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Metropolitan cities in search of identity:
Challenges and opportunities for urban strategic planning in Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan

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Abstract

This article explores the interplay between Integrated Urban Plans (IUPs), introduced by Italy's post-Covid National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), and Metropolitan Cities (MCs) established in 2014 and still pursuing institutionalization. We investigate if IUPs empower MCs as innovative strategic bodies through their direct engagement in urban regeneration. Drawing from institutionalization theory, we analyze documents and interviews from three selected MCs. Findings reveal: diverse approaches to IUPs; varying success in aligning projects with strategic missions; and distinct MC models and degrees of consolidation, shaped by legacies and capacities. The NRRP proves an effective window of opportunity for the institutionalization of MCs.

1. Introduction

This article investigates the relationship between the formulation of Integrated Urban Plans (*Piani Urbani Integrati* – IUPs) – one of the measures of the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) funded by the European Union following the Covid-19 pandemic – and the metropolitan governance embodied in Metropolitan Cities (*Città Metropolitane* – MCs), which were established in Italy by law in 2014 and are still in a phase of consolidation.

After nearly twenty years of reform attempts (Citroni et al., 2016), MCs were hastily created within the framework of a constitutional reform aimed at streamlining government layers that later failed. MCs inherited territorial and organizational structures from long-standing provincial authorities and have since remained suspended between a government role, oriented towards services and utilities management, and a governance role that is more focused on coordinating private and public actors with main reference to local governments, since the MCs were established as second-tier entities aggregating the metropolitan area's municipalities (see section 3). Their territorial and institutional configuration is highly heterogeneous (Crivello & Staricco, 2017), thus preventing a single model of MC from emerging, while their capacity to conduct policy processes is widely uncertain.

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Receiving € 191.5 billion in funding for its NRRP, Italy is the main beneficiary of Next Generation EU, the financial package adopted by the EU to help its society and economy recover from the consequences of the pandemic. Great expectations have been built around the ability of the NRRP to restructure territorial economies and administrations in Italy, and a number of preliminary studies have emphasized opportunities for innovation and renewal. Not only has there been a focus on increasing administrative capacity (Polverari & Piattoni, 2022), but also on the reconfiguration of entire policy sectors, such as urban regeneration (Fedeli, 2022) and social protection (Petmesidou et al., 2023), with implications for the historical problem of the North-South divide (Cerruto et al., 2022), and centre-peripheries relations (Fernández de Losada & Martinez, 2022).

This article offers an analysis of how a specific measure of the Italian NRRP that is dedicated to projects of MCs, i.e. the above-mentioned IUPs, may impact on the institutionalization of these territorial entities, which are still in search of a defined role and identity. We aim to understand if the elaboration of IUPs has provided MCs with the opportunity to perform and consolidate their role. Several factors make IUPs a relevant challenge and an interesting test of MCs' strategic role and capacity: totalling over € 3.1 billion in their first draft – which was later adjusted – they are the largest contribution to the Recovery plan of MCs, which are the sole beneficiaries of such funds. The latter are endowed on a non-competitive basis, so that all MCs are equally involved, and funds are targeted at new projects that must comply with existing national, regional, and metropolitan policies. This, in turn, imposes careful planning and balancing between continuity and innovation.

Therefore, studying IUPs may enable us to understand to what extent MCs operate within the framework of the NRRP as innovative metropolitan-scale bodies, in accordance with their original institutional design. This may notably be accomplished by ensuring cooperation and integration among municipalities towards common development strategies, which lies at the core of their innovative mission.

Following the illustration of our conceptual framework and literature review (section 2), the article portrays the reform process and the state of implementation of MCs in Italy (section 3) in order to describe the status quo over which the NRRP has impacted: a piecemeal, uncertain national legislative process, structural deficit in resources, and decentralised regional implementation have contributed to diverse paths of consolidation and unequal levels of policy capacity. Section 3 also describes what we expect to be a window of opportunity for a new wave of institutionalization: the funds and the rules of Integrated Urban Plans (IUPs) within the framework of NRRP provide MCs with the resources and the opportunity to deploy a consolidation strategy and generate a quasi-experimental setting by impacting all MCs similarly and simultaneously. Section 4 presents the three cases we selected and the empirical analysis of how they have responded to the challenges of IUPs and how the institutional legacy has impacted on their agency and their capacity to exploit the window of opportunity. In the final sections we present and discuss our findings, which point to significant diversity based on legacy: IUPs helped strengthen existing paths of institutionalization and fostered strategic consolidation where this was lacking.

2. Conceptual framework and hypothesis

This article draws its conceptual framework from the extensive literature on institutionalization (March & Olsen, 1984; Hall & Taylor, 1996), with notable reference to research that uses concepts from neo-institutional theory to analyse the building of MCs as entities of metropolitan government and governance (Lefèvre, 1998; Fedeli, 2017; Vinci, 2019).

The application of institutional theory to local government and governance has proved useful in recent decades in describing the interplay between formal rules and legislative reforms, on the one hand, and the socio-political dynamics of change and persistence in power structures on the other (Lowndes, 2005). While not necessarily constituting a conceptually consistent, operational theory for empirical research, "tools from the new institutionalism seem particularly well suited to analyzing [...] patterns of change and continuity within local governance" (Lowndes & Wilson 2003, 279): they allow researchers to focus on how actors engage with the "rules of the game", which include formal, juridical norms and authority, as well as unwritten customs, cultural codes, and embedded capacities; they are particularly well suited to describe and analyse complex institutional environments, where multiple levels of government and multiple fora of decision-making interact in defining roles and logics of action; finally, they elicit questions that touch upon the dialectical relationship between continuity and change through the use of concepts such as adaptation, path-dependency, and context-dependency (*ibidem*).

Reference to these theories in the analysis of metropolitan governance is not new: there are numerous examples of their use to question local and metropolitan government reforms and the diversity of implementation processes and outcomes, which can vary both in terms of degree of institutionalization and of the shape and content of the governance structure (Blatter, 2006; Hulst & Montfort, 2007).

In neo-institutionalist studies of processes of consolidation of new metropolitan bodies, prominent independent variables include the enabling role played by existing traditions of cooperative attitudes among local political elites, as well as policies aimed at overcoming municipal fragmentation through inter-communal practices (Heinelt & Kübler, 2005; Heinelt & Zimmermann, 2011; Le Lidec 2018, 97-98). These have consolidated in territories where élites are characterized by political homogeneity as well as – though less frequently – where, despite belonging to different parties, they are able to overcome partisan barriers to enhance supra-municipal strategies and services. Such legacy has been a driver for metropolitan authorities' consolidation since not only does it help newly established metropolitan governments to inaugurate and then manage their functions in a smooth and effective manner but, by helping to develop trust among local actors, it also contributes to their legitimization (Jouve & Lefèvre, 2002; Demazière et al., 2022), which is a considerable factor for their success. Case studies, hence, emphasize the relevance for metropolitan institutionalization of previous governance arrangements and experiences of intergovernmental collaboration among municipalities, as well as informal practices of exchange and partnership between local authorities and stakeholders (Mikuła et al., 2024). This has occurred, for instance, in Lyons (*ibidem*; Ben Mabrouk & Jouve, 2002; Le Lidec 2018, 98), Hanover, and Rhine-Neckar (Heinelt & Zimmermann, 2011). On the contrary, in territories where new

metropolitan entities did not inherit this legacy of cooperation, they faced a more difficult path in proving as effective protagonists of local governance, as happened in Frankfurt Rhine-Main (*ibidem*) and Paris (Le Lidec, 2018) or, until recently, Lisbon (Gonçalves et al., 2023) and Poznań (Mikuła et al., 2024).

Scholars in this field have also developed indicators to measure local governments' institutional performance and political capacity (Putnam, 1993; Cole & Pasquier, 2015; Pasquier, 2016), autonomy (Lefèvre, 1998), and institutional sustainability (Bolgherini, 2015). With partly different interpretations and operationalizations, all these concepts describe different aspects of institutionalization, insofar as they refer to the degree to which metropolitan institutions have succeeded in establishing themselves as effective policy actors and as contexts of action that influence other actors, not only in terms of their formal prerogatives but also in terms of their ability to shape strategies and expectations. For example, territorial identity factors linked to the metropolitan rather than the municipal dimension, or interest representation networks acting on a metropolitan scale, are not mere indicators of organizational or legal-formal consolidation but can have equally concrete effects in the exercise of metropolitan powers.

In addition to organizational continuity and consolidation, the neo-institutional theory also makes it possible to study change or, at least, the dynamics with which organizations and institutions react to external shocks or stresses. In this sense, the study of the impact of the NRRP's rules and procedures on local political-administrative behaviour and logic of action references a well-established literature on the Europeanisation of Italian institutions (Ferrera & Gualmini, 1999; Fabbrini et al., 2000; Fargion et al., 2006).

Based on this literature, our research question is whether and how the funding provided by IUPs in the framework of NRRP has contributed to the institutionalization of MCs and to what extent the legacy of previous local governance experience and early implementation of metropolitan government reform has influenced their capacity to exploit such window of opportunity. Our hypothesis is that, in an institutional context characterized by uncertainty and ambiguities, as will be illustrated in section 3, different legacies lead new institutions (MCs) to divergent paths of consolidation.

The article therefore examines how different MCs have tackled the challenge of formulating IUPs as a process of innovative policymaking, where uniform NRRP rules have been applied to entities that not only are different in their geographical, demographic, and economic dimensions, but especially in their institutional legacy, as it will be illustrated in the next section. To this purpose, we conducted our analysis on both primary and secondary sources in a sample of three MCs: Bologna, Milan, and Reggio Calabria (see section 4 for a discussion of case selection). First, we analysed a series of documents (reports, working papers, proceedings, and deliberations) published by these cities before and during the process of drafting and adopting IUPs. Second, we held several interviews with key informants (Table 1), aimed at observing roles performed by the different actors of the process. The full list of documents and interviewees is available in the Appendix.

Table 1. Empirical analysis.

Interviewees	N.
Metropolitan and municipal elected officers	7
Metropolitan officials	4
Municipal officials	2

Source: own elaboration. Note: Statutorily, metropolitan officers can only be elected among municipal ones. Therefore, interviewees in the first category can provide information from the perspective of both metropolitan and local governments.

3. Metropolitan Cities in Italy and the opportunity of the NRRP

Within the frame of territorial reorganization policies, which developed in Italy in the 1990s (Law No. 142/1990), the creation of Metropolitan Cities by the Law No. 56 of 2014 (known as 'Delrio law' after its promoter) was welcomed as a significant novelty: Italian metropolitan areas (Figure 1), where 36 percent of the population resided (Table 2), could finally have their own government, thus overcoming their delay in comparison to other European countries (Zimmermann & Feiertag, 2022), and implementing Article 114 of the Constitution which - following constitutional law No. 3/2001 - had already included MCs among the territorial entities that compose the Italian Republic. Sardinia and Sicily – both special autonomous regions – followed on and introduced further MCs. The final picture of this reform is presented in Figure 1 and Table 2, which show the location of MCs in the Italian peninsula and their basic geographic, demographic, and economic data.

Figure 1. Metropolitan Cities

Source: www.tuttitalia.it/citta-metropolitane/mappa/

Table 2. Italian Metropolitan Cities: geographical, demographic, and economic features.

	Area (km2)	Population	Population density (2020, km2)	Value added per capita (2021, current €)	Per capita income (2021) €
Bari	3.863	1.226.784	318	20.990,6	11.100
Bologna	3.702	1.010.812	274	38.244,2	18.060
Cagliari	1.248	421.688	338	25.697,7	13.270
Catania	3.574	1.077.515	301	17.554,9	9.080
Florence	3.514	987.260	289	35.143,7	15.930
Genoa	1.838	817.402	449	31.798,0	16.910
Messina	3.266	603.229	185	17.244,4	10.440
Milan	1.575	3.214.630	2.058	53.816,7	19.750
Naples	1.179	2.988.376	2.533	18.362,7	8.990
Palermo	5.009	1.208.991	241	18.117,7	9.450
Reggio Calabria	3.210	522.127	163	16.773,4	9.380
Rome	5.363	4.216.874	789	34.766,9	15.530
Turin	6.830	2.208.370	325	30.784,7	15.990
Venice	2.473	836.916	341	28.305,4	14.960

Source: Istat (http://dati.istat.it/), own elaboration.

However, MCs originated in a different form than envisaged by Law No. 142/1990, as they replaced the former Provinces, taking over their boundaries, apparatuses, and functions – consisting mainly of territorial planning, urban mobility, suburban roads, and maintenance of school buildings. The concomitance between the establishment of the MCs and the contextual reform of the Provinces, which the Delrio Law downsized due to their planned (but failed) abolition[1], penalized the consolidation of the MCs. As a result, the latter have struggled to find their own institutional identity within the complex and fragmented frame of Italian local government (Zimmermann & Feiertag, 2022). The choice of ex-provincial boundaries for the delimitation of metropolises has hampered the MCs' strategic mission of territorial development as they do not always coincide with the actual metropolitan area, often excluding relevant urban territories or including nonurban, sparsely populated, and peripheral areas (Vinci, 2019). Moreover, the ownership of ex-provincial functions has raised doubts surrounding the innovative nature of MCs, which have often been perceived as a revival of the old and "useless" Provinces according to the political debate of that time (Fedeli, 2017; Zimmermann & Feiertag, 2022). Furthermore, in line with the reform of the Provinces, the Delrio Law devised the status of MCs as second-tier governmental entities, thus weakening their political role. In fact, they were created as aggregations of the municipalities of the

[1] The so-called "Renzi Reform", a constitutional revision that included the abolition of the Provinces, was later approved by Parliament but rejected in a 2016 referendum.

former Provinces with political bodies that are not directly elected by citizens but expressed by these municipalities, which have to exercise metropolitan functions in cooperation with each other. Indeed, the Delrio Law conceived MCs as governance entities rather than government entities and called them to coordinate the activities of the municipalities in metropolitan-scale policies without assuming a hierarchical position over them. Finally, on a financial level, MCs were equated with the still-existing Provinces, sharing drastic cuts in central transfers, also given the severe economic and financial crisis Italy was facing at that time[2]. Such a contradiction – i.e. MCs' being financially downsized just when they needed solid financial support in their start-up phase – has not facilitated the consolidation of MCs as innovative metropolitan entities (*Ibidem*).

The expected innovativeness of MCs mainly concerns their function in strategic planning for territorial development. As required by the Delrio Law, MCs must develop (and regularly update) a Metropolitan Strategic Plan (MSP) that calls for a metropolitan development strategy as the master vision of the area's future in terms of socioeconomic, urban, and local development. This strategy must be negotiated and co-decided with all the territory's institutional actors and stakeholders through participatory political practices (Fedeli, 2017). In drafting, approving, and implementing the MSP, each MC is responsible for directing and coordinating municipal policies toward a common metropolitan development strategy. The Delrio Law also requires that municipalities adopt a metropolitan-scale territorial plan (MTP) that refers to communication facilities, utility networks, and infrastructure to support this strategic development.

Such an innovative and priority mission was later combined with other wide-scale functions inherited from the former Provinces with varying arrangements depending on the reorganization policy enacted by the Regions, which have the power to redistribute the ex-provincial functions and took their time to proceed (Bolgherini et al., 2016; Simoncini & Mobilio, 2016; Camera dei Deputati, 2017; Zimmermann & Feiertag, 2022).

To high demographic, geographical, and economic heterogeneity (Table 2), the MCs soon added institutional diversity stemming from their different legacy and paths of consolidation (Table 3). Some successfully approved both the MSP and MTP within a clear framework of assigned functions, while others accumulated a delay likely to undermine their operability. With reference to metropolitan governance, as the new strategic mission of MCs, the high variability of associative practices already in place among municipalities (Unions) affected the possibility of coordination in metropolitan policymaking, facilitating it in territories already accustomed to inter-municipal cooperation.

Such a strenuous and uneven process of consolidating MCs was also hampered by the scarcity of funding, given the phase of financial austerity that Italy was facing, at least up to 2018, when new national programs were launched, offering consistent funds for local development projects. The first program consisted of a call to redevelop urban suburbs (*Bando Periferie*) promoted by the Prime Minister's Office, followed by the Innovative Plan for Housing Quality (*PINQuA*), launched by the Ministry of

[2] Since the Monti government (2011-2013), Provinces and (since 2014) MCs have experienced gradual cuts in central government transfers, totaling more than € 5 billion; see: www.camera.it/temiap/documentazione/temi/pdf/1129942.pdf?_1652783065031.

Infrastructure and Sustainable Mobility. Both addressed local government with main, but not exclusively, reference to MCs. However, only a few MCs succeeded in these opportunities (Table 3). As a summary of the context in which Italian MCs were entrusted with NRRP funds and actions, Table 3 displays some indicators of the legacy of institutional and administrative capacity exhibited by them prior to the introduction of IUPs.

The financial opportunities for the MCs improved significantly with the NRRP, which provided the necessary funding to develop IUPs. More specifically, in fall 2021, alongside other NRRP schemes aimed at regional and local authorities amounting to € 12,330 million, Italy's government earmarked € 2.49 billion to MCs to finance the Integrated Urban Plans. Resources were granted according to MCs' respective population and an Index of Social and Material Vulnerability. Another € 210 million was added by the national government, and a further € 370 million was provided by local authorities.

Since Law 56/2014 precisely assigned MCs the "purpose" of "caring for the strategic development of the metropolitan area", IUPs represent an unprecedented opportunity as to the extent of the investment, the involvement of all MCs, and the recognition of their innovative mission. The aim of IUPs, in fact, consists of transforming vulnerable territories into smart and sustainable ones, particularly by mending urban and peripheral fabrics and bridging infrastructural and mobility deficits. In particular, IUPs are meant to tackle urban decay and infrastructural and economic underdevelopment by promoting the renovation of public areas and the redevelopment of public buildings aimed at fostering social, cultural, and sporting activities, as well as reducing CO2 emissions. A governmental decree issued in November 2021 (DL n. 152/2021) specified that IUPs should enable innovative and integrated urban regeneration, amounting to over €50 million each, and be fully realized by June 30th, 2026. March 22nd, 2022 was set as the deadline for MCs to submit their proposals. Within this legislative framework, all MCs prepared IUPs and obtained the allocated funds: 31 IUPs were submitted and approved by the central government in April 2022[3].

In brief, the Delrio law designed MCs as ambiguous bodies. They are intended as innovative entities focused on strategic planning and metropolitan governance. Yet, their boundaries coincide with ex-provincial ones rather than with their 'functional' areas (Crivello & Staricco, 2017). In addition, their ruling bodies are made up of municipal elected officers, potentially making the MCs subordinate to or, at least, depending on the municipalities' will for their effective functioning. Moreover, the final definition of their functions was subject to regional legislation reorganizing inherited provincial functions. The 2010s financial austerity additionally weakened MCs' capacity with harsh financial cuts. Against this background, the NRRP has offered MCs the first effective prospect of launching and implementing their own strategies thanks to substantial funding. In fact, the IUPs align with one of the basic functions with which the Delrio law entrusted MCs, i.e., strategic planning. Moreover, the NRRP established

[3] While the decree envisaged the possibility of private contributions, the intervention of start-ups in the public utilities sector, and the co-drafting of projects with NGOs, due to the time constraint, this eventually turned out to be wishful thinking. In fact, the IUPs that were approved by the central government in April 2022 include no revenue from private sponsors or public-private partnerships, and a sizable local contribution only in a few MCs.

homogeneous procedures and mandatory deadlines for adopting and realizing IUPs. For the first time, MCs have been facing a pressing challenge, which, at the same time, provides them all with the resources to fulfill the mission for which they were created (strategic planning). This breaks with the legal and financial uncertainty that MCs had experienced for years after their establishment. Therefore, as regards our analytical framework, IUPs can be depicted as an extraordinary window of opportunity for MCs.

Table 3. Italian Metropolitan Cities: institutional features and legacy.

	Municipalities in Unions	MSP - strategic plan adopted before IUPs	MTP - territorial plan adopted before IUPs[4]	Previous successes in calls for bids: Bando Periferie[5]	Previous successes in calls for bids: PINQuA[6]
Bari	12%	-	-	✓	✓
Bologna	89%	2013 (1st) July 2018 (2nd)	May 2021	✓	✓
Cagliari	56%	-	-	-	-
Catania	12%	-	-	-	-
Florence	69%	April 2017	-	✓	
Genoa	46%	April 2017	Yes	-	-
Messina	54%	-	-	-	-
Milan	8%	May 2016	May 2021	✓	
Naples	3%	October 2020	-	-	-
Palermo	77%	-	-	-	-
Reggio Calabria	6%	-	-	-	-
Rome	20%	-	-	-	✓
Turin	57%	May 2018	-	-	✓
Venice	23%	December 2018	Yes	-	✓

Source: Istat (http://dati.istat.it/), own elaboration.

