

Italy Country Report - Civil Society Elites

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Brief review of elite structure (inequality patterns, class differences, a national elite model)

The social structure of Italian society presents high levels of inequality in a European perspective. Following the economic crisis of 2008 levels of inequality have increased significantly. Recent figures from the Italian national institute for statistics (ISTAT 2018) show a small decrease of inequalities between 2015 and 2016 but the figures are still much higher than before the crisis. When it comes to differences in income Italy ranks at the 19th place among European countries (excluding the UK and Ireland) with a Gini coefficient of 0,327, while the European average is 0.303. Income inequalities are also much more present in the Southern regions (including the islands of Sicily and Sardinia) (0,334) than in the Centre (0,318), the North-west (0,311) and the North east (0,279). In a comparative perspective, the Southern regions have a level of inequality of income similar to the Greek one, while the regions of the Northeast resemble the situation of Austria.

Despite continuous economic and political crises, the structure of the Italian elite, or “ruling class” as it is often described in Italy (*classe dirigente*) has been quite stable. Carlo Carboni’s (2016) periodic surveys of the elite show that “60% of the powerful and renown figures noted in the course of the 2011 had also been observed in 1998” (Carboni 2016: 176). Carboni’s (2015) studies (based on surveys and studies of curricula) show an elite structure based on three maps of individuals in three concentric circles:

- 1) The inner circle including only the “top leaders” with charisma, fame and decisional power (1924 individuals)
- 2) The intermediary circle including also the “pulling elites” who participate to decisional processes thanks to their organizational weight (5.967 individuals)
- 3) The enlarged circle including also the “policy elites” who use positional advantages in the organization, handling and negotiation of functional and corporative interests (17.300 individuals).

Figures from 2007 show that the largest elite group when considering the enlarged group is the political elite which make up almost half of the group (49.9%), followed by associational elite (24,4%) and the business elite (13.7%). It’s interesting to notice however that the business elite is overrepresented among the inner circle of top-leaders, a group in which they are more numerous (38,9%) than the political elite (37,1%). Among this inner circle the associational elite is a small minority (12,6%).

When it comes to social background, in the studies by Carboni (2016) the Italian elite turns out to be a) male-dominated with 8 out of 10 members being man, b) “gerontocratic” with an increasing average age (in 2010 62,3 years of age), c) “provincial” with one in three having studied or worked abroad and d) predominantly coming from the centre north of Italy and metropolitan areas. These figures have been compared to elite groups in Norway, Britain, France, Spain and Germany. A quite similar pattern is depicted in looking at the entries in the

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Who's Who in Italy as discussed by James Newell (2015) based on the entries from 1992 and 2012 (the database seems inactive and has not been updated since 2014).

Scholarly discussions of the development of Italian elites highlight different patterns. The end of World War II and the fall of the fascist regime gave a pivotal role to political parties characterized by an imperfect two-party system with the Christian democrats (DC) permanently in power as the “government elite” and the Communists (PCI) permanently in opposition and the “constitutional opposition (Verzichelli 2016).

The power vacuum created by this event meant that the only authority available for Italians to turn to was the Church or the Resistance movement, which was dominated by the political parties. Central, therefore, to the reconstruction of social organizations and interest groups, the parties were able—as “the principal channels of access to the bureaucracy and the principal transmission belts in the allocation of resources from centre to periphery”—to penetrate the interstices of civil society and the state (Newell 2015: 9).

According to some scholars, these two parties supported and were supported by specific civil society areas, i.e. the Catholic and the socialist organizations (Biorcio and Vitale; 2016; La Valle, 2006; Manoukian, 1968). These relations were so strong that they influenced the construction of the elites of the two parties and the elites of their respective civil society areas. Biorcio and Vitale (2016) show that these parties had a different way to produce leaders. For the PCI it was the party that trained internally its members producing the leaders of the civil society actors. Whereas for the DC it was the contrary: during the first years after the World War II it was the Catholic civil society that trained and provided the political party with some of their best leaders (Ibidem: 22). From the 1970s, this tight relationship between parties and civil society change and solidarity actors and their leaders became more independent for their political counterparts.

