Obituary: Giacomo Becattini (1927–2017)

Marco Bellandi¹

Published online: 1 February 2017

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Giacomo Becattini (1927–2017) passed away on January 21st 2017, ninety years old. He was a great economist, but quite a special one, combining three intellectual passions with sharp intelligence and extraordinary eloquence.

The first intellectual passion was his concern to decipher the inner connexions running between economy and society. He came across the work of Karl Marx early in his career, but also the contributions of classical political economists, the Victorian economists, and some Italian scholars left a mark in his intellectual formation. He was one of the most important internationally acknowledged scholars of the Victorian thought and more specific of Alfred Marshall's. Though always maintaining the left-wing inclination of his youth, Becattini found in Marshall an attention to the value of human beings seen in the places and time of their economic and social life.

The second passion qualifies the first: indeed, Becattini was never interested in tinkering with models of economic systems without any test on real-word contexts and without addressing relevant phenomena. He was stimulated in particular by the rise of light industrialization in Tuscany and other Italian regions after the Second World War, largely unexpected by mainstream economics. As early as the 1960s, he saw the hidden strength of agglomerations of small firms embedded in local socio-cultural relations. He found a link with Marshall's writings on industrial districts and external economies; these studies helped to develop a solid theoretical foundation on the interpretation of the localized sources of development of the Italian industry. He revived and innovated such Marshallian concepts in various contributions during the 1970s, which immediately met the interest of social scientists all around the world. They were looking for alternatives to mass production, urban gigantism, and globalised capitalism. His writings on such themes

✉ Marco Bellandi
marco.bellandi@unifi.it

¹ University of Florence, Florence, Italy

and their impact on international academic and institutional circles are conspicuous and influential.

The third passion was his interest in political and civic debates and engagement, to address concerns related to the future of local societies. Two cities were dearest to his heart: Florence, the city whose University was his affiliation, and where he was full professor in Political Economy from 1968 to 1999; and Prato, the core of the textile district that was his favourite socio-economic laboratory.

Many friends accompanied him in his intellectual journey. One of them was Sergio Vaccà, the founder of the Journal *Economia e Politica Industriale*. Becattini became involved in the Journal in 1985, and maintained an active participation for the following two decades. He was interested in comparing his thoughts on industrial districts and small firms with the approach of Vaccà on multinational companies. He was somewhat intrigued by the possibility that multinationals could favourably interact with local systems of production. This vibrant intellectual dialectic produced, over the years, a series of important editorial campaigns hosted by the journal.

Becattini taught many generations of students and was the mentor of pools of researchers and collaborators. He promoted among scholars, way beyond his beloved Tuscany, the quest for a *capitalism with a human face*. He leaves a scientific and civic lesson that is of universal inspiration in the work of many economists.

Marco Bellandi, University of Florence

On behalf of the Editors in Chief, the Honorary Editors and all members of the Editorial Boards.