4. Case studies

To investigate the impact of the NRRP on MCs' roles and consolidation, we selected three cases that differ on demographic and economic grounds, considered according to the conventional indicators displayed in Table 2, as well as on other dimensions: the North/South divide, which is still the main factor of heterogeneity amongst MCs (Capello et al. 2023, 98), and – in accordance with our conceptual framework – the legacy

[4] Both Genoa and Venice MCs opted for formally reapproving the already existing provincial territorial plans, instead of setting up new ones.

[5] DPCM 6 December 2016, *Approvazione della graduatoria del Programma straordinario di intervento per la riqualificazione urbana e la sicurezza delle periferie, di cui al decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri 25 maggio 2016*. (GU Serie Generale n.4 del 05-01-2017).

[6] DM Ministero delle Infrastrutture e della Mobilità Sostenibili, October 2021.

of institutional and administrative capacity, with data in Table 3 illustrating the relevant indicators. In fact, as summarised in Table 4, the three MCs differ in their ability to adopt the statutory tools of metropolitan planning, portraying a different capacity to play their own innovative role. Moreover, they vary in their degree of success in national calls for bids in urban regeneration and housing, the most relevant national funding aimed at MCs before IUPs were introduced. Lastly, the extent of voluntary municipal aggregation in sharing governmental functions through the establishment of formal Unions also diverges in the three territories, pointing to varying legacies of cooperative practices among local governments.

Table 4. Analytical dimensions in the selected cases.

	Inhabitants (rank)	Population density (2020, km2) (rank)	% of Municipalities in Unions (rank)	added value per capita (2021, € PPP) (rank)	Strategic plan (rank of date of adoption)	New MTP (rank of adoption)	Previous successes in calls for bids
Bologna	8th	11th	1st	2nd	1st	1st	YES
Milan	2nd	2nd	12th	1st	2nd	1st	YES
Reggio Calabria	13th	13th	13th	14th	-	-	NO

Source: own elaboration.

While being among the lowest places on demographic and economic dimensions, Reggio Calabria can be characterized as a laggard in the implementation of the provisions of the Delrio law concerned with its strategic mission. Bologna and Milan clearly stand out as the frontrunners by leading the process of adopting strategic planning tools and demonstrating the ability to seize previous financial opportunities. Both have recently innovated physical planning as well, with new territorial plans. Nevertheless, Milan and Bologna show different legacies as far as the capacity of aggregation among municipalities is concerned. This is poor in the Lombard city, despite the high number of municipalities (see Table 2). Incidentally, this case backs the argument offered by Hulst and van Montfort (2011), who assert that the pressure on local authorities to provide for coordination and planning through cooperation is lower when there is a strong intermediate tier of government with formal competences, resources, and willingness to coordinate local policies or to establish regional plans, as the Milanese provincial government did (see below in this section).

To sum up, homogeneous goals and rules together with sizable funds have been played out by the NRRP on MCs with divergent legacies of institutional and administrative capability. The following paragraphs summarize how the selected cases have managed the process of drafting and adopting IUPs, while section 5 will centre on the path of consolidation they have been experiencing in facing this challenge.

4.1. Bologna

The MC of Bologna was established in 2015. However, a bottom-up experience of metropolitan governance was already in place, based on voluntary cooperation among

municipalities with the support of the then-province (Gabellini et al., 2017). This experience, which predated the Delrio Law, led to the approval of a metropolitan strategic plan (MSP) as early as 2013, creating a favorable ground for the new MC to act (Zimmermann & Feiertag, 2022). The MC of Bologna was designed as a lean governmental entity that was primarily responsible for its strategic planning mission (CM Bologna, 2017a; Interviews 2, 5). It inherited provincial functions but had a special status based on joint agreements with the Region to perform tasks consistent with its new institutional mission (CM Bologna, 2015; Camera dei Deputati, 2017). This gave way to the consolidation of an innovative metropolitan body, which soon led to the approval of a renewed MSP (2.0) in 2018 open to citizens and negotiated with stakeholders (CM Bologna, 2018b; Interview 5; Zimmermann & Feiertag, 2022).

In relation to the window of opportunity offered by the NPRR, the MC elaborated a unitary IUP that stands out by embracing a specific strategy of territorial development, known as "Metropolitan Knowledge Network. Greater Bologna" (CM Bologna 2022a, 2022e). It consists of a unitary vision based on MSP 2.0, which is articulated into 4 macro-projects and 19 policy actions that are all integrated among one another and based on previous participatory processes open to stakeholders (Interviews 1, 4, 5). The overall plan costs € 173 billion, and it resulted from an intensive joint decision-making process between the MC, the 55 municipalities, and the 7 Unions of the area (CM Bologna, 2022e). The role played by the MC in the planning process was one of upstream direction, based on both the metropolitan plans that were already in place and the consolidated practice of cooperative governance (Interviews 1, 2, 5).

More specifically, the Metropolitan Strategic Plan 2.0 and the Metropolitan Territorial Plan (MTP), a new version of the one elaborated by the Province in 2004 (CM Bologna 2020), guided the entire process by directing the municipalities and Unions in their submission of proposals and, at the same time, enabling the MC's selection of integrated projects (Interviews 1, 4, 5). These plans and processes denote the MC's remarkable planning capacity, partly a legacy of the former Province that had already experimented with innovative forms of supra-municipal planning (Gabellini et al., 2017; Interviews 2, 3).

The consolidated practice of cooperative governance comes from a long history of municipal associationism that eased the MC's coordination in the IUP planning process (CM Bologna, 2021b, 2022a). The high rate of territorial integration in the area, where 89.1% of municipalities are associated with one another in Unions (Table 3), facilitated a close dialogue between the MC and the local governments, also thanks to the representation of the Presidents of the Unions in the Bureau of the MC, an institutional innovation provided by Article 32 of the Bologna Metropolitan Statute (CM Bologna, 2016a, 2016b, 2018a). A fruitful exchange among all the governmental entities involved in the process was also favored by the political homogeneity of the territory (CM Bologna, 2022b), with 76% of the municipalities, including the Capital City, governed by the same political majority (center-left parties, mainly the Democratic Party). Finally, in the planning process of the IUP, the MC also made use of the experience that had been gained through its participation in the national programs *Bando Periferie* and *PINQuA*, which enabled it to obtain funding totaling € 103 million (CM Bologna 2017b, 2022c; Interview 5).

Such an integrated, cooperative, and consensual context allowed the MC, through a Commission specially established, to select the 4 macro-projects that composed the IUP out of the 66 proposals submitted by the municipalities and their Unions without producing any conflict (Interviews 1, 4, 5). The selected projects - one by the Capital City, one by the Municipality of Imola, and two by the Union of the Apennines - were in line with the strategic objectives that, in compliance with MSP 2.0, the MC deliberative bodies (i.e., the Mayor and the Metropolitan Conference) had chosen as being consistent with the urban regeneration innovative goals required by the NRRP (CM Bologna, 2022d; Interviews 1, 2, 4).

Projects that were not selected but still fell within the framework of the MSP 2.0 were brought to the attention of the Steering Committee for NRRP and European funds, that the MC had established in partnership with the Capital city, and most of them were found eligible for other forms of funding (Interview 5). The MC did not submit any project proposals of its own, thus limiting itself to a behind-the-scenes directorial role in line with its governance institutional mission, i.e., a governmental entity that stands alongside municipalities and their Unions without playing a hierarchical role (Interviews 1, 3, 5).

4.2. Milan

In respect of the legacy, the Milanese MC inherited a consolidated political-administrative strategic capacity from the old Province. It features a long history, dating back to the 1960s and revamped since the 1990s, of large-scale spatial planning (Vinci, 2019; Zimmermann & Feiertag, 2022), i.e. efforts to build a vision, a "shared image" and "narrative" of the territory (Pasquier, 2016), made up of several voluntary cooperation processes surrounding the need to plan for the future of the territory. The MC was among the first to approve its new strategic planning tools (CM Milano, 2019). In contrast, institutionalized cooperation at the municipal level (Unions) is scarce due to the relatively high average population of its municipalities: 14.133 inhabitants excluding the city of Milan. Thus, in recent years, the MC has activated a series of initiatives to support Municipalities in personnel recruitment, the preparation of tender notices, and participation in European calls. Furthermore, it has built its own capacity throughout the planning and implementation of large-area projects. In fact, it has participated in national tenders (such as *Bando Periferie* and *PINQuA*) since 2016 and has been awarded €73 million for the regeneration of several areas. These ventures have been understood as opportunities to implement the metropolitan strategy of territorial regeneration and have political and bureaucratic personnel learn how to network projects and information between Municipalities and the MC (Interview 3).

With regard to metropolitan functions, instead of designing a lean entity focused on core statutory tasks, a regional law dated 2015 reassigned functions that had been previously exercised by the Province entirely to the MC, with the sole exception of agriculture and hunting. By doing so, it confirmed the MC's status as a government body with its own undertakings of making and implementing policies and services in many fields. Moreover, the law enhances the institutional role of the MC through the establishment of the permanent Region-Metropolitan City Conference as a joint

institutional forum for the coordination of objectives of common interest (Camera dei Deputati 2017, 246, 259, 267).

Against this background, in the making of IUPs, the MC, on the one hand, operated as an autonomous government entity in developing and later carrying out one entire IUP concerned with sustainable mobility through long-distance cycleways (CM Milano 2022c). On the other hand, it was capable of taking up a role of direction, and not one of mere collection, of local projects in drafting two other IUPs focused on flood risk reduction (CM Milano 2022b) and territorial regeneration (CM Milano 2022a). Through a process of participation and sharing with the municipalities both at informal and formal levels[7], the institution has been able to integrate local projects into broader strategies, to achieve some of the objectives that had been set in its own planning. This involved a targeted selection based on criteria established by the MC itself (CM Milano, 2021b), of the projects that had been advanced by municipalities: 34 were selected out of 347 proposed for the IUP on regeneration.

The main exception consists in a further IUP (CM Milano 2022d), which is entirely delegated to the city of Milan – that has the full capacity to both design and carry out its own plans – and to which almost 40% of the total budget is allocated, in proportion to the city's population; this plan is nonetheless coherent with the Metropolitan strategy on regeneration (Interviews 1, 3, 4).

It is worth stressing that all this was accomplished in a phase of uncertainty for the MC, characterized by a political vacuum that was solved only on 19 December 2021, when the elections for the new Metropolitan Council were held after the start of the IUP drafting process. Thanks to collective political leadership involving both the outgoing and the newly appointed (in January 2022) delegates, together with the top management, the institution has therefore proved itself capable of steering local projects and connecting them to metropolitan-scale strategies (Interviews 1, 3).

In brief, the window of opportunity offered by the NRRP, combined with the "strategic elaboration" legacy and "capacity of the MC, has made it possible to intercept and finalize a series of interventions on which the municipalities individually do not have the means to intervene" (Interview 2).

Nevertheless, particularly due to tight time constraints, the process showed limitations, with the remarkable absence of public and stakeholder participation in promoting and selecting projects on one side, and the missing supra-municipal dimension of the projects on the other (Interviews 1, 3, 5). In fact, projects drafted by single municipalities (no Union did so) are all exclusively concerned with their territory. This manifestly confirms the legacy of relatively scarce inter-municipal cooperation in the MC's territory.

4.3. Reggio Calabria

The MC of Reggio Calabria is characterized by a predominantly mountainous and sparsely populated territory. It comprises 97 municipalities, with an average population of just 5.000 inhabitants, and its capital is peripheral to the territorial structure.

[7] See https://www.cittametropolitana.mi.it/portale/news/conferenza/Conferenza-metropolitana-16-dicembre-2021-ore-15/ and https://www.cittametropolitana.mi.it/welfare_metropolitano/progetti/PNRR-Piani-Integrati/

Furthermore, a significant infrastructure deficit places a quarter of its municipalities in the "ultra-peripheral" category of the government's national cohesion policy. However, the strong need for coordination and integration that is dictated by this geographic and administrative peculiarity is matched by a legacy of limited inter-institutional collaboration and planning capacity (see CM Reggio Calabria, 2021). Moreover, municipal cooperation is virtually non-existent in the Unions of this territory (see Table 2), and previous planning efforts by the MC were largely ineffective. In fact, its participation in previous tenders, such as *Bando Periferie* and *PINQuA*, was either unsuccessful or led directly by the municipality of Reggio Calabria, and no MSP or MTP had been approved at the start of the IUP's elaboration process (Interview 1; Table 3).

In this case, the establishment of the metropolitan authority occurred later than in other MCs because the capital city was under the responsibility of a commissioner for mafia infiltration. In November 2021, the Mayor was suspended again, due to a conviction in a case of administrative malpractice. The fact that the Calabria Region has not definitively and clearly defined the competencies that are to be transferred to the MC adds to this unfavorable political and institutional landscape for the development of a coherent governance project, thus leaving it in a state of uncertainty in terms of functions and resources (Interview 1).

In this context of structural weakness, delays, and uncertainties, the decision-making process surrounding the Integrated Urban Plan (IUP) was innovative and surprisingly effective. The effectiveness of the process revolved around two institutional bodies: a multi-stakeholder "Steering Committee" ("*Cabina di regia*"), which was established in April 2021 for political direction and coordination purposes (Interviews 2, 3), and the administrative office for Planning, whose personnel was increased and that became the core of the planning functions of the MC (Interview 1). Within a few months, the MC managed to approve the Development and Cohesion Plan, the Metropolitan Strategic Plan, and the IUP (CM Reggio Calabria, 2022a, 2017, 2022e).

The IUP was developed through a dialectical and iterative exchange between the MC and all the municipalities in the territory. The municipalities were convened for an initial meeting to present the call for proposals and discuss some programmatic guidelines that had been approved by the Steering committee. Approximately a month later, during another meeting between the MC and the municipalities, the project idea "Aspromonte in città" ("Aspromonte in the city") was presented. This was followed by a call for projects, in which only aggregations of municipalities adding up to a minimum of five thousand inhabitants could participate. These projects were then discussed and negotiated between the municipalities and the planning office of the MC for inclusion in the IUP based on their adherence to the guidelines and to the goals and strategy of the overall project (Interviews 1, 2; CM Reggio Calabria, 2022e).

Several significant strategic choices were made in the course of this process, such as the definition of an overall strategy – "Aspromonte in città", aimed at "stitching" the mountain (Aspromonte) with the urban and coastal areas – to ensure the coherence of the IUP with the call and its eligibility for funding; the decision to include all of the municipalities in the territory to ensure political consensus and promote the role of the Metropolitan City as a territorial liaison entity; and finally, the choice to compel

municipalities to aggregate to make the IUP more consistent and easily implementable (Interviews 1, 2; CM Reggio Calabria, 2022e).

As a result, 28 projects were identified out of the approximately 50 that were initially proposed by municipalities. Five are directly managed by the Metropolitan City, one by the Municipality of Reggio, and the remaining 22 by *ad-hoc* aggregations of municipalities. These projects largely focus on sustainable mobility and environmental revitalization.

Two critical aspects have emerged from the analysis, both of which seem to stem from the MC's fragile political-administrative legacy. Firstly, there was no listening or co-design activity with social actors (businesses, third sector, etc.) and only the presence of stakeholders in the "Steering Committee" allowed for a discussion on general guidelines with a selection of representative organizations. In addition to the strict timelines dictated by the government, this lack of co-design can also be attributed to the limited institutionalization and weak legacy of strategic planning that characterize metropolitan territorial governance. A second critical aspect is related to the lack of project detail, which, according to the gathered testimonies (Interviews 1, 2, 3), will impact its implementation capacity. For example, many of the interventions involve the creation of infrastructure for which no long-term management plan is in place.

5. Discussion

The previous section illustrated that the three MCs have followed different ways in taking advantage of the window of opportunity provided by the NRRP. In Bologna, the metropolitan authority has assumed a pivotal role in a governance arrangement characterized by the presence of established networks and collaborative culture among municipalities. As a result, the MC fully undertook a recognizable and coherent wide-area strategy on whose basis local projects have been selected and integrated with one another to make up the city's sole IUP. In Milan, IUPs that are decidedly top-down coexist with loosely integrated multi-project schemes. Thus, the MC still appears to be acting as a governmental authority, asserting itself as a body that is not only focused on discharging its statutory duty in strategic planning but also capable of conceiving and realizing its own projects. In Reggio Calabria, for the first time, the IUP experience itself has made it possible for the MC to take up a strategic role in coordinating and steering local development policies, which was supposed to be its core mission since the establishment of MCs, although with a weak integration of projects.

Therefore, as far as our hypothesis is concerned, the IUP processing turned out to be affected by previous metropolitan planning experiences, with notable reference to, on the one hand, the MSP and MTP as strategic master plans negotiated with stakeholders and, on the other hand, to metropolitan regeneration policies financed by the national programs *Bando Periferie* and *PINQuA*. This was evident in the cases of both Bologna and Milan, where pioneering legacies and established practices were found to be just as capable of enhancing the role of MCs. In continuity with its own legacy, the former city has deepened its mission of a strategic body capable of integrating interventions and projects into a single strategy involving multiple municipalities, with the MC playing the director. Milan displays a more mixed image of an entity that is both able to produce (to then execute) its own plan and willing to delegate to municipalities the drafting and

carrying out of further plans, although coherent with its own MSP. Instead, in Reggio Calabria metropolitan regeneration policies emerge as scarce and weakly joined in its IUP. Nevertheless, this was successfully submitted by the MC, where the MSP, which is the fundamental and required master plan, was not approved until 2022, with the IUP opportunity playing a powerful push factor. As displayed in Table 5, this last point is the main discontinuity with institutional legacies that we have detected.

Table 5. IUPs in selected cases: a comparative overview.

MC	Budget NRRP, €	N. of IUPs	Project selection	MCs' own projects	N. of municipalities involved in IUPs	Continuity with legacy
Bologna	173.068.200	1	4 out of 66	No	2 + 1 Union (4 municipalities)	YES
Milan	287.338.092	4	34 out of 347	Yes (one IUP with 5 projects)	45	YES
Reggio Calabria	118.596.100	1	28 out of 50	Yes (5 projects)	87	NO

Source: own elaboration.

The innovativeness of metropolitan governance in Bologna is influenced by the well-established practice of inter-municipal cooperation (Unions) that is very widespread in the area, an experience that is not shared by Milan and Reggio Calabria, where municipal fragmentation is higher and inter-municipal associationism underdeveloped (see Tables 2 and 3). This must be taken into account in understanding the significant differences in the investigated IUPs: only 6 municipalities (10.9% of the total number – with 4 associated in a Union) receive funds in Bologna, versus 45 (33.8%) in Milan and 87 (89.7%) in Reggio Calabria. High territorial integration, as well as low political and institutional fragmentation in Bologna, have permitted a clearly focused strategy that is less manifest in both Milan and Reggio Calabria. Again, this appears to be consistent with the hypothesis and in line with the literature presented in section 2.

To recap, context-related and legacy variables explain the different paths and solutions that have been adopted by the investigated MCs in the face of the same challenge, that of IUPs. These path-dependent processes are not surprising as, in a timeframe of a few months (November 2021 - March 2022), MCs had to: become familiar with IUPs as a new and mostly unexpected opportunity for them; opt for a metropolitan regeneration and development strategy to prioritize; create a process of co-designing with municipalities; collect and/or process urban projects; assess and select projects through an articulated and complex inquiry, given the size and multidimensional nature of many projects; prepare and submit the IUP proposals to the central government (Ministry of the Interior) for approval. All this had to occur in the absence of a national metropolitan policy with a certain degree of stability and within the ambiguous and uncertain framework provided by the Delrio Law. Therefore, MCs brought what they already had into play, clearly highlighting their different trajectories of development and consolidation to date.

However, the novelty of the experience of Reggio Calabria should be noted once more: the MC seized the opportunity of IUPs to mark a break with its legacy of weak

performance, thus initiating its own institutionalization process. Future studies on IUP implementation will be able to assess whether these diverse patterns are stable, or whether metropolitan governance is destined for new phases of uncertainty.