The development of the Italian elite is often related to the lack of trust they enjoy among the population and the “improper relations” (collusion) between economic and political elites. While economic elites provided political elites with financial support for the rising costs of politics, political elites provided business elites with patronage for routine business matters (Newell 2015).

The corruption scandals that surfaced between 1992 and 1994 however, shook the system and “dismantled the whole ruling elite of the classic governmental parties” (Verzichelli 2016). Unstable centre-left and centre-right governments were at times dominated by non-partisan ministers but were also during periods of crisis replaced by whole technocratic governments. During this time, we see also an increase in the number of the ruling class as the number of people living off politics increased both in terms of elective positions and in terms of policy professionals.

While there are signs of continuity in the permanent condition of crisis of the Italian political system (Kaiser and Edelman eds. 2016), there are also traces of the rise a new system of reproduction of elites based on different party structures: i.e. the minimal party model exemplified by *Forza Italia* (FI) the centre-right party of Silvio Berlusconi, the post-bureaucratic party model exemplified by the centre-left *Democratic Party* (PD) and the anti-party system exemplified by the *Five star Movement* (M5S). Each of these party models

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seems to provide different forms of reproduction of political elites involving different types of leaders (Verzichelli 2016: 197).

The 2013 elections marks not only a new revolution in the formation of the political elite, but also clearly signifies a discontinuity with recent “revolutionary” turning points: indeed, the mean age of the newcomers MPs has significantly decreased (even compared to the mid-nineties), the rate of female representatives is now the highest in Italian history, and, above all, at least three alternative patterns of parliamentary selection are distinguishable.

Short historical civil society development (structure, organizations, events, persons)

The historical development of Italian civil society is of particular interest for understanding the significant changes that have taken place in its nature and role over the last 30 years, when it has changed from a marginal actor to a key actor in the supply of welfare. It is also in its complex history that we can understand its heterogeneity.

Modern civil society in Italy has its roots in the 19th century during the formation of the modern Italian state, but the first civil society institutions, mainly charitable foundations, already existed during the Roman period and operated until the 17th century. Moreover, before the formation of the Italian State, in 1861, there were city corporations and catholic networks of charitable organizations - such as hospices for ill people; shelters for orphans; associations supporting poor etc - created by the Catholic Church. According to most scholars (e.g. Barbetta and di Maggio 2008), the origin of the modern Italian civil society is strongly linked to the Catholic Church that has been the strongest counter-weight to the state since the distinction between spiritual and temporal power. The Catholic institutions were service-oriented actors able to compensate for the absence of public welfare services. In fact, although the new Italian state moved to reduce the influence of the Church in society, incorporating its solidarity actors in the new welfare system, catholic organizations and their representatives maintained their power and influence. For most of the 20th century Italian civil society has been dominated by the Catholic Church but also by cooperatives, trade unions and mutual benefit societies, linked to workers' socialist movement, which emerged mainly in the North of the country at the beginning of the century (Cartocci and Maconi 2006; Barbetta and Maggio 2008).

Even if during Fascism most of the non-Catholic associations were formally suppressed, at the end of World War II they have been recreated assuming an important role in the Italian political context. In that period we see the development of the interrelation between civil society and the two main Italian political parties: the DC (Christian Democratic Party) and the PCI (Italian Communist Party). These two political parties had a different relation with civil society and its organizations. According to De Nardis (2000), Biorcio and Vitale (2016), the main objective of the organizations linked to the socialist tradition (associations but also trade unions) was to extend the political influence of the PCI through a work of mobilization of the population. On the other hand, the DC became the political representation in the government of the interests of the catholic organizations (parish; charitable associations) and its actions were more focused on a work of mediation between the catholic civil society, directly linked to the Church, and the government.

