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Special Issue:
The Last Mile:
When policies go local

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Introduction to the Special Issue

The Last Mile: When Policies Go Local

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The study of local politics and policies in such a diverse country as Italy can be both remarkable and hopeless. On the one hand, going local to study politics allows us to discover how political preferences vary in proximate contexts and how elected representatives distribute power across levels of government, placing emphasis on centre-periphery relations (Page and Goldsmith 1987). On the other, going local to study policies allows us to consider what public agencies do when they apply seemingly self-executory policy measures at the decentralized level, showing the importance of implementation (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). Ultimately, going local is a good way to discover how politics and policies are intertwined, by investigating the relationship between performance and perceived legitimacy (Dente 1985; 1997; Capano and Lippi 2018), especially when the political system is geared towards a majoritarian logic that allows clear alternation in power after the polls – such as after the so-called direct election of a mayor in Italy (Bobbio 2005a).

All in all, going local has proved to be innovative in both theory and empirics. In this sense, the ‘local’ is the natural scene for democratic and institutional experimentation. On the politics side, while Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work* came out as a study of democratic performance of the newborn Italian Regions, scholars such as Caciagli, Riccamboni, Cartocci and Trigilia described the political subcultures focusing on partisan organizations at the local level (Baccetti and Messina 2009). On the policy side, the implementation of national policies offered a unique opportunity for the application of problem-solving as the proper analytical perspective for policy studies in the country (Dente et al. 1990). Later on, the ‘local’ paved the way for studies about administrative reforms and democratic experimentation (Bobbio 2002; 2005b). Nowadays, it still offers a privileged perspective on policy innovation and learning (Di Giulio and Vecchi 2018), on the effects of reforms on local public services (Citroni et al. 2015; Galanti 2016), and on the complex multi-level implications of austerity policies (Lippi and Tsekos 2019; Bolgherini and Dallara 2016), while disclosing emerging phenomena (Bassoli and Polizzi 2019).

However interesting the ‘local’ might be, perils for unfortunate researchers abound. First, there is *the accessibility problem*. Usable data can hardly be relied on for most dimensions related to the input, output or, most importantly, the outcome of the policy process. With the exception of the electoral ones, data on local politics and policies are incomplete or inaccurate or, more often than not, simply not there. Second, there is *the*

comparability problem. Official data sources are often aggregated at higher territorial levels, so fine-grained and comparable measures about salient political and policy issues are scarce. Third, there is *the exceptionalism problem*. Comparison often seems at odds with the specificity of the local context, so that scientific explanations tend to apply only to one case, without making sense of different case studies. Moreover, replicability is unlikely, also because accurate in-depth case study research relying on interviews and process tracing is extremely time consuming. Last but not least, there is *the theoretical problem*, as the proximity between local actors and their sensitivity to contextual conditions makes it rather difficult to find a theory that fits, or to be able to generate hypotheses to generalize the empirical findings.

Still, going local still means dipping into the reality of politics and policies, and this often makes empirical research on local governments and policies highly innovative and insightful and, thus, necessary. The articles in this focus on IPS offer examples of how to turn research problems into opportunities.

First, the accessibility of data can be tackled by seeking other sources of data, building a new dataset, and ultimately focusing on unconventional research questions. Most policies remain on paper until they arrive at the local level, where purposeful actors implement them following strategic considerations. Searching for (as yet unused) data, collected by a number of institutions and organizations at the local level, allows us to shed light on side effects and unexpected consequences that anticipate future developments. This is what emerges in the analysis of Elisa Rebessi of the implementation of the Italian Code of Public Contracts (Rebessi 2019, this issue). Building a brand-new dataset on judicial decisions on the awarding of contracts by the Regional Administrative Courts in Milan, Rome and Turin, and using measures to assess competitiveness in these contexts, Rebessi shows that municipal officers act strategically in shaping the content of the contracts in order to avoid contestation. At the same time, the analysis unveils a side effect: by making the content of the contracts more detailed and rigid, local administrations may paradoxically experience accrued litigation from competing enterprises on the local market.

Second, the comparability problem can be faced by downsizing the analysis to more homogeneous units, amassing qualitative evidence from interviews with different stakeholders in the same cities, while collecting other structural information (e.g. on networks). The comparison between similar cases proves, then, to be empowered by a research question that is original, because it adds a new perspective to the existing literature. This is what emerges from the work of Andrea Pettrachin (2019) in this issue of IPS. He analyses how sensemaking processes affect the implementation of social utility work as an instrument of migration policy in several cities in the Veneto Region. By considering not only the rational motivations of mayors but also their emotional component, the analysis unveils that mayoral decisions depend both on how the issue is perceived in the communities, but also on how they interpret their identity as mayors, including partisanship. In particular, the analysis of how these mayors make sense of their decisions on migration policies shows that partisan mayors tend to behave differently from independent ones.

Third, the exceptionalism problem is confronted by crafting better research designs. Even when a case seems specific to one time and one place, the research should be designed, as the case is one instance among many others. In other words, the researcher has

to be skilled at justifying the case selection, while acknowledging that also in a single case study there might be an explicit or implicit comparison with similar cases (Gerring 2007). In this way, even a single case allows us to discover aspects that might configure as recurring trends for a phenomenon. By selecting a pilot study for the analysis of the implementation of rationalization of municipal corporations, Stefania Profeti reinforces existing knowledge about both policies and political parties. On the one hand, the analysis of rationalization policies in Leghorn under the Five Star Movement confirms that centre-periphery relations still matter for national parties, while the institutionalization of the Movement translates into a centralization of decision-making, especially with regard to apparently ‘local’ problems laden with symbolic meanings. On the other hand, the analysis shows that mayors adapt national policies using a strategic reframing of the issues, and strategically choose from among an array of options, but with constant attention to perceived legitimacy and citizens’ expectations, as their political careers (also) depend on this.

Finally, there is the theoretical problem, which is not exclusive to local government studies. Indeed, this is the most challenging one, but also the most rewarding. To find theories that fit the cases, the researcher has to think at a higher level of abstraction, to discard the aspects that are not relevant to the research question, and finally to take from the findings only those dimensions and relations that explain something – and that are more likely to be present in similar cases. This can be done either when the researcher already has a theory in mind and needs a local case to test it – such as positive political theory in the article by Rebessi – or when he/she is struggling to make sense of a new phenomenon, such as the implementation of a top-down rationalization programme by a new political force in the article by Profeti.

All this requires a solid base of theoretical awareness, a steady orientation towards empirical knowledge, plus a good deal of stubbornness in seeking until you find (Profeti 2010). The future of local politics and policies relies on the capacity of our community to develop proper research agendas to design a collection of case studies under a shared framework and research question, or to invest in a sort of ‘inventive individualism’, with in-depth case studies on understudied phenomena which are telling of trends in both politics and policies, from the distribution of power to the use of policy instruments.

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When Asylum Policies Go Local: the Case of Socially-Useful Works for Asylum-Seekers*

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Abstract

The local sphere of asylum policy, during the refugee crisis, became a key area of intervention for local governments. The existing literature on the topic has largely neglected the role of political affiliation in local asylum policy-making and the implications for policy implementation of mayors' subjective understandings and decision-making. This article aims to fill these gaps by focusing on the case of 'socially useful works' (SUW) for asylum-seekers, a local policy that was defined as the Italian way to deal with the reception and integration of asylum-seekers. The article first analyses the outputs of this policy, assessing which local governments developed SUW policies, what types of measures were implemented and with what policy goals. Second, by applying insights from Weick's sensemaking approach and relying on semi-structured interviews conducted in the Veneto region, it develops an account that analyses how and why these measures were adopted. The analysis concludes, first, that mayors' party affiliations are a strong predictor of how SUW policies are (or are not) implemented. Second, it shows that mayors are not mere passive implementers: they adapt state-level guidelines to their own aims in ways that powerfully shape policy implementation and its outcomes. Third, the article shows how decisions about the implementation of SUW policies are significantly influenced by the mayors' diverse interpretations of the many anti-migrant protests against asylum-seekers, and by different identity processes, past experiences and social relations.

1. Introduction

Asylum policies are an interesting case for investigating the role of mayors' party affiliations in local policy-making and how mayors' aims, motivations and understandings of social and political phenomena influence their decisions with regard to policy implementation.

The local sphere of migration policy, indeed, became a key area of intervention for local governments during the refugee crisis. Reception policies are managed primarily at national level but, during the crisis, mayors had to decide whether to cooperate with national authorities or actively fight against the creation of reception centres, and could decide to develop local integration policies for asylum-seekers (Ambrosini, 2018). Not only did the crisis increase the relevance of the local sphere of asylum policy, but this also became 'an extremely contentious one' (Zapata-Barrero et al. 2017). The sharp rise in

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asylum-seeker flows in most European countries has led to widespread anti-migrant protests and high levels of political contestation around asylum, which make mayors' decisions in this field highly visible.

While an increasing number of scholarly works have recently focused on local asylum policy-making (Jorgensen, 2012; Ambrosini, 2018), most of this literature, particularly in the Italian context, neglects the role of mayors' party affiliations in local policy-making and the implications for policy implementation of mayors' aims, motivations and subjective understandings. This article aims to fill these gaps by focusing on both local policy outputs and decision-making processes and addressing the following questions. First, are mayors mere implementers of schemes decided at the national level or do they shape the policies they adopt in significant ways? And do mayors' political affiliations have any influence or impact on asylum policy adoption and implementation? Second, which elements shape mayors' decisions to adopt (or not) local asylum policies and their policy goals?

The article specifically focuses on 'socially useful work' projects for asylum-seekers (henceforth: SUW projects/ SUW policies), a key local asylum policy developed by mayors during the asylum crisis, entailing the voluntary involvement of asylum-seekers in unremunerated community service. The policy became one of the five key pillars of the agenda promoted by the Interior Minister Marco Minniti¹ which led to the structural reform of the asylum system.² The then chief of the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration, Mario Morcone, defined them as 'the Italian way to deal with the reception of asylum-seekers' (Il Corriere del Veneto, 2016) and a key measure to facilitate their integration (Il Mattino, 2016). The article examines mayors' decisions to adopt and implement these policies in the northern region of Veneto, where SUW projects were widely implemented during the asylum crisis.

The article is articulated in three sections. It begins by explaining the analytical approach and methodology adopted. It then assesses policy outputs, analysing which local governments developed SUW policies, the types of measures implemented and mayors' policy goals. Finally, it accounts for these differences in policy outputs through the analysis of the specificities of mayors' decision-making approaches. The analysis shows, first, that mayors' party affiliations are a strong predictor of how SUW policies are (or are not) implemented. Second, in line with well-established findings in the literature in public policy analysis (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973), it argues that mayors are not mere passive implementers of state-level guidelines and rather adapt them to their aims, in ways that powerfully shape policy implementation. Third, it shows that mayors' decisions about how to implement SUW policies are significantly influenced by their diverse interpretations of the causes of the many anti-migrant protests around them, and by different identity processes, past experiences and social relations.

¹ Source: <https://openmigration.org/en/analyses/5-things-to-know-about-italys-plan-for-immigration/>.

² Law Decree 13/2017, then converted into Law 46/2017.

2. Analytical Approach and Rationale

An increasing number of scholars have recently focused on local asylum policy-making, in Italy and beyond, teasing out some key features of local governments' responses to the asylum crisis and examining their consequences on localities (Ambrosini, 2013; Doomernik and Glorius, 2016). These studies have described a variegated reality, in which local governments follow pragmatic or rights-based approaches in managing immigration or rather decide to adopt 'policies of exclusion' (Jorgensen, 2012; Steen, 2016; Ambrosini, 2018; McMahan, 2019). Despite the increasing number of contributions in this field, at least two main gaps can be identified in such literature, which this article aims to address.

On the one hand, while this literature has focused on the explanation of the variation and effects of local asylum policy, both the role of mayors' political affiliations in local policy-making and their motivations and policy goals have been largely ignored. Most of the literature, and contributions focusing on Italy in particular, often tend to merely extrapolate assumptions about their nature from the observed decisions. Mayors' decisions are thus often assumed to be influenced by the mobilisation of local immigrant-supporting organizations or anti-migrant protests (Filomeno, 2017), by conflicts with regional and national authorities (Scholten and Pennix, 2016), or by mayors' ideological positions (Ambrosini, 2018: 117). This is despite the fact that eminent scholarly works have demonstrated how decision-making is influenced by factors that are not necessarily evident in its outputs.

On the other hand, those scholarly works that, outside the Italian context, do focus on local actors and decision-making, tend to focus on issue framing in policy disputes (Steen, 2016) and/or to move from rationalistic premises to assess actors' choices (Lidén and Nyhlén, 2015). They thus assume that asylum policies 'have an objective basis, in terms of quantifying local costs, the level of state subsidies and demographic effects on the community' (Steen, 2016: 466), and that actors' choices are 'constructed in the public discourse, and often with symbolic connotations' (*ibid.*). These assumptions, legitimate in other contexts, seem inappropriate for studying asylum-related decision-making processes in situations of crisis, such as the one analysed in this article. As pointed out by a number of scholars (Cohen et al., 1972; Brunsson, 1985), indeed, in such situations decisions must be taken quickly and with scant information and tend to be powerfully influenced also by actors' interpretations of the external environment, and not merely by rational or strategic considerations.

This article, therefore, aims to complement this existing literature in two main respects. First, it aims to specifically investigate the role of party affiliation in asylum policy-making, with specific focus on the Italian context. Ambrosini (2018: 117) has questioned the existence of a clear-cut distinction in Italy between centre-right administrations promoting anti-migrant policies and centre-left governments promoting inclusive policies. Steen (2016) reached similar conclusions in the Norwegian context. This article will investigate whether or not mayors affiliated with different parties in Italy implemented SUW policies and whether they did so in different ways.

Second, moving beyond the mere assessment of policy outputs, this article aims to account for such differences or lack of differences through the analysis of the specificities of mayors' decision-making processes in situations of crisis. To investigate these processes, the paper adopts an actor-centred constructivist perspective (Hay, 2012) which mainly draws concepts and ideas from Weick's sensemaking approach (1995). This

approach, rarely applied to political science (Geddes and Hadj-Abdou, 2018), provides an alternative framework for analysing the social psychological processes through which individuals understand and assign meaning to unexpected events and act upon these understandings (Helms Mills et al., 2010: 182). Importantly, it is particularly suited to examining decisions in situations of crisis (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014: 58), such as the one analysed, where local governments were suddenly asked by Prefects to identify buildings to host increasing numbers of asylum-seekers, with scant information available and under the pressure of widespread protests against asylum-seekers. Also, unlike cognitive approaches that merely focus on policy frames, the sensemaking approach connects thought and action and captures ‘the practical activities of real people engaged in concrete situations of social action’ (Boden, 1994: 10). It indeed addresses both the two key questions that organizations and their members have to face in situations of crisis, related not only to cognition – ‘what is happening?’ – but also to action – ‘what should be done next?’ (Mills et al., 2010: 183).

Weick’s ‘sensemaking framework’ (1995: 18), based on some interrelated ‘explanatory properties’, provides a method for analysing how individuals answer these two key questions. According to Weick’s first property, sensemaking is ‘grounded on identity construction’ (ibid.): who individuals think they are as organizational actors in a certain context influences how they interpret events and act. Secondly, Weick states that sensemaking is focused on and by ‘cues’ that individuals extract from the environment in order to take decisions on the relevance and acceptability of information or explanations. These extracted cues are ‘seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring’ (ibid.: 50), meaning that actors make choices by focusing on certain elements or events while ignoring others. According to Weick’s third property, the opportunity for sensemaking, which is a comparative process, is provided by retrospection: individuals rely on familiar past experiences to interpret current events. In practical terms, this means that actors are more reluctant to project, forecast and plan solutions if these are ‘decoupled from reflective action and history’ (ibid.: 30). Fourth, Weick argues that sensemaking unfolds ‘in a social context of other actors’ and is contingent upon interactions with others (Weick et al., 2005: 409).

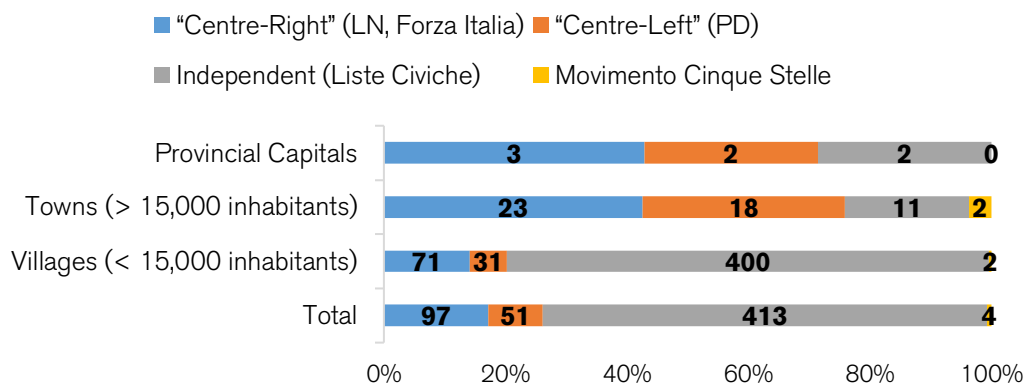
Analysing how these properties influence mayors’ decisions provides in-depth insights into why and how mayors implemented SUW policies and their policy goals. Based on the first property, it is expected that mayors’ decisions are influenced by perceptions of their institutional role, but also by their identity of members of a party or by local identity processes. The second property suggests that mayors’ decisions are influenced by their perceptions of the effects of asylum-seeker reception in their municipalities. Following the third property, past experiences in managing migration flows at the local level should help mayors and city officials deal with the present situation. In the absence of such previous definitions of the situation, asylum policies are expected to be mostly implemented in a very reactive way. Finally, the last property suggests that mayors’ interactions with other actors in the asylum governance system – particularly if these actors are perceived as sharing similar perspectives on the issue – are expected to influence their interpretations and decisions.

3. Case selection and methods

Veneto is an interesting ‘extreme case’ (Gerring, 2006: 89) for analysing the research questions posed by this article and generating hypotheses on the implementation of asylum policies, for at least two reasons.

First, the significant political variation within the region in 2017 (Figure 1) allows us to formulate hypotheses about the role that party affiliation plays in shaping local asylum policymaking during the refugee crisis. Veneto is one of the heartlands of the populist radical right Lega Nord (LN), which maintains a strong regionalist character in the region (Zulianello, 2019: 83). Yet the dominant position of the LN in the regional political system, in 2017, was contrasted by the centre-left Partito Democratico (PD), which controlled a significant number of municipalities, and by several independent mayors, not affiliated to any national party. These mayors are ‘fringe actors’, who, unlike the others, do not aspire to govern at the national level.

Figure 1. Political affiliation of Venetian Mayors in 2017



Source: <http://www.comuniverso.it>

Second, the high pressure from the asylum issue allows us to analyse decision-making in situations of crisis. Veneto, in 2016-2017, was indeed characterised by a harsh political and institutional crisis around the reception of asylum-seekers. It experienced very high levels of political contestation around the issue, and the highest number of anti-migrant protests in Italy (Lunaria, 2017), often organized by ‘anti-migrant committees’ with no political affiliation. Also, it was characterised by a very weak reception system, with a prevalence of emergency reception centres (CAS)³ under the control of the Prefecture, very few SPRAR⁴ centres (directly managed by local authorities), and a very unequal dispersal of asylum-seekers across the region (Ministry of Interior, 2017).

The many anti-migrant protests, and pressure from anti-migrant groups, are expected to significantly influence mayors’ strategies. The very strong regional identity in the region is also expected to influence decisions, particularly those of right-wing mayors.

³ The acronym stands for: *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria*, Emergency Reception Centres.

⁴ The acronym stands for: *Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati*, System of Protection for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees.