6. Conclusions

The Delrio Law gave MCs an innovative role but, at the same time, provided for their marked continuity with the former Provinces, while deferring to the discretion of the Regions, which may legislate autonomously on the exact definition of the functions of MCs, and in a time of financial austerity. Within this ambiguous and uncertain framework, we have traced the processes that led three different Italian MCs to elaborate their integrated urban plans to be granted funds from the NRRP. The aim was to understand whether this window of opportunity has led to either converging or diverging trajectories in the route toward their full institutionalization.

In light of the analysis of these cases, we believe that the drafting of IUPs highlights the undeniable capacity of MCs to promote, coordinate, and even direct local policies. In the case of Reggio Calabria, the southern MC in this study, the IUP appears to be a game changer: thanks to it, the MC began playing its own strategic role, which had remained on paper for several years. The strengthening of MCs' role has occurred in varying forms with regard to IUPs. In line with the main findings of the literature we presented as our theoretical frame, the differences can be traced back to the institutional and territorial legacy of MCs, consisting of former Provinces, territorial fragmentation, governance practices, inter-municipal associationism, and administrative capacity. However, the specific legacy of the strategic planning function should also be considered.

This leads us to see signs of emerging divergent models of metropolitan governance in the various cities that are largely, but not ineluctably, linked to their institutional legacy: an innovative and pure governance model in the case of Bologna, where the MC stands alongside and supports the municipalities; a more conservative model in the case of Milan, where the MC retains all the competencies of the former Province and plays an autonomous and partly hierarchical role with respect to the municipalities; a hybrid and still undefined model in the case of Reggio Calabria, which is penalized by the legacy of low administrative performance (cfr. Putnam 1993). However, thanks to the opportunity provided by IUPs, the MC of Reggio Calabria has taken its first steps in strategic planning, thus overcoming years of delay.

To conclude, the window of opportunity that we identified as strategic for the consolidation of MCs has proved effective in pushing them to produce new strategies and/or coherent projects as well as to set up networks, processes, and internal structures for their successful realization. The time pressure, visibility, and legitimization of IUPs as part of the NRRP were fundamental drivers, particularly for Reggio Calabria MC, that seized the momentum and outlined new spatial strategies. However, lessons learned from different legacies of previous experiences in strategic planning, inter-municipal cooperation, and administrative capacity have led the three MCs to varying pathways of institutionalization of their role in local governance.

The change of national government following the parliamentary election of September 2022 – with the Meloni cabinet taking over from the Draghi government that had approved the NRRP – produced, however, further uncertainties in the outlined

framework. In July 2023, after our research was conducted, the new cabinet drafted a proposal for revision of the NRRP to be submitted to the EU Commission, which unexpectedly and abruptly expunged IUPs from funding. Government officials reassured MCs and municipalities that funds would be drawn from other sources to keep IUPs running – after all, most MCs had already started to assign tasks by contract, as required by the original timeline. In March 2024 a ministerial decree (No. 19/2004)[8] was issued that once again included IUPs in NRRP funding with their full original amount. While this new uncertainty does not affect the research presented in this article, it supports our understanding of the persisting ambiguous condition of MCs in Italy: despite the new window of opportunity, they are still in search of stable political and institutional legitimacy.

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[8] See: https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/dossier/pdf/DFP28Rb.pdf

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7. Appendix

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Table A2. Interviews

Interviews MC Bologna
1. Mayor of a municipality and MC executive councillor
2. Municipality Department director and former MC director
3. Municipality Department director
4. Mayor of a municipality, President of a Union, and MC executive councillor
5. MC Department director
Interviews MC Milan
1. Mayor of a municipality and MC executive councillor
2. Department director
3. Service director
4. Mayor of a municipality and MC executive councillor
5. Mayor of a municipality and MC minority councillor.
Interviews MC Reggio Calabria
1. Department director
2. Mayor of a municipality and MC executive councillor
3. Mayor of a municipality and MC executive councillor

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Party Organizational Development: An Analytical Framework

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Abstract

This article aims at defining an analytical framework for the comparative study of party organizations in liberal democracies. By building on a critical assessment of the literature devoted to party organizations, we combine the premises of Comparative Organizational Analysis, Structural Analysis and the rationale of the dimensional approach of the Political Party Database Project. We also provide a parsimonious mathematical representation of our framework to formalize the discursive exposition of our assumptions. The framework is tested on a case study, the Italian political system from 1993 to 2018, which allows for a quasi-experimental analysis of the co-evolutive relationships between the political system and party organizations. Despite the limitations of testing the framework on a single case, the results indicate that the low stability of the laws and regulations of political competition is actually related to a poor level of party organizational institutionalization; at the same time, their intensity seems to be linked to party organizational convergence, in particular concerning party Structures and resources; however, differently from the evidence raised by literature, a high party system fragmentation is not associated to organizational variance.

1. Introduction

Organization Theory and party studies speak rather different languages (Harmel 2006; Borz and Janda 2018). On the one hand, mainstream Organization Theory pays little to no attention to political organizations, as it focuses primarily on actors operating in the public sector, business firms, social movements, and nonprofit entities (King, Felin, and Whetten 2009; Greenwood et al. 2013). On the other hand, party organization scholars rarely build on analytical frameworks derived from Organization Theory, which consists of a multidisciplinary body of contributions derived from sociology, business management and economics (Tsoukas and Knudsen 2005). Already in the early 1980s, Panebianco (1982) noticed that party studies were scarcely interested in the "real nature" of parties as organizations. Similarly, Janda (1983) argued that scholars had rarely investigated the "essence" of party organization. However, these observations remained in the background of party literature.

Despite this mutual disinterest, we argue that the study of party organizations might benefit from a closer relationship with Organization Theory (Husted, Moufahim, and Fredriksson 2022). In parallel, since Organization Theory suffers from a lack of

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comparative analysis (Whetten 2009), providing a framework for the empirical study of organizational development can contribute to enrich this research field.

The aim of this contribution is thus to define an analytical framework focused on the co-evolutive relationships between party organizations and the political system in liberal democracies, by combining the premises of Comparative Organizational Analysis (COA - King, Felin, and Whetten (2009), Structural analysis (Scott 2002) and the dimensional approach put forward by the promoters of the Political Party Database Project[1]. As for COA, we build on an approach whose primary interest rests on the search for a middle ground along the "agency-determinism" continuum of the relationships between the organizations and their environment (Wohlgezogen and Hirsch 2009); Structural Analysis provides the perspective through which we define the concept of party organization and its dimensions; and the rationale of the dimensional approach (Scarrow, Webb, and Poguntke 2017) helps enhancing the theoretical relevance of party organizational variance (Rahat and Kenig 2018), thus challenging the prevailing perspective based on the convergence thesis and party models.

Since our analytical framework works at the system level, we are not concerned with *how* individual parties organize; rather, we focus on *how much parties converge/vary*. Accordingly, party development is conceived in terms of patterns of organizational convergence/divergence, in time, within the same population – and, possibly, across countries.

Despite our enterprise being primarily conceptual, our assumptions are oriented to provide scholars with specific guidelines for comparative empirical analysis. In this respect, we test our analytical framework on the Italian case, by observing the evolution of this party population from 1994 to 2018. Italy has been selected since its political system experienced a huge realignment following the 1992-1993 systemic shock (Harmel and Janda 1994), which brought to the collapse of the so-called First Republic: this allows for a quasi-experimental observation of the organizational patterns followed by the actors that have developed in the decades to come. We acknowledge that the Italian party system represents an outlier in many respects, and that the framework would benefit from a broader comparative testing. Nonetheless, this exploratory analysis allows for a preliminary verification of the robustness of our analytical framework.

The added value of this contribution consists in strengthening the relations between two strands of literature that hardly communicate with each other. Such cross-fertilization can improve the theoretical toolkit of party scholars, to avoid conceptual stretching and ad-hoc definitions of organizational phenomena; as well as the methodological background of organization theorists, who overlook the benefits of the comparative approach.

The article is structured as follows. In section 2 we identify the major flaws of the mainstream literature devoted to party organizations, based on party models. In sections 3 and 4 we lay down the premises underpinning our analytical framework for the study of the relationships between organizations and their environment, while in section 5 we introduce the rationale of the dimensional approach that we privilege, as well as the organizational dimensions considered. In section 6 we formulate and formalize our

[1] See Political Party Database Project: www.politicalpartydb.org.

assumptions, while in section 7 we present our data and methods; in section 8 we test the theory on the Italian case. The conclusions will help summarize our reflections, which are open to further refinement.

2. The study of party organizations

While Organization Theory has somewhat ignored the study of party organizations, this topic constitutes a major strand in Political Science since the beginning of the 20th century. The pioneering works by Ostrogorski and Michels paved the way for a flourishing literature, which was enriched by the contributions of many scholars – to cite a few: Duverger (1954), Kirchheimer (1966), Panebianco (1982), Katz and Mair (1995, 2009; 2018). The study of party organizations has recently been revived by a new wave of research worldwide (Scarrow, Webb, and Poguntke 2017; Borz and Janda 2018; Rahat and Kenig 2018). However, despite the richness of contributions and data, and contrarily to the optimistic arguments posited by Schlesinger (1984)[2], to date there is still a lack of theorizing in this research field (van Biezen 2005). This persistent *vacuum* can be explained as the by-product of some critical factors.

First, the very notion of party organization does not coincide with any shared definition (Janda 1983). It is possible to maintain that party studies implicitly build upon Duverger's assumption according to which, when it comes to party organization, authors mainly refer to its structures and the power relations underlying their functioning (Krouwel 2006). However, this identification does not consider other crucial aspects of party organizations (Sartori 2005), nor it allows to appropriately frame the relationships between the parties and their environment (Harmel and Janda 1994). This led to a proliferation of definitions of party organization and other adjacent concepts (such as organizational building, institutionalization, adaptation, or change), most of which are used uncritically or stretched to a great extent (Harmel and Svåsand 2019).

Second, the study of party organizations cannot be identified with a unitary approach. Party organizations have been investigated through alternative or complementary interpretations, which can be subdivided into at least three major veins (Harmel 2006): the environment-induced change approach, the life-cycle approach, and the discrete change approach. In particular, the mainstream literature is deeply rooted in the first one (Harmel and Janda 1994), based on the identification of a succession of ideal-typical models (Katz 2017; Krouwel 2006)[3]. However, resorting to party models does not allow to effectively address the question of organizational dilemmas and trade-offs, since the approach is flawed by sociological prejudice (Panebianco 1982) or, in Pierson's words, by "societal functionalism" (Pierson 2004). The predominance of this perspective (March and Olsen 2009), which is built upon the assumption that the broader socio-economic, demographic, cultural and technological

[2]In his well-known article On the theory of party organization, Schlesinger (1984, 373) argued that "To say that we lack a theory of party is to overstate the case. Rather, a theory exists embedded in most of our writings on parties, but we seldom see it as a whole".

[3]While the life-cycle approach aims at linking party organizational change to specific stages of party development, the discrete change approach underlines the incremental and limited nature of party organizational change, which is the by-product of both internal and external factors (Harmel 2006).

environment *determines* politics, brought scholars to frame party organizational development simply in terms of adaptation or decline, «sometimes as competing concepts and sometimes as concepts that highlight the different faces of the same phenomena» (Rahat and Kenig 2018, 17).

Third, as the importance assigned to societal pressures has been overestimated (Harmel and Janda 1994), parties' organizational *convergence* has become the focus of the interpretations provided by scholars (Rahat and Kenig 2018; Pizzimenti et al. 2022). Since Western liberal democracies are (supposedly) characterized by similar environmental dynamics (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000), as well as by the same set of pressures coming from the supranational level (Katz and Mair 2009; Caramani 2010), then political parties are expected to look alike. In this vein, cross-country variance has been overlooked to the benefit of generalizations (Rahat and Kenig 2018). However, recent empirical analyses show how party organizations vary indeed (Poguntke et al. 2016; Rahat and Kenig 2018; Masi and Pizzimenti 2022; Pizzimenti et al. 2022).

Finally, while the environment-induced change approach has privileged the isomorphic tendencies linked to extra-political factors, the differences in the features of the political systems have been rarely included among the predictors of party organizational development (Poguntke, Scarrow, and Webb 2020; Masi and Pizzimenti 2022).

Given these premises, we maintain that, with few and outdated exceptions (Panebianco 1982; Janda 1983), party literature has not yet adopted an organizational-oriented perspective, that is, a more fine-grained reflection on party organization *per se* (van Biezen 2005). At the same time, by looking at the party-environment relationships only in terms of organizational adaptation/decline it has not adequately investigated the active role political parties play in shaping the external context. In this respect, Organization Theory may help fill this gap.

3. Organizations and their environment

Organization Theory is a multidisciplinary body of scholarly work interested in explaining organizational structure, performance, and survival, through the development of a general theory and analytical tools that can be applied to all types of organizations (Tsoukas and Knudsen 2005). When looking at the relationships between organizations and their environment, the research focus of Organization Theory has moved over time from a micro-level towards higher levels and units of analysis, along what Wohlgezogen and Hirsch (2009) have defined the "agency-determinism" continuum. At the opposite poles we find unidirectional explanations of the organizations-environment relationships, whether dominated by the actors or by the context. As for the former, after World War II, Comparative Organizational Analysis put forward by R.K. Merton and the Columbia School was the mainstream approach in American organizational sociology: it focused on case studies at unit level, as it was committed to enhance actors' purposive behaviour within organizational structures (King, Felin, and Whetten 2009). Organizations were not just reflections of their environment: rather, internal organizational dynamics were seen to bring to heterogenous strategies and outcomes.

Similarly to the tendencies registered in party studies, however, at least since the 1970s the search for convergence and similarities in organizational phenomena – primary driven by changes in technology, economic forces, standards and ideological drivers (Scott 2008) – has become predominant also in Organization Theory (Di Maggio and Powell 1983; Meyer et al. 1997). In this vein, the emerging macro-sociological strand of research (Boli and Thomas 1997) was built upon the premise that organizations are primarily shaped by the broader socio-cultural environment (Hasse and Krücken 2013). As far as supra-national/globalizing processes of a social, cultural and economic kind had brought nation-states to look alike, cross-country convergence in organizational structures was the expected end-result.

In a similar fashion, according to a meso level interpretation, new-institutional theorists have emphasized how the specificities of different organizational fields (Di Maggio and Powell 1983), organizational populations (Hannan and Freeman 1977) and networks (Granovetter 1985) constitute the main forces pushing towards organizational convergence (or isomorphism). Even recent theoretical debates revolve around the source and types of requirements that organizations have to comply with; however, a renewed interest toward the actual ability organizations show to modify contextual pressures has emerged (King, Felin, and Whetten 2009).

In this vein, Wohlgezogen and Hirsch (2009, 153) suggest to "[...] highlight a move toward the middle ground of the agency–determinism continuum, that is, varieties of interaction and mutual influence between actors and their environments across levels of analysis [...]". This shift brought scholars to reconsider the relationships between the organization-level and the context-level in term of the "mechanisms" that bring to their parallel *co-evolution* (Greenwood, Hinings, and Whetten 2014). In this perspective, organizations are neither isolated, environment-manipulating players; nor passive actors whose profiles and strategies are shaped by external pressures. Instead organizations are considered active forces that deliberately operate to modify their context, in time and space (Aldrich 2009). This co-evolutive approach is well depicted by Wohlgezogen and Hirsch through the "negotiation framework" approach, which is based

> [...] on two operational constructs that can be utilized in empirical research: negotiation space, the context in which actors conceive of and implement action, and negotiation moves, the acts through which actors attempt to define, defend, or redefine their role and realm of options (2009, 162)

The concept of "negotiation" is useful as it focuses on the interactive patterns of co-evolution between organizational behaviors and choices, on the one hand, and environmental opportunities and constraints on the other. Within a specific negotiation space, the focal organizational actors adopt their negotiation moves with regards to the characteristics of the context, whose boundaries are set by the concomitant agency of other relevant players (actors of the same or of a different nature). The contextual forces that enable or constrain actors' negotiation moves influence (without fully determining) their choices, by opening different opportunity windows to organizations. Negotiation moves thus represent the patterns of interactions between the actors and their environment. Organizations' goals, strategies and coordination are the main elements of negotiation moves.

While providing a useful perspective to analyze the organization-environment relationships, the negotiation framework pays scant attention to organizations' structural features. In this respect, it seems promising to enrich the negotiation framework with a more in-depth analysis of organizations' structural heterogeneity/convergence. Structural analysis can be placed in between the traditional rational systems and open systems approach to organizational analysis (Scott 2002). On the one hand, organizations are considered as deliberately built structural projects, whose creation is aimed at pursuing specific goals, through different combinations of strategies and resources; on the other hand, such projects are not conceived in a vacuum since organizations have to comply with a set of contextual requirements, which correspond to the boundaries of their negotiation space (whether legal, institutional, cultural, social etc.). Depending on individual organizations' development, different organizations within the same population adopt different negotiation moves according to their strategies, structures and resources.

4. Political parties as an organizational population

Political parties represent a rather peculiar organizational population. In liberal-democracies, parties are the main collective actors competing to control the representative institutions (von Beyme 1985; van Biezen 2005), which constitute the legitimated source of (re)production of the regulative structures of the polity, that is, the set of laws and regulations that discipline State's organizational fields. Differently from other organizational populations, in fact, parties that access State representative institutions hold the legitimate power to make coercive decisions which are mandatory for the entire polity. While a bulk of theory has focused on the role of parties as *agents* of a third part (the civil society or the State), little attention has been paid to the role played by political parties as *institutionalization agencies*, which subsumes all their other functions, be they representative or procedural (Bartolini and Mair 2001). Parties are crucial institutionalization agencies as they contribute to channel the political conflict within a predetermined framework of accepted regulative structures; and to promote the values and founding principles of the political community, by favoring the persistence or change of those regulative structures in time. Furthermore, differently from other types of organizational populations, political parties are entitled to discipline their own negotiation space (Mair 1997; Katz and Mair 2018). This autopoietic, self-organizing system includes all the rules governing or impacting political competition and party organizations: electoral laws, campaign laws, political finance laws, party laws, as well as media laws, laws on civil association, national Constitutions, administrative rulings, legislative statutes etc.

Political parties should thus be seen as a relatively autonomous organizational population within the broader social system (Sartori 2005; Olsen 2009). Contrarily to the environment-induced change approach, then, parties cannot be considered "solely as reflections of society" (March and Olsen 2009, 4), or the adaptive/declining by-product of "[...] the driving forces of societal development [...]" (Hasse and Krücken 2013, 541). The control over State institutions makes parties - at least the competitive ones (Sartori 1976) - peculiar: and the processes of their organizational development can be considered as primarily (albeit not entirely) associated with factors belonging to their specific negotiation space.

5. The dimensions of party organizations

Since our contribution aims at building bridges between Organization Theory and party studies, we are interested in combining the premises of COA, Structural Analysis and the rationale of the dimensional approach elaborated by Scarrow, Webb, and Poguntke (2017). Poguntke, Scarrow, and Webb (2020) have highlighted how different political-institutional contexts are associated with different patterns of organizational development *despite* possible cross-country similarities in socioeconomic, technological, demographic or cultural factors. Similarly to COA, then, the possibility that parties diverge in their organizational profiles is considered *at least as plausible as* their convergence. Organizational configurations are not predictable *a priori* since, in pursuing its goals through negotiation moves, each organization adopts different strategies and structural templates, being provided with variable resources; at the same time, the patterns of interaction with the other actors may show different degrees of stability, depending on cases.

By building on a rational open system approach (Scott 2008), we consider organizations as entities that are deliberately projected to pursue specific goals, whose achievement is influenced by the types of relationships developed with their environment, with which organizations exchange fundamental resources in order to survive and to reproduce/modify the existing settings. We thus adopt the rationale of the approach put forward by Scarrow et al (2017), even if we opt for a different classification of party organizational dimensions, more in line with Organization Theory. To heuristic aims, we resort to a taxonomy by subdividing organizational dimensions into three classes (*extra-organizational*, *liminal* and *intra-organizational*), which are further split into more specific analytic sub-dimensions. In the following paragraphs, we introduce each item.