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The earliest research about Italian civil society was conducted at the end of the 1950s (Almond and Verba, 1963; Galli, 1966) and has shown that if the number of Italians engaging in civil society groups was lower (3%) than in other European countries, the number of people who were members of Catholic groups or political parties were higher (Galli, 1966; La Valle, 2006). In that period *“the political integration was –still- based on the culture of political parties and the majority of associative networks was collateral at the political parties”* (Biorcio et Vitale, 2016). During the 1960s and 1970s, the interdependence between civil society and the political parties became more complex and new associative actors were created.

The development of the “new” Italian civil society and third sector began between the end of 1970s and the early 1980s. The cultural, social and political mobilizations of the 1960s and 1970s brought to light new social issues such as the right of the most vulnerable groups. In 1971 the Italian Caritas – one of the biggest catholic organizations – was created and with its first director Monsignor Giovanni Nervo the notion of the “rights of the poor” became central in the actions of and the debate on civil society (Fazzi, 2013). In that period due to the economic and fiscal crisis, the public expenditures had been reorganized and the Italian welfare state became unable to meet the growing needs of the population (Fazzi, 2011; Thomson et al. 2009). In that context, like in many other European countries, the service production was transferred to different kinds of solidarity organizations within civil society: the third sector.

Some scholars have argued that the Italian third sector does not completely coincide with the third sector developed in other European countries (Borzaga and Fazzi, 2011). They argue that if in other countries such as Germany, Grain Britain, but also France (Larchanché, 2012; Santilli 2017) the main social actors who have been developed were humanitarian organizations, or civil society organizations in general, Italy has opted for a strong institutionalization at local level of the cooperation between the public sector and solidarity actors (Scaramuzzino, 2012). During the building of the Italian third sector, charitable organizations have developed linkages with other organizations, including new associations, by organizing themselves into consortia. In fact, this period was characterized by the emergence of new and diversified associations, mainly voluntary organizations but also social cooperatives, a type of organization not bound to a particular form of governance. They may assume a mixed form of both workers and volunteers or only be made up by workers. The majority of them were semi-professionalized organizations. It has been argued that, because of this historical development, the Italian third sector has never included informal groups, grassroots and social movements (Bassoli, Cinalli and Giugni, 2014; della Porta et Diani, 1997; della Porta, 2006; Diani 2015; Giugni, 2004).

These different forms of solidarity actions coexist but their relationship has always been intricate. The areas in which these new actors have most increased their presence have been welfare services, particularly health care, social services and assistance to disadvantaged persons (Fazzi, 2010; Borzaga and Fazzi, 2014). They mostly provided, as those previously in place, social services, assisting and supporting disadvantages people such as people with disabilities, poor or homeless people etc. These actors had a high degree of autonomy in their choices and were supported by public – national and local- funding.

The growth of TSOs [Third Sector Organizations] was also fostered by the availability of public resources, especially at the local level. Economic pressures for the curbing of public expenditures were still at their beginnings.

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At the same time, the combination of political and cultural movements and the emergence of new needs created widespread cultural support for the expansion of public expenditure on social groups previously considered residual or devoid of social rights. This social consensus on initiatives intended to extend the sphere of social citizenship was a further factor which stimulated political decisions to support the growth of TSOs (Borzaga et Fazzi, 2014:415).

With the collapse of the Italian post-war parties and of the whole so called First Republic in the early 1990s, new civil society organizations, more institutionalized than the previous ones, became more prominent. The birth of the so-called Second Republic is considered as a turning point of the Italian civil society history by many researchers. They argue that the 1990s was a period in which the *pioneering phase* gives way to that of the *expansion and recognition* of Italian civil society (Borzaga and Fazzi, 2011). In fact, this period was characterized by a general and marked societal loosing of trust in political parties. This is confirmed by the increase of people who participated to civil society actions and the decrease of people who were members of parties (Manoukian, 1968). A study conducted in 2007 by Vitale and Biorcio (2016) has shown that the number of the members of political parties had changed from 4,000.000 in 1963 to 1,500.000 in 2006. In the same period the number of people engaged in some solidarity activities increased from 3% to 16% (Ibidem; ISTAT, 2013).

