the Order of the Head of the DCP no. 663 of April 18, 2020 and then with the Ordinance n. 673 of May 15, 2020. On March 17, 2021, the composition of the TSC was redefined with Ordinance no. 751. The main change in this reorganization of March 2021 consisted in the rebalancing between the administrative and the technical-scientific components, after which the latter became almost exclusive. Furthermore, given the

Table 1 shows the data relating to the meetings of the TSC in the two-year period 2020-21, which highlight the concentration of activities in the phase here examined when the CTS met 83 times (13 meetings in February, 27 in March, 23 in April and 20 in May).

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The minutes of the 83 meetings in the period considered were analyzed to identify the actors to whom TSC refers, the prevailing content of the TSC recommendations and, finally, the policy targets of the recommendations themselves.[7] The study of the contents and targets of the TSC recommendations is useful to verify the degree of conditioning exercised by them on the decisions taken by the Government in the period considered, that is, on the decrees that the Government issued at that stage. Table 2 reports the recurrences of the content of the recommendations expressed in the 83 meetings. The underlying hypothesis is that if the technical-scientific knowledge was evoked by politicians to supply their intelligence needs and to cope with their relative difficulty in solving complex problems, then we should check whether these recommendations were actually followed by the Government.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

need to rationalize its activities and to optimize its functioning, the number of members of the TSC was reduced, while experts in the statistical-mathematical-forecasting sector and of epidemiology were included to carry out the analysis of the data collected. For reference, cfr. https://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/it/notizia/emergenza-COVID-19--on-line-la-composizione-del-comitato-tecnico-scientifico

[7] The minutes of the meeting are accessible at https://emergenze.protezionecivile.gov.it/it/sanitarie/coronavirus/verbali-comitato-tecnico-scientifico

Swabs, health checks, social and health protocols, measures in social health structures, and with regard to health personnel constitute the main contents of the recommendations of the TSC (138 references), in the acute phase of the crisis (March-May 2020), when the pandemic was spreading rapidly and the recorded number of deaths for or with COVID-19 reached its peak.[8] Restrictions imposed on arrivals from areas at risk (quarantine, forced hospitalization), and travel and activity restrictions (17 references) were drastic from the beginning, as it will be pointed out below, and similarly with the adoption of containment and isolation measures (4 references), and measures concerning the movement of goods, personnel, and of production workers (23 references).

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The policy targets of the TSC recommendations (see Tab. 3) were consistent with their content. Public events were immediately limited and effectively prohibited, the use of new methods (remote working and telematic teaching) was imposed on school and higher education. Military and diplomatic personnel and work environments were subject to guarantee and control measures. These contents and policy targets were systematically acknowledged by the Italian government, which used them to trace the lines of executive intervention to face the pandemic. The instrument used was that of the emergency decree, allowed by the Italian Constitution.[9]

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[8] The failure to distinguish between "deaths from" COVID-19 (as a direct and only cause) and "deaths with" COVID-19 (as a concomitant factor of death) has been a source of controversy in the Italian case. The *Istituto Superiore di Sanità* (ISS, a key player in the constellation described below) opted throughout the crisis to avoid this distinction. According to data from ISTAT (the Italian Statistical Institute), in the period March-May 2020 there were 34079 COVID-19 related deaths in Italy. Cfr. https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/03/Report_ISS_Istat_2020_5_marzo.pdf (p. 9).