5.1. Extra-organizational dimensions

Party organizations move within a specific negotiation space, which we primarily identify with the political system. Political systems differ in terms of their institutional settings (Panebianco 1982; Lijphart 1999), which correspond to the regulative structures disciplining the political competition. We consider the *stability* and *intensity* of the regulative structures, over time, among the main factors associated to party organizational development. As for the intensity, it differs considerably across countries in terms of the "intrusiveness" of party regulation in party life (Piccio 2012; Gauja 2016; Pizzimenti et al 2024). Coming to the stability of the regulative structures, it is a key variable to analyze the predictability of parties' negotiation moves – their patterns of interaction (Harmel and Janda 1994; Mair 1997). Moreover, as recent contributions suggest (Masi and Pizzimenti 2022), the fragmentation of the party system in the electoral, parliamentary, and governmental arena (Bardi and Mair 2008) seems to be in a relation with party organizational dynamics: in fact, in highly fragmented party systems, parties are expected to adopt more variable organizational profiles to stand out from each other. Finally, not all existing parties deserve to be included in the focal population of the party system, since only competitive parties (those parties that are successful in electing their candidates to the Parliament at least once in the analyzed

period – Harmel and Janda 1994) are worth of analysis. Among competitive parties, particular attention must be paid to institutionalized parties (Harmel and Svåsand 2019). Institutionalization is framed as both a process that characterizes the whole organizational development; and as a property of each organizational dimension (Olsen 2009). In the former sense, institutionalization refers to the overall level of stability reached by the organizational configuration; in the latter, it is a variable attribute of each organizational dimension, as parties do not show the same degree of institutionalization along every dimension.

5.2. Liminal dimensions

Party goals constitute an intermediate dimension in between the negotiation space and the organizational boundaries. Goals can be split into two different categories: general, which are common to all organizational forms (*survival, domain selection, autonomy*); and party specific, among which *entering the representative institutions* can be considered the primary goal of this organizational population (Schlesinger 1984; von Beyme 1987).

5.3. Intra-organizational dimensions

Among party strategies, the *intra-party power concentration* — that is the vertical distribution of decision-making powers at different organizational layers – is crucial. In fact, organizations' capacity to act as unitary actors varies according to the extent to which decision-making powers are concentrated at specific organizational layers; or shared between different organs, set at different levels. Parties also adopt different combinations of *incentives* to be distributed among their participants: incentive strategies follow different logics according to the amount and types of resources at parties' disposal. In general, parties tend to recur to all forms of incentives, whether material, symbolic, or implicit (Achury et al. 2020). Finally, *maximizing the role of the party leader* can be conceived as an organizational strategy built upon the personal characteristics of the party top official; while *maximizing intra-party democracy* implies that significant powers are assigned to intermediate party bodies and party members (von dem Berge et al. 2013).

As for structures, parties present variable degrees of *formalization* (Anderson 1968), that is, the set of codified schemes of interaction between their units. This codification is generally disciplined in the party statute and in other related regulations (what is commonly referred to as parties' official history – Katz and Mair 1992). Party *structural differentiation*, instead, recalls the concepts of systemness (Panebianco 1982) and structural articulation (Janda 1980). In this respect, party organs are generally articulated along territorial, functional, dimensional criteria, operational and representativeness criteria.

Finally, organizations must be able to mobilize and employ appropriate amounts of resources to pursue their goals. Resource types are classified into four categories: *human*, *physical*, *financial/economic* and *technical*. *Human* resources refer to all the organizational participants. Further distinctions can be made according to literature: party members, party supporters, party staff, party officials, party top leaders and party

institutional representatives[4]. The *physical* structures where the participants carry out the activities related to the functioning of the organization are generally tailored along spatial as well as institutional criteria (Janda 1980; Panebianco 1982; Deschouwer 2003). The study of party *financial/economic* resources covers crucial aspects of the reflections dedicated to party organization. To our aims it is relevant to identify different types (and amounts) of economic resources managed by parties, thus distinguishing between party revenues and party expenses. Among the former, it is possible to identify grass-roots revenues (voluntary contributions), plutocratic funding (interested money) and public subsidies (law-based direct and indirect funding, when available). Among party expenses, a distinction can be drawn between operational costs (the resources allocated for the ordinary functioning of the organization) and electoral expenses (the amount of resources spent for campaigning). Finally, parties' *technical* resources are mostly concentrated in the fields of communication and propaganda/mobilization (Farrell and Webb 2000; Norris 2002).

6. Assumptions and formalization

Our proposed analytical framework is conceived as a heuristic strategy to identify patterns of possible co-evolution between political systems and party organizations. In line with Harmel and Janda's (1994) discursive scheme, we resort to the concepts previously introduced to elaborate specific assumptions. Even if we are well aware that party-specific intra-organizational dynamics have an impact on individual party organizational development, our primary goal is to define a framework that works at the system level. Our assumptions will thus refer only to the relationships between the political system and the party organizational population considered as a whole. For each assumption we provide a mathematical formalization that can serve as a basis for comparative empirical analysis. For this mathematical formalization, we assume that the time [0, T] under analysis is discrete:

$$[0, T] = \{0 = t0 < t1 < \cdots < tN = T\}.$$

Our assumptions will concern the following seven variables, whose values at time $t \in [0, T]$ will be denoted as follows:

Stability of the regulative structures: ST(t);

Intensity of the regulative structures: INT(t);

Party organizational institutionalization: POI(t);

Fragmentation of the party system: FRG(t);

Party organizational profiles: POP(t);

Party structures: PStr(t);

Party resources: PRes(t).

The specification of each measurement will be provided in the next section. If Q is any of these measurements, Var(Q)(t) will denote the variance of Q at time t. While we assume that all competitive parties share the same general and specific goals, we

[4]See van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke (2012) and Achury et al. (2020) for party membership; (Bardi, Calossi, and Pizzimenti 2017) for the party in public office; (Farrell and Webb 2000; Webb and Kolodny 2006) for party staff.

maintain that political parties adopt and implement different combinations of strategies, structures and resources, which enable them to operate within their negotiation space. The features of the political system are relevant since they have a cross-cut impact on parties. Parties operating in a stable framework of rules are expected to show higher levels of organizational institutionalization. This entails that the higher the stability of the political system, the higher the share of institutionalized parties on the total number of competitive parties. Consequently, our first assumption is the following:

> A1: *The stability of the regulative structures and party organizational institutionalization are in a positive correlation.*
>
> For all i, j ≤ N, St (tj) –St (ti) ≥ 0 if and only if POI (tj) –POI (ti) ≥ 0.

In a similar fashion, also the intensity of the regulative structures is expected to have an impact on party organizational development: party populations that are subject to higher levels of regulation are expected to show low organizational variance, as regulative structures act as homogenizing agents. It follows that:

> A2: *A high intensity of the regulative structures corresponds to low variance in party organizational profiles.*
>
> For all i, j ≤ N, Int (tj) – Int (ti) ≥ 0 if and only if Var(POP) (tj) – Var(POP) (ti) ≤ 0.

Parties that are not subject to intense public regulation are provided with higher degrees of freedom in adopting their organizational templates. Even if the topic is still underdeveloped at the empirical level, according to the literature (Piccio 2012; Casal Bértoa, Piccio, and Rashkova 2014; Pizzimenti, Piccio, and Masi 2024), party structures and party resources are more likely to be impacted by law; while party strategies are more dependent on individual party attitudes and organizational culture. Therefore our fourth assumption is:

> A3: *A high intensity of the regulative structures corresponds to low variance in party structures and resources.*
>
> For all i, j ≤ N Int (tj) – Int (ti) ≥ 0 if and only if Var(PStr) (tj) – Var(PStr) (ti) ≤ 0 and Var(PRes) (tj) – Var(PRes) (ti) ≤ 0.

Finally, besides regulative structures, the fragmentation of the party system can be considered another relevant factor impacting on party organizational development. In fact, fragmented party systems are expected to be characterized by tendencies towards organizational divergence, as parties have more incentives to adopt distinctive organizational profiles (Masi, Pizzimenti 2022). This entails that:

> A4: *The fragmentation of the party system and variance in party organizational profiles are in a positive correlation.*
>
> For all i, j ≤ N, FRG (tj) – FRG (ti) ≥ 0 if and only if Var(POP) (tj) – Var(POP) (ti) ≥ 0.

7. Data and methods

Our analytical framework will be tested on the Italian case through a diachronic analysis that covers the period 1993-2018. The Italian case is particularly fit for the study of party

organizations, since the country was invested by a systemic shock between 1992 and 1994, according to the criteria identified by Harmel and Janda (1994): several factors of both exogenous and endogenous nature radically transformed the established political system (Jones et al. 2015; Pizzimenti 2020). The magnitude of the systemic shock thus allows for a quasi-experimental observation of the patterns of party organizational development in the following 25 years. We acknowledge that testing our analytical framework on such an extreme case could lead to drawing limited conclusions about its external validity. However, the Italian case represents a valuable exploratory testing ground: the analytical framework's focus on the co-evolutive relationships between the political system and party organizations, as well as its parsimony, makes it easily applicable to a large gamut of liberal-democracies.

Table 1. Analyzed documents

Party	Statutes	Balance Sheets
PDS-DS	1991; 2005	1994; 2005
PPI-DL	1995; 2006	1995; 2006
PD	2015	2015
FI	1998; 2004; 2017	1998; 2004; 2017
AN-FDI	1995; 2006; 2018	1995; 2006; 2018
LN	1998; 2002; 2015	1998; 2002; 2015

Source: own elaboration.

The process of continuous modifications that have characterized the evolution of the Italian party population brought us to include only those parties that show continuity to some extent, and their mergers: PDS-DS; PPI-DL; PD; FI; AN-FDI; LN (see the Appendix for party full names). To assess the level of party organizational variance, we resort to an in-depth analysis of the official story (Katz and Mair 1992; Smith and Gauja 2010) of the analyzed parties, which has been integrated with data on voters derived from official sources (https://elezioni.interno.gov.it/) and membership figures drawn from secondary literature (Bardi et al 2007; Pizzimenti 2020). The total number of statutes analyzed is 14 (see Table 1). The study of the official story of political parties (Katz, Mair 1992; Scarrow et al 2017) has often been considered controversial: most of the criticisms deny the possibility to get a realistic picture of the "actual" dynamics of party life. However, although statutes, programs, and balance sheets do not consent to an all-encompassing analysis, they represent valuable sources for comparative studies (Smith, Gauja 2010; Katz 2017). Knowing the official story of a party is a precondition to assess the validity of the information gathered through other sources. Moreover, party statutes can help identify the horizontal/vertical distribution of organizational powers between party organs and party layers: they are the "map" which condenses the representation of intra-party authority, the degrees of freedom accorded to party articulations, the role assigned to party members etc. (Poguntke et al 2016).

In Table 2 we report the analyzed dimensions, which have been selected according to our premises. For each dimension, we identify a number of sub-dimensions, the related indicators and indexes as well as the range of their values (see Appendix for more details). As for the sub-dimensions pertaining to the dimension "Political System", *Stability* (ST) is calculated as the ratio between the number of reforms in the laws and regulations disciplining the political competition and the number of years covered by the

analysis considered: the values range from 0 (no reform) to a possibly infinite number of reforms. The *Intensity* (INT) of party regulation is measured by assigning a score to the sources of law in force, ranging from 0 (No regulation) to 6 (Highest Intensity) – see Appendix for details. We measure *Party System Fragmentation* by resorting to 3 indicators drawn from the secondary literature: Electoral Fragmentation (EFRG), Parliamentary Fragmentation (PFRG) and Governmental Fragmentation (GFRG) – see Siaroff 2019. We also calculate a general Fragmentation Index (FRG) as the mean value of the 3 indexes. Looking at the *Focal Population*, we consider as "institutionalized" (INS) a party that, over a timespan corresponding to 3 national elections, has not significantly altered its organizational order (Arter and Kestilä-Kekkonen 2014). We also include in our analysis the total number of parties contesting each election in the period and the number of Competitive parties, that is the number of parties winning seats to the Chamber of Deputies in each election.

Table 2. Dimensions, sub-dimensions, variables, indexes and indicators

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Variable	Range
Political system	Stability of the regulative structures	ST: (N°Reforms/N°Years)	0 - ∞
	Intensity of the regulative structures	INT: EL+PFL+PL+PC	0-6
	Focal population	N° Competitive Parties/Tot parties	0-1
		N° Institutionalized parties/Competitive parties	0-1
	Party system fragmentation	Electoral Fragmentation (EFRG)	0-1
		Parliamentary Fragmentation (PFRG)	0-1
		Governmental Fragmentation (GFRG)	0-1
Party Organization	Strategies	Intra-Party Power Concentration Index (PCI)	0-1
		Party Leader Maximization (PLM)	0-1
		Intra-party Democracy Maximization (IPD)	0-1
		Incentives (INC)	0-1
	Structures	Formalization Index (FORM)	0-1
		Structural Differentiation Index (SD)	0-1
	Resources	Human (M/V)	0-1
		Financial (Public Funding/Total Party Income)	0-1
		Technical (Electoral Expenses//Total Party Income)	0-1

Source: own elaboration.

Coming to "Party Organization", *Party Strategies* are registered through 4 variables. Intra-party power concentration concerns the distribution of power at different party layers. Here, in line with the methodology adopted by Pizzimenti and Calossi (2018; 2020), we combine the level of ex-officio involvement of regional representatives in the party national organs with the level of autonomy assigned to the party regional organs (see Appendix), to obtain an index of power concentration (PCI) ranging from 0 (the highest the role played by the national organs) to 1 (the highest the powers and autonomy assigned to the regional organs). The maximization of the role of the party leader (PLM) and the maximization of the intra-party democracy (IPD) are calculated by resorting to a number of variables (see Appendix), measuring the powers and prerogatives of the party highest representative; and members' involvement in leader and candidate selection: both indexes range from 0 (parties with a weak leadership and low levels of intra-party democracy) to 1 (parties with a strong leadership

and high levels of intra-party democracy). Coming to incentives (INC), we analyse the level of membership openness, that is the role and powers assigned to members and other possible rank-and-file figures such as sympathizers or supporters: this is calculated by resorting to 6 indicators (See Appendix): the index ranges from 0 (closed membership) to 1 (open membership). As for *Structures*, formalization corresponds to the codified schemes of interaction between party organs, which are measured through 8 variables (see Appendix) whose values range from 0 (poor formalization) to 1 (high formalization); structural differentiation identifies the level of complexity of party organs, analysed through 5 variables (See Appendix) ranging from 0 (low differentiation) to 1 (high differentiation). Finally, concerning party *Resources*, we have included indicators for all the relevant sub-dimensions but physical resources, since available data are neither complete nor reliable for most of the parties in our sample. As for human resources we resort to the Members/Voters ratio; economic resources are calculated resorting to the ratio between party public funding and party total income; while technical resources are measured through the quota of funds allocated to electoral campaigning on party total income.

8. Empirical analysis and findings

As Table 3 shows, in the 25 years following the 1992-1993 systemic shock, the registered value of ST stands in the lower half of the range (ST = 0.44). Differently from the past 45 years, during the so-called Second Republic the electoral laws at all institutional levels were reformed, and even the law disciplining national elections was modified three times. Moreover, the continuous changes in the party funding regime (7 significant modifications were approved by the Parliament) has been described as a process of "normative layering" (Pizzimenti 2017) – whereby new norms were laid over the old ones.

Table 3. Regulative structures stability and party organizational institutionalization

Period	ST	INT	A Total parties (Mean Value)	B Competitive parties (Mean Value)	C Institutionalized parties (Mean Value)	B/A	C/B
1994-2018	0.44	4	38.4	8.4	2.6	0.25	0.31

Source: own elaboration.

In parallel, the number of institutionalized parties looks very limited, both in absolute terms and in relative terms (as calculated on the number of competitive parties). At the 1994 election, none of the parties that won seats to the Chamber of Deputies could be considered as institutionalized according to our criteria. In 2018, none of them existed any more, except for FI (that had temporarily merged with AN, from 2009 to 2013) and LN[5]. In line with our assumption A1, then, a rather low level of stability of the regulative structures of political competition is accompanied by a low share of institutionalized parties on the number of competitive parties (0.31).

[5]The PRC was one of the parties that won seats in 1994: however, since the party ceased to be competitive in 2008, we opted not to include it in our sample.

We now point to the intensity of party regulation. The value is consistent (INT=4), even if the overall regulative framework is far from univocal. On the one hand, despite the Italian Constitution (art. 49) recognizes explicitly parties' fundamental role for democracy (Piccio 2012), Italian parties have always been disciplined as private associations. However, the recent Law 13/2014 on party funding introduced a form of party regulation (in terms of party registration as well as of controls on party statutes) as a pre-condition to access indirect public funds. According to scholars (Allegri 2020), this reform has to some extent implemented the constitutional provision concerning the "democratic method" that should inform intra-party dynamics.

Having ascertained that, from 1994 to 2018, the stability and the intensity of the regulatory framework ran in parallel to a poor institutionalization of the party population, we now point our attention to the level of party organizational variance (Table 4), to verify the assumed existing relationships between INT and variance in party organizational profiles (A2 and A3).

Table 4. Party organizational sub-dimensions

	Strategies				Structures		Resources		
	PCI	PLM	IPD	INC	FORM	SD	M/V	PF/TOT	ELEC/TOT
Mean	0.47	0.63	0.15	0.45	0.50	0.45	0.05	0.55	0.23
St. Dev	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.33	0.05	0.09	0.03	0.16	0.21

Source: own elaboration.

In Table 4 we report the values registered along each sub-dimension. We first focus on party Strategies. The mean value of PCI shows that, on average, Italian parties adopted moderately regionalized organizational templates: in this respect, the variance in party organizational choices, at the population level, looks modest. By focusing instead on the maximization of the role of the party leader (PLM) and the maximization of the intra-party democracy (IPD), our indexes show that the parties in our sample have, on average, empowered their leaders while limiting the bottom-up selection of both candidates to national elections and the top party position: also in these cases, it is possible to register an all in all limited variance. On the contrary, coming to incentives (INC), party organizational variance is significant (St. Dev: 0.33) with the mean value set at 0.45 – that is an organizational profile in which party boundaries are somewhat closed. Also concerning Structures and Resources party variance is limited. As for the former, the values of both formalization and structural differentiation indexes are set in the middle of both scales, with practically no variance; as for the latter, variance is higher concerning the indicator measuring the quota of the party income devoted to electoral expenses. According to A2, these findings seem to confirm that higher regulative intensity corresponds to lower levels of party organizational variance – despite some exceptions, in line with the rationale of the dimensional approach.

Table 5. Party organizational dimensions and party organizational profile

	Strategies	Structures	Resources
Mean	0.43	0.48	0.28
St. Dev	0.21	0.07	0.13

Source: own elaboration.

Next, coming to our assumption A3 – which affirms that high levels of intensity of the regulative structures makes variance in party structures and resources to diminish – it is possible to observe (Table 5) how variance is actually higher concerning party *Strategies*, thus confirming that parties tend to converge more along their Structures and Resources[6].

Lastly, with regards to the fragmentation of the party system (Table 6), it is possible to observe how the reforms adopted in these decades failed to achieve their main objectives – namely, to diminish the electoral and parliamentary fragmentation. Moreover, during the whole period, the number of parties in government ranged from 2 (in 2018) to 8 (in 2000): while the First Republic was a "frozen" political system, where the parties in government were more or less the same through different combinations, the new patterns of competition emerged in 1994 brought to a significant alternation.

Table 6. Regulative structures intensity and the fragmentation of the party system

Period	EFRG	PFRG	GFRG	FRG
1994-2018	0,8	0,8	0.49	0.7

Source: own elaboration.

However, no relationship seems to exist between the fragmentation of the party system and party organizational variance, thus refuting our assumption A4 and in contrast to the evidence that emerged in recent comparative analyses (Masi, Pizzimenti 2022).

9. Conclusive remarks

The study of parties and Organization Theory have rarely talked to each other. The aim of this article was to contribute to fill this gap. In this respect, our primary goal was to define a basic analytical framework focused on the co-evolutive relationships between party organizations and their environment in liberal democracies, by combining the premises of Comparative Organizational Analysis, Structural analysis and the dimensional approach put forward by the promoters of the Political Party Database Project. We built our framework around the concepts of dimensional convergence and divergence, in time, enabling a fine-grained analysis of party organizational development at the system level. We tested four assumptions, concerning seven sub dimensions of the political system and party organization, on a rather peculiar case: the Italian party system between 1993 and 2018. The Italian case is particularly interesting, as it provides a quasi-experimental research design as a consequence of the systemic shock suffered by the political system and the party population in 1992-1993. Our data tend to confirm our assumptions, except for A4: an unstable regulatory framework of the political competition actually co-evolves with poorly institutionalized party organizations; at the same time, the rather high intensity of the regulations disciplining the political competition correspond to a tendency to organizational convergence, despite divergence emerges along a (limited) number of dimensions – a finding that

[6]For each dimension, the index is calculated as the mean value of the scores reported along each sub-dimension.

corroborates the validity of the dimensional approach. In this respect, party Strategies represent the dimensional cluster that shows higher variance compared to both Structures and Resources – which is consistent with the comparative literature in the field. On the contrary, the evidence raised through the empirical analysis concerning the assumed existing relationship between party system fragmentation and variance in party organizational profiles contradicts the recent comparative findings: probably, while fragmentation constitutes a structural feature of the Italian party system since 1948, the increased intensity of the laws and regulations disciplining the political competition in the last decades had a predominant impact on party organizational choices.