In that period, the number of organizations and their diversification increased because of the strongly low public coverage of social services. According to the first census on non-profit organizations, conducted in 1999, 55,2% of existing organizations was founded in the 1990s (ISTAT, 2001). As in the past decades, the historical organizations previously in place linked to the Church and to the workers movements had a privileged relationship with public authorities but during the 1990s, other actors became increasingly prominent.

Associations such as sports clubs, trade unions, volunteer organizations and advocacy groups acquired a new ability to orient political choices, to shape agenda setting in the public sphere and to filter media communication. (Ruzza, 2010: 263)

Because of the increase in the number of people seeking support and of the number of organizations interested in accessing public funds, public authorities applied more competitive procedures in the allocation of public resources. In this new context, the relationship between the state and the solidarity actors became more elaborate but, as some studies have shown, the competitive situation that was established did not curb the progressive expansion of the entire non-profit sector within the field of welfare services provision.

From 2000, the structure of civil society changed further. This last period is characterized by a marked dependence of the third sector on public authorities and by a process of professionalization of the whole organized civil society but in particular of the social cooperatives, the main local actors of the third sector (Fazzi, 2011; Ascoli, Pavolini, and Ranci; 2003).

The orientation towards social welfare needs and services of the third sector actors and their close dependence on public resources, seems to have caused a fracture in its relationships

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with the grassroots and social movements during the last ten years.

State – CS relations: models, forms and patterns of consultation, key reforms etcetera

The State-civil society relations have been shaped and re-shaped several times since the 1990s. Before the 1990s, Italian law did not regulate the third sector and associative actions and organizations. In their periodization of these relations, Ranci, Pellegrino and Pavolani (2007) identify three periods that relate to the development of an “Italian third sector policy community” (p. 101).

The first period (1980s to mid-1990s) is associated with an “absence” of a policy community and hence civil society actors resorting to “fragmented pressure pluralism”. There were a hand-full of peak organizations that were trying to influence third sector policy in their own ways without any “sustained sector-wide collective endeavour” (Ranci et al. 2009).

The second period (mid-1990s to 2001) is described as the “golden age” and is characterized by a phase of intensifying institutionalization. This period revolves around two separate but related events: on the one hand the creation of a permanent third sector platform representing the whole “third sector” at national level, namely Forum del Terzo Settore (FTS) (Ranci et al. 2007). It is a so called “network of fourth level”, that includes “networks of second and third level” and is hence at the top of the hierarchy of networks of networks. On the other hand we have the formalization of third sector-state relation through specific policy processes, involving the FTS as interlocutor (Ranci et al. 2009). It has implied the recognition by the state of the role of the FTS through a specific compact (“agreement”) between the Italian centre-left government and the Third sector in 1999. By this agreement the Forum has gained the status of social part and it has hence the right to be consulted when public decisions have to be made on all themes and issues in the “social field” (see also Antonucci 2014).

This process had started with three laws enacted in 1990 and in 1991. The first one allowed local authorities to subcontract the delivery of services to organizations regulating and facilitating the procedures. The two laws of 1991 – law 381/91 and law 266/91 concerning social cooperatives and voluntary associations - recognized the social and public function of private not-for-profit organizations engaged in the production of welfare services and the work integration of disadvantaged people (Borzaga and Fazzi; 2010). As a consequence, from 1991 onwards, the amount of public expenditure on social services substantially increased as well as the number of cooperatives. These laws can be said to represent the formal creation of the Italian third sector.

The third period (from 2002) is described as the “submergence”, with decreasing levels of institutionalization of the national representation of the third sector and an apparent loss of the gains made during the previous period. This period is marked by a downgrading of the FTS and a loss of political cohesion within its ranks and a choice by the new centre-right government to “... *laps into essentially ad hoc and individualistic relationships with particular parts of the non-profit world*” (Ranci et al. 2009: 105).