[9] Art. 77 of the Italian Constitution establishes that the Government can be delegated by the Parliament to issue decrees ("in extraordinary cases of necessity and urgency") which have the value of ordinary laws. The delegation of the Parliament to the Government is expressly requested. The Italian constitution does not specify what these "extraordinary cases of necessity and urgency" are, and during the history of the

To verify the degree of compliance of the Government with the actions requested by the TSC, an indirect method is offered using a comparison between the timing of the meetings of the TSC itself and the issuing of the decrees. A simple consequentiality can be hypothesized between the recommendations expressed in the TSC meetings and the subsequent measures adopted by the Government. In other words, if consequentiality were to be verified, we could assume it as an indication of the fact that the Government acted only after the recommendations of the TSC. In any causal link, synchronism is one of the conditions necessary for its verification, that is to say that if *x* causes *y*, then *x* must precede *y* and between *x* and *y* there is a temporal continuity (Nagel 1961: 4). Furthermore, a more direct method of verification can be used, comparing the content of the recommendations of the TSC expressed at time t_1 with the subsequent implementation of the same in the Government decrees at time t_2. Checking the timing is very easy and has a fairly obvious outcome, after all in the most critical months of the pandemic the Italian public got used to the almost daily declarations of the Minister of Health Mr. Speranza, or the Prime Minister Mr. Conte who said, paraphrasing, "We asked the TSC to tell us if ... ", or "We are waiting for the TSC to tell us if ... ". Ultimately, any political action and Government decision went through a prior approval by the TSC. Furthermore, the Italian public soon got used to the daily appearance in the media of TSC members, in official or informal communications, which anticipated the content of future Government measures. In Table 4, however, an attempt is made to apply both the criteria of synchronicity and that of content.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Republic governments have often used art. 77 to bypass the ordinary parliamentary procedures and speed up the executive action. In the Conclusion this point will be addressed.

Synchronism is detected simply by counting the number of TSC meetings that precede the issue of each Government decree. Of course, this data cannot assure with certainty the causative character of the TSC's action on that of the Government, but simply the Government's caution and its willingness to make its decisions after the issue of the TSC recommendations are indirect proofs that there had to be a quite consistent exercise of influence of the latter. The correspondence of the content of the TSC recommendations with that of the decrees was instead evaluated in a more qualitative way, by comparing the minutes of the TSC meetings with the text of the decrees themselves.

The decree of February 25, 2020 is preceded by 8 meetings of the TSC, which on February, 22 (Minute n. 7) explicitly recommends "the isolation of the areas in which SARS-CoV2-19 transmission is taking place" (the Regions of Lombardy and Veneto). This Decree created the first "red zones", isolated from the outside and with restrictions on circulation and socio-economic activities. From here on there was a progressive extension to the whole national territory of the limitations already imposed on these "red areas" of Lombardy and Veneto, particularly through the following Decrees of March 1, 4 and 8. During the meeting held on March 4, 2020 (Minute n. 18), one of the rare episodes of tension between the TSC and the Government is recorded. The Government had just decided to close schools and universities, despite the TSC arguing that

> There are currently no data that irrefutably address the usefulness of school closures regardless of the local epidemiological situation. Some predictive models indicate that the closure of the school could guarantee a limited reduction in the spread of viral infection […] Given that the Council of Ministers has decided to suspend the frontal teaching activities of schools of all levels on the national territory, the CTS deems it appropriate to point out that this decision is a further precautionary measure, in a strategy to contain the contagion [Minute n. 19, March 5, 2020].

The whole sequence can be observed and evaluated in Tab. 4, without it being necessary to go into a detailed account here. The general impression is that there was a maximum

degree of convergence of the content of the Government decrees with the recommendations of the TSC. The fundamental passage is registered on March 7, 2020, when the TCS recommended a national lockdown until April 3, issuing a detailed list of all the required measures [cfr. Minute n. 21, March 7, 2020]. This list of measures to contain the epidemic were all meticulously taken up in the decree of March 9, 2020 which imposed the national lockdown, i.e. the extension to the whole national territory of all the measures already adopted for the "red zones" with the Decree of March 8, 2020. Among these was the prohibition of any form of gathering of people in public places or places open to the public. Further restrictions imposed by the Decree of March 22, 2020 were preceded by 11 meetings of the TSC. These restrictions were the closure of non-essential or strategic production activities, and the prohibition of all persons from travelling by public or private means of transport to a municipality other than the one in which they were located, except for proven work needs, or absolute urgency for health reasons.