The article draws upon an extensive document analysis of policy documents and newspaper articles and 33 semi-structured interviews conducted in Veneto in November 2017. The sample of interviewees includes 14 mayors and deputy mayors from municipalities that hosted reception centres; ten non-party actors directly involved in the implementation of SUW policies (four civil servants, four representatives of service providers, two deputy prefects) and nine experts (four academics, three NGO representatives, two representatives of trade unions). The sample of mayors and deputy mayors (henceforth: mayors) includes three LN mayors, three PD mayors, and eight independent mayors. Independent mayors have been grouped into three categories – ‘right-wing independent’, ‘centre-right independent’ and ‘centre-left independent’ – using, as criteria, the definition of actors themselves as such, past membership of a party, and the external support received by parties at local elections. Interviewees were carefully chosen through a quota sampling strategy, in order to include, for each of the five groups, mayors from municipalities of different sizes (one provincial capital, one town and one village), in different provinces, and hosting different types of reception centres.⁵

Section 3 uses insights from all interviews and the document analysis to assess which local governments developed SUW policies, the types of measures implemented and mayors’ policy goals. Section 4 uses insights from the 14 interviews with mayors to assess decision-making processes: following Maitlis and Christianson (2014: 62), Weick’s ‘sensemaking framework’ has been used as a method of analysis, on the basis of which the 14 mayors were asked specific questions.

In addition, Social Network Analysis (SNA) was applied to enhance the utility and value of Weick’s framework, under the assumption that social processes also shape interpretations of events (Geddes and Taylor, 2016: 588).⁶ The analysis relies on data collected through structured questionnaires filled in by the interviewed mayors that implemented SUW policies, investigating their interactions with other actors in the asylum governance system, and the degree of similarity or difference in their perspectives on asylum-related issues.

4. SUW Policies in Veneto: the main Policy Outputs

This section assesses which local governments developed SUW policies, the types of measures implemented and mayors’ policy goals.

The interview material and other sources⁷ reveal that mayors’ political affiliations are a strong predictor of whether local governments developed (or not) SUW policies, unlike other variables (e.g. size of municipality, province, type of reception centre hosted). SUW projects were implemented by local governments led by independent centre-left, independent centre-right and PD mayors (including the nine mayors interviewed with these political affiliations). Only a few local governments led by LN mayors developed these policies, including one of the three municipalities analysed. Most LN mayors opposed SUW projects, arguing that they entailed a disproportional

⁵ No provincial capital was governed in 2017 by a ‘right-wing independent’ administration. The group of ‘right-wing independent’ mayors, therefore, only includes two interviewees.

⁶ For an overview of applications of SNA to political phenomena see: Wasserman and Faust, 1994.

⁷ Sources: *Il Corriere del Veneto*, 2016; *Vvox*, 2016; Gjergji, 2017.

administrative burden for the municipality and/or that these activities should rather have been proposed to local unemployed citizens (Vvox, 2017). The two independent right-wing mayors interviewed harshly criticised and opposed SUW policies.

Table 1. Key features of the SUW policies implemented in the 14 municipalities analysed

Political Affiliation of the local government	Standpoint on asylum-seekers' reception	Adoption of SUW Policies	Policy content (types of voluntary activities proposed)	Policy implementation: key features	Policy goal
Independent right-wing (2)	Oppose	No			
Lega Nord (3)	Oppose	Only one local government	Sweeping the streets, maintaining parks, painting of public buildings	Emphasis on visibility	Short-term: increasing citizens' perception of security
Independent Centre-Right (3)	Do not oppose	Yes, all	Sweeping the streets, maintaining parks and gardens, assistance to disabled children.	Pragmatic approach: measures vary according to needs.	Short-term: providing services to the local population
Partito Democratico (3)	Do not oppose	Yes, all	Sweeping the streets, maintaining parks, painting of public buildings	Emphasis on visibility, high numbers, involvement of municipal companies.	Short-term: showing empathy for the fears of the local population; reducing social tensions.
Independent Centre-Left (3)	Do not oppose	Yes, all	Maintaining parks and gardens, activities in schools, nursing homes, restaurants.	Attempts to target activities to migrants' skills	Long-term: integration of asylum-seekers

The analysis also provides information about the type of activities proposed to asylum-seekers and about mayors' policy goals, showing that, in the selected municipalities, these are both strictly linked to mayors' political affiliations. PD mayors decided to implement SUW policies with the greatest enthusiasm: as one of them explains, 'the decision was so rational that we cannot even speak of a decision-making process, everybody sustained this initiative'. All PD mayors interviewed agree that the main policy goals were twofold. The policies were implemented, first and foremost, to show the empathy of the local government for the local population, who were annoyed by seeing asylum-seekers loitering inside and outside the reception centres. As a PD mayor explains:

We cannot deny that the rationale was that of positioning ourselves on the side of our citizens, who were annoyed by seeing migrants doing nothing for the whole day. Thus, we decided that these migrants had to give something back to the community that was hosting them (PD mayor).

Furthermore, SUW policies, in the PD mayors' view, can potentially contribute to reducing people's fears of migrants, and re-orient the political debate on the reception of asylum-seekers:

Initially I was very sceptical (...) then I realised that these projects contributed to decreasing social tensions. As a councillor from the Five Star Movement rightly told me, 'if you see a person sweeping the street, you can't be afraid of him'; you don't see him as a potential enemy (PD Deputy mayor).

These goals clearly influence the type of work in which asylum-seekers are involved, which in PD-led municipalities only include low-skilled auxiliary jobs such as sweeping the streets, painting public buildings and maintaining parks and gardens. Also, they have significant implications for policy implementation. First, as a city official explains, SUW policies are developed in ways that make asylum-seekers' work strongly visible to the locals:

The local government decided to develop this policy in a period when the context was quite tense, with the aim of showing to the locals that these migrants were doing something useful for the community, which was the reason why we made them work in areas where they could be highly visible (City Official).

Some PD-led local governments also organized public ceremonies during which the mayor delivered certificates to the asylum-seekers, proving their participation in SUW projects (Cervellin, 2016).

Second, these goals seem to influence the number of asylum-seekers involved in these projects and the choice of the actors involved in policy implementation:

While others started developing these policies on a smaller scale, our mayor decided that we had to 'go big', doing something that could be visible to everybody. It didn't make much sense to develop a project just for a dozen or so asylum-seekers; we had to do something important. So, he decided to involve the municipal company to implement these projects. And everybody praised him. (...) He was not the first one to develop this policy, but he systematised it and communicated it very well (PD deputy mayor).

Interestingly, the only LN mayor interviewed that decided to promote SUW policies did so with similar goals, and with a similar emphasis on the impact of the policy on the local population. As he explains, the main goal of the policy was that of showing to the people that the local government was doing something to increase their security.

The decisions of independent centre-left and independent centre-right mayors to develop SUW policies, conversely, are driven by very different goals.

All the independent centre-left mayors interviewed explain that their goal was to foster the integration of asylum-seekers in the local community and labour market:

The rationale behind this decision was to try to help these migrants learn a job, and to actively promote their integration in our society, thus creating the conditions to avoid social marginalisation (Independent centre-left mayor).

As another mayor puts it, ‘we wanted to make asylum-seekers feel part of the community where they are hosted’. This approach seems to influence the type of activities proposed to asylum-seekers, which in these municipalities also include work in public libraries, schools, canteens and nursing homes.

Centre-right independent mayors, finally, take a more ‘pragmatic approach’ and mostly explain that their decisions to develop SUW policies were aimed at the provision of services to the local population that could not be provided otherwise. As one of these mayors explains:

To be sincere with you, the main reason why we involved asylum-seekers in public utility works is because we had nobody that could perform those tasks. For instance, we involved them in the assistance of disabled children in the kindergarten, because no other local association was available. The main reason, therefore, is that we really need them (Independent centre-right mayor).

For this reason, two of these mayors suggest that the involvement of asylum-seekers in these projects should become compulsory – an idea publicly launched by the mayor of Verona, Flavio Tosi.⁸

5. Sensemaking Processes

This section aims to account for the differences in the implementation of SUW policies identified so far through the analysis of the specificities of decision-making approaches. Such analysis will thus provide crucial and in-depth insights into why and how mayors variously implemented SUW policies, and why mayors with different political affiliations were moved by different policy goals.

To do so, I apply Weick’s ‘sensemaking framework’ (1995: 18) and, by investigating how Weick’s four key properties of sensemaking influence mayors’ strategies and decisions, I examine how individuals develop understandings about the situation around them and act upon these understandings. The four properties are clearly interlinked but, for analytical and operational reasons, their impact on mayors’ decisions has been analysed separately. Each of the following sections thus provides complementary insights and clarifies different aspects of mayors’ decision-making processes.

Identity Processes

Identity construction ‘is at the root of sensemaking and influences the other properties of the sensemaking process’ (Helms Mills, 2003: 55). As Weick points out (1995), individual identities have various dimensions and, indeed, the interview material reveals that mayors’ decisions are influenced by their institutional identity (who they think they are as institutional actors), their political identity (i.e. their party membership) and their sense of belonging to their state or region (cultural identity). The complex interaction between these dimensions helps to explain, first, the mayors’ standpoints on the reception of asylum-seekers and, second, why SUW policies were developed in Veneto and became so popular there.

⁸ See link online at: <http://www.veronasera.it/politica/tosi-salvini-tweet-migranti-protesta-trattato-dublino-5-gennaio-2017.html>.

Awareness of their institutional role, the interviews reveal, leads PD mayors to moderate the traditionally pro-migrant positions of their party. As one of them explained, 'being a mayor makes me more realistic, I'm more aware of the practical problems that migration flows pose and I can understand much better how people think'. Another interviewee added:

We must be welcoming towards asylum-seekers because this is the mission of a centre-left administration (...). [However] as local government we must confront reality and try to come up with responses. This doesn't mean giving up our ideals, but adapting them to the situation (PD deputy mayor).

Their strong sense of belonging to the Italian State, however, prevents PD mayors from opposing Prefects' decisions to allocate asylum-seekers to their municipalities. As a mayor explains:

We are convinced that local authorities, being part of the Italian State, should do their part and cooperate with national authorities so that the State can fulfil its duty to provide international protection to those who are entitled to it (PD mayor).

Most independent centre-left and independent centre-right mayors, conversely, describe their experience as local administrators as a learning process. They state that their institutional role put them in 'a privileged point of observation' and allowed them to meet experts and to better understand immigration dynamics. The three independent centre-right mayors interviewed, despite their initial scepticism about hosting asylum-seekers in their municipality, ended up changing their preferences. As one of them explains, 'my institutional role allowed me to get around mystifications and journalists' fabrications.

Instead, the very strong sense of regional belonging (and 'resentment' towards the national political class) of LN mayors and, even more, independent right-wing mayors, leads them to harshly oppose the dispersal of asylum-seekers organized by national authorities. As an independent right-wing mayor explains:

Rome is trying by any means to destroy us (...). The only thing to do is reject the asylum-seekers, we must send them back to the sender. Rome should burst. In a metaphorical sense of course. Rome should keep all the immigrants, to really experience what it means. They should manage this problem there (Independent right-wing mayor).

The coordinator of a service provider reports that, during a meeting, an LN mayor motivated his decision to oppose the creation of a reception centre by stating: 'I want to keep eating *soppressa* [a local type of sausage] as I have always done and drinking my own wine'. Interestingly, however, two of the three LN mayors also explain that their institutional role moderated their initial, more radical, anti-migrant, positions:

Before being elected I had a more political and ideological approach to the issue. Then, when you have to make decisions, the approach changes significantly. For instance, I was against the SPRAR system (...) but after analysing it in detail, I changed my mind. The decisions you make as a mayor, despite being partly influenced by political considerations, are more reasoned and thought out (LN mayor).

Independent right-wing mayors, unlike LN mayors, explain that their institutional role did not influence their understandings and decisions. One of them states that, were he a private citizen, he would probably be the leader of an anti-migrant committee. Another mayor explains that his opposition to the reception of asylum-seekers in his village started before he was elected and that his position has not changed since then.

The very strong sense of regional identity in Veneto also seems to explain why SUW policies became so popular there. Many mayors that do not oppose the reception of asylum-seekers, particularly PD mayors, indeed, agree that opposition to immigration in the region is largely grounded on identitarian concerns. As a PD mayor puts it, ‘the Venetian identity is based on contrapositions against those who come from outside’, and Venetians’ ‘industriousness’ and ‘aptitude for hard work’ are some of the elements upon which such contrapositions are built. The fact that most asylum-seekers are unemployed during asylum applications, as a Deputy Prefect interviewed puts it, ‘is not accepted in Venetian culture’. Making asylum-seekers work for the community, therefore, assumes, in the region, a specific symbolic value.

Understanding the Effects of Migration Flows

To analyse which events and cues influence mayors’ sensemaking processes, mayors were asked about their perceptions of the effects of asylum-seeker reception in their municipality. Table 2 illustrates the findings of a frame analysis of actors’ responses, based on a typology of frames derived from the influential works of Helbling (2014: 25) and Benson and Wood (2015).

Table 2. Frame analysis of mayors’ responses to questions investigating their perception of the effects of the reception of asylum-seekers (in bold: mayors of provincial capitals)

		IND/RW-1	IND/RW-2	LN-1	LN-2	LN-3	IND/CR-1	IND/CR-2	IND/CR-3	IND/CL-1	IND/CL-2	IND/CL-3	PD-1	PD-2	PD-3	
Securitized Frames	Crimes, Security Problems															
	Risk of Health Problems															
Public Opinion Frames <i>(Public Opinion is hostile towards migrants because...)</i>	People are inherently hostile to migrants															
	Hostility is caused by political propaganda/media															
Administrative Frames <i>(Management problems, due to...)</i>	Numbers / the complexity of the problem															
	Local institutional tensions / lack of coordination															
Economic Frames	Labour market competition and burden on public finance.															
	Asylum reception has turned into a profitable business															

As expected, the interview material reveals that, while describing the effects of asylum-seeker reception, most mayors focus on the many anti-migrant protests that have taken place in Veneto. Crucially, however, the five groups of mayors understand the causes of these protests in significantly different ways.

Mayors affiliated to both the LN and the PD describe anti-migrant protests and locals' hostility towards asylum-seekers as an unavoidable reaction to the presence of asylum-seekers which makes locals feel insecure. As a PD mayor explains, locals are 'hostile to migrants due to *inherent fears* of persons that are different from them'. As an LN mayor explains:

The main effect has been a perception of insecurity among the citizens (...). People see the presence of these migrants as something that is imposed on them and that they don't know how to face (...). And this perception of insecurity risks turning into xenophobia (LN mayor).

Independent mayors, instead, frame these protests and locals' hostility as the outcome of specific events and dynamics. The two right-wing independent mayors, unlike LN mayors, adopt securitised frames and describe locals as 'under threat', because asylum-seekers commit crimes and represent a risk to public health:

A spate of crimes has broken out; crimes are increasing, particularly those of a sexual nature (...). The asylum-seekers are causing abnormal social malaise. Some of them went to the doctor and everybody ran out of the clinic, especially older people, and the doctor didn't know which medical checks these migrants had done (Independent right-wing mayor).

Independent centre-left and independent centre-right mayors, instead, explain that the main effect of the dispersal of asylum-seekers in Veneto has been increased tension between local institutions, which has led to a very inefficient management of the reception of asylum-seekers and a high level of politicisation of the issue. The anti-migrant protests are mostly perceived by these mayors as the consequence of these institutional tensions, of the anti-migrant propaganda campaigns of the far-right, which received vast coverage in local media, and the unbalanced dispersal of asylum-seekers.

These different understandings of the effects of asylum-seeker reception on public opinion and of the causes of the anti-migrant protests, have important implications for mayors' decisions to develop (or not) SUW policies and powerfully influence the type of measures implemented. They clearly explain why PD and LN mayors, particularly concerned about public reactions to asylum-seeker reception, have developed SUW policies with the main goal of being seen to do something to address citizens' perceptions of insecurity. It also explains why they want these activities to be highly visible. A PD deputy mayor explains that she had long suggested the idea to develop SUW projects without being supported by the mayor, but that, at some point, the mayor suddenly changed his mind 'when he perceived the rising social tension around asylum-seeker reception'. Similar political and symbolic considerations influenced the only LN mayor to implement the policy. In the case of the two LN mayors that did not develop SUW policies, a similar assessment of the problem did not lead to the same solutions. Interestingly, both these mayors had to deal with a more limited number of asylum-seekers and did not perceive the citizens' sense of insecurity as undermining their public support.

Conversely, the conviction of independent centre-left and centre-right mayors that anti-migrant protests are a consequence of the inefficiencies of the reception system and of the lack of information about the issue, leads them to identify other policy solutions.⁹ All of them, indeed, unlike PD mayors, actively tried to combat people's hostility through information campaigns or public events with experts. They have also taken a more proactive role in trying to better organize the regional reception system. As one of them explains, 'what we did was to try to coordinate the reception system in our province, going beyond our formal competences'. Public opinion, therefore, plays a minor role in these mayors' decisions to develop SUW projects: as an independent centre-right mayor puts it, 'our decision had nothing to do with public opinion. I feel ashamed when I hear people around me saying that the solution is to have them clean the streets'. Also, these understandings clearly explain why these mayors are much less concerned about the visibility of SUW policies.

Finally, the analysis provides useful insights into why independent right-wing mayors so harshly oppose SUW policies: being convinced that asylum-seekers represent a real threat to public security, they oppose any initiative that allows them to get closer to the citizens.

The Influence of Past Experiences

The analysis of the retrospective element of sensemaking provides interesting insights into why local governments propose different types of activities for asylum-seekers and why they do so with long-term or short-term policy goals.

While replying to questions designed to grasp how they made sense of the refugee crisis, most mayors do not make any reference to past events. Rather, they seem to perceive recent flows as an entirely new phenomenon, despite Veneto having received significant migrant flows in the past three decades. In line with expectations, this absence of previous definitions of the situation leads to reluctance to make plans and projections. Most mayors interviewed, indeed, describe asylum-seeking migration as an overwhelming phenomenon beyond their control and speak about the future in very anxious terms. Many are concerned about the possibility that the asylum-seekers will settle in their municipality after the asylum procedure.

This lack of planning and forecasting, at odds with the urgent need to provide solutions, suggests the potential for reactive tendencies in local asylum policy-making. Most interviewed mayors, in fact, seem to have internalized the idea of being passive respondents rather than active shapers of asylum policies. As a PD mayor explains:

We don't have the instruments. Problems arise, and no ideas about how to deal with them have been previously developed. I think we are dealing with a matter for which we were not prepared (...). We make urgent, emergency decisions (PD mayor).

This helps to explain why most mayors implement SUW policies in a reactive manner, as emergency measures and without any long-term planning.

⁹ The analysis does not allow us to assess the cause of these different perceptions. This might be due to the presence of strong inputs from the parties or mayors' different aspirations to pursue a political career at the national level.

Conversely, the availability of past experiences in the management of asylum or similar issues helps to explain why the three independent centre-left mayors (and one of the independent centre-right mayors) implemented SUW policies with different policy goals. These four mayors, indeed, during the interview, refer to lessons from the past that helped them to make decisions during the asylum crisis. One of them explains that when the Prefect suddenly decided to send 90 asylum-seekers to his village, the previous experience of his municipality within the SPRAR system helped him to manage the unexpected event:

After 15 years of experience with the SPRAR system, we knew that this system and the diffused reception model worked: we had to recover that model and develop it further (Independent centre-left mayor).

Importantly, these four mayors, unlike the others, are less afraid of the impact of asylum-seeking flows on their municipalities, and keener to make future projections and recommend innovative policy solutions:

I think the most important thing is to understand that immigration is a structural phenomenon that will continue for the next 30-40 years. We have the social policy areas of disability, mental health, seniority, we have and will have the one of immigration. We must govern it through three-year programmes in a structural manner, building networks between municipalities, as we do in these other areas (Independent centre-left mayor).

Interestingly, the availability of past experiences also seems to influence the implementation of SUW policies. Three of these mayors, indeed, explicitly mention that they initially replicated similar initiatives that had been implemented in previous years with asylum-seekers hosted in the SPRAR centres or with other groups of disadvantaged individuals. Their tendency to project into the future helps to explain why they implement SUW policies with more long-term policy goals.

Social Network Analysis

Figure 2 illustrates the findings of a social network analysis elaborated with the Gephi software using data collected through structured questionnaires filled in by the ten interviewed mayors who implemented SUW policies. The questionnaire investigates their interactions and discussions about asylum-related issues with other actors in the asylum governance system, the frequency of these interactions, and the degree of similarity or difference in actors' perspectives on asylum-related issues.¹⁰ The four networks illustrate the connections of the different groups of mayors, with each node representing a category of actors with whom mayors discussed asylum-related issues. The size of the nodes and the weight of ties are proportional to the frequency of their interactions (the more frequent the exchange, the bigger the nodes). The colour of nodes depends on the degree of similarity of actors' perspectives on asylum-related issues (red means significant similarity, yellow means significant difference). In order to facilitate the comparison, all political actors have been positioned in the upper-left corner in all

¹⁰ Frequency is measured on a scale of 1-5 (occasionally; monthly; twice a month; weekly; daily). The degree of similarity of views is also measured on a scale of 1-5.

graphs; institutional actors in the upper-right corner; service providers, media and experts in the lower-right corner; and advocacy actors in the lower-left corner.