This phase can however also be traced back to the year 2000 with a new national law on social services (L. 328/00), approved by a centre-left government, which initiated a new chapter of relationship between public authorities and third sector. With the law the third sector was recognized as a “*legitimate participant in the planning and management of social services, but within a new model which defined an integrated system of services under the*

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aegis of the public authority” (Borzaga and Fazzi, 2014: 417). Local public authorities assumed a central role in local social planning and in financial resources spending (Bifulco and Cemenleri 2008) in a period marked by national budget constraints. The result was the growth of competition between non-governmental institutions in order to obtain resources, as described earlier. Moreover, since 2006, the majority of regional authorities have introducing new regulatory instruments prescribing that organizations which provide specific services, must conform to professional standards. For that reason, other researchers describe this period as an “institutionalized” phase of the Italian third sector.

The third sector was recognized as a legitimate participant in the planning and management of social services, but within a new model which defined an integrated system of services under the aegis of the public authority (Fazzi, 2011)

This perspective doesn't contradict the definition of this phase proposed by Ranci, Pellegrino and Pavolini (2009). Borzaga and Fazzi refer mostly to the service-oriented activities of third sector organizations rather than to the voice, representation-oriented activities. Ranci, Pellegrino and Pavolini instead focus on the FTS and its role as representative of the sector vis-à-vis the state. To sum up this third period is characterized by a de-institutionalization of the third sector in terms of national representation and a institutionalization of its organizations at sub-national level as service-providers.

The beginning of a new fourth period might be marked by the recent reform of the law on the third sector (decreto legislativo n. 117 del 2017), introduced in 2017 by the centre-left government (see Balli et al. 2017). This reform has introduced many provisions that are still under implementation, not least because of the results of the 2018 elections which have brought to power a coalition of right- and left-oriented populist parties (Lega and Movimento 5 Stelle). Among other things the law has introduced a new arena for state-civil society dialogue, the national council for the third sector (Consiglio Nazionale del terzo settore, CNTS). Participants from third sector organizations in the CNTS are by law chosen by the FTS (16 participants) and by the Ministro del Lavoro e delle politiche sociali (Minister of Work and Social Policies) (28 participants). The FTS has a strong presence in the Council with only 9 representatives in the Council representing organizations that are not directly members of the FTS.

It seems clear that the representation of civil society vis-à-vis the state has been influenced by the political developments at national level. It is in particular evident a “cultural ideological” affinity between the centre-left governments and the third sector while the opposite goes for its relation with the centre-right governments led by Silvio Berlusconi. The latter governments have had a more confrontational approach than collaborative when it comes to both industrial relations with the trade unions and relations with the third sector in the social welfare area (Ranci et al. 2009).

The representation of civil society in specific policy areas has also been shaped by recent trends of subsidiarization of social policies both vertically with devolution of powers and responsibilities to the sub-national level and horizontally with an increased role played by third sector organizations in producing welfare services with or without support by public authorities (Kazepov 2012). This fragmentation of the system of decision-making has produced a complex web of relations at different administrative levels for the policy processes