In this phase, the TSC was strengthened on an organizational level and also began to formulate recommendations of a more explicitly political nature. From an organizational point of view, the establishment of Working Groups (protective devices, ventilation equipment, biocides)[10] and the inclusion in the TSC of representatives of AIFA (Italian Pharmaceutical Agency) and INAIL (Italian National Institute for the Insurance against Accidents at Work),[11] are worthy of note, in so far as they testify to the intent of the TSC to extend it technical-scientific expertise and finally even to guide the Government in the field of labour policies. Furthermore, the TSC initiated the practice of regular meetings

[10] The Working Groups were set up on March 13 (Cfr. Minute n. 26, March 13, 2020), and their composition was decided on March 14 (Cfr. Minute n. 27, March 14, 2020).

[11] The inclusion of the Director of AIFA was requested by the TSC to the Department of Civil Protection on March 16, 2020 (Cfr. Minute n. 29) and his first participation to a TSC meeting was reported on March 21 (Cfr. Minute n. 34). On March 17, 2020 INAIL officially delegated its representative in the TSC as an expert in the fields of labour health and security.

with the media to communicate its guidelines, complaining that its action was presented in a prejudicial manner by the press and that therefore it was necessary to establish a channel of direct communication with national public opinion.[12]

In the waning phase of the pandemic spread (April-May 2020), the TSC imposed caution and counteracted the pressure of the Government and the various stake holders for the easing of restrictions and the resumption of socio-economic activities:

> The TSC takes into consideration the possibility of removing the restriction measures currently in force [...] The TSC reserves the right to deepen the discussion in the light of the analyses that the ISS is finalizing, as well as to convene representatives of the world of work and the competent institutions in the next few days… [while] In order to implement mitigation strategies of contagion containment measures, the TSC preliminarily agrees that control actions should be gradually reduced [...] The lockdown must be removed progressively and in successive phases based on the assessment and hierarchy of the risk in each structure of social importance [Minutes nn. 42 and 49 April 2 and 9, 2020].

We can therefore deduce from this close analysis of the sequence of the TSC meetings and the issuance of the Decrees that the action of the Italian government in the very first stage of the pandemic (February-May 2020) was clearly guided by the indications of the TSC itself, to a degree that raises doubts on the autonomy of the Italian government with regard to the former.

However, if it can be inferred that the TSC was the central actor of this new arena of power, who were the other actors of the constellation that made it up?

[TABLE 5 AND FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

In Tab. 5 the references of the TSC to other actors of the hypothetical constellation have been counted, omitting the duplications and limiting the survey to the 83 meetings held

[12] Cfr. Minute n. 27, March 14, 2020.

during the period under observation. The data in this elaboration were also obtained from the study of the minutes of the meetings. Considering that the references were counted without duplications over the whole set of the 83 meetings of the TSC, the Index of Relevance (*R*) in Tab. 5 calculated as a simple ratio between the total number of references to each actor (r_a) and the total number of meetings (m) can vary from 0 (no reference) to 1 (one or more references per each meeting). Therefore, if $R=r_a/m$, then the more *R* approaches 1, the more relevant the actor will be.

The very first impression one gets is that of a very centralized and national arena. In fact, references to institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or other international regimes are very rare, just 15 in 83 meetings (*R*=.18). As other studies have highlighted (Vampa 2021; Vicarelli and Neri 2021), the management of the COVID-19 emergency has exacerbated the competition between the State and the Regions in Italy which in some phases has turned into a real confrontation. Ultimately, as shown very well by Baldi and Profeti (2020), decision-making centralization feeds the conflict and the mobilization of the regions against central administration for various reasons: the spread of infections varies from region to region; the control of health expenditure is borne by each region;[13] the composition of political coalitions in regional governments differ; there is no clear distinction between state and regional spheres of competence (Baldi and Profeti 2020: 286-293).[14] The Regions have tried to defend their capacity of autonomous political response from the interference of the central administration, on aspects such as the management of the health emergency, the regulation of socio-cultural activities, and

[13] For the implementation of the health measures in Italy at the regional level, see Capano and Lippi (2021), according to whom the first response to the pandemic depended on the health policy organizational capacity, decentralized health systems (i.e. Italy, Sweden) implement very differentiated first responses.