All in all, the "exceptional nature" of the Italian case – as assumed by the literature – seems to be mitigated to some extent. Also, testing the robustness of our analytical framework on a single case limits our ability to generalize our results, which would benefit from a larger comparison: in this respect, our analytical framework could be further refined, to include other dynamics of the relationships between political systems' features and party organizational development. However, even as it stands now, it shows some potential to explain party development.

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Appendix

Table A1. Parties included in the analysis

Partito Della Sinistra / Democratici di Sinistra (PDS / DS)
Partito Popolare Italiano / Democrazia è Liberta (PPI / DL)
Partito Democratico (PD)
Forza Italia (FI)
Alleanza Nazionale (AN)
Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)
Lega Nord (LN)

Source: own elaboration.

Table A2. Variables and indexes

Stability – ST = Number of Reforms/Number of Years
Intensity – INT = Electoral law + Party Funding Law + Party Law + Party Constitutionalization

- Electoral Law = 0
- Party Funding Law = 1
- Party Law = 2
- Party Constitutionalization = 3

FOCAL POPULATION

- Number of Competitive Parties/Total parties
- Number of Institutionalized parties/Competitive parties

FRAGMENTATION

- Electoral Fragmentation (EFRG) (Siaroff, 2019)
- Parliamentary Fragmentation (PFRG) (Siaroff, 2019)
- Governmental Fragmentation (GFRG) – Average number of parties in government

PARTY ORGANIZATION[7]
Strategies

- Intra-Party Power Concentration Index (PCI) = (Involvement + Autonomy)/2
    - Involvement of regional representatives in national organs

  Coding

  0 – No rules in the statute about the body composition
  1 – Only regional delegates
  2 – Partially composed of regional delegates with voting rights
  3 – Partially composed of regional delegates without voting rights
  4 – No regional delegates, which can still be invited/consulted
  5 – Only national delegates
  6 – No involvement, the function is performed exclusively by leadership and/or direct membership consultations

  Variables

  - Leadership selection body composition
  - Candidate selection body composition
  - Electoral strategies drafting body composition
  - Executive body composition

[7] After coding, all values have been recalculated to have a 0-1 interval for all variables.

- Autonomy of regional organs at the regional level

Coding

0 – No autonomy, the function is performed exclusively by leadership and/or direct membership consultations
1 – Only national delegates/representatives
2 – Partially composed of national delegates/representatives with voting rights
3 – Partially composed of national delegates/representatives without voting rights
4 – No national delegates, which can still be invited/consulted
5 – Only regional delegates
6 – No rules in the statute about the body composition

Variables

- Leadership selection body composition
- Candidate selection body composition
- Electoral strategies drafting body composition
- Executive body composition

- Party Leader Maximization (PLM)

Coding

0 – No
1 – Yes

Variables

- Presence of more than one leader
- Party leader has exclusive representation of the party
- Party leader has the power to summon the party congress
- Party leader has the power to summon the party executive organ
- Party leader has the power to decide on party organizational structure
- The party leader nominates his own cabinet
- The party leader manages the party name and symbol
- The party leader authorizes the deposit of candidates lists and symbol

- Intra-party Democracy Maximization (IPD)

Which body has the final say in selecting leadership/candidates

- Leadership selection
  1. Party congress
  2. Highest executive organ
  3. Another national body
  4. Party Leader
  5. Party Members
  6. Semi-open primaries
  7. Open primaries
- Candidates selection
  1. A sub-national body
  2. A national body
  3. A specific body for this function
  4. Party leader
  5. Closed primaries
  6. Semi-open primaries
  7. Open primaries

- Incentives (INC)
  - Party statutes recognize a separate level of formal affiliation with reduced obligations and reduced rights (for instance, party "friend" or "registered sympathizer"). This does not include members with reduced dues but full rights, such as reduced fees for young people or unemployed.
    0. Only members
    1. Members and sympathizers
  - Presence of a register for non-members
    0. No
    1. Yes

- Is it possible for an individual to join the national party directly?
  0. No
  1. Yes
- Are there temporal limits to membership?
  0. No
  1. Yes

Structures

- Formalization Index (FORM)
  Coding
  0 – Not mentioned in party statutes
  1 – Only mentioned
  2 – Partly disciplined
  3 – Disciplined in detail
  Variables
  - Objectives/Preamble
  - Party symbol
  - Membership
  - Basic units
  - National governance
  - Sub-national governance
  - Management of finances
  - Guarantee bodies
- Structural Differentiation Index (SD)
  - Number of layers
    [Number]
  - Does the statute calls for a party secretary?
    0. Yes
    1. No
  - Does the statute calls for a party president?
    0. Yes
    1. No
  - Number of executive organs at the national level
    [Number]
  - Number of administrative organs at the national level
    [Number]

Resources

- Human
  - Members/Voters
- Financial
  - Public Funding/Total Party Income
- Technical
  - Electoral Expenses//Total Party Income

Source: own elaboration.

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The Politicization Effect of the Environment Issue in Labour Claim-Making: The case of Italy

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Abstract

Drawing on the Italian case, this article demonstrates how labour organizations strategically leverage environmental issues to politicize their claims when necessary. Italy serves as a critical case due to its strong tradition of trade union protest mobilization. This study argues that, given the rising prominence of environmental concerns in public debate, environmental issues have not only revitalized environmental movements but have also reignited labour conflicts, with some stemming from the adverse consequences of the environmental transition paradigm. The article combines the recent perspective of social movement unionism with the older "political exchange" theory developed by Alessandro Pizzorno and proceeds in two phases. First, through a protest event analysis based on an original dataset, it statistically demonstrates that the use of environmental issues in claim-making is associated with four indicators of politicized claims: coalitional coordination, social inclusion, a repertoire of actions extending beyond striking, and the generalization of claims. In the second phase, the study reconstructs a case of labour conflict in the automotive sector, offering a qualitative examination of the underlying mechanisms that drive this association.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, environmental concerns have steadily ascended to the forefront of public consciousness, becoming a pivotal issue in political discourse worldwide (Leiserowitz et al. 2022, Antronico et al. 2020, Beltrame, Bucchi and Loner 2017). The increasing visibility of climate change effects, such as extreme weather events and rising sea and river levels, has elevated public concern for the health of our planet. This surge in ecological awareness is reflected in the growing demand for sustainable practices and policies (Bumann 2021).

The politicization of climate and environmental concerns has advanced through various avenues: growing public concern over climate change, heightened focus in public discourse, political party agendas increasingly oriented towards ecological issues, and state-led collaborative efforts towards environmental transition. At the heart of this shift, social movements have been pivotal, advocating at the grassroots level for an immediate and equitable ecological transition (Imperatore and Leonardi 2023; Reichel, Plüschke-Altof and Plaan 2022, Hoberg 2021).

Many social movement scholars have focused their analyses on climate justice movements like Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, Last Generation, and other similar youth movements (della Porta and Portos 2023, Skovdal and Benwell 2021,

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Reichel, Plüschke-Altof and Plaan 2022). However, it is only occasionally (Andretta and Imperatore 2024, Imperatore and Leonardi 2023, Velicu and Barca 2020), and particularly when considering the Global South (Almeida, González Márquez and Fonsah 2023, Imperatore and Leonardi 2023, Bell 2020), that authors acknowledge the significant role of workers and labour organizations in environmental struggles.

This article focuses on workers' protest mobilization to illustrate how the politicization of the climate crisis has not only revitalized the environmental movement but also has the potential to rekindle labour conflicts, some of them arising from the negative consequences of the environmental transitions paradigm (Kleinheisterkamp-González 2023, Bell 2020, Velicu and Barca 2020). In this article, I will demonstrate that in the last two decades, worker protest mobilizations in Italy have contributed to the politicization of environmental issues by strategically framing part of their struggles as environmentally concerned.

In the first part of this article, I will sketch the theoretical framework on which I will draw my empirical analysis. I argue that the prevailing literature, which often highlights a conflict between labour and environmental concerns (Kalt 2021), and, by extension, between workers and environmentalists (Nebbia 2012), predominantly addresses conflicts of interest that surface during standard bargaining interactions within industrial relations. On the contrary, shifting attention from industrial relations to protest mobilization often reveals the emergence of a distinct 'working class environmentalism', sometimes even based on a radical transformative and democratic vision.

To fill this gap, I advocate for a synthesis of the industrial relations framework with social movement studies, drawing particularly on Alessandro Pizzorno's 'political exchange' theory (1978) and the concept of 'social movement unionism' (Trongone 2022), as already proposed by other authors (Pilati and Perra 2023, della Porta et al. 2023). This integrated approach leads to what I call the 'politicization' hypothesis of the environmental issue. I will, then, outline the methodological approach of the analysis, which employs a mix of quantitative and qualitative tools, and dedicate two sections to the empirical analysis.

In the first section, utilizing a unique dataset of protest events from 1994 to 2021, I test the 'politicization' hypothesis and demonstrate that trade unions, when incorporating environmental issues into their protest claims, are more likely to act as socially inclusive social movement unions. In the second part, I will delve into the in-depth case study analysis to illustrate this politicization mechanism. I will do so by examining a specific workers' mobilization in the automotive sector in Italy: the GKN workers mobilization against collective layoffs in Campi Bisenzio, Florence. Here, I seek to show that - due to the central role of the climate crisis frame in public opinion and in the social movement landscape - workers grappling with collective layoffs justified in terms of costly production adaptations to ecological transition standards may strategically choose to transcend the environmental/job dilemma. This strategy not only serves as a means to mobilize structures, people, and public opinion to achieve the immediate goal of job preservation but also plays a crucial role in a profound symbolic and meaning-making effort aimed at constructing a new collective identity and integrating environmental concerns into a broader framework of justice. The mobilization of GKN workers serves as a compelling example of how workers, faced with insufficient power within the

industrial relations system, leverage the environmental issue to politicize their claims effectively. GKN workers engaged with the local territory and civil society organizations, expanding their network by collaborating with other labour disputes and social movements, including students and ecological groups. Initiatives such as the "Insorgiamo tour" and participation in national strikes and demonstrations were instrumental in this effort. Furthermore, they played a key role in forging a new collective identity that integrates social and environmental concerns. In the conclusions, I will summarize the empirical evidences of the article, elaborate on their theoretical and political implications and suggest some venues for future research.

2. Environmentalism and workers: between collective bargaining and social movements

2.1. Workers against environmentalists or environmentalist workers?

Many scholars have pointed to the systematic recurrence of the labour/environment conflict: "the history of 20th-century environmentalism is ridden with conflicts between environmental activists and workers, which have compromised any possibility for political alliance in many cases" (Barca 2019, p. 5). Applying a rational choice perspective, the conflict at hand can be attributed to the competing interests of various actors and the high stakes involved in the transition and reindustrialization policies that are necessary to adapt production systems and address the pressing need to mitigate environmental degradation and contrast climate change. Companies can use their power to opt out to strongly influence the workers' perception of their interests, by forcing them to choose between job security and reducing the environmental and health impact of their production (Barca 2012).

In this context, trade union strategies regarding environmental policies depend on the costs that workers would face, determined by the level of exposure of their sector to industrial restructuring, and can range from open opposition to green policies to a more collaborative approach with institutions aimed at achieving a "just transition" (Kalt 2021; Snell 2018).

Recent studies seem to confirm that claims about just transition in labour and environmental movements are pitted against each other, with important consequences on transition policies (Kalt 2021).

However, when scholars describe labour as resistant to changes in production and their work in view of more general interests, such as the environment or future generations, they are actually referring to the positions of trade unions within the framework of collective negotiations, as required by or requested for the governance of the ecological transition (Andretta and Imperatore 2024). In such bargaining processes, the rule is the mutual adjustment of partisan interests (Lindblom 1959), and the interests at play in this bargaining structure range from "those of decent and fairly paid work [...], to 'ecological' interests, [...] [such as] do not poison the population through productive activities," to those of entrepreneurs "to derive a profit from the money invested in producing goods through human labour" (Nebbia 2012).

2.2. Environmentalism and the politicization of labour claim-making

Despite this interests-based proposed analysis and its implication for the labour-environment relations, the contribution of workers to the 'ecological spring' has been observed at all levels worldwide (Obach 2002; Räthzel and Uzzell 2013; Wang and Lo 2021). Starting from the 1960s and 1970s, in parallel with the explosion of consumption production and the expansion of the industrial districts which led to unprecedented levels of environmental degradation and pollution, workers and labour organizations did begin to actively question the relationship between production and reproduction, between labour and nature in many western industrialized countries (Bell 2020, Andretta and Imperatore 2024).

Examples of how workers and working-class communities have mobilized beyond their 'natural' interests in job safety and reproduction, overcoming ecological versus distributive conflicts, can be traced back to that period (Imperatore and Leonardi 2023).

The struggle of residents—primarily workers—in the Love Canal neighbourhood in 1972 is one of such efforts. They mobilized against the toxic waste deposited by the Hooker Chemical Company, a crisis that escalated after a flood which forced the evacuation of 800 families. Additionally, multiple mobilizations against the siting of hazardous waste disposal landfills in predominantly Black working-class communities contributed to the coining of the term *environmental racism.* Similarly, the concerted efforts of workers and trade unions in heavily polluting industries, such as the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers' Union (OCAW), have aimed to protect both workplace conditions and environmental well-being, ultimately leading to the emergence of the concept of a "just transition."

The case of Italy is very interesting in this respect, as it represented an important laboratory, with struggles and practices connected with the ecology-labour nexus in highly noxious and labour-intensive production plants such as those in the automotive sector (in particular in major automotive industries, e.g. former Fiat), in the chemical-pharmaceutical industry (e.g. Farmitalia, close to Turin) or in the petrochemical sector (e.g. Montedison in Porto Marghera, near Venice). In these contexts, the workers started a radical mobilization against the harm understood both as the capitalist authoritarian organization of work (Feltrin and Sacchetto 2021) and the negative externalities coming from production, and achieved important outcomes such as the improvement of living conditions in the workplace, the *Statuto dei Lavoratori* (Workers' Statute, Act 300/1970), the reform of the national health system (Marchetto 2014) and a partial democratization of the industrial relations.

The link between workers' interests and ecology was also found evident in the Global Justice Movement – emerged worldwide in the late 1990s (della Porta et al. 2006), in parallel with the acceleration of environmental devastation as a function of the globalization process (Räthzel and Uzzell 2013). This transnational movement, questioning neoliberal globalization, integrating North and South countries' struggles and claiming for a more democratic 'glocal' governance of the socio-economic processes, has – in fact – put at the core of its master frame the link between environmental, social justice and democracy (Andretta 2005). Again, in Italy, the Global Justice Movement was notable for its comparatively more effective integration of social and environmental concerns through a network that bridges trade unions and environmental movements, making it

a recognized model for social movements across Europe and globally (della Porta et al. 2006).

Although the economic crisis has compelled Italian trade unions to focus their mobilization mostly on social concerns (Andretta 2018, 2022), the subsequent decade saw the climate issue becoming central in public discourse (Imperatore and Leonardi, 2023), providing labour movements with new opportunities to politicize their mobilization efforts around environmental issues.

The most recent and arguably significant example is the mobilization of GKN workers in Campi Bisenzio, who since July 2022 have been protesting against the collective layoffs proposed by the plant's owner. They have effectively linked their job insecurity issues with broader concerns about social and climate insecurities, incorporating both aspects into their demands (Andretta and Imperatore 2024).

By acting as social movements, then, sometimes workers expand their utility function to include additional elements that could potentially conflict with their established interests, somehow solidified or 'frozen' within the system of industrial relations, and – or because they are - 'protected' by trade union organizations through bargaining exchanges. According to Alessandro Pizzorno (1978, p. 279), this is more likely to happen when workers need to "threat the withdraw of the wider consensus or social order" because they cannot "threat the withdraw of continuity of work" or find it insufficient to acquire "the goods they need". In this case, workers politicize their actions by connecting their economic demands with broader societal concerns, expanding their range of actions, and collaborating with non-labour organizations (Pilati and Perra 2023). As a consequence, "the structure of occupations and of productions" is not necessarily any longer the sole "criteria by which collective identities may be identified" (Pizzorno 1978, p. 280). New collective identities may emerge, which challenge or transform labour organizational identity and "this will constitute another factor distorting the simple pursuit of the maximisation of immediate gains for the members by the union apparatus" (ibid.).

2.3. A social movement unionism approach: argument and hypotheses

In the previous two sections, I presented the argument that:

a) The perceived conflict between labour and the environment arises within the established patterns of worker's claim-making in industrial relations, particularly when workers' interests are perceived to be at odds with environmental policies and their advocates.

b) Conversely, a form of 'working class environmentalism' develops when labour mobilization evolves into a social movement, which then redefines workers' interests through the process of collective identity (tras)formation.

By drawing on Alessandro Pizzorno's political exchange theory, I interpret the second scenario as being driven by a politicization mechanism, resulting from a shift of workers' claim-making from the realm of 'collective bargaining' to the broader 'political market.' (for a similar interpretation see Pilati and Perra 2023 and della Porta et al. 2023). This shift redirects the traditional labour action from ceasing work (strike) to challenging the overall social order through expanded forms of protest (extra-strike protest).

The mechanism of politicization is intertwined with the dynamics of social movements, a connection that is clarified when industrial relations are considered in tandem with social movement studies. From this 'bridging' perspective, scholars have increasingly focused on how unions are adapting to the new challenges of neoliberal globalization by revitalizing labour struggles and adopting a social movement posture (see Trongone 2022 for a recent review). This literature underscores trade unions' efforts to mobilize in coalitions with other civil society and social movement organizations to enhance their influence over both the political system and industrial relations (Baccaro et al., 2003).

Fairbrother (2008, p. 214, emphasis added) has reported four characteristics of social movement unionism: a) inclusive 'rank and file mobilization'; b) 'experimenting with collective actions, that go beyond the strike, or workplace limited activities'; c) 'building alliances, coalition building, and extending into the community and beyond'; and d) 'embracing emancipatory politics, framing demands politically, and formulating transformative visions'.

The concept can be used to identify a specific mode of unions coordination similar to social movements (Diani 2018, Pilati and Perra 2023).

My argument is that, given the prominent place of the climate crisis in public discourse and within the realm of social movements, trade unions shifting their claim-making focus from collective bargaining to the political arena is increasingly likely to integrate environmental issues into their demands. To check the empirical validity of this argument, I will test the following hypotheses by drawing on specific dimensions of social movement unionism:

> H1: The use of environmental issues is associated with a coalitional mode of coordination that transcends the labour movement.
>
> H2: The use of environmental issues is associated with socially more inclusive protest mobilization (peripheral actors other than workers themselves are present in the protest event).
>
> H3: The use of environmental issues is associated with forms of mobilization that transcend striking (extra-strike forms of action).
>
> H4: The use of environmental issues is associated with a generalized frame that transcends domestic boundaries by also targeting international institutions.

However, this argument ought to be controlled for by the well-established 'politicization' argument prevalent in social movement studies, which emphasizes the role of political opportunity structures (see della Porta and Diani 2020, cha. 8, for a detailed review).

Political opportunities are reported to influence social movements in various ways: through the availability (or lack) of allies, the inclusiveness (or exclusiveness) of institutional channels, and historical patterns that favour either more responsive or repressive state strategies toward "challengers". Stable factors like political regimes and state centralization tend to explain cross-country protest variations but not changes over time within a single country. More dynamic elements, such as shifts in political power and the influence of allies and adversaries in the political system, are more useful for the purpose of this article. The stance of political allies and opponents plays a significant role in how protest groups act. For instance, leftist parties often ally with progressive movements,

while right-wing parties usually oppose them. When opponents are in power, these groups are more likely to ramp up protest activities, as institutional access is limited. The involvement of political parties in protests is thus contingent on their status within the political system. The counter-argument is then that workers politicize their claim-making either when political parties are involved or in presence of 'hostile' right-wings governments. All the hypotheses will then be checked by considering the presence of political parties in the protest event and the presence of a center-right government at the time of the protest event.