Figure 2. Interactions of the three independent centre-left mayors with other actors in the asylum governance system.

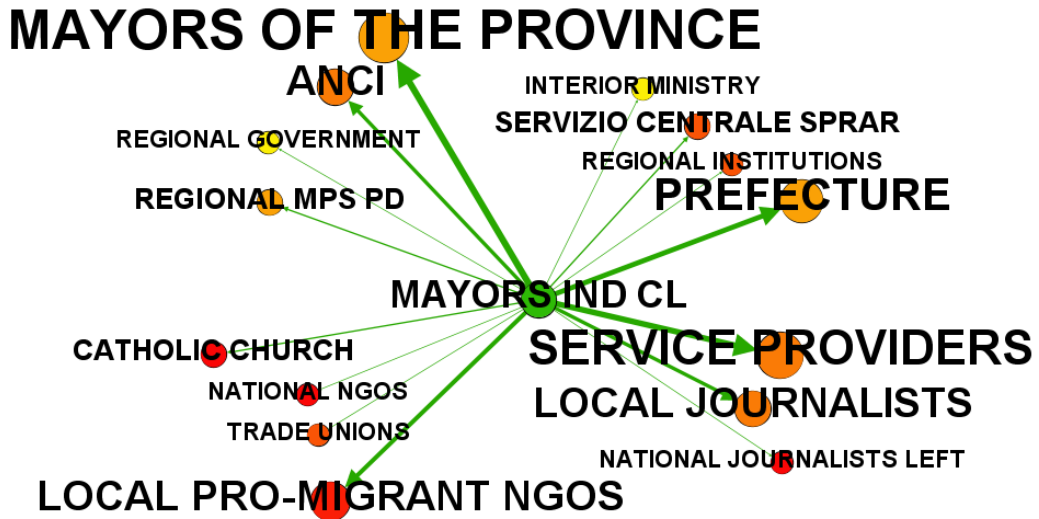
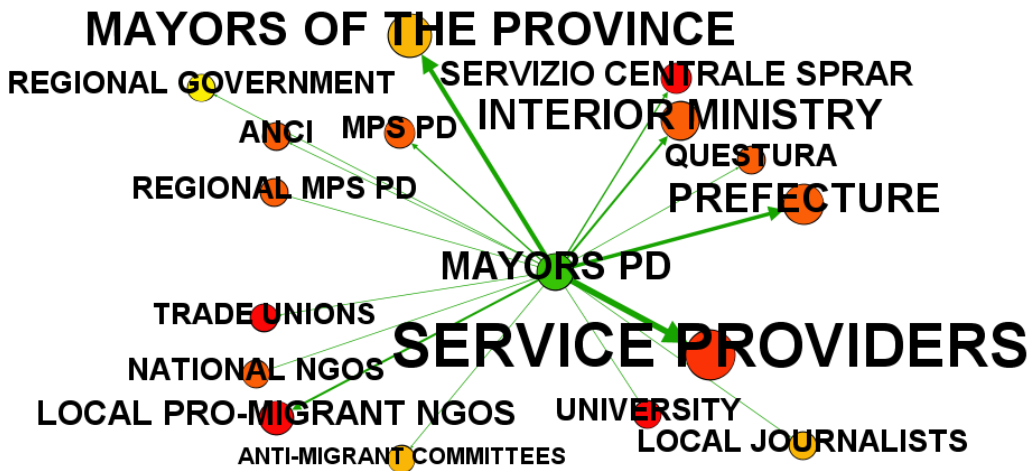


Figure 3. Interactions of the three PD mayors with other actors in the asylum governance system.



The SNA allows us to investigate Weick’s fourth property of sensemaking, according to which sensemaking is contingent on interactions with other actors. It provides interesting information about those actors that, having frequent contacts with the mayors and sharing similar views on asylum-related issues, plausibly influence how SUW policies are implemented. Not surprisingly, all mayors have close interactions with the main actors involved in the organization of the reception system – the prefectures, and service providers – while the frequent discussions with other mayors help to explain

the quick diffusion of SUW policies. The frequency of mayors' interactions with other actors, instead, varies significantly, as does the degree of similarity of their views on asylum-related issues. Independent centre-left mayors have close relationships with local pro-migrant NGOs and other advocates of asylum-seeker reception, actors with whom they also share similar perspectives. This helps to explain why they adopt rights-based approaches while implementing SUW policies and why migrant integration is their main policy goal. PD mayors, instead, have close relationships with the Ministry of the Interior and less frequent interactions with advocacy actors, which helps to explain why they develop SUW policies in ways that seem more in line with national guidelines.

Figure 4. Interactions of the three independent centre-right mayors with other actors in the asylum governance system.

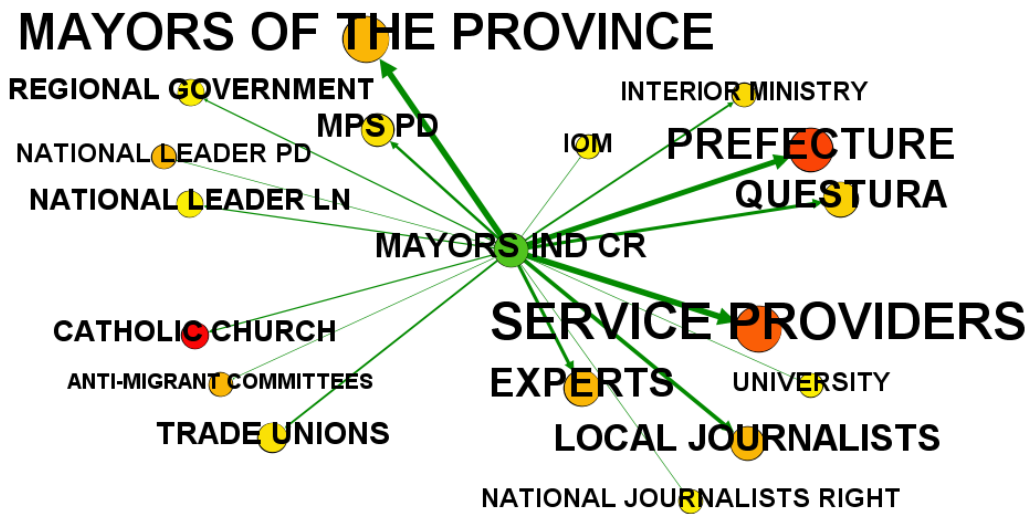
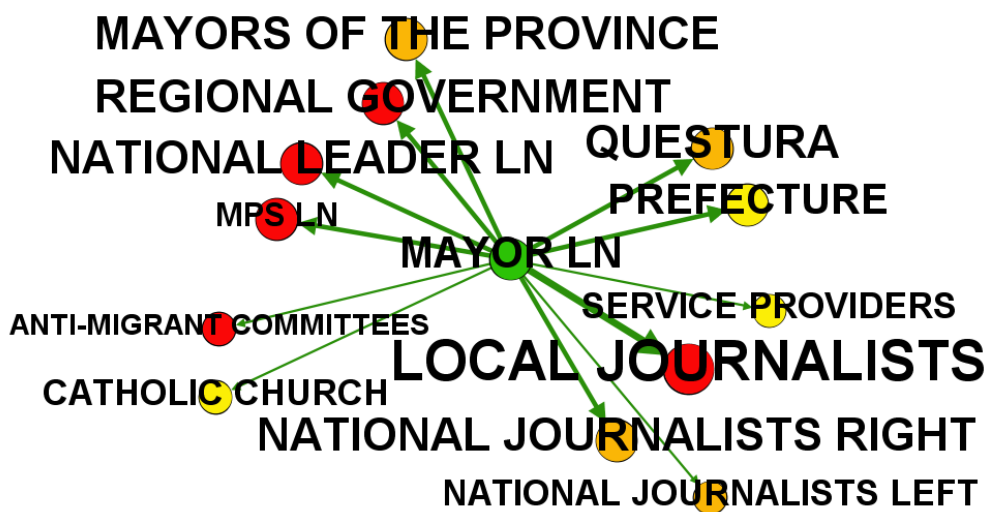


Figure 5. Interactions of the LN mayor that implemented SUW policies with other actors in the asylum governance system.



Independent centre-right mayors, compared to the other groups, seem to face less pressure from non-governmental actors and, rather, have close relationships with experts (e.g. researchers, experienced civil servants and practitioners). Also, they do not share similar views on asylum-related issues with any of the actors with whom they interact (with the exception of the Catholic Church). These elements help to explain their more pragmatic policy approach, less influenced by external pressures.

The close interactions of the only LN mayor to implement SUW policies with journalists, finally, seems to be linked to his willingness to be seen as opposing the Prefect's decision to allocate asylum-seekers to his municipality. After he decided to implement SUW policies, he also released several interviews on the issue to local newspapers, during which he explained that these policies were aimed at improving citizens' security.

6. Conclusions

This article has examined policies for the involvement of asylum-seekers in socially useful works in fourteen municipalities in Veneto, investigating how, why and with what goals this policy was developed. The main aim is to generate hypotheses for future research. The analysis leads to three main concluding remarks.

First, the article has shown that only some of the selected local administrations implemented SUW policies in Veneto and that they involved asylum-seekers in different types of activities, from very low-skilled auxiliary jobs to more professionalising activities. Importantly, it has also shown that mayors' political affiliations (more than other variables) in the selected municipalities, is a strong predictor of their decisions to implement SUW policies and of the type of measures implemented. To formulate proper generalisations, this finding should be tested in future research on a higher number of cases and in other regional and national contexts.

Second, the article has shown that mayors' policy goals also vary significantly. Mayors, therefore, do not passively implement the measures promoted by the national government. In doing so, they follow their own agenda and adapt national-level guidelines to their own aims in a way that powerfully shapes the policies developed and their outcomes. Independent centre-left mayors develop SUW policies with the aim of integrating migrants in the local community. Independent centre-right mayors adopt more pragmatic approaches. PD and LN mayors develop SUW policies with the main aim of being seen to do something to reduce citizens' perceptions of insecurity. This finding is consistent with well-established findings in the literature on public policy analysis (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973).

Third, the article sheds light on processes of meaning-production and decision-making, in order to understand how and why they decide to develop SUW policies, why they implement different types of measures and why they do so with different policy goals. To do so, it has applied insights from Weick's sensemaking approach, which is particularly relevant to the study of decision-making processes in situations of crisis. The analysis has crucially shown that mayors are not 'passive recipients of information, but active interpreters and rationalizers' (Mutz, 2007: 91). Decisions about the implementation of SUW policies are significantly influenced by mayors' diverse understandings of the anti-migrant protests around them and interpretations of their causes, by different identity processes, and by their diverse past experiences and social relations.

The decisions of PD and LN mayors to implement SUW policies are reactive responses to the protests and the perceived hostility of the local population towards migrants. Such hostility is perceived to be increased by the sight of asylum-seekers loitering within reception centres, particularly unacceptable in the Venetian society, where 'industriousness' and 'aptitude for hard work' are defining elements of a very strong sense of regional identity. Making asylum-seekers work for the community, therefore, in these mayors' eyes, is a policy that has the potential to meet locals' approval and reduce their discontent. These understandings significantly influence the implementation of SUW policies in these municipalities, which mostly involve very low-skilled jobs, highly visible to the local population.

Independent mayors, conversely, are much less influenced by public opinion. Independent centre-left mayors' decisions to develop SUW policies in ways that are primarily aimed at fostering migrants' integration seem to be significantly influenced and shaped by relevant past experiences of dealing with asylum-seeking migration and their close connections with pro-migrant NGOs. The more pragmatic policy approach of independent centre-right mayors seems to be linked with the absence of pressure from both pro-migrant and public opinion.

These findings complement and challenge the assumptions of the (scant) existing literature on local decision-making processes on asylum-related issues. It shows, indeed, that asylum policies, at least in situations of crisis, do not necessarily have 'an objective basis', in terms of quantifying local economic costs and benefits and demographic effects on the community, as shown by Steen (2016: 466). It has also illustrated the potential of applying sensemaking approaches to understand local asylum policy-making processes, compared to cognitive approaches that more narrowly focus on policy frames analysis (Lidén and Nyhlén, 2015). Following Fiss and Hirsh (2005: 31), while 'framing focuses on whose meanings win out in symbolic contests', applying sensemaking in this article has allowed us to 'shift the focus to understanding why such frame contests come into being in the first place, and over which territory they are fought'. Future research should move from these findings and further explore sensemaking processes in other contexts and policy fields.

Disclosure statement

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Reshaping policy solutions through local implementation: The rationalization of municipal corporations in Leghorn and the case of AAMPS

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Abstract

Within the context of the austerity policies introduced in Italy over the last decade, a major role has been played by the top-down driven "rationalisation" of public spending and organisations, particularly in terms of the country's local authorities and of the plethora of companies in which such authorities hold interests. Against this backdrop, and through the analysis of what happened in an "extreme" case such as the Leghorn Municipality, the essay aims to analyse how and how much the rationalisation 'recipe' promoted by the central Government is transformed when it is prepared at lower levels. The analysis brings to light not only the importance of local politics in the transfer of policy ideas, but also the role played by both the characteristics of the implementation structure developed around the municipal rationalization plan, as well as some sudden changes to the contextual conditions. In fact, the interweaving of these two dimensions – the endogenous and exogenous to the policy process – plays a key role in redirecting the declared strategies of local decision makers during the course of operations, and in redefining problems and solutions in the transition from the centre to the periphery.

1. Introduction

Within the context of the austerity policies introduced in Italy over the course of the last decade, a major role has been played by the 'rationalisation' of public spending and organisations (Bolgherini *et al.* 2019), particularly in terms of the country's local authorities and of the plethora of companies in which such authorities hold interests (Citroni *et al.* 2019). Starting with Decree Law 78/2010, 'Urgent Measures regarding Financial Stabilisation and Economic Competitiveness', followed by the Spending Review proposals submitted by the Special Commissioner Cottarelli in 2014, and the more recent 'Consolidated Act on State-Controlled Enterprises' implementing the so-called 'Madia Law', numerous legislative measures have in fact been introduced in an effort to reduce the number of state-controlled enterprises and to rationalise this instrument and its use. On the basis of this latter legislation, as from 2015 local authorities – just like other public administrations – are required to draw up special and annual plans for the rationalisation of their own state-controlled enterprises, in accordance with a series of criteria and requirements expressly established by central government, regarding

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both the sectors in which such enterprises operate, and their organisational and financial characteristics.

The present essay aims to analyse what happens to the rationalisation ‘recipe’ promoted by the central government when it is translated at lower levels. As a starting point, I assume that together with the instructions received from the centre, other ‘ingredients’ of an eminently local nature (McLaughlin 1987; Barrett 2004), coupled with strategic political considerations (Yin 1981; Howlett and Mukherjee 2017), contribute towards the (re)formulation of the imperatives of rationalisation during the drafting and implementation of local plans. More precisely, since in multi-layered institutional settings, central policy guidelines require ‘a secondary policy formation activity on the part of local government’ (Hupe *et al.* 2014), I consider implementation as a part of an ongoing process of policy making which physiologically implies some adaptations (Howlett 2018). Furthermore, due to the thorny nature of the rationalisation issue and the complex network of actors involved therein, I treat implementation as an iterative process made up of several decisional rounds, each of which may ‘change the direction of the match, new players can appear, and in some cases the rules of the game can even be changed’ (Teisman 2000, 939).

Based upon these premises, the analysis presented here goes beyond the output-driven objective of measuring and explaining the implementation gap between central provisions and local practices – whose existence is somewhat taken for granted – but rather focuses on the drivers that may concur in (re)shaping problems, solutions and actors’ strategies as implementation goes on. To this purpose, besides taking into account specific contextual conditions which are key in the bottom-up approach to implementation (such as policy legacy, the local nature of political competition, the relative salience of the issue, as well as the multiple stakes involved in the policy subsystem), attention is paid to the different streams of actors, problems and events that go along with the drafting and execution of local rationalisation plans, eventually triggering subsequent rounds of policy calibration.

The analysis of the implementation process focuses on a single pilot case study (Yin 1994; 2003) so as to achieve the greatest possible amount of information and theoretical insights in view of future comparative research on the topic (Flyvbjerg 2011).¹ Indeed, the objective of this essay is exploratory by nature since on the one hand there is no consolidated framework to analyse implementation out of the success/failure paradigm (Howlett 2018) or beyond deficit analysis (Hupe *et al.* 2014; Sausman *et al.* 2016) and, on the other, the policy under scrutiny – i.e. the rationalisation of municipal corporations in Italy – is quite recent and poorly understood so far. The choice fell on the city of Leghorn because, as will be discussed below, the peculiarity of its politics, the salience of state-

¹ In the analysis I made recourse to classic case-study instruments, relying on data source triangulation. In addition to the electoral programmes and official statements by candidates and political representatives, I examined the Operating Plans for rationalisation of the state-controlled enterprises approved by Leghorn Municipality in 2015 and 2017, the corresponding accompanying technical reports, as well as other primary sources such as contract services, local administrative courts’ judgments and AAMPS annual reports. Furthermore, around 150 articles published in the local edition of the major newspapers (*Il Tirreno*, *La Nazione*, *La Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*) and local information websites between January 2014 and August 2018 were selected through keyword search and examined manually. Three face to face in-depth interviews with municipal officers (Environment and Organisation Departments) and trade unionists, lasting about an hour each, were personally conducted between March and April 2019 to fill the gaps and check the accuracy of inference.

controlled enterprises in the public debate and the conditions of municipal corporations maximise the likelihood of strategic local action.

After a brief overview of the criteria of rationalisation established at national level (Section 2), aimed at reconstructing the causal theory that guided the formulation of the government's policy recipe, the essay reconstructs the decisional rounds that accompany the implementation of the rationalisation plans within the municipality of Leghorn (Section 3) with specific focus on the measures adopted in regard to one company in particular, AAMPS S.p.A. The concluding Section 4 discusses the results of the analysis, and offers a number of hypotheses which could be tested in future studies of a comparative nature.

2. Designing rationalisation at the centre

From the 1990s onwards, the debate over Italy's municipally-controlled enterprises was linked to the broader debate regarding the reform of the local authorities and public services (Citroni et al. 2019; 2018). The introduction of enterprises owned wholly or largely by the State among the various forms of services management that local authorities were permitted to adopt under Italian Law 142/90, for example, clearly reveals the close relationship between autonomist euphoria and managerial inspiration that accompanied those Civil Service reforms at that time, characterised by a generalised recourse to private-law instruments in the exercise of functions that had traditionally been reserved for the Public Administration. At the same time, however, both political discourse and the legislation introduced in the following decade, leading to the disorderly regulation of local public services, reflected the decision makers' greater interest in promoting the principle of competitiveness in the assignment of services than in establishing any limits to the corporate instrument itself, which, as a consequence, developed rapidly in the absence of any true 'theory of change' (Weiss, 1995).

The number of limited companies established and controlled by local authorities in fact grew exponentially from a handful in the early 1990s to almost 5,000 in 2015 (see IFEL 2015). Such companies ended up not only operating in the utilities sector (the management of which, in virtue of their industrial character, was entrusted to third-party private concerns), but also, in approximately 40% of all cases, in some policy domains (such as care services) where the use of the corporate instrument appears unnecessary, or even in sectors which had nothing to do with the municipalities' institutional purposes (see IFEL 2015). As various studies have shown, the growth of state-controlled enterprises well beyond the ideal level leads to the assumption that they were being used not so much for managerial purposes, but rather as a means by which to take advantage of the formally private nature of the enterprises in order to circumscribe certain restrictions on public administrations: both financial constraints (e.g. compliance with the Internal Stability Pact) and limits on the hiring of staff, the choice of suppliers and contractual partners, and the transparency and disclosure of decisional processes (Galanti 2016). Furthermore, several scholars – as well as a great deal of public opinion – read the growth of municipal corporations as the effect of pervasive political/partisan appointments within state-owned enterprises, that led to the proliferation of patronage dynamics, especially at the sub-national level (Di Mascio 2014).