[14] See also Casula, Terlizzi and Toth (2020) and Toth (2021) who stress the effect of the regionalization of the Italian health system on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar tendencies by the Government to centralize decision-making to the highest degree, marginalizing the regions, were also reported in the management of the Recovery Fund. See Profeti and Baldi 2021.

the closure of the territories to the outside world. The establishment of the TSC and the relative marginalization of the regions in the circuit of the decision-making has contributed to accentuate this contrast.[15] Tab. 5 indicates, in fact, how the TSC refers not too frequently (32 references) to the Regions and to the so-called "system of Conferences" (R=.38).[16]

The real counterparts of the TSC are the Government (*R*=.68), which delegates competent ministers (in particular the Minister of Health Mr. Speranza) in 57 meetings out of 83 held during the period,[17] the AIFA (38 references, *R*=.45) and above all ISS (65 references, R=.78). These actors stand out in the constellation that is described in Fig. 5 where the width of the arrows has been drawn according to each actor's relative *R*, while in a more qualitative way they point towards the subordinate actor in the asymmetrical relations. Furthermore, two axes of relations have been hypothesized. The horizontal one has been named Technical-scientific and shows the relationships between external or international actors, such as international organizations and regimes, and national actors, whilst the vertical has been named Political and concerns the center-periphery relationships among the political institutions in the multilevel Italian structure of government.

Among the international actors, only the WHO was a referent of the TSC, which adopted its guidelines on the pandemic and often referred to the international framework of the

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[15] The unstable equilibrium between center and periphery in the management of the pandemic was underlined also by Parrado and Galli (2021).

[16] The multi-level relations in Italy, in a complex administrative structure with the State at the top, follow by the Regions, Provinces and Municipalities as well as other local bodies, have recently been channelled into a system of Conferences that facilitate the meeting and the negotiation of policies: the State-Regions Conference, the Conference of Presidents of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces, and finally the Unified Conference (which brings together the first two).

[17] It is worth mentioning that during the period under observation certain Government Ministers put forward to the TSC 11 petitions or questions, and auditions with various Ministers were held, particularly in the policy area of sport, tourism, labour, transport.

pandemic as presented by the WHO. However indirect and not particularly strong, the relationship between WHO (*R*=.18) and TSC signifies the dependence of the CTS on the guidelines of the WHO. Always on the Technical-scientific dimension, but oriented towards the National semi-axis, there can be seen the references of the TSC to the ISS (*R*=.78) and AIFA (*R*=.48), which are the two national agencies that mostly influenced the recommendations of the TSC to the Government. While the ISS provided daily data on the progress of the pandemic in Italy, the AIFA played a fundamental role in the validation of protocols and in the certification of anti-COVID therapies and drugs.

Ultimately, Fig. 2 shows with some clarity that in the center of the actor constellation involved in the management of the crisis lay the TSC of the CPD. It is equally evident that in that constellation the actors of the national and central arena dominated, namely the Government (but in a subordinate position with respect to the TSC), the ISS and AIFA, with a consequent relative marginalization of the Italian regional system. We are therefore in the presence of a highly centralized decision-making process at national level, in an actor constellation dominated by technical agencies and technical-scientific experts. The actors of the democratic representation circuit (government, parliament, regions, local power institutions) were marginalized and substantially excluded from the decision-making process.