3. Method

In this article, I will employ a dual-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses. The initial phase will involve testing the article's central hypotheses through quantitative methods. Subsequently, I will delve into a qualitative case study to elucidate the mechanisms that support the validated hypotheses.

The quantitative component of my analysis utilizes Protest Event Analysis (PEA), a methodology recognized in the social movements literature for its ability to facilitate cross-temporal and cross-spatial comparisons of protest mobilization. PEA has become an established approach within the fields of social movement and protest studies, providing a systematic framework for comparative research (see Hutter 2014 for a review). Despite the potential biases associated with using newspapers as a source, scholars often rely on them to gather data on protests, especially when studying events over extended periods.[2] Newspaper coverage yields critical information on protest events (PEs), such as the organizing entities, the types of participants involved, the nature and content of their claims, the forms of action employed, protest targets, the scope of the protest, and other pertinent details. This data is categorized using a codebook that specifies variables and coding labels for each attribute of a protest[3]. The collected data are then entered into a matrix, forming the basis for subsequent statistical analysis.

By operatively defining a PE as *a protest episode in which five or more people mobilize through political direct and contentious actions to influence elites decisions and decision making with their claims*, the quantitative analysis of this article is based on data from articles selected from the online version of the daily newspaper *La Repubblica* using the keyword 'protest*'. Among all the articles with 'protest*' in the text or the title, only those referring to PE carried out by more than five people were selected[4].

According to the data gathered between 1994 and 2021, *La Repubblica.it* reported on 6,311 protests in Italy. About one third (2,217) of PE identified have been coordinated by trade unions organization.

Since my goal is to assess the extent to which trade unions use the environmental issue to politicize their claim-making, this analysis will be based solely on trade union protest events. This includes each protest event in which at least one trade union was present as an initiator or co-organizer. I will analyse these data synchronically and test the hypotheses elaborated by means of binary logistic regressions. Information on the variables included in the models is reported in Table 1 below.

[2] For further details, see the methodological note in the appendix section.
[3] The codebook is available upon request to the author.
[4] For further details, see the methodological note in the appendix section.

For the coalitional mode of coordination in H1, I created a dummy variable that is assigned a value of 1 when trade unions protested alongside other civil society or social movement organizations, and 0 otherwise. Regarding social inclusion in H2, I initially differentiated between employed workers with stable employment relationships (insiders) and precarious workers (outsiders) (refer to Pilati and Perra 2023). Subsequently, I created a dummy variable to indicate whether in addition to insiders, outsiders, women, students (or other youth), unemployed individuals, or immigrants were mobilizing in the same protest event. This occurred in 21% of the cases.

For the extra-strike forms of action in H3, the dependent variable scores 1 if other demonstrative forms of action (marches, symbolic actions, sit-ins, or direct actions) are used either in the presence or in absence of a strike (45% of the cases).

Finally, for H4, the dummy variable scores 1 when an international institution or actor is also addressed by the protest (8% of the protest events).

The environmental and democratic issue, the main factor in my hypotheses, is an original variable found to be present in 11% of the protests. Protests on this issue included workers mobilizing against perceived environmental degradation in their workplaces or living areas, targeting pollutants such as asbestos or chemical agents, opposing incinerators and nuclear plants, and advocating for democratic control over their environment.

My control variables include the presence of political parties, which were present in 5% of the trade union protests, and the timing of the protests, with 44% of the trade union protest events in my database occurring during a government supported by right-wing parties (Berlusconi I/1994-1996, II/2001-2005, III/2008-2011, Conte I/2018-2019)[5].

In the following section of the empirical analysis, I will illustrate a detailed case study to explicate the politicization mechanism at play. This will involve a close examination of the mobilization by automotive workers at GKN in Campi Bisenzio (Florence), who were protesting collective layoffs.

The case-study is based on fifteen in-depth interviews with key actors, Facebook posts from the worker's organization, and self-produced political documents. Interviews were reviewed, and extracts related to main themes were manually selected. All Facebook posts from July 9, 2021, to February 2, 2023 (749 posts), were downloaded using the Facebook Graph API. Automatic coding with selected keywords (environment, transition, convergence, conversion) was followed by manual analysis of over 200 posts to identify relevant theoretical aspects. Additionally, self-produced documents on the convergence between workers' struggles and climate justice were collected.[6]

[5] Table 1A, located in the appendix, presents the bivariate correlations among the independent variables. The correlation coefficients are sufficiently low, mitigating any concerns regarding multicollinearity (Hair et al. 2019, Chapter 9). Table 2A, on the other hand, presents the correlations between the dependent variables. The significant Pearson's scores demonstrate that the four hypotheses primarily address the same theoretical argument.

[6] For a more comprehensive analysis of the GKN mobilization and its implications for workers' approach toward environmental concerns and the struggle for a green transition, refer to Andretta et al. (2023) and Andretta and Imperatore (2024).

Table 1. Dependent, Independent and control variables included in the logistic regressions[7]

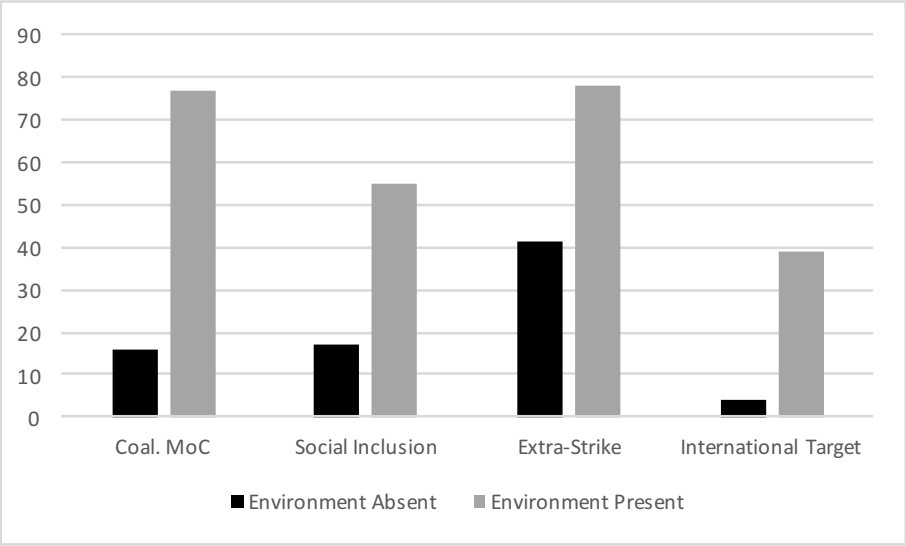
Variables Name	Variables operationalisation	Means and (standard deviations)
	Dependent variables	
Coalitional mode of coordination	1 if besides trade unions other civil society or social movement organizations are present; 0 other	0.22 (0.41)
Social inclusion	1 if besides workers other peripheral social actors are present (women or precarious workers or students or young or immigrants or unemployed); 0 other	0.21 (0.41)
Extra-Strike forms of action	1 if other demonstrative forms of action are used (marches or symbolic actions or sit-ins or direct actions); 0 other	0.45 (0.50)
International target	1 if an international target is present; 0 other	0.08 (0.26)
	Main independent variable	
Environmental issue	1 if an environmental issue is present; 0 other	0.11 (0.30)
	Controlling variables	
Political parties	1 if a political parties is present; 0 other	0.05 (0.22)
Centre-right government	1 if PE happened when a centre-right government was present (including the first Conte government); 0 other	0.44 (0.50)

Source: own elaboration.

4. Testing the politicization hypotheses of the environmental issue

When the hypotheses that environmental issue contributes to political mobilization are preliminarily examined, it appears that approximately 77% of the protest events that included these claims were coalition-coordinated (compared to only 16.2% of protests not focused on environmental issues). Furthermore, around 55% of these events involved other social actors (compared to 17%), 78% featured at least one extra-strike action (compared to 42%), and 39% targeted international institutions (compared to 3.4%) (Figure 1).

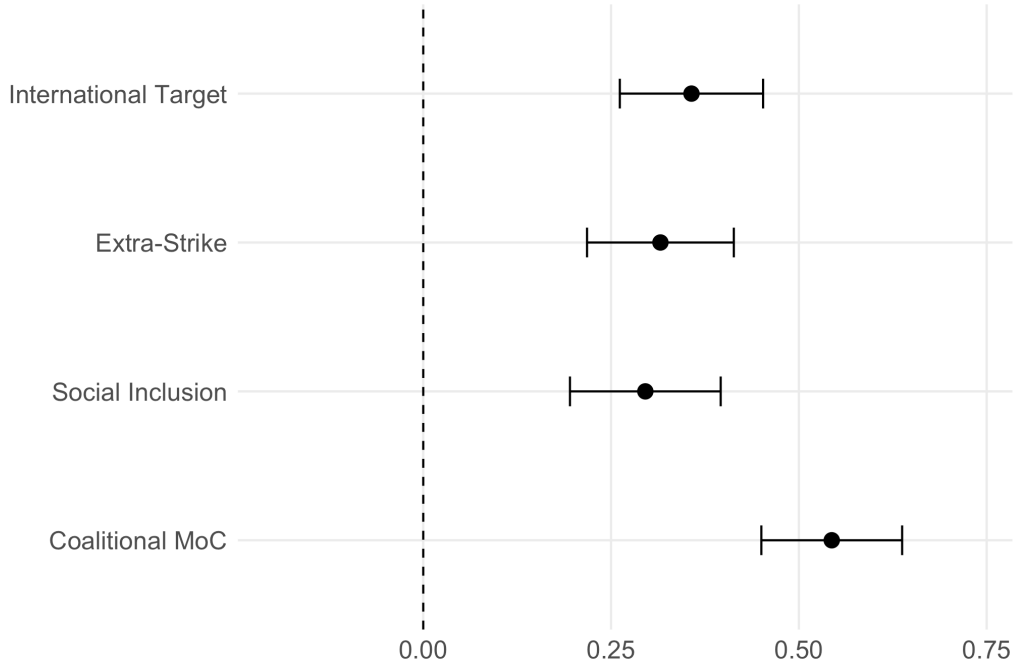
Figure 1. The Impact of Environmental Issue on Indicators of the Politicization of Trade Union Claim-Making (Percentage Presence of Indicators)



Source: own elaboration.

[7] Information on the original dataset variables is shown in Table 3A, located in the appendix.

Figure 2. Change in the predicted probabilities of the politicization of labour claim-making when the environmental issue is part of the claim with 95% CIs (full models in the Appendix, Table 4A)



Source: own elaboration.

The analysis of the politicizing effect of the environmental issue is controlled by accounting for two indicators of the political opportunity structure. Actually, when political parties are present, trade unions tend to coordinate actions with other civil society or social movement organizations more frequently (82% vs. 19% when political parties are absent); their protests are more socially inclusive (62% vs. 19%), less strike-oriented (85% vs. 43%), and more likely to target international actors (25% vs. 6%).

On the contrary, centre-right governments do not seem to trigger a politicizing effect: 24% of trade union protests occur during their periods (compared to 22% otherwise); 25% of these protests are more socially inclusive (compared to 18%); 48% include extra-strike forms of action (compared to 44%), and there are no differences at all in international targeting (about 7%).

To summarise the key findings from the binary logistic regressions, Figure 2 illustrates the changes in the predicted probabilities of the environmental issue as driver of politicization.

Overall, the results support the stated hypotheses: the controlled presence of the environmental issue has a significant impact on trade unions' coalitional mode of coordination (H1), as the predicted probabilities of a labour coalitional mode of coordination are more than four times higher when the environmental issue is present compared to its absence. Similarly, the probability of social inclusion (H2) is nearly three times higher, the use of extra-strike forms of mobilization (H3) is about 1.75 times higher, and the likelihood of targeting international institutions (H4) is more than 11

times higher when the environmental issue is present (see also Table 4A and 5A in the Appendix).

When considering the control variables based on the political opportunity structure approach only for the involvement of political parties similar changes in the predicted probabilities are observed, with the notable exception of targeting international institutions, while, the presence of centre-right governments has a minor, yet only occasionally significant, overall effect (Table 4A and 5A in the Appendix).

5. The GKN mobilization: a case of workers' environmentalism

5.1. The GKN campaign

The GKN workers' mobilization in Campi Bisenzio, Florence, serves as a distinct example of labour organizations harnessing environmentalism to give a political edge to their claims.[8]

On July 9, 2021, the GKN trade union representatives, operating under the name *Collettivo di Fabbrica* and affiliated with FIOM-CGIL, were informed via email about the immediate dismissal of all 422 employees and the subsequent closure of the plant scheduled for the following day. An opinion piece in Econopoly, a blog hosted by IlSole24Ore, characterized these mass layoffs and the plant's closure as typical occurrences in the ecological transition within the automotive industry (Econopoly, 2021).

Initially owned by FIAT and subsequently acquired by GKN, which was itself taken over by Melrose Industries in 2018, the plant specialized in manufacturing car axles. Its history is marked by a series of substantial labour conflicts in the early 20th century, which resulted in enhanced safety and environmental standards at the workplace (Int. 4 and 12).

The July 9, 2021, announcement of layoffs at the GKN plant became a pivotal moment. Workers, traditionally reliant on trade unions and institutions for dispute resolution, faced job insecurity and felt ecological demands were at odds with labour needs (Int. 4, 9 and 10).

Instead of merely operating within the mechanisms provided by industrial relations and initiating a classic union dispute, the *Collettivo di Fabbrica* responded to the mass layoffs by establishing a permanent assembly that continues to operate today. The assembly has enabled workers to collaborate effectively with civil society organizations, informal groups, and environmental activists, coordinating numerous collective protest actions nationwide (Int. 1, 2, 3, 7 and 13), which have raised the profile of their campaign for a just society based on social and environmental concerns.

By building a large social movement network and mobilizing the support of public opinion, the GKN workers have so far been able to block the collective layoffs and secure an exemption from the redundancy fund.

If observers have tried to explain the factory's closure with the restructuring processes of the automotive sector within the ecological transition, rather than mobilize the well-known conflict between environment and labour, GKN workers have developed

[8] The information presented herein draws from the following sources (Andretta and Imperatore 2024, GKN 2022, Cini 2021).

over these two years of mobilization a transition project that would transform the factory into an innovative model of green production controlled by the workers and the local community (Andretta et al. 2023, Andretta and Imperatore 2024, Imperatore and Leonardi 2023).

This case vividly illustrates how integrating environmental concerns into labour demands activates a process of politicization through collective action coordinated via social movement modes. This involves expanding the repertoire of collective actions and coordinating with other civil society and social movements to redefine collective identities and thereby the interests around which labour mobilizes.

5.2. From strike to inclusive protest

The GKN mobilization is a clear case of shifting the locus of labour conflict from collective bargaining to the political market. The workers could rely on the mechanisms of the social dialogue governing labour disputes in case of collective layoffs. And indeed in parallel with their protest mobilization, the FIOM-CGIL continued to play a significant role in that respect (Int. 11). But the GKN workers decided a different, 'political', pathway which called workers, students, citizens for protest collective actions under the motto 'Insorgiamo!' ('raise up!'), an *inclusive grassroots mobilization*.

The range of protest tactics employed by the Collettivo di Fabbrica, including sit-ins, marches, symbolic actions, and blitzes, are characteristic of social movement unionism. While it is not feasible to detail every initiative undertaken by the GKN workers, an examination of the early stages of their mobilization can provide a clear illustration of their approach.

Only 10 days after the e-mail, the GKN workers were able to mobilize about 10 thousand people in Piazza Santa Croce in Florence with the participation of workers involved in other labour disputes and many Florentine citizens. Eventually, a 2 hours' general strike was called by the main Tuscany's metalworkers trade unions; on 24th July a demonstration in the streets of Campi Bisenzio brought together 8,000 people; and on 18th September a demonstration with the participation of 40 thousand people – an important symbolic number in the Italian workers movement history[9] – took place in Florence (GKN2022, 52, Int. 4 and 8). In 2022, they launched the 'Insorgiamo tour', where delegates from the GKN plant travelled around Italy to meet workers involved in similar labour disputes or other territorial struggles (Int. 4, 5, 8). They participated in the general strike called for by grassroots unions on October 11th, prepared a workers' section of the anti-G20 ecologist demonstration march in Rome and were also protagonists of the unitary mobilization of workers and students in Florence (Int. 1, 2, and 8). Finally, it is important to mention a joint demonstration with the climate justice movement in Bologna, which saw the participation of about 30 thousand people from all over the country.

[9] On 14th October 1980, 40 thousand FIAT managers and white-collar workers marched in support of the company's proprietors, counteracting the trade unions' mobilization against the planned collective layoffs of 15 thousand metalworkers. The 'March of the 40 thousand' is recognized as a pivotal event marking the decline of the workers' movement in Italy (Ginsborg 1990, 902).

5.3. Coalition building

Protest mobilization is central to the workers' strategy for creating a collective entity capable of altering the political landscape that permitted their firm's relocation and is obstructing its shift toward environmentally sustainable production:

> An overall change can be achieved only through a large movement. … For this very reason we also call for the unity of the workers' movement with all social movements, starting from the climate justice movement (Int. 4).

From its inception, the Collettivo di Fabbrica engaged the local community, which they refer to as the 'territory,' to support their campaign (Int. 2, 6, 7 and 8). The GKN permanent assembly quickly evolved into a nexus for social movement activity, fostering the development of strategies and visions, as well as organizing events to promote broader unification (Int. 8). Since their intention was to overcome the job-environment dilemma and they wanted to elaborate an ecological transition plan for their plant (Int. 3 and 7), they "had to start seeking support in environmental mobilization networks, looking for organizations that were willing to dismantle that narrative first and then … to join our fight" (FB 11/01/22; Int. 4). In this perspective, they have considered the *strategy of coalition building* as fundamental for the future of the conversion: "outside of this convergence we have no future. Because the publicly owned and socially integrated factory, in this system, in this context, with these power relations, cannot be realized" (FB 22/10/22).

5.4. Ecological transformative vision

The coalition built by the GKN workers' served not just to share and allocate resources for collective action, but also to engage in a process of collective identity redefinition. Participants in the mobilization report that the GKN workers successfully forged a substantial network by advocating for a rebellious (Insorgente) identity (Int. 1, 2, 6, 7). The redefinition of collective identity among the GKN workers is anchored in a radical eco-social critique of the "system of production" (Int. 1). They contend that "sustainability will become the arena of conflict and class struggle" (Int. 6), indicating a necessity to integrate environmental, democratic and labour concerns.

Once the utility function is redefined through a process of collective identity building, it appears clear that workers' interests are ultimately and naturally 'environmentalist':

> To resist the many processes of exploitation of natural resources, ecosystems and living species, we recognize the importance of the intersection of environmental struggles and struggles for labour rights. *The reduction of working hours for equal pay and the introduction of a minimum wage system are environmental struggles*; rethinking the production model from below is an ecological struggle; *putting the living, care and regeneration back at the core,* freeing ourselves from the environment (health)/job blackmail is an ecological struggle. (Doc. 2)

The development of an alternative plan for industrial conversion suggests a radical restructuring process for both plant activities and the automotive industry's future: "a social, political and *environmental experiment to improve our country by creating a sustainable mobility hub*" (FB post 14/11/2021).

5.5. The conditions of the GKN 'class environmentalism'

If the GKN case illustrates how labour groups address environmental issues to politicize their claim-making, several specific factors may explain its workers' radical environmentalism.

The GKN factory in Campi Bisenzio is one of the most heavily unionized plants in Italy. Not only did unionization facilitate the rapid mobilization of workers at the time of layoffs, but it also facilitated the convergence with environmental movements based on a workers' ecological tradition. The most prominent labour union at the plant is by far the FIOM-CGIL, which has a strong leftist political orientation and was originally affiliated with the Italian Communist Party. This organization was strongly involved in the mobilization of the 70s, which took the ecological stance I mentioned above, and the memory of these struggles is part of the memory repertoire of the Collettivo (Int.1, 2, 4 and 7).

Moreover, the very organizational model of the Collettivo is based on the more informal work councils of that period, eventually formalized in what is known now as the union representative unit (RSU). This explains also the workers' ability to mobilize independently of the dominant category union in the factory and their ability to engage with the local community and various organized structures of civil society. The workers' need to overcome the main federal and confederal trade unions strategies in the case of collective layoffs - based on compensations and labour market repositioning - pushed them to elaborate on the past Italian trade unionism to recuperate its radicality of proposal and action.