It has only been over the last decade, when faced with the worsening of the global economic crisis and the political importance given in Italy to the question of the costs of politics – which was added to the public agenda in particular following the early electoral success of the Five Star Movement (5SM) – that the phenomenon of state-controlled enterprises has been the subject of a series of *ad hoc* laws designed to better regulate the use of this particular instrument. In a first phase (2007-2014) these provisions, which continued to be of a largely disjointed nature as they were often part of omnibus legislation (Citroni and Di Giulio 2016; Galanti 2016), were set against a background of a general call for the containment of Civil Service spending (Di Mascio and Natalini 2014), following a strategy of ‘maintaining’ (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). For instance, the 2007 Financial Bill put a limit on the number of members of company boards, and Decree Law 78/2010 envisaged a 10% cut in their pay; on the other hand, starting with the 2008 Financial Bill, several provisions prevented local governments from creating new companies, in order to freeze the number of municipal corporations (Bonura 2017). It was only in 2014, however, that a streamlining approach to the rationalisation of state-controlled enterprises began to develop, as they received specific attention within the Spending Review operations conducted by the Special Commissioner Carlo Cottarelli, who was entrusted by the then Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, with the task of drafting a report on this phenomenon and of outlining a number of possible solutions to the problem.

The programme of rationalisation of state-controlled enterprises provided for by the so-called ‘Cottarelli Report’ delivered in August 2014 was designed to reduce the ‘morass’ of state-controlled enterprises (some 7,762 in number, of which 5,000 were controlled by local authorities), many of which were in the red. The Commissioner’s proposal, which was largely incorporated into the 2015 Finance Bill, recouped many of the ingredients previously introduced in a rather fragmented fashion, and transformed them into a more organic approach centred around three aspects of the problem, each with its own proposed solution, as follows:

- a) The stunted nature of the enterprises in question, their fragmentation and their failure to pursue economies of scale when managing their assigned services. These problems could be countered by reducing the number of such enterprises and by encouraging and facilitating processes of corporate aggregation, particularly in the utilities sector.
- b) The inefficiency and financial weakness of the enterprises. In this regard, the proposed solution consists in the introduction of specific economic-financial parameters to be employed in order to assess whether or not the existing state-controlled enterprises should be maintained, with those enterprises that have been operating at a loss for some considerable time to be sold off, and with the elimination of ‘shell companies’ (i.e. those state-controlled enterprises with very few employees and low turnover, but nevertheless requiring an administrative structure). The so-called ‘micro-holdings’, that is, interests too small to be of strategic importance for the municipalities concerned, would be sold.
- c) The ‘distorted’ use of the corporate instrument. In response to this an attempt was made on the one hand to limit the operation of state-controlled enterprises exclusively to the institutional tasks of the Municipal stakeholders, and on the other hand to bring the functioning of such enterprises back to the scope of public law.

This would be achieved by establishing, for example: an obligation to hire personnel through transparent, non-discriminatory procedures; the inclusion of state-controlled enterprises within the scope of local authorities' consolidated financial statements; disclosure and transparency requirements as a means to preventing corruption; and a ban on the assignment of senior posts to persons who have held political office in public entities.

In accordance with this project, the 2015 Finance Act (Italian Law no. 190/2014) established that each public administration, including municipalities, had to formulate and approve an operating plan by 31 March 2015, containing an overview of all stakes held and of the characteristics of the enterprises concerned, together with a programme for the reduction in the number of (directly and indirectly) state-controlled enterprises that takes account of certain specific guidelines:

- the elimination of those enterprises and shareholdings that are not indispensable for the pursuit of institutional purposes;
- the abolition of enterprises composed solely of directors, or of more directors than employees;
- the elimination of shareholdings in enterprises that carry out similar types of business, including by means of mergers;
- the aggregation of enterprises operating in the utilities sector, with the aim of increasing their dimensions and of favouring the achievement of economies of scale;
- the containment of running costs, also through the reorganisation of administrative and control bodies, and of business units, and through a reduction in the corresponding levels of remuneration.

The Consolidated Act on State-Controlled Enterprises, which was part of the Madia Law on Civil Service reform, was approved in 2016 (Law Decree 175/2016) and preserved exactly the same guidelines, introducing stricter rules on the dimensional and economic-financial aspects to be taken into account when deciding on whether or not to preserve a company. However, it had to be revised shortly after the Constitutional Court struck down some key parts of the reform on the grounds that they should have been approved by regional governments. The renewed Decree 100/2017 partially relaxed the rationalisation requirements for local authorities, as far as it postponed several deadlines (e.g. for the adaptation of companies' statutes and for the approval of rationalisation plans), extended the scope of admissible activities, and halved the turnover threshold to avoid restructuring from 1 million euro to 500,000 euro. In addition to softening the rationalisation criteria, such changes and postponements noticeably introduced some uncertainty in the national regulatory framework, thus reducing the pressure to stick to the rule and paving the way to wider discretion in local implementation strategies.

3. When rationalization goes local: municipal corporations in Leghorn and the case of AAMPS

However, what happens to the principles coming from the centre when they reach the peripheral decision-making arenas? What factors come into play in the decodification and

recodification of the guidelines received? Furthermore, which drivers accompany the transition from the choice of local solutions, to the implementation of those solutions?

This essay intends to reconstruct the transformation of the rationalisation imperatives between centre and periphery, looking at the intertwining of different streams of actors, problems and events that go along with the local implementation process in a pilot case. As said in the introduction, the choice of a pilot case study is justified by the fact that no systematic research has been carried out so far on the topic. The objective is to explore if, when and how factors endogenous to the local context and environmental conditions, such as the onset of changes within the economic, political and legislative context, combine together in reshaping policy problems and solutions when a top-down designed rationalisation programme is transferred at lower levels, so as to identify some hypotheses to be tested through future comparative research.

From this point of view Leghorn undoubtedly represents an ideal observational context, since on the one hand, its legacy in terms of municipal corporations provides a fertile ground for rationalisation measures and, on the other, the characteristics of the local political system maximise the likelihood of divergent implementation strategies. In 2014, i.e. the year in which the census was conducted in order to comply with the requirements of the 2015 Finance Act, the municipality in fact held investments in quite a number of enterprises (a total of 28, with the municipality holding direct interests in 17 of them), of which a substantial share (10) had made losses over the previous three years, some (5) were already in liquidation, and none had provided the municipality with any profit. The indebtedness of certain Leghorn companies had already come to the attention of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance prior to the Cottarelli Report, revealing a critical situation and thus one that had to be addressed in terms of rationalisation. At the same time, in 2014 the city's government dramatically changed political colours when, after years of centre-left government, the 5SM candidate Filippo Nogarín was elected Mayor. Indeed, as numerous studies have shown (see, among others, Mosca 2013), since its very inception the 5SM has always been contrary to the privatisation of certain public services (first and foremost, the water service), while at the same time clearly opposing the political 'caste' and the improper costs of political bodies, and this has had a number of potentially ambivalent implications in terms of the decisions to be made regarding state-controlled enterprises.

This section will reconstruct the rationalisation process of those enterprises in which the Municipality of Leghorn holds investments, with a specific focus on the measures adopted in regard to one company in particular, AAMPS S.p.A. Since implementation is understood here as a dynamic process, the analysis identifies four different decisional rounds (Teisman 2000), each one leading to some reshaping of formerly set strategies: the definition of the new Mayor's agenda; the approval of the first rationalisation plan; the selection of an ad-hoc solution for AAMPS; and the entry into force of that decision. For each round, the key events, the most relevant concurring processes and the network of actors involved have been identified, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Decisional rounds in the rationalisation of AAMPS: a summary

Decision-making rounds	Relevant events	Relevant concurring events	Key actors	Implementation (sub)strategy
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Definition of Mayor's agenda (Summer-Autumn 2014)	Mayor's decision to cut municipal corporation directors' pay by 20%; Resolution by the municipal Council amending former decision to merge AAMPS with RetiAmbiente.	Publication of the Cottarelli Report	Mayor; 5SM national leaders	Strategic reframing
Approval of 1 st rationalization plan (January-November 2015)	Changes at the head of AAMPS Approval of the AAMPS draft budget for 2014 postponed The Board of Auditors rejects AAMPS financial records for 2014	Pending approval of the national Decree on Local Government Finance Decree 78/2015 on Local Govt. Finance allows the transfer of unpaid claims from AAMPS to the municipality	Mayor; Councillors for the environment and the accounts; 5SM councillors; AAMPS managers	Cherry-picking
Identifying the solution for AAMPS: the arrangement with creditors (end 2015-2016)	Dismissal of 3 Councillors from 5SM group Resignation of the Councillor for the environment; Revocation of the AAMPS Chairman and Board Administrative appeals with the Coastal ATO	Judicial inquiry 'Clean Town' on AAMPS mismanagement between 2012 and 2016; Discovery of new legal options for bankruptcy (then acknowledged in the Consolidated Act on State-Controlled enterprises); Forthcoming local elections in some other capital cities	Mayor; Councillors for the environment and the accounts; AAMPS managers; 5SM national leaders; Legal advisors; Coastal ATO; Trade Unions; Local magistrates; Creditors	Adjustment to environmental changes
Entry into force of the arrangement with creditors (2017-ongoing)	Administrative appeals with Regional gov. and Coastal ATO The Council approves the arrangement with creditors (Oct. 2017)	Final approval of the Consolidated Act on State-Controlled Enterprises; Resignation of 2 Councillors from the 5SM group (the 5SM loses self-sufficient majority); Suspension of tender procedure in the Coastal ATO; Local elections and changing majorities in neighbouring Municipalities	Mayor; Councillor for the accounts; AAMPS managers; Legal advisors; Regional Government; Coastal ATO; Local Administrative Court; Mayor	Consolidation and local grounding

3.1. Round 1: setting the 5SM's agenda for Leghorn

As just mentioned, the imperative rationalisation of state-controlled enterprises, which started from the spring of 2014, coincided with elections in many municipalities. In Leghorn, the 5SM candidate Nogarín included local state-controlled enterprises among the key issues of his electoral campaign, defining them as examples of the '*system of patronage inherited from the Democratic Party (PD)*',² and framing them as a problem not only

² Nogarín: "A Livorno dal Pd abbiamo ereditato il sistema clientelare, adesso basta", La Nazione-Livorno, 5 September 2014.

of a financial nature, but also of improper privileges: ‘*over the years, these companies have totted up considerable debts (tens of thousands of euro), and yet those people appointed (by politicians) to run these companies, have been paid amounts that are not in keeping with the actual performance of the companies themselves*’.³ Three solutions to this problem, defined in these terms, were proposed, namely: ‘*cutting the costs of politics, reducing waste, and ensuring the utmost transparency of public resource management*’.⁴

This was to be achieved through a series of proposals specifically addressed to state-controlled enterprises, as set out in the 5SM electoral programme. These proposals included: a) the creation of the ‘citizen controller’ figure on the boards of enterprises in which municipal government has a controlling interest; b) the creation of a system of citizen participation through online meetings and consultations, in view of substantial spending and works involving state-controlled companies; c) guaranteeing the utmost transparency regarding appointments, through the creation of a technical advisory committee tasked with the evaluation of candidates’ CVs, ‘*thus favouring meritocracy over the existing patronage-based system*’.⁵

In the course of the electoral campaign, and during his first months in office, on several occasions Mayor Nogarin came out against the privatisation of certain local state-controlled companies, in line with the 5SM national policy and in clear contrast with the policies implemented by the PD in Tuscany, and in previous years in the city of Leghorn itself.⁶ Furthermore, the line set out in the programme with regard to the reduction of waste was confirmed in the summer of 2014 (thus concurrently with the release of the Cottarelli Report), when the newly-elected Mayor launched an ‘independent’ rationalisation plan involving a 20% cut in the pay of the companies’ directors.⁷

The newly-elected Leghorn council thus operated a sort of *strategic reframing* (Boxembaum 2006) of the rationalisation imperatives, garnishing its proposals with the standard 5SM rhetoric against the traditional political caste, while completely ignoring problems such as the fragmentation of state-controlled enterprises, their inefficiency, and the need to generate economies of scale in local utilities. All these topics were, on the other hand, key aspects of the policy promoted by the national government in the 2015 Finance Act.

3.2. Round 2: The approval of the first rationalisation plan

Leghorn Municipality’s strategy in the first rationalisation plan approved in 2015 appears very much in keeping with the new Mayor’s programme, while respecting some selected national indications in a *cherry-picking* fashion. On the one hand, the idea was to sell off those of the Municipality’s interests in the directly and indirectly controlled enterprises that were deemed not to be indispensable to institutional functioning (as with the ‘Fidi Toscana’), and to close all of those that had already been wound up by the

³The Leghorn 5SM’s 2014-2019 electoral programme (www.livorno5stelle.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Programma1.7.pdf)

⁴Facebook post by Filippo Nogarin, 15 May 2014

⁵See: www.livorno5stelle.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Programma1.7.pdf

⁶‘Nogarin: “La nostra mission: cambiare, cambiare, cambiare”’, *Quotidiano.net*, 24 December 2014.

⁷‘Ridotti del 20 per cento i compensi degli amministratori delle società controllate dal Comune’, Leghorn Municipality press release, 4 July 2014.

previous council, with a view to reducing costs and eliminating waste. On the other hand, in the case of all those state-controlled enterprises that it had been decided to maintain, operating costs were to be contained, in particular through cuts in staff costs. In no case, however – contrary to the guidelines issued by the central government – was the path of aggregation or merger with other companies chosen.

This decision appears particularly significant in the case of AAMPS, the nature of which would have led one to assume that it was to be merged with other companies. The Independent Municipal Public Services Company (*Azienda Autonoma Municipale dei Pubblici Servizi* - AAMPS) was founded in 1949 following a decision taken by the Municipal Council. In 1996 it was changed into a Special Company, and then transformed again in 1998, to become a Limited Company in which the Municipality of Leghorn held 100% interest. Over the years, the Council has always entrusted the waste management service to the company; the last direct award dates from 2008, during the first of the two terms of office of the then Mayor Alessandro Cosimi of the PD. Provision of this service by the company was envisaged up until the year 2030. However, in the intervening period a number of changes were made to both national and regional law. Tuscany Regional Law 69/2011, in particular, provided for the creation of Local Integrated Public Services Areas (*Ambiti Territoriali Ottimali* - ATO) on a macro-provincial scale, tasked with the management of waste collection and disposal services, and required a unique operator for each such area. To this end, under the guidance of the Tuscany Regional Government, those municipalities coming within the Coastal Area ATO (including Leghorn), benefiting from a strong degree of centre-left political homogeneity, launched the merger of their state-controlled enterprises into one single company, RetiAmbiente, initially 100% publicly owned but due to become a joint private-public enterprise through the selection, by tender, of a private minority shareholder. In 2011, Leghorn Municipal Council approved the idea of transferring AAMPS to RetiAmbiente; and with its resolution no. 503/2012, it established that the contract for the provision of services stipulated with AAMPS, notwithstanding its duration until 2030, was to lose validity as soon as RetiAmbiente had become operative. These decisions would seem to indicate that the fate of AAMPS had already been decided in 2012. The 2014 rationalisation requirements became even more imperative given the extremely critical financial position of the company which, over the course of the years, had accumulated enormous debts to suppliers and external companies, largely due to uncollected customer charges.⁸ Falling within the category of utilities companies, and being among those such companies in financial difficulty, according to the criteria established at national level AAMPS should have been merged with, or incorporated in, other companies.

However, the new majority leading Leghorn Municipal Council decided to go a different route, by questioning the original plan for the merger of AAMPS with RetiAmbiente in its council resolution no. 225 of 23 December 2014, which was passed thanks to the votes of the 5SM and of other majority civic lists. In this resolution, the Mayor undertook to ‘*take steps, using all means at his disposal*’, to annul or amend the decision taken by the previous council, and to follow one of two alternative paths: either save AAMPS by recapitalising the company using municipal funds, so as to continue the

⁸ ‘Aamps è malata di debiti, la medicina amara di Rosi’, *Il Tirreno* - Livorno, 1 May 2012; Interview 3 - Environment Department.

in-house service provision independently; or to have AAMPS become part of RetiAmbiente, but only if the new service management enterprise remained totally in public hands.

Indeed, the two alternative solutions to save AAMPS divided the majority. On the one hand, during the early months of 2015 (i.e. at the time of the submission to the Council of the draft Operating Plan for the rationalisation of municipal companies) most of the 5SM's Councillors strongly opposed the hypothesis to keep the door open for RetiAmbiente, and suspended the approval of the plan asking for a more explicit break with past administrations.⁹ On the other, both the AAMPS management (which was changed three times by the Mayor in the first half of 2015 alone, in line with his propensity to spoils system practices)¹⁰ and the Councillor responsible for the environment, privileged the hypothesis of a gradual relaunch of the company through a new industrial plan, in view of the possible merger. The industrial plan delivered by AAMPS in the summer of 2015 was nevertheless rejected by the 5SM national tiers as it was deemed to be 'not in line with the 5SM's programme' and too close to the PD's approach to waste management.¹¹ At the same time, the Councillor responsible for the accounts (who in 2017 would leave Leghorn to join Mayor Raggi's Rome City Executive Committee) began to question the possibility of recapitalising the company, since the operation would have endangered the stability of the council's budget and the financial sustainability of other policies, in particular social services.¹²

All these episodes occurred against the turbulent (and late) approval process of the AAMPS budget for 2014. This had been postponed several times during 2015 while waiting for the possible novelties introduced by the pending national Law on Local Finances with respect to the transfer of unpaid claims from the company to the municipality. In October 2015, after this was deemed possible with Decree 78/2015, about 11 million euro of unpaid claims were transferred from AAMPS to the municipal budget.¹³ In spite of the adverse opinion of the AAMPS Board of Auditors, who were questioning the fairness of such an operation, on 19 November, the Municipal Council approved the company's budget in the absence of any sound hypotheses on the company's future. A decision had thus to be made shortly to avoid failure, amidst uncertainty and rival solutions.

3.3. Round 3: another solution for AAMPS

At the end of November 2015 the final decision was given which removed all of the alternative solutions considered up until then: so as 'to avoid the reorganisation plan hitting the pockets of Leghorn's citizens',¹⁴ the Council decided not to recapitalise the company, but chose to go with the solution of an arrangement with creditors aimed at continuing

⁹ 'Società comunali, il M5S ferma il piano della giunta', Il Tirreno - Livorno, 31 March 2015

¹⁰ Interview 2 - Organization Department.

¹¹ 'I Parlamentari M5S bocciano il Piano Industriale di AAMPS', Il Tirreno - Livorno, 10 August 2015.

¹² 'When companies decide that recapitalisation is the only possible instrument the council can employ in a reorganisation plan, I say no', interview with city Councillor Lemmetti, reported in the article entitled 'Tregua finita, Aamps verso lo sciopero', Il Tirreno - Livorno, 18 October 2015.

¹³ Council Resolution n. 453/2015.

¹⁴ 'Nogarin: "Aamps, il concordato non peserà né sulle tasche dei cittadini né sulle casse comunali"', Il Tirreno - Livorno, 11 June 2016.

business operations, pursuant to Section 186-bis of the Bankruptcy Law.¹⁵ Actually, the pre-bankruptcy procedure for settlement with creditors had not been a legal option for public enterprises until a case law of the Supreme Court of Cassation in late 2013¹⁶ paved the way to that possibility. That solution was proposed by the Councillor for the accounts following legal advice by the law firm Lanzalone & Partners, and it was suddenly supported by Mayor Nogarin. Although enabling AAMPS to continue operations, the pre-bankruptcy procedure placed the company's operations under the strict surveillance of a court-appointed official receiver, thus restricting in many ways the Municipal Council's control and room for manoeuvre as owner of the company. Besides the apparent aim of saving AAMPS from dismissal, this solution had some less declarable advantages for the municipality: on the one hand the company would be legally forced to stick to efficiency principles,¹⁷ thus reducing the need of continuous negotiations between the municipal Executive Council and the AAMPS management; and on the other the municipality could 'shift the blame' for any unpopular decisions or outcomes.¹⁸

Whatever the reasons behind that choice, the announcement of the pre-bankruptcy solution kicked up a real storm: within the council – basically excluded from the decision – three members of the 5SM voted against the proposal and left the party's group. Within the Municipal Executive Committee itself, which had been kept in the dark about this possibility until it was announced, the Councillor for the environment – who had voted against the motion – was suspended from office.¹⁹ The unions, who feared the repercussions of 'receivership' on working conditions inside the company, called a strike of waste collection service workers.²⁰ Finally, in terms of inter-institutional relations, the Coastal Local Area ATO and the Tuscany Regional Government saw the arrangement with creditors as the premise for AAMPS continuing to manage the service in-house for the further six years required to implement the recovery plan, and for this reason – or rather, owing to the failure to meet the deadline for the merger of AAMPS with RetiAmbiente – lodged a series of administrative appeals.