Conclusion

Simon (1947) logically demonstrated how in the means-ends decision-making chain the initial end is transformed into a means and in this way we can argue that the means selection has a political value. In the staged sequence of decisions, the same activity can be classified simultaneously as an end or as a means. This perspective has a clear value

in the analysis of decision-making processes, particularly when technical committees or "technocracies" are operating, as in the case of the management of the COVID-19 emergency in Italy. The technical committee that supported the government took decisions that were not merely instrumental but "finalized", therefore as such of political value. The reconstruction of the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Italian case revealed how crisis and emergency favour the implicit transformation of any technical unit into a political unit, technical and scientific information provided by experts, technical committees and other external agencies confine the political class into a minor position and relegate it to the margins of the decision-making process. If experts and scientists are part of a larger epistemic community, the TSC in Italy operated as a national sub-set of it, amplifying the marginalization of the democratic representative institutions.

The paradox is that the expertise of the technocrats generates new problems which they are not qualified to address. This paradox was well known to De Jouvenel (1964), who rightly argued that in politics there are never solutions to problems, certainly not in the sense that the term "solution" assumes for the scientist or area expert.

The COVID-19 case and other cases of emergency management signal a relative marginalization of the political class and of the parliament (Feltrin 2020). Decisions are in fact made by technicians and professionals, who are not politically responsible and who exercise unlimited discretion in their actions. However, "responsibility of the decision makers" and "foreseeable areas of application" of their decisions are the two cornerstones of any democratic system. Democracy risks being suspended in the management of emergencies and environmental crises. A situation of emergency is in itself a psychological perception, a reaction aroused by the observation of a phenomenon and the value that the observer attributes to it. We are in the presence of a circular and

self-confirming reasoning: the observer declares an emergency, based on values selected by himself. In political terms, the declaration of the "state of emergency", itself a violation of the Italian Constitution because it was not foreseen, served to speed up the response, but as a technical response ended in raising much wider social issues.

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Table 1: Number of Meeting of the TSC (2020-21)

	2020	2021
January	-	10
February	13	11
March	27	7
April	23	9
May	20	10
June	8	8
July	6	7
August	7	4
September	6	6
October	12	2
November	9	5
December	9	2
Totals	140	81

Table 2: Frequency of the Contents of the TSC recommendations (February-May 2020)

	Restrictions imposed for arrivals from areas at risk (quarantine, forced hospitalization), travel and activity restrictions	Adoption of containment and isolation measures	Swabs, health checks and protocols, health and social health structures, health personnel	Movement of goods, personnel, production workers, work
February	6	2	6	4
March	9	-	52	10
April	2	2	50	6
May	-	-	30	3
Totals	17	4	138	23

Table 3: Frequency of Policy Targets of the TSC recommendations (February-May 2020)

	Labor	School	Higher Education and University	Public and Private Transport (train, planes, ship)	Military and Diplomatic Personnel, Police	Public Events (sport, show business, culture, religious functions, entertainment)
February	-	3	2	4	2	5
March	1	4	1	8	3	13
April	11	5	5	7	4	2
May	4	5	1	-	-	16
Totals	16	17	9	19	9	36

Table 4: Synchronism between the TSC meetings and the issue of the Government decrees and correspondence of the contents of the recommendations of the TSC and of the Government decrees (February-May 2020)