Last, but surely not least, the area between Florence and Campi Bisenzio, is indeed a potential 'rebelling territory', characterized by hubs of activism deeply rooted in a political subculture that extends beyond mere party affiliation (della Porta and del Panta 2024). The Collettivo found it relatively straightforward to mobilize in this culturally rich territory shaped by past struggles against fascism and worker movements. This subcultural context facilitated their action for a just, equal, and green society, reactivating latent tensions between institutionalized elements like trade unions, political parties, and local institutions, and the subculture's rebellious nature:

> [Florence] [...] we know that one of your characteristics is that of a rebellious city, never tamed. Capable of challenging popes, kings, resisting sieges, rising up with your own plebeians whether it was the time of the Ciompi or 1944. [...] For this reason, Florence, we call on you once again to amaze us. Let's push together. Let's fearlessly defeat every maneuver, unmask every rhetorical and formal stance, bring fresh air into these places filled with stale air." (FB 1/09/21)

6. The politicization effect of the environment in labour claim-making: concluding remarks

The relationship between workers and environmental concerns is complex and demands urgent attention. Workers are often the first to face the social impact of transition policies, which they may resist. Simultaneously, as they stand to incur many of the costs, their viewpoints and approaches to ecological transition are critically important. In this article, I challenged the predominant notion that labour is largely resistant to

environmental issues. This view often arises from an analytical focus on the conflicting interests present in the bargaining processes within transition policy arenas.

Yet, when examining workers' protest mobilizations, many scholars acknowledge that workers have consistently struggled against environment degradations of recent decades, with Italy being no exception in this regard. Workers and trade unions engaged in social movement-style mobilizations appear more inclined to incorporate environmental concerns into their claims. I have proposed a synthesis of the industrial relations framework with the social movement perspective as a means to reconcile these diverse and contradictory findings. While this integrative approach is not unprecedented, the 'social movement union' concept often used in such efforts typically falls short in theoretical precision, failing to adequately identify when there is a transformative process of collective identity redefinition among workers. I contended that the concept of social movement unionism ought to be situated into Alessandro Pizzorno's 'political exchange' theory. Following this perspective, a prototypical form of social movement unionism tends to emerge when workers enter the 'political market' to challenge the existing social order through their claims; and it is characterized by socially inclusive grassroots mobilization that employs a diverse array of protest tactics beyond traditional strikes, aimed at cultivating widespread, transformative visions for societal change.

I examined the 'politicizing effect' of environmental issue within a substantial dataset of Italian trade union protest events from 1994 to 2021. The analysis found that all markers of politicization — which include social inclusion, coalition-based coordination, the use of non-strike protest tactics, and the broadening of claims — are statistically linked to the integration of environmental and democratic concerns into the workers' advocacy. The study also documents the 'politicizing effect' of political parties' involvement, which, while not contradicting the hypothesis, suggests an area for further research to investigate how political opportunities and the prominence of environmental concerns interplay within the dynamics of social movement unionism.

In the final section of this article, I presented a detailed case study that illuminates the dynamics by which an ecological vision influences and is influenced by workers' political mobilization. The case of the GKN workers, who faced collective layoffs, exemplifies how workers, amidst the heightened public and social movement focus on the climate crisis, navigate the conflict between environmental standards and job security. Rather than simply overcoming the environmental versus job dilemma, these workers crafted a distinctive form of 'class environmentalism'. This emerged through a redefinition of collective identity during their coordinated social movement unionism efforts.

In concluding, it's important to recognize that examining how the climate crisis influences workers' struggles is to observe just one aspect of a multifaceted issue. The case study suggests that the incorporation of environmental concerns into workers' advocacy cannot be simply viewed as an 'independent variable'. While the GKN workers initially cantered their mobilization against layoffs around an ecological narrative, it becomes apparent that this focus evolved dynamically through their involvement in the coalitional processes characteristic of social movement unionism. Furthermore, the findings from both the statistical analysis and the case study indicate a reciprocal relationship: while environmental issues can politicize workers' claims, workers' ecological struggles also

appear to amplify the political dimensions of the climate crisis. Future research should aim to elucidate the mechanisms underlying this dual politicization process and the factors that enable such outcomes. In this endeavor, a comparative study of negative and positive cases would be particularly illuminating.

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Appendix

Notes on methods

Newspaper articles serve as a valuable source for collecting detailed information about protest events (PE). These articles can provide insights into various aspects of protests, including the organizations staging the protest, the social players involved, the claims and issues being protested, the forms of action used, the targets of the protest, its scope, and other relevant details.

This information is systematically organized using a codebook that defines the variables and labels for each property of the protest. The resulting data are then compiled into a matrix for statistical analysis.

However, it is important to acknowledge at least two types of biases associated with using media and newspapers as sources. Firstly, there is bias related to the type of protest itself. Newspapers are more likely to report on and provide details about large-scale or radical protests that address issues already at the forefront of media attention (McCarthy, McPhail et al. 1996). Secondly, there is bias related to the type of newspapers selected. Local and liberal or leftist newspapers tend to cover more protest events compared to other types of newspapers (Rucht and Neidhart 1998).

Despite these significant biases, there are four reasons to support the use of this research strategy:

1. Inevitability of Bias: Every source produces biases, which political and social scientists must acknowledge and work with.
2. Consistency in Comparative Research: In comparative and longitudinal research, the primary objective is to keep biases as constant as possible to ensure reliable comparisons over time.
3. Feasibility of Large-Scale Data Collection: This strategy enables the collection of a large amount of data, which would otherwise be impossible or too labour-intensive to gather through other means.
4. Impact on Public Debate: Protests are more likely to enter public debate, become known to the public, and ultimately influence elites and decision-makers if they receive media attention (Hutter 2014).

The selection of La Repubblica as a source is justified by the accessibility and diffusion of the newspaper (della Porta et al. 2015) and by its liberal editorial profile, which has been considered more sensitive and receptive to protest mobilizations (della Porta and Diani 2004). To identify potential biases in this source compared to other journalistic outlets, a study following the same protocols was conducted using Corriere della Sera for selected months in 2009 and 2010. In 2009, La Repubblica reported 93 events while Corriere della Sera reported 89. In 2010, Corriere della Sera reported 128 events compared to La Repubblica's 108. Both newspapers covered institutional or party organizations in 37% of events. Corriere della Sera reported on trade unions in 52.5% of events, compared to 38% by La Repubblica. La Repubblica gave more attention to associations and formal movement organizations (55% vs. 46%), whereas Corriere della Sera focused more on informal actors (19% vs. 14%). Regarding forms of action, La Repubblica reported on conventional actions in 60% of events, non-conventional forms in 63%, and

violent actions in 9%. Corriere della Sera reported on conventional actions in 51% of events, non-conventional forms in 72%, and violent actions in 10% (Andretta 2017).

The operational definition of a protest event and the use of the keyword 'protest' are based on previous research using the same method of analysis, source, and procedures (della Porta et al. 2015; della Porta et al. 2017; Andretta 2018; Andretta 2022). Since my database extends and integrates that original database, to avoid additional biases, I adhered to the same operational procedures. Although the use of a list of terms for specific forms of action would be more effective, the term 'protest' in Italian is frequently associated with most of them. To assess the bias introduced by using this keyword, I report the number of items sorted by the Repubblica.it research tools with specific forms of action as keywords and the number of items sorted when specific forms of action are searched in combination with 'protest' for the year 2021: 'strike' 499, 'strike and protest' 162; 'march (corteo)' 117, 'march and protest' 108; 'sit in' 167, 'sit in and protest' 65. Additionally, while in Italian some forms of action are strictly associated with specific terms (strike, march, sit in), others are much less so (occupation, violence, symbolic action, assembly). For the same year, 'assembly' produced 1,593 items, while 'assembly and protest' produced only 55; 'violence' produced 2,566 items, while 'violence and protest' produced 211 (mostly world news).

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Table 1A. Correlations between independent variables

	Parties	Centre-right gov.
Environment	.31***	.09***
Parties	-	.06***

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2A. Correlations between dependent variables

	Social inclusion	Extra-strike	International target
Coalitional MoC	.49***	.28***	.26***
Social Inclusion	-	.31***	.20***
Extra-Strike	-	-	.21***

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3A. Trade unions' protest events' features (percent, N=2,217)

Trade unions	**%**	**N**
CGIL	58.7	1,302
CISL	42.1	934
UIL	40.6	900
Grass Roots (together)	45.2	1,002
UGL	3,7	81
Other organizations		
Informal groups	14.3	317
CSOs	13.5	296
Political parties	5.1	113
Institutions	2.2	48
Social actors (other than workers)	**%**	**N**
Students	14.1	312
General citizens	13.0	288
Precarious workers	7.0	155
Journalists, politicians,..	3.5	78
Immigrants	1.3	29
Women	1.0	20
Action Repertoire	**%**	**N**
Strike	54.6	1,210
Perturbative	30.4	675
March/rally	29.9	663
Conventional	11.5	254
Symbolic and Sit-ins	10.0	221
Violent	2.9	64
Claims	**%**	**N**
Labour	70.4	657
Anti-austerity	21.1	467
Welfare	18.9	418
Environment and democracy	10.6	236
Culture	2.4	54
Immigration	1.2	26
Gender	1.2	24
Other	5,7	127
Targets	**%**	**N**
National Governments	58.5	1,298
Economic Institutions	36.9	817
Local Governments	22.1	489
Regional Governments	14.3	316
International Institutions	7.2	160
State Agencies	1.8	41

Source: own elaboration.

Table 4A. Binary Logistic Regression: Full Models

	Coalitional MoC	Social Inclusion	Extra-Strike	International Targets
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Environment	2.626***	1.476***	1.374***	2.919***
	(0.173)	(0.153)	(0.169)	(0.197)
Center-Right Gov.	-0.152	0.370***	0.029	-0.529***
	(0.119)	(0.111)	(0.089)	(0.190)
Parties	2.471***	1.434***	1.554***	0.279
	(0.275)	(0.220)	(0.277)	(0.281)
Constant	-1.690***	-1.811***	-0.394***	-3.154***
	(0.079)	(0.081)	(0.059)	(0.137)
Observations	2,217	2,217	2,217	2,217
Log Likelihood	-957.836	-1,036.880	-1,449.135	-449.521
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,923.671	2,081.760	2,906.270	907.043

Source: own elaboration. Significance levels: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5A. Binary Logistic Regression: Changes in predicted probabilities

		Coalitional MoC	Social inclusion	Extra-Strike	International Target
Environment	Absent	.162 (.085)	.169 (.053)	.415 (.059)	.034 (.009)
	Present	.766 (.115)	.546 (143)	.779 (.085)	.389 (.079)
Parties	Absent	.194 (.153)	.187 (.088)	.432 (.090)	.062 (.097)
	Present	.823 (.149)	.628 (.168)	.849 (.081)	.247 (.206)
Centre-Right Gov.	Absent	.216 (184)	.175 (.110)	.435 (.113)	.077 (.118)
	Present	.238 (.230)	.252 (.151)	.478 (.141)	.064 (.105)

Source: own elaboration.

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Two decades of SGRI: Italy and the evolution of IR scholarship in the twenty-first century

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Abstract

This article marks the 20th anniversary of the Italian Standing Group on International Relations (SGRI), reflecting on its pivotal contributions to International Relations (IR) scholarship in Italy. Founded in 2004 under the Italian Political Science Association (SISP), SGRI sought to foster collaboration among scholars, promote research excellence, and enhance the discipline's international visibility. Over two decades, SGRI has evolved into a vibrant platform for academic exchange, supporting early-career researchers, organizing conferences, and encouraging participation in global projects. The article examines SGRI's role in addressing historical challenges in Italian IR scholarship, such as fragmentation, limited global engagement, and marginalization within academia. By promoting intergenerational mentorship, facilitating high-quality research, and adopting English as its primary language for events, SGRI has successfully bridged gaps between Italian and international academic communities. Its initiatives have bolstered Italy's presence in global IR discourse, fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration and enriching scholarly dialogue. Despite these achievements, challenges remain, including structural barriers in Italian academia and the need for greater integration of regional studies and subfields. The article calls for enhanced institutional support, further internationalization, and greater alignment with global standards. SGRI's journey highlights its critical role in shaping a more interconnected and impactful IR academic network in Italy.

1. Introduction

The year 2024 marks the twentieth anniversary since the birth of the Italian Standing Group on International Relations (SGRI). The Standing Group was created in the early 2000s within the structure of the Italian Political Science Association (SISP), as part of a broader effort to foster collaboration among political science scholars working in similar research areas. In March 2004, SGRI organised its first conference in Parma, bringing together researchers from Italy and abroad to explore challenges and opportunities in the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union. Since then, SGRI has promoted and encouraged the study of international politics, particularly among early career researchers, supporting the development of research projects and the dissemination of knowledge. The sixteenth SGRI conference, which took place in summer 2024, offered an opportunity to reflect on the group's contributions over the past two decades. Relying on data from SISP and SGRI conferences and organizational activities, this article examines such contributions, contextualising them within the evolution of the Italian International Relations (IR) scholarship in the twenty-first century.

The article shows that SGRI has contributed to the shaping of a more interconnected and internationalised IR scholarly network. Through its channels and initiatives,

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SGRI has progressively turned into a platform for research development, building avenues for cooperation and innovation in the field. Such activities have advanced the scholarship at the national level. Still, major challenges for the expansion and consolidation of IR as an academic discipline persist, requiring sustained engagement from the research community.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section briefly traces the history of the Standing Group since its inception in the early 2000s. Then, the article examines the evolution of the IR scholarship in Italy, considering its trajectories in the twenty-first century while assessing the role played by SGRI within the process. Finally, the last section discusses challenges and opportunities for SGRI and IR research in the forthcoming years.

2. The creation of SGRI and its development

SGRI was instituted in 2004 on a specific proposal made to the Italian Political Science Association (SISP) by Filippo Andreatta, Fulvio Attinà, Luciano Bardi, Luigi Bonanate and Umberto Gori. The aim was to foster research on international politics and foreign policy, facilitating cooperation and stimulating synergies among IR scholars. The creation of SGRI was driven by a specific awareness among Italian political scientists of a growing demand for academic education in International Relations, particularly following the events of September 11, 2001. The first two generations of IR scholars laid the groundwork (see Andreatta and Zambernardi 2010), and the initial SGRI activities were carried out by a third group of young professors, including Filippo Andreatta, Marco Clementi, Alessandro Colombo, and Vittorio Emanuele Parsi. These academics sought to initiate dialogue with political institutions (like the Italian Ministry of Defence), think tanks (such as Istituto Affari Internazionali and Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale), and several other stakeholders, showcasing the success of an intergenerational handover.

The establishment of a Research Project on International Politics and Conflict Resolution at the Bruno Kessler Foundation (Trento, Italy) revitalized SGRI activities, expanding its international network through the involvement of a board of eminent IR scholars, who participated in the general conferences of the Standing Group (including Joe Grieco, Pierre Hassner, Dan Reiter, Ted Hopf, Christopher Hill, Jakub Grygiel, Richard Devetak and Pascal Vennesson). Between 2012 and 2019, seven of such conferences were organised in Trento, contributing to the dissemination of information and knowledge in the field, as well as to a robust cross-fertilization of methodological and research perspectives. In twenty years, SGRI has organized 15 conferences, gathering about 700 participants from over 40 Italian universities and 50 European and international academic institutions – featuring about 400 papers presentations, keynote speeches, roundtables and plenary lectures (see Table 1). Thanks to a new management policy of SISP, which in recent years has granted more autonomy to Standing Groups, SGRI now connects about 200 people through a regular newsletter and social media campaigns, with over half formally enrolled via SISP membership. The handover is ensured through a regular rotation of coordinators, who are elected by the more than 80 SISP members for renewable two-year terms.

Table 1. Data on SGRI conferences (2008 – 2023). Locations, participants, papers and panels.

	SGRI conference	Participants	Papers presented	Panels
2008	Bertinoro (FC)	-	21	4
2009	Milano	-	8	2
2012	Trento	-	33	4
2013	Trento	73	34	7
2014	Trento	53	22	5
2015	Trento	97	57	10
2016	Trento	75	34	7
2017	Trento	36	19	5
2018	Bologna	60	39	10
2019	Trento	101	59	18
2022	Perugia	62	22	6
2023	Catania	74	50	11

Source: own elaboration.

3. SGRI and the IR scholarship in the twenty-first century

As several works note (e.g., Attinà 1989; Bonante 1990; Morlino 1991; Sartori 2004), IR has historically faced substantial challenges in gaining traction as an academic discipline in Italy. During the Cold War era, the country experienced a progressive expansion of political science within national universities, with the creation of the Italian Section of Political Science in 1973 and the establishment of the first three chairs of IR in 1975 (Friedrichs 2004; Panebianco 2007). Still, politics and IR continued to occupy a marginal role within the Italian cultural landscape, often being regarded more as an "art" than a "scientific" discipline and fragmented into a multitude of disconnected notions taught by experts from fields such as law or history (Andreatta and Zambernardi 2010). Such a state of affairs was exacerbated by the constraints imposed by great power competition to the Italian foreign policy, which contributed to decreasing the demand for, and the interest in, IR expertise at a national level (Pasquino 1977; Friedrichs 2004).

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War brought new impetus to the discipline. Driven by the changing international scenario, an increasing number of Italian scholars turned their attention towards the study of peace and conflict, exploring the role of international actors in the promotion of global security. However, the production of IR research, along with the teaching of international politics in political science curricula, continued to remain relatively low during the 1990s (Lucarelli and Menotti 2002; Clementi 2013). Furthermore, despite some exceptions, the Italian IR scholarship maintained a limited visibility and impact beyond national boundaries. National conferences and seminars, frequently conducted in Italian as the primary language, tended to deter participation from international scholars, resulting in low resonance beyond Italy's borders. At the same time, the engagement of Italian scholars in international projects and events, such as those hosted in the US or the UK, failed to reach substantial levels. As Lucarelli and Menotti commented at the beginning of the twenty-first century (2002: 124), "looking at the Italian literature from the viewpoint of the broader IR community, the picture is more that of a detached world that finds it difficult — and perhaps unattractive —to establish and maintain a systematic link with the outside."

The last two decades have seen a gradual departure from such historical trends, registering substantial improvements in the IR scholarship. A commonly used indicator to

assess the health of a discipline is the number of publications by scholars (see e.g., Bornmann and Mutz 2015). In this perspective, several studies have noted a rising pattern in scholarly output, highlighting a greater vitality in the field. Clementi (2013), for example, examines the number of articles on IR topics published by Italian scholars in the Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica (RISP) since its establishment. His findings show that IR articles were rare in the first fifteen years (1971-1985), but started increasing between 1985 and 1999, comprising about 10% of all articles published in RISP. Most notably, the proportion rose to one-third of all contributions from 2000 to 2011. Focusing on 25 high-impact international peer-reviewed journals and five Italian journals, Calcara and Vittori (2019) present even more encouraging data. A total of 340 articles published by Italian scholars were identified in the period between 2011 and 2017. Despite the substantial contribution from researchers based outside Italy (suggesting a brain-drain effect to foreign universities), such figures denote a growing focus on IR in the national academic environment as well as an increasing alignment with international standards among Italian scholars.

Participation in Italian Political Science conferences has reflected this trend (on this aspect, see also Caffarena and Costalli 2024). Evidence from the past decade shows that a consistent number of researchers have presented papers on topics related to international politics and global security. The IR section of the SISP general conference has received an increasing number of panel proposals, progressively expanding the themes and subjects covered. Out of the 13 to 14 sections typically organised at SISP conferences, the share of papers presented in the IR section has averaged about 14 per cent of all papers discussed, comprising between one sixth and one fifth of the entire conference programme in the last five editions (Table 2). Such figures have been accompanied by an increase in the overall attractiveness of the SISP conference, which has seen growing scholarly participation since the second half of the 2010s.

A comparison between the IR section and the other sections of SISP general conferences further reveals the increasing role played by the International Relations community within the academic landscape. The IR section has had the highest number of papers in most of the editions of the last ten years (Table 3). Particularly, since 2018, the section has been the most consistent in all but one instance.

Table 2. IR papers in SISP general conferences.

Conference	Year	IR Papers	Papers (total)	Share
Perugia	2014	42	269	16%
Calabria	2015	19	207	9%
Milano	2016	33	309	11%
Urbino	2017	18	296	6%
Torino	2018	75	446	17%
Lecce	2019	67	424	16%
Online	2021	57	376	15%
Roma	2022	61	371	16%
Genova	2023	98	544	18%

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3. IR Sections in SISP general conferences, 2014-2023.