The solution of an arrangement with creditors was supported not only by the Mayor and the Councillor responsible for the accounts, but also by the national leadership of the 5SM²¹ (specifically, Roberto Fico, Luigi Di Maio, Alessandro Di Battista and Beppe Grillo himself), in view of the local elections to be held in 2016, with voting in a number of

¹⁵ By means of this type of procedure, a company in crisis may arrange for settlement of its debt situation without having to stop operations. In practical terms, it is assumed that the debtor submits an application for admittance to the procedure, to the court, and that it undertakes to deliver a given series of documents (the plan, the proposal, a professional expert's report, etc.) by a set deadline established by the court itself. As with all arrangements with creditors, the application also has to be accepted by the creditors concerned.

¹⁶ Judgement no. 22209/13. The bankruptcy option was subsequently introduced into law with the Consolidated Law on State-Controlled Enterprises in 2016.

¹⁷ Interview 3 - Environment Department

¹⁸ Interview 1 - Trade Unions.

¹⁹ 'Sette giorni per la decisione. Gordiani si dimette, tre M5S si staccano. Per un voto il consiglio non esclude il concordato', *Il Tirreno* - Livorno, 1 December 2015.

²⁰ 'Nogarin contestato da 200 lavoratori in consiglio comunale', *La Repubblica* - Firenze, 27 November 2015; 'Perché la Livorno di Nogarin è sommersa dai rifiuti', *NextQuotidiano*, 29 November 2015.

²¹ 'Di Battista (M5S) speaking about the Aamps case: "That's enough of the inefficiencies of politics and the trade unions"', *QuiLivorno.it*, 30 November 2015; 'Aamps, Di Maio (M5S): "Sindacati e PD hanno spadroneggiato"' (*The unions and the PD have called the shots*), in *Il Tirreno-Livorno*, 4 December 2015.

important capital cities, the outcome of which was going to be of national political importance. Hence the idea of entrusting to the courts the destiny of a company whose debts had always been presented as the responsibility of the previous administration, and of proceeding to save that company (at least apparently) without burdening the municipal council's coffers, appears to be solutions that the public can be more easily persuaded to accept, rather than paying off that company's debts with public moneys.²² The support of the 5SM national leadership was also forthcoming in the subsequent months, when both Mayor Nogarin and the Councillor for the accounts (together with the former mayor Cosimi of the PD and various AAMPS directors) were under criminal investigation on charges of fraudulent bankruptcy and abuse of office in relation to the AAMPS affair (of which they were subsequently cleared). The Chairman and the Board of Directors of the company in office at the time expressed their concern about the recourse to an arrangement with creditors, and they asked the Municipal Council to reconsider its position and not to proceed hastily with the chosen course of action. The result of this was that all Board of Directors posts were cancelled by revocation without cause on the part of the Mayor, in January 2016.²³

The local newspapers at the time, and the documents relating to the dismissal of the aforementioned criminal charges, also highlight the rather unclear role played by the legal advisor, Luca Lanzalone (who subsequently made the news in 2018 in relation to the scandals surrounding the proposed construction of the new Rome football club stadium), in the process leading up to the Municipal Council's decision. In particular, the cooperation between Lanzalone and Leghorn Municipal council, although initially of an informal nature, appears to date back to 2015, and seems to have played a key role in the proposal for the arrangement with creditors, and in the dismissal of the Board of Directors in office at the time,²⁴ in close conjunction with the then national leaders of the 5SM responsible for relations with local authorities.²⁵

All in all, the decision was made in a context of urgency and under the external pressure of various concurrent events. In this sense the replacement of the previously promised recapitalisation with the pre-bankruptcy procedure can be interpreted as an *adaptation* of the original preferences to environmental challenges.

²² 'Livorno, approvato il concordato per l'azienda dei rifiuti', in *Il Corriere fiorentino*, 1 December 2015.

²³ 'Iacomelli passa alle vie legali: "Revoca illegittima e errata"', in the Leghorn edition of *La Nazione*, 15 January 2016.

²⁴ 'L'avvocato di Nogarin smentisce l'assessore: "Ho scritto io la revoca di Iacomelli"', *Il Tirreno-Livorno*, 23 January 2016; 'Sulla vicenda AAMPS non si muoveva foglia se non voleva Lanzalone', *La Repubblica*, 14 June 2018.

²⁵ 'Di Maio e Bonafede hanno un problema "professionale" con Lanzalone. Storia di due email', *Il Foglio*, 8 September 2018.

3.4. Round 4: the entry into force of the arrangement with creditors

The plan for the arrangement with creditors, which was deemed admissible by the Court of Leghorn in July 2016, accepted by creditors in January 2017 and then finally approved by the Municipal Council in October 2017, covers the period from 2016 to 2021. It contains the undertaking that the existing jobs at AAMPS are to be preserved, and it also provides for the settlement in full of all debts, the payment of 80% of proven amounts due within a period of 5 years, at an estimated cost to the council of around 13 million euro (which, according to the opposition parties and the unions, is higher than the amount that would have been necessary to recapitalise the company),²⁶ to be recouped through waste collection charges between 2018 and 2021, and through raising company efficiency.

The launch of the arrangement, insofar as it enables the company to continue operations, thus puts off the possibility of any merger of AAMPS with the single service provider RetiAmbiente, at least until 2021. All the more so because in January 2017, the Coastal Area ATO cancelled the tender procedure launched 5 years earlier, for the selection of a private partner to join RetiAmbiente as a minority shareholder. The reasons given for said cancellation included the risk of giving rise to illegal operations as a result of excessive time delays, due to ‘repeated amendments to the legislative framework’ and to ‘the substantial change made to the extension of Local Integrated Public Services Area’, together with the opposition raised by certain councils, that of Leghorn first and foremost.²⁷ The suspension of the tender procedure opened the way to a reconfiguration of relations between the mayors who were members of the ATO Assembly,²⁸ which in the meantime witnessed a break-up of the political homogeneity of the centre-left that had characterised it until just a few years before. The 2017 and 2018 local elections, in fact, saw some of the larger municipalities within the ATO (and thus those with greater weight in the construction of voting majorities at council meetings) going over to the 5SM (Carrara) and to the centre-right (Pisa and Massa), thus resulting in a united front large enough to be able to counter the pressure in favour of a merger, coming from the regional government (led by the PD).

As a matter of fact, in spite of persistent turmoil in the governing majority due to the protests (and then resignation) of some 5SM Councillors against the continuous interference of national party leaders and the decision to ‘sell’ the Councillor for the accounts to the Raggi administration in Rome,²⁹ external concurring events have thus provided the Leghorn Municipality with the opportunity to *consolidate* its decision over the fate of the AAMPS. Indeed, at the moment, despite the fact that RetiAmbiente has been officially established and provided with governing bodies, its operations in the Coastal Area ATO remain extremely limited, and thus represent no challenge – at least in the immediate future – to Leghorn Municipal Council’s preservation of the in-house management.

²⁶ Interview 1 - Trade Unions

²⁷ ‘Rifiuti, Ato Costa annulla gara per il privato. Nogarini “Sistema toscano PD fallimentare”’, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 13 January 2017.

²⁸ Interview 3 - Environment Department.

²⁹ Interview 2 - Organisation Department

4. Concluding remarks

The reconstruction of the rationalisation process undertaken by Leghorn Municipality offers initial confirmation of this essay's underlying premise, namely that once central government's policies are transposed to the periphery, they may be reformulated in order to adapt them to the specific political needs of the actors operating at local level. In the case analysed here, local politics' interference in the *strategic reframing* of rationalisation strategies is particularly clear from the sudden change in the political colours of the municipal council, and from the considerable political importance that the 5SM mayoral candidate gave to the question of state-controlled enterprises, as he focused on their mismanagement as one of the principal arguments underlying his electoral campaign against the outgoing centre-left administration (Round 1). Consequently, the newly-elected council led by the 5SM, in drawing up its plan for the rationalisation of state-controlled enterprises, adopted a *cherry-picking approach* to the criteria for rationalisation established by national legislation, choosing only those (such as the containment of operating costs) that appear more in keeping with the 5SM agenda, whilst discarding those solutions that are more in line with the legacy of the previous administration, and with the solutions promoted by the Tuscan centre-left in general, such as aggregation and merger operations involving companies operating in the utilities sector (Round 2).

The diachronic analysis of the specific measures adopted in relation to one such company – AAMPS S.p.A. – has revealed, however, that other factors besides local politicians' preferences have led to the reformulation of problems and solutions during the course of implementation, thus redefining the council's agenda and strategies to a certain extent.

To begin with, the whole implementation process was marked by high uncertainty due to the incremental development of national legislation on state-owned enterprises and the various administrative appeals lodged by the Regional Government and by the ATO management – two typical elements of Italian decision making that hamper the stability of any policy solution (Capano and Giuliani 2001). In such an undetermined context, the critical juncture of political and policy streams (Howlett 2018) swayed the Municipality towards the reformulation of problems and strategies. On the one hand, the political salience attributed to the 2016 local elections by the national M5S leaders, coupled with the intervening availability of policy solutions that had not been thought of before (i.e. the pre-bankruptcy procedure), paved the way to the *adaptation* of previously designed solutions for AAMPS to the environmental changes (Round 3). On the other, local elections held in 2017 and 2018 in neighbouring municipalities resulted in a radical shift in the balance of power within the Coastal ATO Assembly, with Leghorn being brought in from the cold, no longer politically isolated, and thus able to *consolidate* the arrangement with creditors and present it as a locally grounded solution to rationalise the company (Round 4).

Actually, if one looks at the network of actors involved in each decisional round, the constant influence of the 5SM national leadership over local choices is more than evident. It also appears clear if account is taken of the style in which the key decisions were made (basically of an exclusive nature and in the shade of the 'official' debate in the council chambers), and of the political role played by advisors. Of course such an

interference had been facilitated by the already mentioned political isolation of Leghorn within the framework of the regional governance of waste management. However, it may also be explained by the peculiar organisational features of the 5SM party: indeed, although at its very beginning the Movement was marked by a very loose party structure and high level of autonomy of local meetups, the more it became institutionalised the more it experienced a centralisation of power in the hands of the so called 'Direttorio' (i.e. the central executive body of the Movement), together with increasingly rigid control over party discipline and less room for manoeuvre of the local party representatives (Passarelli *et al.* 2018; Biancalana and Piccio 2017).

To sum up then, notwithstanding all the limitations inherent in a pilot case study, the analysis of the rationalisation of AAMPS has brought to light some key factors that have impacted upon local choices along with the implementation of the national guidelines:

- First, local political/ideological preferences did influence the transfer of policy ideas from the centre to the periphery, leading to a strategic reframing of the problem in the rhetoric used by the new elected council, as well as to a cherry-picking approach in the identification of policy solutions to be put in place;
- Next, some sudden changes to the environmental conditions due to the interweaving of legal uncertainty and concurring political and policy streams, coupled with the (scarce) autonomy of local M5S party leaders, played a key role in redirecting the declared strategies of local decision makers during the various rounds of the implementation process, leading them to adapt policy solutions to renewed decisional contexts;
- Finally, during the entire implementation process, local decision makers could not ignore the eventual political consequences of their choices in terms of public support and perceived legitimacy. Indeed, just like in any organisation, leaders should confer on their decisions a meaning which is coherent with their declared objectives and consistent with citizens' expectations (Selznick 1957). In this sense, as the implementation process proceeded, the pre-bankruptcy solution began to look like a solution that the public could accept more easily, rather than paying off company's debts with public moneys and/or through cutting other budget headings (such as social measures). Hence, local policy makers made their decisions not only following an instrumental logic, but also taking into account legitimacy considerations (Capano and Lippi 2017), in order to establish solutions that were, at one and the same time, technically feasible, politically sustainable and socially acceptable (Wilder and Howlett 2014).

A more thorough formulation of this analytical framework and of the corresponding causal hypotheses is for the moment deferred until future studies of a comparative nature are conducted.

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Unexpected consequences of the implementation of the Code of Public Contracts: judicial decisions on awarding procedures in three Italian cities

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Abstract

By building on Spiller (2008) and Moszoro and Spiller (2012), this paper analyses the implementation of the Italian Code of Public Contracts. Contracting authorities are expected to design tendering procedures strategically, using less discretion the higher the risk of third-party challenges, and more discretion the lower this risk. The analysis considers three cases: the municipalities of Milan, Turin and Rome. After assessing the potential for third-party challenges with measures of competitiveness of the economic environment where the municipalities are located, the paper sheds light on how the municipalities apply the Code, analysing judicial decisions that accept the reasons of the applicants on the awarding of public contracts issued by Regional Administrative Courts (2006-2018). Results confirm expectations on the strategic use of administrative discretion, and also reveal that the Code is generating litigation when the contracting authorities rigidly assess the moral and contributory requirements of the economic operators.

1. Introduction

Following New Public Management reforms of public administration, the awarding of public contracts is nowadays a cornerstone in the delivery of services and public works. Italy, affected in the 1990s by administrative reforms inspired by the principles of New Public Management and at the beginning of the 2000s by a constitutional reform that considerably strengthened local governments, provides a context in which local government plays an important role in the awarding of services and public works, including a considerable degree of discretion in shaping decisions and implementation (Marcou 2016). Decisions on the awarding of public contracts actually feed local economies and open opportunities for shaping public service implementation, with specific reference to the role of the Administrative Courts. Nevertheless, at the present time there is no empirical evidence on the role of courts and their interactions with the other actors of local government in shaping the implementation of public awarding. This paper aims to fill this gap by focusing on the implementation in three Italian cities of a key regulatory instrument: the Italian Code of Public Contracts. The Italian Code of Public Contracts aims to limit discretionary actions of the contracting authorities through a formalized, process-oriented legal framework (OECD 2016). This paper analyses the implementation of the Code, building on Spiller (2008) and Moszoro and Spiller (2012) who provide an institutional theory of public contracts and a rationale for the use of discretion in public contracting. In particular, by analysing the strategies that local contracting authorities use in designing public contracts, we show that the potential for third-party challenges

(i.e. legal challenges from competitors of the contractors) affects the use of administrative discretion in public contracts more than by-law prescriptions.

Scholars in positive political theory and rational choice have highlighted the role of third parties in supervising and controlling public contracts in democratic societies (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984; McCubbins, Noll and Weingast 1987, 1989). These scholars have also extensively analysed rational anticipation of courts' decisions by legislators (among others: Ferejhon and Shipan 1990, Ferejhon and Weingast 1992, Steunenberg 1997, Santoni and Zucchini 2006, Brouard and Honnige 2017). This kind of theoretically driven and empirically grounded approach has not been applied to the study of local public procurement in Europe, and in particular in the case of Italy. By analysing the strategies that local administrations use in designing public contracts, the present contribution shows how rational anticipation of litigation affects the implementation of the Code. Hence, the present contribution enriches the literature in two ways. First, it investigates the empirics of implementation in public procurement in Italy by considering actors such as the decision-makers, the courts, and the third applicants. Second, it applies rational choice theories to the behaviour of these actors, considering also the rationality of the Municipality, thus enriching the academic debate on their role in public procurement (Wollmann et al. 2016).

The paper addresses the following research questions: how are local government administrations implementing the Code of Public Contracts and, in particular, how are they using administrative discretion in tendering procedures? What type of litigation is fostering the implementation of the Code before the administrative judge? Is litigation revealing unexpected consequences of legislation, once implemented by local governments?

The paper is based on a comparative analysis of three cases: the Italian municipalities of Milan, Turin and Rome. The use of administrative discretion in the awarding procedures is assessed through a diachronic analysis of the decisions on the awarding of public contracts issued by Regional Administrative Courts in the three municipalities between 2006 and 2018. The potential for third-party challenges, which is supposed to affect the use of administrative discretion, is approximated by measures of the competitiveness of the economic environment where the municipalities are located.

Results confirm that the administrations tend to use more discretionary procedures in less competitive economic contexts, where the potential for third-party challenges is lower, and more rigid procedures in more competitive economic contexts, where the risk of potential challenges is higher. Surprisingly, the implementation of the Code is generating litigation when the contracting authorities rigidly assess the moral and contributory requirements of the economic operators. This outcome possibly reflects a controversial aspect of the Code, which gives responsibility for the control of the participatory requirements to the same contracting authorities, and not to an independent body not involved in the awarding procedures.

The paper is structured as follows: section one presents the theoretical framework, according to which one hypothesis is generated. Section two presents the cases, the dependent and independent variables, and briefly outlines the regulatory framework of the Code of Public Contracts. Section three provides the analysis of litigation for the awarding of public contracts. Section four concludes the paper.

2. Institutional theories of public contracts and their implications for the use of administrative discretion

Following New Public Management reforms, public administrations have differentiated the provision of public works and services, opening up the traditional hierarchical production and delivery systems to contract-like relationships (Pollit 2001). In this context, the awarding of public contracts has become the main instrument for local government administrations to purchase goods and services to achieve their institutional goals. The fundamental features of a contract depend on the nature of contracting hazards (Williamson 1979) and specific forms of opportunism can arise in public contracting: opportunism from public agent ('governmental opportunism') and opportunism from interested third parties ('third-party opportunism') (Spiller 2008). Governmental opportunism consists in the government's power to adopt new legislation to obtain part of the quasi-rents of the contracting partner. This might be the case of the adoption of a secondary legislation act that denies a tariff increase to a public utility. Governmental opportunism however finds institutional limits, since the potential for the opportunistic use of legislative powers depends on the control of the executive over the legislature and on the presence of an independent judiciary. Third-party opportunism relates instead to the incentives that competitors, interest groups and political opponents may have in challenging a public contract. The legitimacy of a public contract can be contested both in court and informally through the media. Interested third parties play a fundamental role in democratic societies in supervising and controlling public contracts (McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984; McCubbins, Noll and Weingast 1987, 1989); however, they can also challenge the probity of a public agent for the benefits they may receive in political and economic terms.

A successful challenge in political terms entails the replacement of the public agent with an agent whose preferences are closer to those of the interested third party. A successful challenge in economic terms causes the replacement of the private contractor, or the terms of the contract are changed and become more favourable to the interested third party. Moszoro and Spiller (2012) claim that the higher level of contract specificity and rigidity in public contracting can be interpreted as a risk adaptation by public agents. More precisely, by limiting their discretionary actions and increasing contract formalities and rigidities, public agents would reduce their exposure to the risk of third-party challenges. Marshall, Meurer and Richard (1994) similarly noted that agreements that can be contested by excluded operators tend to be more carefully delimited and governed by formal features. The strategies of the economic operators are affected in turn by the level of contract specificity and rigidity: the more discretion they observe in contract terms, the more room they have to challenge the contract while the less discretion they observe in the contract terms, the less room they have to challenge the contract.

Spiller's (2008) institutional theory of public contracts and Moszoro and Spiller's (2012) account of public contract rigidity can be used to analyse the strategies adopted by contracting authorities in local public procurement, and in particular to explain the room contracting authorities leave for their own discretionary evaluations in adjudication procedures. The presence of more rigid/less discretionary assessments in the adjudication process reflects the higher risk of third-party challenges. Third-party challenges are expected to come from economic operators that would benefit from a private contractor's replacement or from changing the rules of adjudication. Contracting authorities are

expected to perceive a higher potential for third-party challenges when local productive systems are more competitive, and firms are more numerous and competitive enough to enter the procurement market and eventually appeal against the adjudication decision before an administrative court. According to the argument just illustrated, I put forward the following hypothesis:

H1. I expect tendering procedures to be more rigid (less discretionary), the higher the potential for third-party challenges.

3. Data and variables

The analysis is based on three cases, the municipalities of Milan, Turin and Rome, three of the biggest cities in Italy, all characterised by advanced urban infrastructures and a value-added service industry, sectors at the centre of the public procurement market.

