

Tomaso Pompili

I first met Roberto in early September 1984 in the corridors of the Economics Institute at Università Bocconi, Milan, just after returning from my postgraduate studies in the UK and presenting my first paper at the Milan ERSAs Congress.

I had not been a student of his, but Riccardo Cappellin, then my mentor, introduced me to Roberto, who was managing several research projects and needed research assistants. Roberto and Riccardo, both associate professors, had been engaged in a fruitful scientific and applied cooperation for several years (Camagni and Cappellin 1981), but by then they were starting to pursue independent research projects and in 1984 Riccardo had enough research assistants.

I cooperated with Roberto very closely during the following eight years or so. From the start, Roberto made three guiding *academic principles* clear to me, as he did to other junior researchers.

First, he trusted us with a high degree of autonomy in conducting our work. He would hold an initial discussion, often a brainstorming one, on what we were aiming at and then he would apply a careful refereeing on the written output of what we had achieved and wanted to present publicly. Of course he was available for any intermediate discussion at our request, but, unlike other colleagues, he would not impose himself by the strength of his authority.

Second, he was ready to make the research funds he managed generously available to us, especially to finance our participation in national and international congresses. However, he stressed this was contingent on us being able to present a written paper at those congresses. We were researchers now, not students any longer, and we were expected to contribute, not just to listen and learn. Were our paper well received, he would help us in finding a publication outlet.

Third, he was adamant that any funded activity must provide scientifically relevant results. The Bocconi ethos viewed independent scientific research and

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commissioned applied research with equal consideration. Unlike other colleagues, Roberto insisted the two were not separated and that we were not in the latter “just for the money”, but to transfer new ideas and even to get stimulation towards new ones.

These guidelines were very influential in shaping my working habits well beyond those eight years of close cooperation.

Not before long, I was struck by the variety of projects, a witness of Roberto’s *intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm*, and perhaps a legacy of Innocenzo Gasparini, the rector of Università Bocconi and mentor of Roberto’s generation of economists.

At the time Roberto was working simultaneously on regional, urban, and innovation economics. Italy’s National Research Council was funding a nationwide Progetto Finalizzato (Purposeful Project) on Transport, and a grant was devoted to inland waterways, which Roberto designed and our group (including Diego Piacentini, later at Apple and Amazon) developed focusing on the relationship of goods transport and inter-modal terminal location with regional economic development of the non-metropolitan Po Valley provinces.

At the same time, Region Lombardy, the Province of Milan and Milan’s Chamber of Commerce were funding Project Milan, following the path-breaking example of the New York research project: under Roberto’s leadership our group broadened the scope to the Europe-wide role of the metropolitan area of Milan, applying both classical and not-so-classical concepts in urban economics. Later, the Italian government commissioned a project on metropolitan areas (Camagni and Predetti 1988; Camagni and Pompili 1991). These experiences contributed to Roberto’s idea of writing his well-known handbook on urban economics.

Finally, in those years, IBM was financing research on the impact of computing on firms: Roberto established a solid relationship devoted to exploring innovation in firms, especially related to ICTs.

Later on, these research threads continued through our participation into international scientific projects such as UrbInno (on Urban Innovation), RURE (on Urban and regional Europe), GREMI (on Milieux Innovateurs), and others¹, but also into international projects with a focus on policy, such as cooperation with France’s DATAR or with the EC Directorate on Regional Policy.² I was privileged in being given the opportunity to work with Roberto in all of these, following his customary guidelines on our working relationship and receiving the benefits of entry into the international scientific community, which came with several publications.

After eight years, in 1992 I obtained a permanent position as assistant professor at the University of Pavia and Roberto, already a full professor at Padua, was also relinquishing his connection to Bocconi (he would move to Milan’s Politecnico a few years later). Thus, our relationship evolved into something less close-knit and

¹On these themes, see Camagni and Pompili (1990a, c), Pompili (1992), Camagni and Pompili (1993), Camagni et al. (1986) and Diappi et al. (1990).

²On these themes, see Camagni and Pompili (1990b), Camagni (1992); Pompili (1994).

exclusive. Even more importantly, the legacy of those years remained lively and bore fruits.³

Furthermore, our cooperation developed through our joint membership in the bodies of the Italian Section of Regional Science Association International. Here I could appreciate his skills and vision in the *organization of a scientific community* made both of academics and of practitioners.

In fact, Roberto went on providing stimulating opportunities for cooperation, mostly in *local policy-related fields*, and especially in spatial economic development planning, an interest Roberto shares with Cristina Gibelli, his wife and colleague.⁴ Thus for several years we worked with the provinces of Cremona, Milan and Trento: a rural area, a metropolitan area and a mountain area. Here Roberto's old autonomy principle expanded into encouraging me into interacting directly and extensively with our clients. He also nudged me towards developing a practical and academic interest in policy evaluation.⁵

Finally, after I was called as professor at the University of Milan-Bicocca in 2002, our relationship has evolved into one of mutual respect and, dare I say, of friendly affection. Indeed, throughout all these years Roberto has insisted on *personal relationships* within the small research community he was leading, with not a few light-hearted dinners. In fact, there is one reproach I move to Roberto: his offer of oysters just arrived from France at one of those dinners, which caused all of us an awful night! I have not eaten oysters ever since.

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³Capello and Pompili (1994), Pompili (1996a, b) and Camagni et al. (2002a).

⁴Camagni and Gibelli (1994) and Camagni et al. (2002b).

⁵Camagni (2006), Chapter 20 in this book; Pompili (2009).

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