

LUIGI EINAUDI. THE OPINION MAKER

DORA MARUCCO*

ABSTRACT

This short note examines Einaudi's methodological approach in his journalistic and teaching activities at the turn of the 20th century. It focused in particular on the contextualization of his work within the positivist framework, his interdisciplinary orientation and the expository attitude he adopted.

Keywords: Positivism, Sociological Investigation, Statistical Inquiry, Argumentative Approach.

Luigi Einaudi's cultural attitude was that of a keen observer of his own era, a period marked by profound transformations driven by the rise of the industrial system, which brought the relationship between industrialization and society to the forefront. As a result, he became a firm believer in the necessity of a "reform". This situates us at the turn of the twentieth century. His worldview centers on the impact of technological progress on the world of work and on the role of publishing and printing in the country's process of reform. This landscape is particularly troubled by his concern over the lack of awareness of the importance of these transformations.

In her contribution, Cristina Accornero – who has extensively and fruitfully studied the Turin School of Economics, its members, and the themes they addressed¹ – rightly situates Einaudi's activity within the context of positivism, which was particularly influential at a local level. Numerous accounts describe other initiatives that emerged in that intellectual climate; one such example is Cesare Lombroso's *Società di cultura*, which brought together scholars from diverse backgrounds. What, then, distinguishes

* Università di Torino. Address for correspondence: dora.marucco@unito.it.

¹ ACCORNERO 2001: 1-90, 2003-2004. Valuable biographical profiles of minor figures outlined by Accornero, see, for example, that of Effren Magrini, in MARCHIS 2010.

Einaudi's contribution? I would argue that what merits particular attention – and further investigation – is his methodological approach to reality. First and foremost, his empirical stance prevents his findings from becoming ossified; they must instead be continually tested. Moreover, he developed and employed appropriate tools for this purpose, including specialized institutions devoted to inquiry and methodological techniques specifically suited to this task. In this regard, particular attention should be given to the well-known sociological investigation that Einaudi himself employed to analyze the strikes in Biella (1897) and Genova (1900-1901), which he reported on in *La Stampa*, the newspaper with which he collaborated. He complemented this inquiries with specially collected and processed quantitative data, as well as with official statistics.² His mentor, Cognetti De Martiis, placed large-scale investigations at the core of any serious reform project. As has been observed, it is from this positivism of Cognettian origin that the centrality of statistical data for both Einaudi and the Turin School derives. Through the contributions of several of its members, this school helped shape both theoretical perspectives and the application of methodological statistics in Italy.³ Together, these efforts fostered a sustained and systematic reflection on socio-economic reality in its continuous evolution. At the same time, they underscored the need for dedicated institutions tasked with collecting and processing data, and with disseminating operationally useful insights from research activities. This is why there was a project to enrich the *Laboratorio di Economia Politica* – established, as is well known, in November 1893 by Salvatore Cognetti De Martiis – by adding an *Osservatorio economico*. The Biellese economist and close contemporary Emanuele Sella⁴ also contributed to this initiative. This project, and others like it, were not the result of a particularly fervent creativity – as we might say today – but rather of a vision that looked beyond national borders to engage with other experiences, not merely to draw inspiration from them, but to connect them, thereby forming networks of exchange and collaboration.⁵ From this experience, emerged Einaudi's critique primarily at the state administration's deafness to the need for reliable information – an essential requirement for the productive sector – as well as against the complacency of private individuals in safeguarding their own interests.

² See EINAUDI 1924 (now in anastatic reprint by Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura with Afterword by Roberto Marchionatti) in the Foreword of which Einaudi recalls having accepted Gobetti's invitation to exhume his writings on labor problems from the journals and newspapers in which he had gone on to publish from 1897 onward.

³ Cf. MARCHIONATTI and SODDU 2010: 88.

⁴ EINAUDI and SELLA 1902. On Emanuele Sella, see C. Rotondi in MARCHIONATTI 2009.

⁵ On this aspect of great importance see, again ACCORNERO 2007.

An integral and qualifying component of the method is interdisciplinarity. The emergence and development of the social sciences within the positivist climate, in which it appeared that everything could be subjected to laws, encouraged their use, even if inspired by a rigor quite different from that of the so-called exact sciences. This context fostered the incorporation of social-scientific perspectives, to enrich the cognitive approach with new questions and methods.