The *dependent variable*, the use of discretion in tendering procedures, is assessed through the analysis of the decisions that accept the reasons of the applicants on the awarding of public contracts (*'decisioni in materia di aggiudicazione'*) issued by Regional Administrative Courts against the municipalities of Milan, Turin and Rome between 2006 and 2018. In decisions that accept the reasons of the applicants (from now on 'accepting decisions'), the Administrative Court states that the reasons of the applicant who is challenging the decision of a Municipality on the awarding of a contract are founded. For instance, the Court can recognize that the procedures applied by the administration in a specific tender procedure, such as the use of weighting criteria to evaluate the offers, were not coherent with the tender notice or with specific provisions of the Code. If the Court states that the appeal is founded and assesses that the administration did not correctly apply the law or the procedures of the tender, the judicial decision considers the acts illegitimate and therefore it nullifies them. The administration can decide to present an appeal to the second instance Court, the Council of State; otherwise the awarding procedure is nullified. The dependent variable, which describes the use of discretion in accepting decisions, is assessed through the judges' description of two fundamental aspects for the award of the contract: 1. the rigidity of the administration in applying the Code in the selection of participants in the tender, and 2. the coherence of the acts of the administrations with the procedures declared in the tenders.

Judicial decisions on the awarding of public works and services are collected from the Juridical Database *Leggi d'Italia*. Applicants are unsuccessful bidders: firms, consortia, cooperatives, ventures, associations and, less frequently, public institutions that appeal for the annulment of awarding measures and against measures of exclusion. The appeals are against provisions adopted by the municipalities, represented by their mayor *pro tempore*. Decisions against provisions adopted by subsidiaries of the municipalities (e.g. Expo Milano 2015 S.p.a. and other public owned companies) were not included. Judicial decisions are distributed as follows: 165 decisions against the municipality of Rome (45 of which are accepting decisions), 135 decisions against the municipality of Milan (21 of which are accepting decisions), and 49 decisions against the municipality of Turin (5 of which are accepting decisions).

The Italian Code of Public Contracts¹ aims to prevent corruption, promote transparency and achieve the opening-up of public procurement to competition in coherence with European Directives.² To this end, firms that intend to participate in a procurement procedure must meet a list of requirements, which include general morality requirements, financial capacities, absence of contributory negligence and technical skills. In order to certify their status, firms must produce a series of certificates, such as the DURC '*Documento Unico di Regolarità Contributiva*' which attests regular payments of social security and insurance contributions, the subscription to official Registers ('*albi*'), and other certificates of technical skills and self-declarations. The same contracting authorities are responsible for assessing firms' requirements and are asked to verify the information provided by the applicants. The Code of 2016 charged the Italian National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC) with the task of explaining through guidelines the evidences appropriate to justify operators' exclusion.

The Code regulates procurement both above and below specific financial thresholds, established and periodically updated by the European Commission (art. 35 of the Code). Procedural rules of the Code must be applied to contracts above the EU thresholds and allow for any European firms or institution to participate in the procedures. Ordinary awarding procedures include open and restricted tender procedures. Open and restricted ordinary procedures are characterized by a limited use of discretionary powers in the selection of the bidders, who submit non-renegotiable offers. Special awarding procedures, which can be applied to procurements below the EU financial thresholds, include competitive procedure with negotiation, negotiated procedure without previous publication of the call for tender and direct purchasing ('*affidamento diretto*') permitted only for low value tenders (art. 36 of the Code). Negotiated procedures are characterized by significant discretionary powers for the contracting authority, which consults potential suppliers and negotiates contract conditions with them (Baltrunaite et al. 2018). Unsuccessful bidders can apply to the Regional Administrative Courts for any measure adopted during the awarding procedures (ICLG 2019). This paper focuses precisely on the decisions issued by Regional Administrative Courts in three cities (Rome, Milan, Turin), in order to better describe the implementation of the Code. In particular, we first describe whether the Courts recognize that the complaints of the applicants are founded, thus we focus on the judges' evaluation of tendering procedures and on the reasons why the applicants were successful before the Courts (see Figure 1).

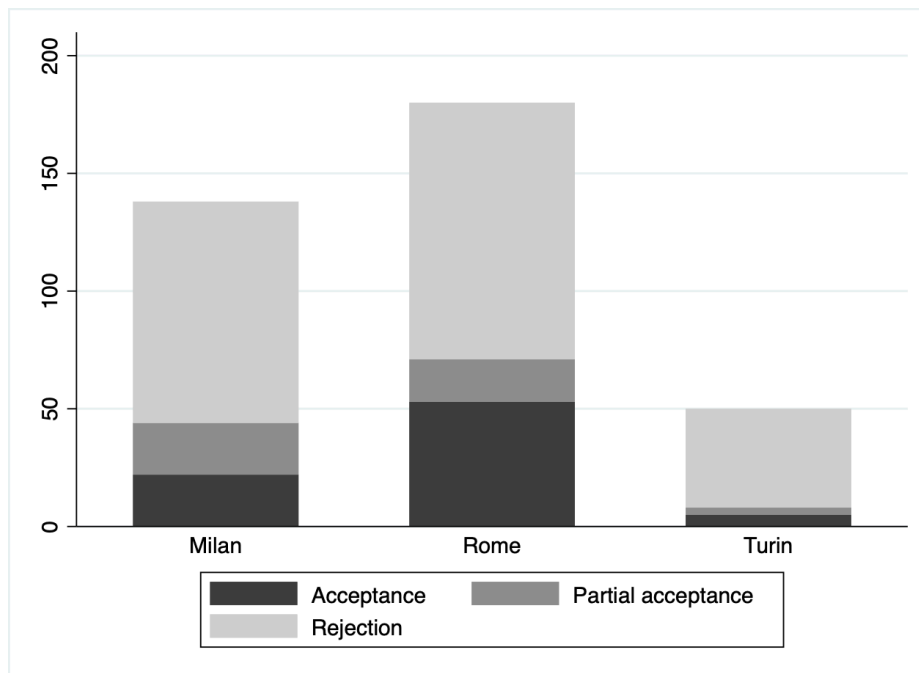
The municipality with both the largest number of disputes before the administrative judge and the highest rate of acceptance decisions is Rome. Indeed, the municipality of Rome presents 165 judicial decisions, followed by Milan (135) and Turin (49). In all municipalities, rejection decisions are higher than acceptance decisions. In the city of Turin, the rejection rate is particularly high and amounts to 84%. In Milan, the rejection rate amounts to 68% and is close to Rome's 60%. The highest rate of acceptance decisions is achieved by Rome, with 29% of accepted cases, followed by Milan, with 16% of total

¹ Legislative Decree no 163/2006, then abrogated by Legislative Decree no. 50/2016, as amended by Legislative Decree no. 56/2017 and Law 96/2017

² The Public Procurement Code in its first version of 2006 implements the EU Directives 2004/18/EC and 2004/17/EC; the second and present version of the Code, of 2016, transposes the EU Directives 2014/23/UE, 2014/24/UE and 2014/25/UE.

decisions, and Turin, with 10% of acceptance decisions. Partially accepted cases, namely cases in which one instance is accepted, while the others are rejected or declared not admissible, amount to 16% in Milan, 10% in Rome and 6% in Turin. Two interesting features that emerge from data are the apparently low number of litigations in the city of Turin, compared to Rome and Milan, and the relatively high rate of acceptance decisions in the municipality of Rome.

Figure 1. Distributions of judicial decisions on the awarding of public contracts for type of outcome, by municipality (2006-2018).



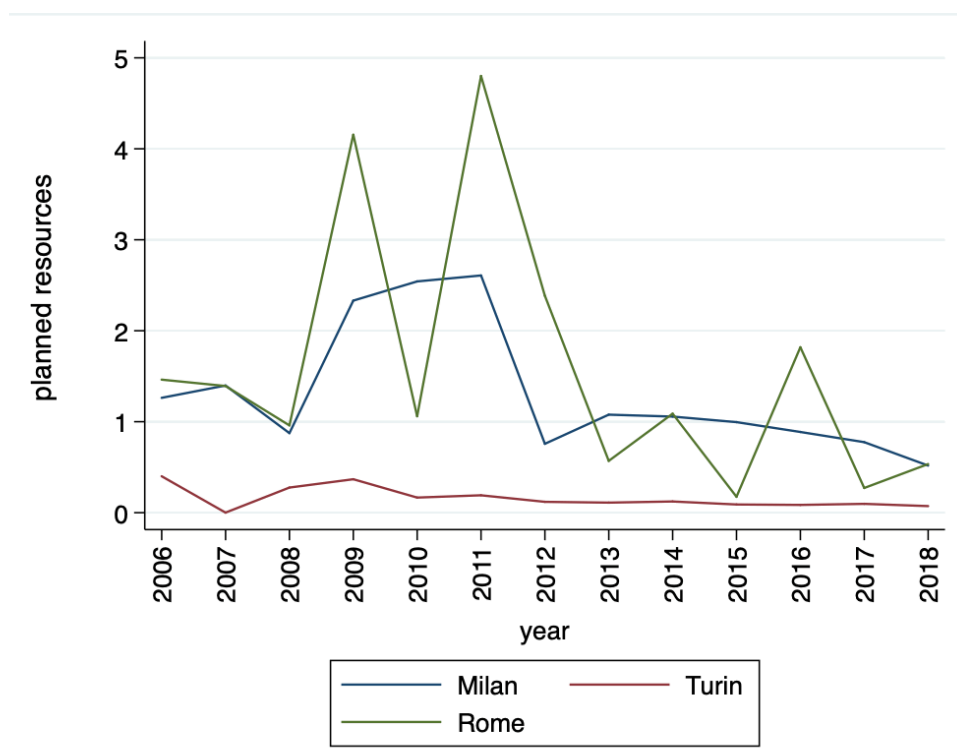
To compare the scope of litigation, the number of administrative disputes is related to the amount of resources that the municipalities planned to spend on public works between 2006 and 2018. The Code of Public Contracts requires the municipalities to publish the tri-annual plan for the commitment of public works with an estimated value equal to or greater than 10 thousand euro (from 2006).³ The total funds that the three cities planned to spend on public works between 2006 and 2018 are represented in Figure 2. Data show that the three cities present different levels of investment.

According to the data provided by the municipalities, the city of Turin presents a considerably lower level of planned investment in public works throughout the period considered: the yearly average value of planned funds for public works amounts to 161 million euro and the highest value observed, in 2009, does not reach half a billion euro. On the contrary, the total volume of funds is comparable in Milan and Rome, where, except for a few peaks, it is rarely lower than 1 billion and presents a yearly average value of 1.3 billion in the city of Milan and of 1.5 billion in the city of Rome respectively. It is

³ Information on total planned funds for the commitment of public works are available on the official websites of the three municipalities in the section: '*amministrazione trasparente*', 'calls for tenders and contracts', and on *Osservatorio regionale contratti pubblici* of Lombardy Region and *Osservatorio dei contratti pubblici* of Lazio Region.

reasonable to suppose that, in absolute terms, the lower number of litigations observed in Turin can be due to the lower resources tendered for public works. Hence, if we take into account the total planned resources, the number of decisions in Turin is not lower than in the other municipalities.

Figure 2. Total planned resources for public works (billion euro) in the three municipalities, by year



Source: personal elaboration of data from *Osservatorio contratti pubblici Regione Lombardia*; *Osservatorio dei contratti pubblici Regione Lazio* (SITARL); Official websites of the Municipalities of Milan, Rome and Turin, sections 'Amministrazione trasparente', 'Calls for tenders and contracts' (*Bandi di gara e contratti*).

4. Competitiveness of the economic environment

The market of public procurement has a consistent local dimension and local firms are often the largest participants in the auctions (Moretti and Valbonesi 2015; Coviello and Gagliarducci 2010). The *independent variable*, the potential for third-party challenges, is approximated by measures of numerosity and competitiveness of the firms that operate in the main sectors affected by the public procurement market (manufacturing industry and service sector) in the regions to which the municipalities belong (regions of Lombardy, Piedmont and Lazio). In addition, more comprehensive indicators of competitiveness of the firms, together with measures of the macro-economic context, are considered for the provinces to which the municipalities belong (provinces of Milan, Turin and Rome).

Regional data come from the Italian national statistics office (ISTAT) database on firms' economic indicators. Data include information about firms' local units, turnover, value added at factor cost, personnel costs, wages and salaries, gross investment in

tangible goods, persons employed, and number of employees⁴. All economic indicators show that firms in the manufacturing sector are more numerous and competitive in the Lombardy Region. Considering the most relevant indicators, the average number of local units in Lombardy between 2008-2015 (equal to 94,070) is almost three times the number of local units in Piedmont (35,787) and almost four times the number of local units in Lazio (24,038). Firms in Lombardy are significantly more numerous also in the service sector⁵. Manufacturing firms seem more competitive in Piedmont than in Lazio, while the same does not apply in the service sector, where the situation is reversed. In both the manufacturing and services sectors, Lombardy presents more numerous and competitive firms.

Provincial data on competitiveness of the firms and on macro-economic contexts are provided by Ciccarelli (2006) who ranks the Italian provinces according to a series of indicators⁶. The province of Milan is in first place, followed by Rome in 26th place and Turin in 54th place as regards the competitiveness of local firms. The province of Milan is in 6th place, followed by Rome in 39th place and Turin in 41st place as regards the competitiveness of the macro-economic context.

All measures highlight that the municipality of Milan belongs to a more competitive economic environment, in which firms are more numerous and efficient compared to Turin and Rome.

Since there is a larger number of economic operators in the market of public procurement and the risk of potential challenges increases, I expect that the Municipality of Milan uses less discretion in the awarding procedures in order to prevent litigation. On the contrary, given the lower number of economic operators in the market of public procurement and the lower risk of potential challenges, I expect that the administrations of Turin and Rome tend to use more discretion in their procedures.

5. Analysis of the accepting decisions for the awarding of public contracts

The analysis of the economic environment outlines two contexts: one more competitive, in which the municipality of Milan is embedded, and where the public procurement market potentially involves more economic operators; the other less competitive, which concerns the municipalities of Turin and Rome, and that potentially involves fewer

⁴Firms are classified according to the economic classification ATECO. Letter C defines the manufacturing industry, letters I, J, N, M, Q, R, and S define the Service sector. Data on the manufacturing industry are available between 2008 and 2015; data on the service sector are available between 2008 and 2014.

⁵ Lombardy has on average more than twice the number of local units in the accommodation and food services sector (Letter I, ATECO) (46,393) compared to Piedmont (21,620), and Lombardy's firms are rather more numerous than Lazio's firms in the sector (29,730). The same applies to information and communication services (Letter J, ATECO), where Lombardy presents 25,971 local units, against 14,882 units in Lazio and 8,242 units in Piedmont. In healthcare and social assistance services (Letter Q, ATECO), local units are on average 50,745 in Lombardy, with 35,490 in Lazio and 20,371 in Piedmont.

⁶The competitiveness of local firms is measured by indicators of the firms' natality/mortality, presence of advanced manufacturing, general industry productivity, average dimension of local units, rate of corporate firms, failure rates, and cross-territorial dissemination. The competitiveness of macro-economic contexts is measured with indicators of value added per capita, number of employees out of total population and working age population, information on trade credit usage, solvency ratio of firms, firms' propensity to export.

economic operators. I expect that the judicial decisions reveal a more rigid (less discretionary) use of the tendering procedures in the first context, where challengers of the contracts are potentially more, and a more discretionary use of tendering procedures in the second context, where challengers are potentially fewer. By reviewing the content of the judicial decisions, I expect to find that there is a less discretionary and more rigid use of tendering procedures in the first context, where challengers of the contracts are potentially more numerous, and thus where competitiveness over public procurement is higher. Conversely, I expect that the analysis of the judicial decisions in the less competitive contexts will show that the use of discretion in tendering procedures is higher.

The analysis of judicial decisions for the awarding of public contracts in the three municipalities seems to confirm such expectations.

The analysis of the 21 accepting decisions against the municipality of Milan reveals a rather homogeneous content of litigations. Indeed, 19 decisions concern cases where the applicants question their own exclusion, while the legitimacy of the choice of the contractor is contested in two decisions. Of those 19 decisions in which applicants question their own exclusion, in 14 cases the applicants claim that the contracting authority has implemented the Code too rigidly, in particular regarding the assessment of their moral and contributory requirements. This is the case for decisions 1314/2012, 1578/2012 and 2985/2012 where the applicants claim they were unfairly excluded from the tender, since the administration acknowledged irregularities in their tax and wage compliance certificate (DURC), but without further assessing the real gravity of their social security infringements. In decisions 4842/2009 and 4843/2009, applicants claim that the administration decided on their exclusion because of their false declarations made in previous tender procedures, but without further investigating their position through the consultation of the register of Public Works Observatory. In decisions 249/2018 and 250/2018, applicants claim that the administration interpreted too rigidly the provision of the Code that provides for the exclusion of economic operators who have been convicted by definitive judgment of certain offences (in this case, the violations of norms on safety and health at work), since the offences were committed by a subject with a marginal role in the company (a member of the board of auditors) and in the capacity of legal representative of another firm⁷. Five decisions contest the assessment by the administration of cartel formation: the applicants contend that the mere presence of a family relationship is unfit to signal cartel formation (289/2013, 444/2013, 502/2013), or, by referring to the jurisprudence of the Council of State, that the elements considered by the contracting authority are insufficient to signal cartel formation (decisions 844/2015, 845/2015).

A common feature emerging from decisions against the administration of Milan is the unwillingness of the contracting authority to assess deeper, contextual evaluations of the cases when certain irregularities have occurred. In particular, when there are signals that violations of the Code such as lack of moral requirements, or contributory negligence have taken place, the contracting authority reacts by limiting its own discretionary power and does not take responsibility for further investigations into the

⁷ On similar cases, the National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC) and the supreme administrative court, the Council of State, have expressed contrasting opinions. In the above-mentioned decisions, the TAR of Lombardy confirmed Council of State jurisprudence against the interpretation of ANAC.

operators. Quite unexpectedly, the rigid assessment of moral and contributory requirements is generating litigation and is often the cause of the Milan administration's defeat.

This outcome reveals how the assessment of participatory requirements presents several problems in practice. In particular, the analysis of accepting decisions shows that the contracting authorities can receive documents which are not fully updated and may fail to assess the most recent changes in the status of the economic operators. In this respect, a potential weakness of the Code is that it assigns the responsibility for assessing the economic operators' requirements not to an independent authority as is common in other regulatory frameworks (Gilardi 2005), but to the same contracting authorities.

Conversely, the analysis of the accepting decisions in the municipalities of Rome (45 decisions) and Turin (5 decisions) reveals a more heterogeneous litigation, quite different from that against the administration of Milan. In the municipality of Rome, a first group of 8 decisions reflects administrative inertia and other administrative errors. This is, for instance, the case of decision 12400/2015, where the administration did not finalize the tendering procedure, nor did they conclude the agreement, and decisions 5336/2006 and 5337/2006, where the call did not clearly state the deadlines for participating in the procurement procedure. A second group of 29 decisions in the municipality of Rome and the 4 decisions in the municipality of Turin reflect an improper use of discretionary powers. This is, for instance, the case of: decision 2469/2008, where the administration of Rome introduced new weighting criteria after the bids were already opened; decisions 7326/2014 against the municipality of Rome, where the bids were not opened in public; decisions 2573/2011, 10313/2015 against the municipality of Rome and 2300/2006 against the administration of Turin where the weighting criteria used by the administration were judged unclear or applied inadequately; decisions 5607/2009, 122/2016, 1429/2017 against the municipality of Rome and 155/2016 against the municipality of Turin, which outline that the administrations did not comply with the principles of transparency and public access required by the tender-opening sessions; decisions 12348/2008, 7716/2009, 3766/2011, 2217/2014 against the administration of Rome and decisions 1119/2014 and 1226/2017 against the municipality of Turin, which ascertain misuse of powers and incoherence of the administrative action, since the tenders were awarded to operators that lacked the requirements; decisions 1969/2016, 1505/2018 against the municipality of Rome and 160/2008 against the municipality of Turin, which state that abnormally low bids were wrongly included. Remaining decisions against the municipality of Rome concern claims for damages (1), assessment of cartel formation (2), real estate procurement (2), execution of the judicial decisions (2), and revocation decision (2). Most of the decisions against the municipality of Rome concern negotiated procedures. For instance, in decision 5607/2009 the administration states that precisely because it was following a procedure below the EU thresholds, it did not expect that the formal procedures of the Code, such as opening the bids in public, had to be applied. Similarly, in decision 6839/2013, where an economic operator contested the admission of another participant in the tender, the administration declared that the contract was divided into two lots precisely so as not to incur in the above threshold legislation. In decision n. 1873/2016, the administration, which opted for a negotiated procedure for urgency reasons, interpreted the procedure too creatively, imposing excessively short time-limits on participants in order to apply. The analysis of litigation shows

that in implementing public contract legislation, the administrations of Rome and Turin tend to use more discretionary procedures and often the use of discretion is considered illegitimate by the administrative judge.