Section	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
Political Regimes/Democracy and Democratization	16	10	24	18	29	15	22	40	32
Political Theory	23	7	22	15	45	29	14	0	25
Comparative Politics, Government, Parliament and Representation	3	15	8	27	42	69	55	22	33
Italian Political System/Party Politics	18	11	17	19	27	32	14	16	22
Administration and Public Policy/Political Science and Public Policy	15	16	31	23	37	22	35	29	46
Political Communication	27	16	29	29	18	26	48	36	40
Participation and Social Movements	32	22	41	30	38	50	40	38	35
Elections and Voting Behaviour	13	26	17	48	30	30	22	29	59
International Relations	42	19	33	18	75	67	57	61	98
Regional Studies and Local Policies	15	30	19	13	33	31	18	25	36
Research Methodology	8	6	18	16	19	16	5	7	28
Politics and Policies of the European Union	9	20	24	36	45	29	42	25	38
Gender and Politics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	36
Politics and Religion	14	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	34	5	26	4	8	8	4	11	16
Total	269	207	309	296	446	424	376	371	544

Source: own elaboration.

Such figures have resulted from multiple changes and initiatives set in motion since the early 2000s. The implementation of international projects and the launch of new IR PhD programmes in several departments, for instance, have contributed to fostering a vibrant research environment and nurturing a broader generation of academics. Undoubtedly, the development of SGRI has played a key role in these processes, shaping their trajectory and horizons (see Attinà and Lucarelli 2012; Caffarena and Costalli 2024). The Standing Group has served as a catalyst for the consolidation of a more integrated IR community that in the last two decades has continued to expand, building the "critical mass" (Lucarelli and Menotti 2002, 119) that was lacking in the previous decades.

Key to SGRI's success has been the promotion of research excellence and its particular attention towards the establishment of a dialogue between different generations of scholars. Through its channels, the Standing Group has operated as a platform for research collaboration, disseminating information on events and job opportunities within the field of IR. Conferences and workshops have regularly offered insights into the evolution of the Italian higher education system, exploring pathways for research empowerment while providing guidance for career advancement. Such guidance has also included advice on the obtainment of the Italian national scientific qualification (ASN) which, due to structural features discussed in the last section of this article, requires early career researchers to develop specific publication plans.

SGRI events have also been characterized by a close focus on the contribution and professional growth of PhD students and postdoctoral researchers, who have frequently benefited from mentoring and feedback. Such an intergenerational exchange has enhanced the scholarly discourse and supported the journey of new members within Italian universities. In so doing, it has cultivated a cohesive network that has increasingly transcended institutional boundaries, laying a solid foundation for the future of the discipline in the country.

SGRI has also encouraged the internationalisation of IR scholarship, enhancing the reputation and the visibility of the Italian research abroad. Differently from other Standing Groups of the Italian Political Science Association, SGRI has promoted a limited use of Italian, adopting English as the official language for its events. This has contributed to bridging the historical gap between Italy and the IR community, enriching the national academic framework with a more cosmopolitical outlook. An increasing number of international scholars have been attracted by the conferences and seminars sponsored by the Standing Group. Emerging links have favoured network expansion, allowing a greater exchange between different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The growing influx of Italian researchers returning into national academia after periods abroad has further catalysed these dynamics, enhancing collaborative efforts with foreign universities while shaping a transnational environment around SGRI. Such a connectivity has created a more inclusive context, providing Italian scholars with new opportunities to express their voices and benefit from resources and expertise.

SGRI's recognition and celebration of research achievements in IR studies has also facilitated the establishment of cross-national links over the last two decades. Initiatives such as the recently introduced "Best Conference Paper Award" have incentivised the production of high-quality scholarly work generating impacts at an international level. The Award, which was firstly presented at the 2023 SGRI general conference in Catania, acknowledges the production of outstanding research that advances the theoretical, empirical or methodological debate in IR scholarship, supporting an environment of academic excellence.

Finally, the internationalisation of Italian IR research has been promoted through collaborative projects and partnerships. SGRI has progressively consolidated connections with European and internationally based associations, aligning its profile and mission with those of longstanding institutions in the field. Such a process has provided Italian academics access to a broader network of scholars from diverse contexts, joining established forums for research development.

One way in which this has been done is through the launch of joint initiatives with IR organisations. SGRI has increasingly been involved in projects with counterpart entities from other countries. An example is the British International Study Association (BISA), which, since the early 1970s, has promoted the study of global politics in the United Kingdom. Links between SISP, SGRI, and BISA have intensified over the last few years, especially within the framework of the BISA annual conference. In 2021, the Standing Group participated in a special joint panel to further the study of Italian foreign policy at the BISA virtual conference. In 2024, a joint panel on EU-China relations was held at the BISA conference in Birmingham. Another example is the Mexican International Studies Association (AMEI), created in the late 1960s as a research platform in the area of international affairs. In 2021, a joint panel between SISP, SGRI and AMEI was established to investigate "Perspectives of Multilateralism in a Renewed World Order" at AMEI's 34th conference.

International connections have also been forged through the co-sponsoring of events. The Standing Group has strengthened its presence in the European research landscape, increasing cooperation with other institutions. Among these, the European Consortium on Political Research (ECPR) has recently been a key player. Founded in

1970, ECPR has constituted a global network for political scientists and IR researchers across and beyond Europe, fostering knowledge exchange and innovation. Collaboration between ECPR and SGRI has not only enabled the latter to enhance the scope of its initiatives but has also helped build bridges between Italian and European research, positioning Italian scholarship as an integral part of the European IR community. With ECPR support, SGRI launched an International Studies PhD workshop in 2024, offering PhD students from across Italy and Europe the opportunity to present their research and receive feedback from senior scholars in their respective fields. The event, which preceded the 2024 SGRI general conference in Parma, included interactive sessions on how to publish in leading journals and access academic positions. These featured interventions from the ECPR President and the President of the European International Studies Association (EISA), providing early career researchers with advice and insights about the state of IR research in Europe and at the international level.

4. The challenges ahead

SGRI achievements have wielded a significant influence on the advancement of the IR scholarship in Italian academia. However, multifaceted challenges persist. Several of these challenges concern the way in which the scholarship is still administered at the national level. Despite the progress registered since the early 2000s, the Italian regulation of higher education continues to be based on a longstanding categorisation that neglects the role of IR as a proper discipline. According to this system, "Political Science" (SPS/04) is the sole reference sector for different, and arguably distant, fields of study such as IR, Party Politics, or Political Theory. Furthermore, in contrast with most of the other European countries, the regulation traces boundaries between overlapping research subjects, treating the study of IR history, or the analysis of specific regions of the world (i.e. Area Studies), as disciplines separated from Political Science. As a consequence, Italian works on African or Asian politics fall within specific siloed sectors (SPS/13 and SPS/14). Still, these works not only speak directly to the IR and political science literature, providing in-depth insights into dynamics commonly examined by IR scholars, but often even draw on IR theories or methodologies to build their analytical frameworks.

The monolithic structure of the Political Science sector, along with its divisions from related areas, impose constraints on the obtainment of the national scientific qualification (ASN) and the construction of an international academic profile among Italian IR scholars. To be eligible for ASN, publications and research outputs must adhere to strict canons that frequently do not resonate beyond national boundaries. Only specific journals are recognised as aligning with disciplinary criteria, while even published books are evaluated based on their pertinence to the sector. This complicates classification within the SPS/04 realm. Outlets such as scientific journals prioritising more historical or regional perspectives on contemporary politics may not be considered––or may even be regarded as indicative of a research profile rooted in a different area. At the same time, such fragmentation furthers the marginalisation of Area Studies, imposing a limited and differentiated range of publication options to scholars with regional expertise.

As some authors note (e.g., Andreatta and Zambernardi 2009), sectoral divisions limit research diversity within the IR scholarship. One of the main consequence of this

in Italy has been the narrow focus on non-Western politics. Being separated from geographical and regional research, the Italian IR literature has historically tended to prioritise the study of domestic or European affairs over political dynamics in regions such as South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America (see Calcara and Vittori 2019). IR conferences have reflected this trend. Less than a third of the papers presented at the SGRI general conference between 2013 and 2023 addressed global-South politics as their primary focus, with the majority concentrating on EU/Italian policies, Mediterranean politics, and the global political order.

Relatedly, divisions hamper the consolidation of a wider and more interconnected research network. Despite the increasing prominence of SGRI over the last two decades, participation in IR events and workshops has remained relatively limited among area study experts, and even IR historians, who have generally prioritised sectoral initiatives. This has reduced opportunities for collaboration, hindering the integration of multi-perspective and context-sensitive approaches into the study of global politics.

Besides recognising the role of IR in the Italian academic landscape, there is also a need for a greater acknowledgement and promotion of the branches and sub-fields that characterise the discipline. Subjects such as International Security, Modern Warfare or Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), which are commonly taught in European academic curricula, continue to be excluded from most of Political Science and IR courses offered by Italian universities. As highlighted at the 2023 SISP general conference, such a state of affairs furthers a misalignment between the Italian scholarship and international standards. Furthermore, it contributes to fuelling the historical distance between Italian academia and policy making in the area of security and foreign policy. Despite recent improvements, the IR academic community continues to be rarely engaged in debates with practitioners this is a factor that reduces the practical impacts of scholarly research, limiting its visibility and influence on national decision-making processes.

The continuous development of SGRI can have a positive effect on these trends in the forthcoming years, increasing the impact of IR research both within and beyond academia. The Standing Group has been an active promoter of initiatives and panels exploring IR boundaries and horizons, addressing contemporary security challenges while raising awareness of the implications of current foreign policy decisions. Further investments in such a research direction may contribute to solidifying these areas as established fields of study within Italian university courses, enhancing public engagement. One way this could be done is through the shaping of a more comprehensive and institutionalised organizational framework recognising and incentivising research on specific branches of the discipline. Areas such as FPA could progressively turn into thematic sections, mirroring the very mechanisms through which SGRI, along with other Standing Groups, was formed within SISP. A permanent secretariat would help sustain research efforts and dissemination, supporting SGRI coordinators in the management of administrative tasks while amplifying external outreach and coordination. Such an operational structure would actively enhance the breadth and scope of the IR scholarship. In so doing, it would contribute to consolidating its relevance within the Italian research community, effectively building on the successes achieved in the last two decades.

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Each of the authors has contributed equally to the manuscript.

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TRIBUTE

Giorgio Freddi (1932-2024): The winemaker of Political Science in Italy

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Giorgio Freddi passed away on the 20th of May 2024. He was 92. Professor Emeritus of the University of Bologna, Giorgio Freddi played an essential and decisive role in institutionalising political science in Italy and making the University of Bologna an internationally recognised centre for empirical studies of politics, administration and public policy. He also played an important role in the institutionalisation of the ECPR.

Born in 1932, after graduating with honours in law in 1955 and obtaining a position as assistant professor of administrative law at the University of Bologna, he was awarded a Ford Foundation scholarship in 1959, which enabled him to obtain a master's degree and a PhD in political science at the prestigious Berkley campus of the University of California. This experience shaped his academic and professional life. On his return to Italy, developing empirical political research and creating institutions for this purpose became his main objective.

After working as a consultant for ENI and teaching in Trento, adjunct professor at the newly founded Faculty of Political Science in Bologna, he became a full professor in Bologna in 1972. Here he was first Director of the Istituto Politico-Amministrativo and then Director of the Department of Organisation and Political System (later the Department of Political Science), which under his leadership was to become the most important centre of political science in Italy.

A tireless institutional builder, Giorgio Freddi was President of the Italian Society of Political Science, the first Italian Chair of the European Consortium of Political Research (he held this position for two terms), founder of the Rivista Italiana di Politiche Pubbliche, and for many years a permanent lecturer at the National School of Public Administration. A pioneer in the internationalisation of universities, he has been a visiting professor at many prestigious universities, including UC-Berkeley, UC-Irvine, Uppsala, Oslo and Bergen.

He was equally dedicated to his students: he was not interested in their adherence to his ideas and scientific paradigms but in their passion, intelligence and critical spirit.

His research interests ranged from the comparison of bureaucratic systems to the study of the functioning of Justice, from the public administration to the study of

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organisations and public policy - environment, higher education, health - and resulted in the publication of over 15 volumes and some 50 papers.

It is therefore necessary to highlight the role played by Giorgio Freddi in the development of Italian and Bolognese political science. Eight years younger than Giovanni Sartori, the father of Italian political science, he shared with Sartori the efforts necessary for the birth of this discipline. In the words of Giuseppe De Palma, his good friend and colleague, "if Giovanni Sartori, an intemperate preacher, was spreading the good news, Giorgio Freddi, as an industrious winemaker, was diligently pulling up the shoots".

A firm believer in the virtues of a monodisciplinary department based on the American model, he had the satisfaction, however brief, of seeing the birth of the Department of Political Science, unique in the Italian academic landscape. And one cannot overlook the bitterness of the retired Freddi, when he realised how the Gelmini reform had thwarted his lifelong efforts.

Elegant, with refined tastes, a man of the world, a great conversationalist, affable, endowed with a great sense of humour and exquisite courtesy, ironic and self-mocking, with a lively intellect and curious nature, stimulated by an endless series of interests that went far beyond political science. Loyal, open and direct, if reserved, Giorgio Freddi was an intellectual even before he was a professor. And he was such a brilliant professor because he was such a brilliant intellectual, able to move easily on the most diverse subjects, with ease, balance and wit, aware, as it were, of the limits of the human condition, but always animated by an unshakeable faith in reason.

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TRIBUTE

Mario Caciagli (1938-2024)

A Political Scientist Between Political Science and History

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Mario Caciagli passed away in May 2024. For over sixty years, beginning in the early 1960s and continuing up to his final moments, he made a remarkable impact on the field of social sciences. His distinctive approach to comparative and historical political science set him apart as a significant contributor to our discipline.

Caciagli had an intense vita activa: he was deeply involved in organizing cultural activities through various institutional roles, and as a university professor, researcher, and scholar he dedicated himself to exploring political and social phenomena.

His scholarly contributions are reflected in an extensive bibliography spanning four languages in addition to Italian. As a university professor, he is fondly remembered for his exceptional ability to engage students in meaningful discussions, explanations, and interpretations of social and political phenomena. He deeply mastered the art of writing, dedicating himself to making complex ideas and phenomena accessible to all. Through his teaching, he imparted invaluable writing skills to countless students and mentees, emphasizing the importance of using words thoughtfully, elegantly, and thriftily. His legacy continues to inspire those who had the privilege of learning from him, leaving an indelible mark on the academic community.

The following pages will highlight the pivotal aspects of Mario Caciagli's intellectual journey and the major contributions his works made to the field of Political Science.

Empirical Comparative Politics: Between Electoral Studies and Political Culture

Through his research and theoretical reflections, Caciagli significantly contributed to defining historical political science, a method he predominantly utilized in studying local politics and political culture. He began his academic journey with robust historical investigations. His tesi di laurea was in Contemporary History, supervised by Giovanni Spadolini, and focused on La Martinella, a socialist periodical from Colle Val d'Elsa

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(Siena). Following this, he furthered his expertise as a research fellow at the Italian Historical Institute in Naples.

Caciagli dedicated his professional life to political science, yet he firmly believed that history always plays a crucial role in shaping political events and behaviors. He was convinced that it is impossible to engage in political science, or to analyze political and social phenomena more broadly, without without a deep awareness of their historical context.

His theoretical contemplation and empirical research primarily focused on political cultures. Throughout his writings, he emphasized that the term "political culture" does not inherently carry a positive connotation. It does not simply equate to civic culture, namely a culture based on the respect for rules and conscious democratic conduct. Rather political culture should be understood as a neutral term that can describe a wide range of sometimes conflicting phenomena in the social sciences. Caciagli expanded the understanding of political culture beyond the psychological aspect emphasized in Gabriel Almond's influential studies from the 1950s. He clarified that political culture is not solely based on individual opinions or attitudes. Instead, it is rooted in concepts, values, symbols, norms, rituals, and shared collective myths. Political culture is a multifaceted blend that emerges within a specific historical framework, interwoven with and shaped by power dynamics and economic structures. It is a fluid and evolving phenomenon that transforms over time. Therefore - Caciagli reminded us - there is no single political culture but rather multiple political cultures: those of the youth, women, immigrants, the bourgeoisie and proletariat, Catholics, Muslims, fascists, and communists. There are also the political cultures of national states and different cultures within nation-states, which can be defined as territorial subcultures (among others, Caciagli 2017; 2004; 1988a). Indeed, Italians have had and continue to have diverse and opposing political cultures, and Caciagli dedicated a significant portion of his research and publications to these characterizing subcultures. He applied comparative analysis to explain the differing electoral behaviors in various subcultural areas and the different organizational evolutions of parties. He wrote extensively about the twentieth-century epic of the red regions in Europe, explaining, through historical electoral comparison, the similarities and differences among these areas in Germany, Austria, and France (Caciagli 2006), and comparing them with the evolution and decline of the last red strongholds in Italy.

He also explored comprehensively the concept of clientelism, examining it not only in Italy but also as a widespread political phenomenon globally (Caciagli, 1977; 2009). His work includes an insightful analysis of the diminishing influence of the white subculture in Veneto (1988b), and the evolution of political subcultures during the Second Republic in Italy (Caciagli, 2010). Notably, his research on the red political subculture in Tuscany was thorough and extended over several years. His dedicated book on this subject, regarded as comprehensive in many respects (Caciagli, 2017), offers an in-depth look at the political culture of communists. This work is organized into four distinct phases over two decades, with a particular focus on the Medio Valdarno Inferiore region in central Tuscany. This study provides a valuable framework for understanding the broader ideological shifts within the Italian electorate from the post-war era to the present day.

Mario Caciagli's most recent publication (2022) brings together a rich selection of writings that span over fifty years, focusing on the Valdelsa region. His deep-seated commitment to this area, which he returned to for research repeatedly, reflects both his belief in the idea that "on revient toujours à ses premiers amours" (one always returns to one's first loves) and his desire to highlight the importance of delving into a region's historical processes to better understand contemporary issues. By carefully examining this specific territory, local political research allows for the collection of primary empirical data, enabling a thorough analysis of events. This approach, while more focused in scope, provides a solid foundation for the broader generalizations that are central to social and political science: Sacrificing some breadth in favor of gaining deeper insights.

Caciagli was deeply committed to interdisciplinary scholarship, seamlessly weaving together with political science, diverse fields such as history, electoral geography, sociology, and anthropology. This approach did not dilute his analysis or make it fragmented or ambiguous; rather, it enriched his work, making it more thorough, comprehensive, and insightful. By ensuring that each element interrelated and supported the others, he maintained a cohesive and comprehensive understanding. This exemplifies what it means to truly embrace an interdisciplinary approach, where each discipline enhances and deepens the insights provided by the others.

Internationalization: Embracing Languages and Cultures

On a scientific level, Caciagli's legacy is profoundly marked by his comparative, integrated, and in-depth approach. However, his broader academic impact is equally significant and deserves recognition: his unwavering dedication to the internationalization of research. This was particularly noteworthy in an era when, once again, such practices were far from commonplace. The idea of an international perspective, research networks, and collaborations with colleagues abroad was not yet standard; these concepts were still emerging and not widely adopted in academic circles.

Mario Caciagli didn't just champion these ideas in theory; he embodied them. His own work took him across Europe—spanning Spain, Germany, and France—reflecting his comparative outlook and boundless scientific curiosity. Moreover, he also urged young scholars to embrace international opportunities. This guidance was forward-thinking, anticipating that, within a few decades, such global connections would become vital for any successful academic career.

At the University of Florence, after having served as a professor at both the University of Catania in the South and the University of Padua in the North of Italy, he made a significant impact by championing the European Erasmus Program from its inception in 1987, and then coordinating it for nearly a decade. Through this dedicated effort, he greatly expanded the scientific, intellectual, and linguistic horizons of hundreds of political science students, as well as those of numerous young faculty members.

Caciagli was fluent in three foreign languages, in addition to (and better than) English. Before English became the dominant global lingua franca and the primary language in our field, his linguistic skills— which by him meant a comprehensive cultural knowledge gained through collaborations, research stays, networks and fieldwork— enabled him to work effortlessly across many European countries and beyond. He was not only able to write in these languages but also read newspapers, primary sources, and

conduct interviews. Such deep cultural and linguistic knowledge - such an essential requirement for academic researchers - was rare among his peers of his generation. Through his example, Mario Caciagli showed many young scholars and future generations a richer form of internationalization, which goes beyond merely knowing a (single?) foreign language. A path that, while certainly more complex, is intellectually much more stimulating and rewarding.

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