Another aspect of Einaudi's methodology worth highlighting is its expository character – particularly evident in his journalistic and teaching activities – which was especially significant for a field such as economics, then still only marginally engaging the general public. His argumentative approach was shaped, on the one hand, by Anglo-Saxon journalism, and, on the other, by the experience of the *Laboratorio di Economia Politica*, which was firmly grounded in careful data analysis and rejected dogmatism and preconceived positions. As has been noted, his lectures consistently featured “a comparative approach to other national contexts, frequent use of economic history as a method of comparison, attention to current events and everyday issues, engagement with economic theories, and a pragmatic approach grounded in investigations and statistics”.⁶

What is the ultimate aim of what may be considered a revolution extending from economics to all domains of knowledge, transforming structures, systems, professional roles, and political and administrative orientations? A straightforward and concise answer is that it entails the formation of a leadership class aligned with the characteristics and needs of the new industrial society. According to Einaudi, this objective requires the adoption of a new type of culture, both in its nature and in the audience it is intended to reach. With regard to the first aspect, its defining feature should be the integration of different fields of knowledge, breaking down disciplinary boundaries and fostering collaboration between the social sciences and technical disciplines. This integration should be realized through open and cooperative arrangements within educational and university institutions. As for the audience, the role of the *Laboratorio di Economia Politica* is emblematic: it was accessible not only to aspiring engineers but also to future lawyers and economists. Over time, moreover, it increasingly welcomed individuals beyond the student body – entrepreneurs, industrialists, politicians, and scientists – who, in order to function as an effective ruling class within a transformed and constantly evolving society, lacked adequate economic training. It is important to note that the objective pursued by the Turin economist was consistent

⁶ ACCORNERO 2024.

with that guiding the cultural and political activities of his young pupil, Piero Gobetti – namely, the formation of a culturally grounded leadership class with a European outlook. For Einaudi, the impetus to broaden both thematic horizons and intended audiences derived not only from his role as a scholar and teacher, but also from his active engagement in public life and journalism. What Einaudi was developing in the years leading up to the First World War reflects his personal concerns, even as his public image and role remained a work in progress. From the very outset of his career, certain core principles are clearly established and remain consistent throughout his long and active life: liberty as the guiding principle of liberalism and free-market economy; a commitment to social reform; and a rejection of statism. Yet each of these principles was also “lived” – that is empirically tested and continually reassessed – because society itself is a living, evolving organism. This required the capacity to understand and respond to the technological and economic transformations that define industrial reality, transformations that profoundly shaped Einaudi’s lifetime. Such an ongoing dialogue constituted an inescapable challenge that “Einaudi the man” confronted across the different roles he assumed over the course of his long and multifaceted career.

REFERENCES

- ACCORNERO C. 2024, “Introduction”, in L. Einaudi, *Insegnare l’economia. Lezioni al Politecnico di Torino*, Torino: Arago: L.
- ACCORNERO C. 2007, “Sulla circolazione internazionale delle idee: il Laboratorio di economia politica e il Musée Social di Parigi”, *Le culture della tecnica*, 18.
- ACCORNERO C. 2003-2004, “Metodo positivo, musei e laboratori. Un esempio d’interdisciplinarietà nella Torino positivista d’inizio secolo, il Laboratorio di Economia Politica e il Regio Museo Industriale”, in R. Marchionatti and G. Becchio (eds.), *La scuola di economia di Torino. Da Cognetti de Martiis a Einaudi*, Quaderni di Storia dell’Università di Torino, VIII-IX, Torino: Celid: 33-36.
- ACCORNERO C. 2001, “I laboratori della scienza positiva. Cultura tecnica e scienze sociali a Torino tra Otto e Novecento. The case of the Regio Museo Inadustriale”, in C. Accornero and E. Dellapiana, *Il Regio Museo Industriale tra cultura tecnica e diffusione del buon gusto*, Quaderni Crisis IV, Torino: Crisis: 1-90.
- EINAUDI L. 1924, *Le lotte del lavoro*, Torino: Piero Gobetti Editore.
- EINAUDI L. and SELLA E. 1902, *L’istituzione di un osservatorio economico, Il Congresso degli Istituti industriali e commerciali italiani*, Torino: Baravalle. Available at: <https://www.luigieinaudi.it/pubblicazione/listituzione-di-un-osservatorio-economico/> (accessed February 16, 2026).
- MARCHIONATTI R. (ed.) 2009, *La scuola di economia di Torino. Coprotagonisti ed epigoni*, Firenze: Olschki.

- MARCHIONATTI R. and SODDU P. (eds.) 2010, *Luigi Einaudi nella cultura, nella società e nella politica del 900 (Atti del Convegno tenuto a Torino, 16-17 aprile 2009)*, Firenze: Olschki.
- MARCHIS V. (ed.) 2010, *Progetto, cultura, società. La scuola politecnica torinese e i suoi allievi*, Torino: Ass. Ingegneri e Architetti.