4. Conclusions

This paper analyses the implementation of the Code of Public Contracts in three Italian cities: Milan, Turin and Rome, adopting a theoretical framework which states that public contracts are designed strategically, by rational actors concerned with reducing the risk of litigation before the Administrative Courts. The local administrations may design public contract awarding procedures using more or less discretion, according to the likelihood of receiving legal challenges from third parties. By capturing potential for third-party challenges using measures of competitiveness of the economic environment in which municipalities are located, the paper identifies two contexts: one more competitive, where potential challenges from the economic competitors are expected to be higher, the other less competitive, where the potential for third-party challenges is expected to be lower. The municipality of Milan belongs to the first context; the municipalities of Rome and Turin to the second. The analysis of judicial proceedings for the awarding of public contracts confirms that the administration of Milan, which belongs to the first context, tends to use more rigid (less discretionary) procedures. Conversely, the administrations of Rome and Turin, which belong to the second context, tend to use more discretionary procedures, and often the use of discretion is judged illegitimate by the administrative judge. In this respect, this paper shows that the Italian municipalities also act strategically when they implement policies and, as positive political theory suggests, the interactions with other actors and interests can generate unexpected consequences. Surprisingly, the analysis of litigation reveals that the rigid implementation of the Code can also be the cause of defeat for the administrations. This outcome is, however, related to a specific and potentially controversial aspect of the Code, which is the attribution of the responsibility for the control of moral and contributory requirements of the firms to the same local contracting authorities. It is reasonable to argue that such responsibility should be delegated to an independent body, not directly involved in the awarding procedures.

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The influence of media messages on populist attitudes: State of the art and insights from experimental research on the Italian case

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Abstract

Despite the growing interest of political and communication scholars in populism in Italy, there is still little knowledge of Italian voters' populist attitudes and whether and how they are connected to media communication. The purpose of this article is to pave the way for the study of this salient topic also with reference to the Italian case. Thus, it both presents the main existing studies on the measurement of populist attitudes and the impact of populist media messages on them, as well as reconstructing the literature on the topic concerning Italy. Moreover, it shows the preliminary results concerning the Italian case of a comparative experimental study on the impact of media messages on voters' populist attitudes conducted within the framework of the Cost Action IS-1308 'Populist Political Communication in Europe'. The article is a first step towards the comprehension of the impact of populist media messages on Italians' populist attitudes. It contributes to the study of populist attitudes in Italy by providing a new operationalization which is reliable in the Italian context and offering a comparable measurement of the strength of populist attitudes among Italian voters.

1. Introduction

The rise of populism around the globe has attracted the attention of a growing number of studies aimed at understanding the spread of populist ideas among citizens (e.g. Norris, 2005; Norris and Inglehart, 2018; Tsatsanis, Andreadis and Teperoglou, 2018; Elchardus and Spruyt, 2016; Andreadis, Stavrakakis, and Demertzis, 2018) and verifying whether political communication plays a role (e.g., Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese, 2017; Matthes and Schmuck, 2017; Müller et al., 2017). It has already been ascertained that certain media outlets report or directly express populist messages (e.g. Mazzoleni, 2003; Mazzoleni, 2008; Akkerman, 2011; Bos, van der Brug, and de Vreese, 2013; Bos and Brants, 2014; Kramer, 2014) and the literature on media effects has highlighted that media messages may forge, activate and reinforce political beliefs (e.g. Bennett and Iyengar, 2008; Holbert, Garrett, and Gleason, 2010). However, the impact of populist media messages on voters' populist attitudes is currently a debated research subject, especially because there is no agreement on how to operationalize populist attitudes (e.g. Castanho Silva et al., 2018; Hameleers and De Vreese, 2018) and how strongly these may be affected by populist political communication (e.g. Matthes and Schmuck, 2017; Müller et al., 2017; Hameleers, Bos and de Vreese, 2018b).

This article aims to pave the way for the study of the effects of populist media messages on populist attitudes with reference to the Italian case. Thus, it both presents the main existing studies on the measurement of populist attitudes and the impact of populist media messages on them as well as reconstructing the literature on the topic concerning Italy. Moreover, it presents a comparative experimental study on the impact of media messages on voters' populist attitudes conducted in the framework of the Cost Action IS-1308 'Populist Political Communication in Europe' and shows its preliminary results concerning the Italian case.¹

2. State of the art on the influence of media messages on populist attitudes

2.1. Existing operationalizations regarding populist attitudes

In social science literature, populism has been conceived in different ways, but the recent and most relevant studies agree in considering it as a thin-centred ideology (or a set of ideas) about how politics should function (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Aalberg et al, 2017; Engesser, Fawzi and Larsson, 2017). Following this view, populism can be embraced not only by politicians and the media but also by ordinary citizens, and it can be measured among them through opinion surveys investigating their attitudes.

In recent years, many efforts have been made to identify populist attitudes, but their operationalization has proved challenging. There is no full agreement either as to what the dimensions of populist attitudes are, or the best indicators to measure them. However, the main operationalizations of this concept may be grouped into two sets according to the definition of populism considered. In fact, while the central and undoubted characteristic of populism is the positive valorisation of the people, different definitions of populism consider other aspects to be part of the populist set of ideas, such as criticism of the elite, the Manichean opposition between these two groups, the need to guarantee the sovereignty of the people (e.g. Mudde, 2004), and also the exclusion of horizontal out-groups like immigrants (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007).

The first and most numerous group of studies that operationalize populism refers back to Mudde's (2004, p. 453) definition of populism as "*an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people*". For example, the operationalization of populist attitudes by Hawkins, Riding and Mudde (2012) individuated three dimensions of populism: 'Manichaeic view of politics', 'reified popular will' and 'belief in a conspiring elite' and defined a consequent set of indicators that were tested on a representative sample of the U.S. population during the 2008 electoral campaign. Stanley (2011) then applied the measure of populist attitudes to the context of the 2010 Slovak election, his

¹ The Italian participants in the Cost Action IS-1308 'Populist Political Communication in Europe' (for more information visit: <https://www.ntnu.edu/populistcommunication/populist-political-communication-in-europe>) were Giuliano Bobba, Cristina Cremonesi, Antonella Seddone (University of Turin) and Guido Legnante (University of Pavia). For this first and single authored publication, the scholars involved in the study agreed to disclose only the preliminary results of the study.

operationalization of populism being organised in four dimensions. Three of these ('positive valorisation of the people and denigration of the elite', 'popular sovereignty', 'antagonistic relationship between the people and the elites') were very similar to those of Hawkins, Riding and Mudde of 2012, while the fourth focused on a different aspect of populism: the perception of the people and the elite as two homogeneous groups. Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2014) merged the two previously presented operationalization attempts, returning to a three dimension operationalization of populist attitudes ('sovereignty of the people', 'opposition to the elite', 'Manichean division between "good people" and "evil elite"'), without completely renouncing references to the homogeneity of the two antagonist groups by considering the indicator 'The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people'. This operationalization was firstly applied to a representative sample of the Dutch population in 2013 and was then adopted in several research projects such as the British and German National Election Studies.² Finally, Castanho Silva et al. (2018) elaborated a similar operationalization. They considered as dimensions of populism criticism towards the elites ('anti-elitism') and the Manichean conception of politics ('Manichaeian outlook'),³ and a third dimension named 'people centrism', which measured citizens' opinions of the fact that politicians should be close to the people and committed to realizing the people's will (just as Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove's (2014) dimension 'popular sovereignty' did). This operationalization was tested and proved reliable on seventeen samples belonging to thirteen countries, including Italy.

The second set of operationalizations regarding populist attitudes includes a small number of more recent studies that in addition to some elements of populism individuated by Mudde (2004)'s definition (i.e. 'sovereignty of the people', 'anti-elitism', 'Manichean division between good people and evil elite') consider also the exclusionist dimension of populism. This dimension is stressed both by the seminal definition of populism by Jagers and Walgrave (2007: 323): "When political actors talk about the people and combine this with an explicit anti-establishment position and an exclusion of certain population categories, one can talk of thick populism", and by the work of the Cost Action IS1308, that in the book 'Populist political communication in Europe' affirms: "the people' should be regarded as the key component of populist messages, with anti-elitism and anti-out-group stances serving as optional additional elements. These elements can be combined in various ways, resulting in different types of populism" (Reinemann et al.'s, 2017: 23-24). The operationalization proposed by Hameleers and De Vreese (2018) belongs to this group. According to them, populist attitudes are organised into two dimensions: 'anti-establishment' and 'exclusionism'. This operationalization was tested empirically on the Netherlands voters: it not only demonstrated a good fit with the data,

² For more information on these surveys see: Fieldhouse, E., J. Green., G. Evans., H. Schmitt, C. van der Eijk, J. Mellon and C. Prosser (2015) British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 10. DOI: 10.15127/1.293723; and Roßteutscher, Sigrid; Schmitt-Beck, Rüdiger; Schoen, Harald; Weßels, Bernhard; Wolf, Christof; Bieber, Ina; Stövsand, Lars-Christopher; Dietz, Melanie; Scherer, Philipp (2018): Pre-election Cross Section (GLES 2017). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA6800 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12990

³ It is important to highlight that Castanho et al. (2018) are the first authors that consider the populist Manicheism in terms of 'opposition between different political views', instead of 'opposition between the elite and the people', as all the previous theoretical studies have done (see Castanho Silva et al., 2018: 153).

but it also proved that differently from what is usually assumed in the literature, populist exclusionist attitudes do not coincide with nativist perceptions (Hameleers and De Vreese, 2018: 10-11). Last but not least, also the studies by Hameleers and Schumck (2018) and by Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese (2017a and 2018b) adopted the same two-dimensional operationalization for investigating the influence of media communication on populist attitudes.

2.2. The role of media messages in influencing populist attitudes

Among the factors that may impact the level of populist attitudes in the population, media exposure plays a relevant role. In fact, not only are populist attitudes associated with enduring factors such as socio-economic characteristics (i.e. being male, with a low educational level and a weak economic position), psychological traits (i.e. the feeling of relative deprivation), and ideological inclinations (i.e. the fact of being on the left or right margin of the political continuum) (e.g., Elchardus and Spruyt, 2016; Andreadis, Stavrakakis, and Demertzis, 2018; Tsatsanis, Andreadis and Teperoglou, 2018), but are also connected to the more mutable factor of media communication.

Recent studies have revealed that both one-time consumption and repeated exposure to messages containing populist cues may affect people's political attitudes (e.g., Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese, 2017a and 2017b; Müller et al., 2017). As regards one-time consumption, the experimental-design studies of Matthes and Schmuck (2017) and of Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese (2017b) are of primary importance. The former proved that political advertisements with a negative portrayal of immigrants strengthen voters' exclusionism attitudes. The latter demonstrated that political news items blaming the national or EU elites for citizens' problems foster both the citizens' perception that the ordinary people's will is not represented by politicians, and their belief that society is divided between 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elites' (Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese 2017b: 890). Concerning repeated exposure, the real-setting research by Müller et al. (2017) showed that the influence of media messages displaying populism depends on media users' prior attitudes: when exposed to a larger amount of populist messages, citizens with anti-populist attitudes became less populist, while populist ones became more so (Müller et al., 2017: 984). Finally, in their studies on populist voters' media diets and selective exposure to populist communication, Hameleers, Bos and de Vreese (2017a; 2018b), found that populist attitudes both drive the selection of specific communication contents (such as tabloids and media that use populist frames) (Hameleers, Bos and de Vreese 2017a), and influence the effects of populist communication, since voters with populist attitudes are more prone to being convinced by populist messages (Hameleers, Bos and de Vreese, 2018b).

Regardless of whether exposure is once-off or repeated and of the level of prior populist attitudes, the psychological mechanisms behind the influence of media messages on populist attitudes are the same. As explained by Hameleers et al. (2019) in the second (forthcoming) book of the COST Action IS-1308 'Communicating populism. Comparing interactions between politicians, media, and citizens across Europe', 'cognitive priming of social identity' and 'blame attribution' drive the impact of populist messages on voters' attitudes. According to the literature on trait activation and cognitive priming (Richey, 2012; Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese, 2018b), the way media present a social group (as well as an event or a political actor, etc.) may influence audience's perception of it. For example, a media message that

focuses on the national aspect of social identity and praises the national-people may activate a positive evaluation of this group and of its homogeneity (Reinemann et al., 2017; Andreadis et al., 2019). As regards blame attribution, this rhetorical device has proven to activate in the audience a negative evaluation of the actors indicated as responsible for an undesirable situation (e.g., Marsh and Tilley, 2010; Hameleers, Bos and de Vreese, 2017b; Hameleers, Bos and de Vreese, 2018a). Consequently, we can assume that this mechanism is at play in the effects of populist rhetoric that is centred on the depiction of the people's wellbeing as threatened by political elites and social out-groups (such as immigrants or the super-rich).

3. The influence of media messages on populist attitudes in Italy: preliminary results from comparative research

3.1. Current knowledge on the Italian case

The considerable and repeated success of populist forces in Italy (e.g. Bobba and McDonnell, 2015; Tarchi, 2015; Bobba and Legnante, 2016) – culminating in the formation of a populist government in March 2018 – has raised scholars' interest in Italian populism. However, while Italian populist parties and leaders have been investigated thoroughly (e.g. Boni, 2008; Biorcio, 2010; Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013; Bracciale and Martella, 2017; Bobba, 2018), so far the populist attitudes of Italian voters have received almost no attention. Moreover, despite the fact that the Italian media are often accused of being accomplices in the success of populist political forces (as for example Berlusconi's Go Italy or, more recently, Salvini's League), the relation between populist media messages and populist attitudes in Italy has not been tested until now.

As far as the spread of populism among the Italian population is concerned, only Biorcio (2007) has addressed the topic. Biorcio elaborated and tested a measure of populist attitudes articulated in three dimensions: 'anti-politics' (similar to Akkerman, Mudde, Zaslove (2014)'s dimension 'opposition to the elite'), 'ethnocentrism' (like Hameleers and De Vreese (2018)'s dimension 'exclusionism'), and 'authoritarianism' (which can be interpreted as a sort of side-effect of the populist request for more popular-sovereignty – see for example Tarchi, 2015). Following this operationalization, Biorcio found that the penetration of populist attitudes in Italy was particularly strong in the sectors of the population distant from the democratic political life, with a weak economic position (e.g. self-employed, unemployed, pensioners, etc.) and a low level of education (Biorcio, 2007).

Although the studies on media populism stemmed from the research of an Italian scholar (Mazzoleni, 2003; Mazzoleni 2008; Mazzoleni 2014), hardly any research has investigated populism with reference to the Italian media. Only one recent contribution addressed the topic. It investigated how often the Italian press outlets mentioned populist stances and whether journalists simply reported or also supported them (Cremonesi, 2018). This study confirmed that some media outlets in Italy promote populism, but no research has addressed the topic of the impact of media populist messages on the populist attitudes of Italian voters. The study presented below is the first experimental design research investigating the topic with reference to Italy.

3.2. Research design

In order to shed light on the diffusion of populist attitudes in Italy and to test the influence of media messages on them, Italy took part in a Comparative Research study that involved 16 European Countries conducted within the framework of the Cost Action IS 1308 ‘Populist Political Communication in Europe’.⁴ The aim of the study was to explore the effects of populist communication on voters and in particular to verify whether, and to what extent, media messages with different populist elements (i.e. people centrism, anti-elitism, right-wing or left-wing anti-outgroup cues) could affect voters’ populist attitudes. The research study adopted an experimental design, asking respondents (14,499 overall)⁵ to read a manipulated version of a short news item on the economic crisis and then to answer a series of questions regarding their populist attitudes.

As far as Italy is concerned, the data were collected in April 2017, by the polling firm Research Now. A sample of 858 respondents, representative of the Italian voting population, was selected and interviewed through an online survey. The survey included three phases. First, participants were asked to give their informed consent and to fill in a pre-test questionnaire about their socio-demographic characteristics and general political opinions. Second, respondents were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions⁶ and were instructed to read a news article (the stimulus of this experimental study) for at least 20 seconds. Third, participants had to answer a series of questions about their political attitudes and behaviours, as well as about their level of agreement with the news, and also to some questions (manipulation checks) aimed at verifying their understanding of the news article (for an in-depth description of this experimental study and of the variables included in the survey, see Hameleers et al, 2018: 525).

The news item given to the respondents differed slightly for each condition. In fact, while all the stimuli presented the same story and visual elements, the text for six of them was altered, and various combinations of populist elements inserted. The first and basic control stimulus consisted of a piece of news allegedly published in a fictional online newspaper (news.com) created on the model of euronews.com. The news story was about the future decline of purchasing power in the country and presented the picture of an empty wallet (Figure 1). The second stimulus used as a control condition was created by adding to the text the sole blame attribution to politicians, i.e., national politicians were accused of being responsible for the decrease in purchasing power in the

⁴ The comparative experiment design study was coordinated by the Cost Action’s Working Group ‘Citizens and populism’; Cristina Cremonesi (University of Turin) was in charge of the Italian version of the experiment; the Department of Political and Social Science of the University of Pavia financed its realisation. The other countries involved in the comparative experiment were Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

⁵ After a data cleaning procedure, low-quality responses were removed from the original sample counting 17,597 cases. As better detailed in Appendix C of the article ‘Start Spreading the News: A Comparative Experiment on the Effects of Populist Communication on Political Engagement in Sixteen European Countries’ (Hameleers et al., 2018), the criteria applied for individuating the low-quality responses were: 1) completion time, 2) straightlining, 3) item nonresponse, 4) incorrect answers to manipulation checks. As regards the Italian case, 198 low-quality responses were excluded from the analysis.

⁶ A randomization check shows that the eight conditions do not differ significantly with regards to age ($F=0.277$, $p=0.963$), gender ($F=0.447$, $p=0.872$), education ($F=0.678$, $p=0.690$) and ideology ($F=0.749$, $p=0.631$).

country. While no element of populism was inserted in these control stimuli, in the six treatment conditions either single populist elements or combinations of them were introduced.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the news item administered to the Italian respondents as experiment stimulus (control condition with no populism elements)



In this way, six populist versions of the news item were created, mirroring the different types of populism individuated by Jagers and Walgrave's (2007) definition. They are: (1) positive valorisation of the people (i.e. empty populism), (2) positive valorisation of the people and blame attribution to politicians (i.e. anti-elitist populism), (3) positive valorisation of the people and blame attribution to immigrants (i.e. right-wing populism), (4) positive valorisation of the people and blame attribution to both politicians and immigrants (i.e. complete right-wing populism), (5) positive valorisation of the people and blame attribution to the super-rich (i.e. left-wing populism), (6) positive valorisation of the people and blame attribution to both politicians and super-rich people (i.e. complete left-wing populism)⁷ (Table 1).

Regarding the measurement of populist attitudes, the experiment adopted a four-dimensional operationalization combining the classical dimensions of populism derived from Mudde's definition (2004) – 'popular sovereignty', 'people homogeneity', 'anti-elitism' – with the dimension 'exclusionism' taken from Jagers and Walgrave's (2007) conceptualization of thick populism. In order to measure the level of populism in each of these dimensions, respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed, on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) with a series of statements. Table 2 reports the items employed for measuring participants' attitudes towards these dimensions and indicates for each of them the average level of agreement of the Italian respondents.