Synchronism			Correspondence of the contents	
N. of TSC Meetings held before the issue of each Government Decree (DPCM)	Dates of TSC Meetings	Issue of the Government Decrees (DPCM)	Synthesis of the recommendations of the TSC	Synthesis of the measures enforced by Government Decrees (DPCM)
8	7, 10, 12, 14, 18, 21, 22, 24.02	25.02	"[…] in light of the current epidemiological situation, [the isolation of the areas in which SARS-CoV2-19 transmission is taking place] is strongly recommended - provided it is timely - for the reduction of the circulation of the virus outside the affected areas, […] in agreement with the President of the Lombardy Region" [Minutes no. 7 of the meeting held at the Ministry of Health, on 22 February 2020].	- Isolation of areas of first spread of COVID-19 (Lombardy and Veneto); - Measures relating to conduct of sporting events, organization of school activities, health prevention in prisons, organization of cultural activities and tourism.
4	26, 27, 28, 29.02	01.03	"There are currently no data that irrefutably address the usefulness of school closures regardless of the local epidemiological situation." [Minute n. 18 March 4, 2020]. "Given that the Council of Ministers has decided to suspend the frontal teaching activities of schools of all levels on the national territory, the CTS deems it appropriate to point out that this decision is a further precautionary measure, in a strategy to contain the contagion" [Minutes n. 19 March 5, 2020]. *On March 7, 2020, the CTS recommends a national lockdown until April 3, issuing a detailed list of all the required measures* [cfr. Minute n. 21 March 7, 2020].	Extension and standardization to whole national territory of measures already adopted at regional level (Lombardy and Veneto).
3	1, 2, 3.03	04.03		
3	5, 6, 7.03	08.03		Further containment and management measures. The two DPCM of March 1 and 4, 2020 cease to produce effects.
-	-	09.03		National lockdown: - the measures enforced by the DPCM of March 8, 2020 are extended to

				entire national territory. - Any form of gathering of people in public places or places open to the public is prohibited. - Measures envisaged for containment and management of epidemiological emergency from COVID-19 are applicable throughout the country.
2	9, 10.03	11.03	The ISS provide daily pandemic data relating to the previous 24-48 hours.	Over entire national territory: -Closure of all commercial and retail activities, with exception of food stores, basic necessities, pharmacies and parapharmacies.
11	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21.03	22.03	In this phase, the CTS mainly decides on aspects relating to compliance with medical protocols and prescribed procedures. Furthermore, its organization is articulated and strengthened: - with the establishment of Working Groups (Protective devices, ventilation equipment, biocides); - with the inclusion in its composition of representatives of AIFA and INAIL. CTS announces that it will organize a meeting with heads of the Press Offices of the various Institutions on communication strategies.	Over entire national territory: -Closure of non-essential or strategic production activities. - All persons prohibited from travelling by public or private means of transport to a municipality other than the one in which they are located, except for proven work needs, or of absolute urgency for health reasons.
5	24, 25, 27, 30, 31.03	01.04	The Head of Cabinet of the Ministry of Health communicates to the CTS the "possibility of confirming the containment measures of the epidemic so far in force, presumably extending them […] Furthermore, given the need for timely interventions, it is necessary that the CTS pronounces itself with a document that specifically indicates the activities to be carried out for an attenuation of the measures where the	On the entire national territory: - Extension to 13th April 2020 of the measure of the DPCMs 8th, 9th, 11th and 22nd March 2020.

			scientific conditions existed and all the investigations were carried out". With regard to possibility of restarting production activities, the TSC emphasized that there were no solid and conclusive data on the spreading of the epidemy and reaffirmed the continuation of the decreed measures, allowing the possibility to children and teenagers of leaving the house for exercise and sport activities [Minute n. 40 March 31, 2020].	
8	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9.04	10.04	"The CTS discusses the possibility of removing the restriction measures currently in force [...] The CTS reserves the right to deepen the discussion in the light of the analyses that the ISS is finalizing, as well as to convene representatives of the world of work and the competent institutions in the next few days". "In order to implement mitigation strategies of contagion containment measures, the CTS preliminarily agrees that control actions should be gradually reduced [...] The lockdown must be removed progressively and in successive phases, based on the assessment and hierarchy of the risk in each structure of social importance" [Minutes nn. 42 and 49 April 2, and 9, 2020].	Over entire national territory: - Extension of all restrictive measures to May 3, 2020. -From April 14, opening of stationeries, bookstores and clothing stores for children and babies is allowed, and forestry and wood industry are included among permitted production activities.
10	11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24.04	26.04	*At this stage, the TSC turns its attention to the vaccination campaign and the "socio-political" effects of the lockdown*: - "The CTS expresses strong concerns about the news coming from the territory on the reduction of vaccination activities, which could significantly reduce vaccination coverage with a consequent increase in the	Over entire national territory: -Measures for containment of the COVID-19 emergency during phase two. - Reopening of manufacturing, construction, real estate brokerage and wholesale activities. - Catering with take-away is allowed but with the prohibition of