⁷ The exact wording (in English and Italian) of the media messages used as stimuli for this experiment is reported in the Appendix 1 'Wording of the treatment messages' included with this article

Table 1. Experiment conditions

Conditions with Populism (Pro-heartland is a constant)		
	No anti-elite	Anti-elite
No outgroup	(1) empty populism	(2) anti-elitism populism
Outgroup 'immigrants'	(3) right-wing outgroup populism	(4) complete right-wing populism
Outgroup 'The wealthy 1%'	(5) left-wing outgroup populism	(6) complete left-wing populism
Control Conditions		
No heartland	(control 1) no populism/ rational	(control 2) only anti-elitism

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Populist Attitudes Items among the Italian respondents (1 - completely disagree; 7 - completely agree)

Dimension/Items	N	Mean	SD
<i>Popular Sovereignty</i>			
The people should have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums	852	5.52	1.69
The people should be asked whenever important decisions are taken	851	6.07	1.22
The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people	852	5.56	1.64
<i>People Homogeneity</i>			
Although the [country members, e.g. British] are very different from each other, when it comes down to it, they all think the same	852	4.35	1.79
Ordinary people all pull together	852	4.64	1.61
Ordinary people share the same values and interests	852	4.56	1.66
Ordinary people are of good and honest character	852	4.59	1.60
<i>Anti-elitism</i>			
Politicians in government are corrupt	857	5.58	1.46
Politicians make decisions that harm the interests of the ordinary people	858	5.64	1.42
Politicians are not really interested in what people like me think	858	5.83	1.44
MPs in Parliament very quickly lose touch with ordinary people	857	6.11	1.24
The people instead of politicians should make our most important policy decisions	857	5.13	1.75
The ordinary people should have more influence in political decision making than large corporations	857	5.45	1.44
The differences between ordinary people and the ruling elite are much greater than the differences between ordinary people	858	5.77	1.32
People like me have no influence on what the government does	858	5.71	1.49
Poor people should have a greater voice in politics	858	5.28	1.53
International financial institutions have colonized our country	855	5.44	1.40
A bunch of rich families are really running this country	855	5.17	1.56
Big corporations accumulate wealth by exploiting the people	858	5.57	1.42
<i>Exclusionism</i>			
Immigrants are responsible for a lot of our nation's problems	851	4.20	2.04
People who are not originally from our country should have no rights to our social benefits	852	4.04	1.99
Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture	852	4.42	2.08
Immigrants cost our country a lot of money that should rather be invested in our own people	851	5.02	1.97

3.3. Preliminary Findings

In order to verify the validity of the proposed operationalization of populist attitudes for the Italian case, I investigated the internal consistency of the indicators of each dimension and of the whole set of items through a reliability measure (Cronbach's alpha). The positive result of this check (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70)⁸ allowed me to create four additive indices of populist attitudes ('popular sovereignty' index; 'people's homogeneity' index; 'anti-elitism' index; 'exclusionism' index) and an overall aggregate index of Populism; all the indexes were normalized resulting in five continuous variables ranging from 0 to 1. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics of these indices.

From these data, all types of populist attitudes proved to be widespread in Italy: among the Italian respondents the mean value of the populism index was 0.68, and all the indexes measuring the specific dimensions of populist attitude presented a mean value higher than 0.5 (Table 3). Particularly strong among Italians were the populist attitudes referring to the dimensions 'popular sovereignty' and 'anti-elitism': the indexes of these dimensions showed a mean value equal respectively to 0.79 and 0.76. This is revealing of the Italian voters' dissatisfaction with the country's economic and political establishment and of their perception of elected politicians as being out-of-touch and insensitive to Italian citizens' requests, as if they had failed in their representative function.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Populist attitudes indexes (0-1) among Italian respondents

Index/populism dimension	N	Mean	SD
Popular sovereignty index	851	0.79	0.23
People's homogeneity index	852	0.59	0.25
Anti-elitism index	851	0.76	0.17
Exclusionism index	850	0.57	0.30
Populism index	842	0.68	0.18

Besides looking at the populism indexes on the whole sample, I also conducted a preliminary analysis aimed at revealing the impact on the respondents' level of populism of the different media populist messages used as stimuli. In Table 4, I report the mean value assumed by the indexes of populist attitudes among the respondents exposed to each of the six experimental conditions and to the two control conditions (Table 1). I noticed that the mean values of the indexes did not change markedly according to the conditions and a one-way ANOVA test confirmed this perception: none of the populist attitudes' indexes differed in a statistically significant way between the experiment conditions (Table 4).

This preliminary result contrasted with those of previous experimental studies, which found that a single populist message may have a relevant effect on voters' populist attitudes. Based on these studies, the media messages containing the blaming of the elite

⁸ Popular Sovereignty (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.885); People Homogeneity (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.913); Anti-Elitism (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.905); Excluding Outgroups (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.916); Populism Index (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.921).

(conditions 2, 4, and 6) and of immigrants (conditions 3 and 4)⁹ were expected to have an impact on the corresponding subcomponent of populist attitudes, i.e. ‘exclusionism’ and ‘anti-elitism’ (Matthes and Schmuck, 2017; Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese, 2017b).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Populist attitudes indexes (0-1) according to the experiment conditions and connected ANOVA test results

Index Condition	Popular sovereignty		Homogeneity of the people		Anti-elitism		Exclusionism		Populism index	
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.
(1) empty populism	0.84	0.20	0.60	0.24	0.77	0.16	0.59	0.30	0.70	0.17
(2) anti-elitism populism	0.77	0.25	0.62	0.26	0.77	0.17	0.59	0.30	0.69	0.19
(3) right-wing outgroup populism	0.80	0.23	0.58	0.25	0.75	0.17	0.60	0.28	0.68	0.17
(4) complete right-wing populism	0.80	0.22	0.58	0.25	0.76	0.18	0.59	0.33	0.68	0.18
(5) left-wing outgroup populism	0.78	0.24	0.61	0.25	0.76	0.18	0.56	0.31	0.68	0.19
(6) complete left-wing populism	0.79	0.22	0.60	0.24	0.78	0.17	0.57	0.30	0.68	0.17
(Control1) No populism/rational	0.77	0.24	0.55	0.25	0.74	0.18	0.52	0.30	0.65	0.18
(Control2) No populism/only anti-elitism	0.74	0.24	0.58	0.24	0.75	0.15	0.54	0.29	0.66	0.18
	F	Sig	F	Sig	F	Sig	F	Sig	F	Sig
One-way ANOVA between conditions	1.442	0.185	0.675	0.694	0.681	0.689	1.029	0.409	0.935	0.479

In order to better understand this unexpected result, I also tested whether at least significant single item differences existed between respondents assigned to control groups and treatment conditions. The one-way ANOVA test performed on the 23 items of populism confirmed that all the indicators of the dimensions ‘exclusionism’ and ‘anti-elitism’ did not vary significantly between conditions, confirming the lack of impact of a single media populist message on these indexes (Table 5). However, the same test also revealed that the item “The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people” which belongs to the populism dimension ‘popular sovereignty’, differed significantly between treatment conditions (Table 5). Therefore, I checked the average level of agreement with this statement among the respondents exposed to the different stimuli. The values reported in Table 6 suggest that the media message most effective in activating this populist trait was the one containing the positive valorisation of the people (Condition 1).¹⁰ It lets us hypothesise that in the case of Italy the positive priming of national identity does not influence Italians’ perception of themselves as a homogeneous group (Hameleers et al., 2019), but directly triggers the Italians’ request for a political class that truly takes care of them. It probably occurs because of the long-lasting fracture between politics and citizens in Italy.

⁹ For the wording of the media messages used as stimuli for these conditions, see Appendix A ‘Wording of the treatment messages’ included with this article.

¹⁰ For the wording of this treatment message, see Appendix A ‘Wording of the treatment messages’ included with this article

Table 5. ANOVA test results of populist attitudes items according to experiment conditions

Dimension/Items	F	Sig
<i>Popular Sovereignty</i>		
The people should have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums	0.72	0.65
The people should be asked whenever important decisions are taken	1.51	0.16
The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people	2.09	0.04
<i>People Homogeneity</i>		
Although the [country members, e.g. British] are very different from each other, when it comes down to it, they all think the same	1.30	0.25
Ordinary people all pull together	0.48	0.85
Ordinary people share the same values and interests	0.66	0.71
Ordinary people are of good and honest character	0.57	0.78
<i>Anti-elitism</i>		
Politicians in government are corrupt	0.38	0.92
Politicians make decisions that harm the interests of the ordinary people	0.93	0.49
Politicians are not really interested in what people like me think	0.25	0.97
MPs in Parliament very quickly lose touch with ordinary people	0.83	0.56
The people instead of politicians should make our most important policy decisions	1.49	0.17
The ordinary people should have more influence in political decision making than large corporations	0.73	0.65
The differences between ordinary people and the ruling elite are much greater than the differences between ordinary people	0.42	0.89
People like me have no influence on what the government does	0.59	0.77
Poor people should have a greater voice in politics	0.87	0.53
International financial institutions have colonized our country	1.47	0.17
A bunch of rich families are really running this country	1.61	0.13
Big corporations accumulate wealth by exploiting the people	0.75	0.63
<i>Exclusionism</i>		
Immigrants are responsible for a lot of our nation's problems	1.19	0.31
People who are not originally from our country should have no rights to our social benefits	0.79	0.60
Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture	0.74	0.64
Immigrants cost our country a lot of money that should rather be invested in our own people	1.41	0.20

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Popular Sovereignty indicator "The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people" (1 - completely disagree; 7 - completely agree), according to experiment condition

Condition	Mean	St. Dev.
(1) empty populism	6.46	0.84
(2) anti-elitism populism	5.94	1.33
(3) right-wing outgroup populism	6.10	1.29
(4) complete right-wing populism	6.08	1.25
(5) left-wing outgroup populism	6.06	1.27
(6) complete left-wing populism	6.08	1.16
(Control1) No populism/rational	5.96	1.31
(Control2) No populism/only anti-elitism	5.88	1.19

4. Conclusions

Despite the growing interest of political and communication scholars in populism in Italy (e.g., Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013; Tarchi, 2015; Bobba and Legnante, 2016; Bracciale and Martella, 2017), there is still little knowledge of the populist attitudes of Italian voters and whether and how they are connected with media communication. The purpose of this article was to pave the way for the study of this salient topic (e.g., Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese, 2017a and 2017b; Müller et al., 2017) also with reference to the Italian case. For this reason, the article presented the preliminary results concerning Italy of a European comparative experimental study investigating the effects of different populist media messages on voters' populist attitudes.

The findings revealed the presence of strong populist attitudes among Italian citizens but provided only limited support to the commonplace that the media are accomplices of the success of populism in Italy. The analysis revealed that a single populist media message does not activate the populist attitudes of Italian voters. In fact, only the news item containing the positive valorisation of the Italian people (stimulus 'empty populism') affected the respondents, and only with reference to their agreement with the statement "The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people". The other stimuli included in the experiment proved to have no effect on the indexes of populist attitudes.

While this result came as unexpected, being in contrast to previous experimental studies on the topic (Matthes and Schmuck, 2017; Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese, 2017b), two interpretations may explain it. On the one hand, it could be that only specific segments of the Italian electorate are affected by the populist messages. Even if on the whole sample the impact of populist messages is not significant, voters with certain political and psychological traits may be particularly prone to their influence (e.g. Hameleers and De Vreese, 2018). In order to verify this, further studies should test the impact of populist media messages while considering the moderating effect of a series of characteristics, such as ideology, level of prior populist attitudes, and perception of relative deprivation (see for example Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese, 2018b, and Hameleers and De Vreese, 2018). On the other hand, the lack of effect may be due to the high level of populist attitudes registered among the Italian respondents: a single populist message may not affect Italian voters since they are already strongly populist. In this case, a comparative study should verify whether the effect of populist media messages varies between countries according to their citizens' prior level of populist attitudes.

While further research is needed to clarify the impact of media populist messages on Italians' populist attitudes, this article is a first step in this direction. Moreover, it contributes to the study of populist attitudes in Italy by providing a new operationalization with regard to populist attitudes that has proved reliable in the Italian context and offering a comparable measurement of the strength of populist attitudes among Italian voters.

Appendix 1.

Condition 1 - Empty populism

ENG	Headline: Purchasing power of [nationals] will decline – foundation FutureNow releases new report Text: According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report: 'The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard every day to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.' Read more...
ITA	Titolo: Il potere d'acquisto degli Italiani si ridurrà – la Fondazione FuturoOra rilascia un nuovo rapporto Testo: Secondo un nuovo rapporto di FuturoOra, in Italia il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà nei prossimi anni. Un portavoce di questa fondazione indipendente che da anni monitora l'andamento dell'economia ha commentato così il rapporto: 'I cittadini italiani devono essere informati del fatto che avranno meno soldi da spendere. In Italia così tanta gente lavora duramente ogni giorno per avere una vita migliore. È profondamente ingiusto che questi sforzi non siano ripagati. Bisogna agire ora per affrontare questa minaccia al benessere della nostra gente'. Leggi di più...

Condition 2 - Anti-elitism populism

ENG	Headline: Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation FutureNow blames politicians in new report Text: According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report: 'The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard every day to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that politicians are to blame. They have been too short-sighted, self-serving, and corrupt in recent years. They don't care about anyone but themselves and are too detached from the people. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.' Read more...
ITA	Titolo: Il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà per gli Italiani – Il nuovo rapporto della Fondazione FuturoOra incolpa i politici Testo: Secondo un nuovo rapporto di FuturoOra, in Italia il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà nei prossimi anni. Un portavoce di questa fondazione indipendente che da anni monitora l'andamento dell'economia ha commentato così il rapporto: 'I cittadini italiani devono essere informati del fatto che avranno meno soldi da spendere. In Italia così tanta gente lavora duramente ogni giorno per avere una vita migliore. È profondamente ingiusto che questi sforzi non siano ripagati. È ovvio che la colpa è dei politici: negli ultimi anni sono stati troppo miopi, opportunisti e corrotti. Non si preoccupano di nessuno se non di loro stessi e sono troppo distanti dal popolo. Bisogna agire ora per affrontare questa minaccia al benessere dalla nostra gente'. Leggi di più...

Condition 3 - Right-wing outgroup populism

ENG	Headline: Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation FutureNow blames immigrants in new report Text: According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report: 'The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard every day to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that immigrants are to blame. They are too demanding, they exploit our system and are hard to integrate. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.' Read more...
ITA	Titolo: Il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà per gli Italiani – Il nuovo rapporto della Fondazione FuturoOra incolpa gli immigrati Testo: Secondo un nuovo rapporto di FuturoOra, in Italia il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà nei prossimi anni. Un portavoce di questa fondazione indipendente che da anni monitora l'andamento dell'economia, ha commentato così il rapporto: 'I cittadini italiani devono essere informati del fatto che avranno meno soldi da spendere. In Italia così tanta gente lavora duramente ogni giorno per avere una vita migliore. È profondamente ingiusto che questi sforzi non siano ripagati. È ovvio che la colpa è degli immigrati: sono troppo esigenti, sfruttano il nostro sistema e si integrano con difficoltà. Bisogna agire ora per affrontare questa minaccia al benessere dalla nostra gente'. Leggi di più...

Condition 4 - complete right-wing populism

ENG	Headline: Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation FutureNow blames politicians and immigrants in new report
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Text: According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report: 'The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard every day to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that politicians and migrants are to blame. Politicians have been too short-sighted, self-serving, and corrupt in recent years. Migrants are too demanding, they exploit our system and are hard to integrate. And still, politicians only take care of the migrants instead of our own people. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.' Read more...

- ITA Titolo: Il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà per gli Italiani – Il nuovo rapporto della Fondazione FuturoOra incolpa i politici e gli immigrati
 Testo: Secondo un nuovo rapporto di FuturoOra, in Italia il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà nei prossimi anni. Un portavoce di questa fondazione indipendente che da anni monitora l'andamento dell'economia ha commentato così il rapporto: 'I cittadini italiani devono essere informati del fatto che avranno meno soldi da spendere. In Italia così tanta gente lavora duramente ogni giorno per avere una vita migliore. È profondamente ingiusto che questi sforzi non siano ripagati. È ovvio che la colpa è dei politici e degli immigrati: i politici negli ultimi anni sono stati troppo miopi, opportunisti e corrotti. Gli immigrati sono troppo esigenti, sfruttano il nostro sistema e si integrano con difficoltà. Bisogna agire ora per affrontare questa minaccia al benessere della nostra gente'.
 Leggi di più...

Condition 5 - Left-wing outgroup populism

- ENG Headline: Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation FutureNow blames wealthy in new report
 Text: According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report: 'The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard every day to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that the super-rich are to blame. They have been too egotistic, self-serving and corrupt in recent years and do not care about anyone but themselves. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.'
 Read more...
- ITA Titolo: Il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà per gli Italiani – Il nuovo rapporto della fondazione FuturoOra incolpa i ricchi
 Testo: Secondo un nuovo rapporto di FuturoOra, in Italia il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà nei prossimi anni. Un portavoce di questa fondazione indipendente che da anni monitora l'andamento dell'economia ha commentato così il rapporto: 'I cittadini italiani devono essere informati del fatto che avranno meno soldi da spendere. In Italia così tanta gente lavora duramente ogni giorno per avere una vita migliore. È profondamente ingiusto che questi sforzi non siano ripagati. È ovvio che la colpa è dei ricchi: negli ultimi anni sono stati troppo egoisti, opportunisti e corrotti, e non si preoccupano di nessuno se non di loro stessi. Bisogna agire ora per affrontare questa minaccia al benessere della nostra gente'.
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Condition 6 - Complete left-wing populism

- ENG Headline: Purchasing power will decline for [nationals] – foundation FutureNow blames politicians and the wealthy in new report
 Text: According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power in [country] will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report: 'The common citizens in [country] need to be made aware of the fact that they will have less money to spend. So many people in [country] are working so hard every day to have a good life. There is something profoundly wrong when these efforts do not pay off. It is obvious that politicians and the super-rich are to blame. Politicians and the super-rich have been too short-sighted, self-serving, and corrupt in recent years. And still, politicians only take care of the super-rich instead of the common people. Action has to be taken now to address this threat to the well-being of our people.' Read more...
- ITA Titolo: Il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà per gli Italiani – il nuovo rapporto della Fondazione FuturoOra incolpa i politici e i ricchi
 Testo: Secondo un nuovo rapporto di FuturoOra, in Italia il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà nei prossimi anni. Un portavoce di questa fondazione indipendente che da anni monitora l'andamento dell'economia ha commentato così il rapporto: 'I cittadini italiani devono essere informati del fatto che avranno meno soldi da spendere. In Italia così tanta gente lavora duramente ogni giorno per avere una vita migliore. È profondamente ingiusto che questi sforzi non siano ripagati. È ovvio che la colpa è dei politici e dei ricchi: i politici e i ricchi negli ultimi anni sono stati troppo miopi, opportunisti e corrotti. Inoltre, i politici si curano solo dei ricchi anziché delle persone comuni. Bisogna agire ora per affrontare questa minaccia al benessere della nostra gente'.
 Leggi di più...

Control 1 - No populism/rational

ENG	Headline: Purchasing power will decline – foundation FutureNow releases new report Text: According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report: 'We have to raise awareness about what this prospect means. There will be less money to spend. Action has to be taken now to address this threat.' Read more...
ITA	Titolo: Il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà – la fondazione FuturoOra rilascia un nuovo rapporto Testo: Secondo un nuovo rapporto di FuturoOra, nei prossimi anni il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà. Un portavoce di questa fondazione indipendente che da anni monitora l'andamento dell'economia ha commentato così il rapporto: 'Noi dobbiamo aumentare la consapevolezza su ciò che questa direzione comporta: ci saranno meno soldi da spendere. Bisogna agire ora per far fronte a questa minaccia.' Leggi di più...

Control 2 - Only anti-elitism

ENG	Headline: Purchasing power will decline – foundation FutureNow blames politicians in new report Text: According to a new report by FutureNow purchasing power will decline in the coming years. A spokesperson for the independent foundation that has been monitoring economic developments for years comments on the report: 'We have to raise awareness about what this prospect means for [country]. There will be less money to spend. It is obvious that politicians are to blame. They have been too short-sighted, self-serving, and corrupt in recent years. They don't care about anyone but themselves and are too detached. Action has to be taken now to address this threat.' Read more...
ITA	Titolo: Il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà – il nuovo rapporto della Fondazione FuturoOra incolpa i politici Testo: Secondo un nuovo rapporto di FuturoOra, nei prossimi anni il potere d'acquisto si ridurrà. Un portavoce di questa fondazione indipendente che da anni monitora l'andamento dell'economia ha commentato così il rapporto: 'Noi dobbiamo aumentare la consapevolezza su ciò che questa direzione comporta per l'Italia: ci saranno meno soldi da spendere. È ovvio che la colpa è dei politici: negli ultimi anni sono stati troppo miopi, opportunisti e corrotti. Non si preoccupano di nessuno se non di loro stessi e sono troppo distanti. Bisogna agire ora per far fronte a questa minaccia.' Leggi di più...

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