			incidence of infectious diseases such as measles." - *The requests of Government Ministers to reopen the universities are considered, but* "The CTS reserves the right to express a definitive opinion, in the light of the acquisition of information relating to the more comprehensive remodeling of the contagion containment measures (transport, availability of airway protection for the population)" [Minutes nn. 50 and 52 April 11, and 15, 2020].	consuming the products inside the premises and the prohibition of parking in the immediate vicinity of the same.
15	27, 28, 29, 30.04 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.05	17.05	The TSC continues its activity of monitoring protocols and procedures. The requests for mitigation of the lockdown are presented by the Government to the TSC.	- With specific decrees and ordinances, state, regional or municipal, the movements of natural persons and the methods of carrying out economic, productive and social activities can be regulated.
-		18.5		- Amendments to article 1, paragraph 1, letter cc), of the DPCM May 17, 2020.

[Sources, our own elaboration from: www.gazzettaufficiale.it; www.governo.it/it/iorestoacasa-misure-governo; https://emergenze.protezionecivile.gov.it/it/sanitarie/coronavirus/verbali-comitato-tecnico-scientifico]

Table 5: References of the TSC to Actors (February-May 2020)

	TSC meetings (m)	References of the CTS to Actors (r_a)				
		ISS	Government Ministers	AIFA	State-Regions Conference, Regions	WHO and other International
February	13	2	6	-	1	-
March	27	36	12	4	23	9
April	23	12	21	16	8	6
May	20	15	18	18	-	-
Totals	83	65	57	38	32	15
Relevance Index (r_a/m)		.78	.68	.45	.38	.18

Legenda: AIFA, *Agenzia Italia del Farmaco* (Italian Pharmaceutical Agency); ISS, *Istituto Superiore della sanità* (Higher Institute of Health); WHO, *World Health Organization*.

Figure 1: Means-Ends in a hypothetical decision sequence $d_{0...n}$

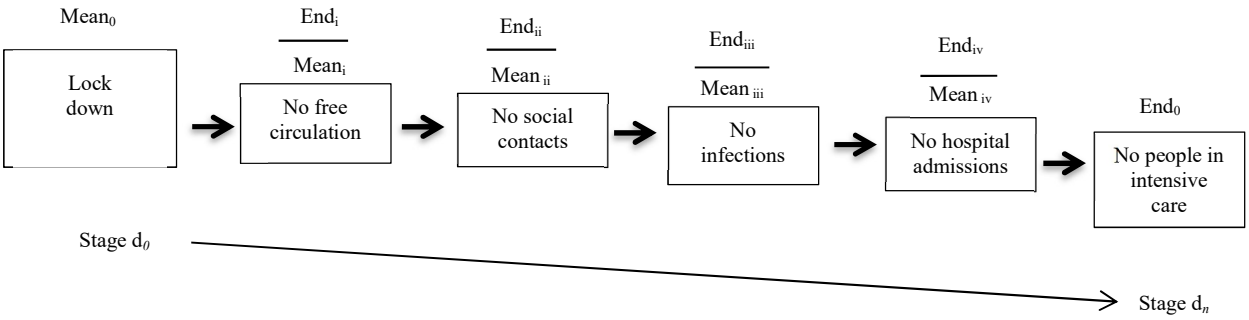

Figure 2: The Actor Constellation of the Policy Arena over the Management of COVID-19 Emergency in Italy (February-March 2020)