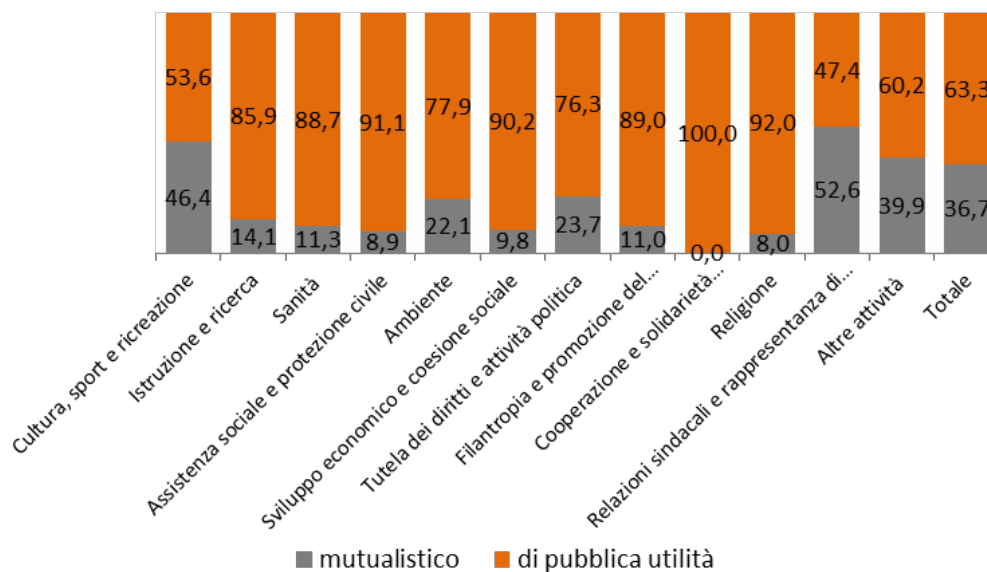
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and in the chain of decision and production of welfare services (Antonucci 2014, Ranci et al. 2009).

Organized civil society structure in each country (facts and figures no. organizations, volunteers, employees, revenue). New forms of organizing (network, fluid and flexible)

According to the most recent data of ISTAT, in 2016 there were 343,432 non-governmental organizations in Italy; of which 85,1% were associations; 4,5% were cooperatives; 2,2% were Foundations; 8,2% were catholic organizations, mutual help organizations and other kind of organizations, such as informal groups and trade unions. The data did not include political parties. Reflecting the historical evolution of the Italian civil society, in 2015 the majority of the organizations (63,3%) were service-oriented, engaged in service activities such as education, health services and social welfare. The data were similar in the past years with a slight increase compared to 2011 (+1,5).

FIGURA 1.2. ISTITUZIONI NON PROFIT PER ORIENTAMENTO (MUTUALISTICO O SOLIDARISTICO) E SETTORE DI ATTIVITÀ PREVALENTE Valori percentuali Anno 2015



Concerning their mission, most of Italian non-profit organizations supported vulnerable groups (disable people; poor; migrants) (34,4%) or worked in the field of human rights (20,4%). Compared to the national data of 2011 and 2015, in 2016 the number of religious organizations, foundations, trade unions and associations working in the environmental field, had increased.

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PROSPETTO 5. ISTITUZIONI NON PROFIT E DIPENDENTI PER SETTORE DI ATTIVITA'
Anno 2016, valori assoluti, composizione percentuale e variazioni percentuali

Settori di attività	Istituzioni			Dipendenti		
	v.a.	%	Var. % 2016-2015	v.a.	%	Var. % 2016-2015
Cultura, sport e ricreazione	220.859	64,3	1,2	51.079	6,3	9,1
Istruzione e ricerca	13.417	3,9	-0,5	122.928	15,1	-1,6
Sanità	12.080	3,5	4,2	183.662	22,6	3,3
Assistenza sociale e protezione civile	32.105	9,3	4,0	295.423	36,4	4,1
Ambiente	5.422	1,6	6,2	2.070	0,3	4,3
Sviluppo economico e coesione sociale	6.613	1,9	-3,3	96.737	11,9	4,4
Tutela dei diritti e attività politica	5.268	1,5	0,4	3.474	0,4	-1,5
Filantropia e promozione del volontariato	3.604	1,0	-4,7	1.966	0,2	-9,0
Cooperazione e solidarietà internazionale	4.049	1,2	-6,5	4.072	0,5	-6,4
Religione	16.455	4,8	14,4	8.579	1,1	28,2 ^(a)
Relazioni sindacali e rappresentanza interessi	21.813	6,4	5,8	38.041	4,7	0,3
Altre attività	1.747	0,5	0,1	4.675	0,6	-16,8
TOTALE	343.432	100	2,1	812.706	100	3,1

(a) La variazione è influenzata dall'effetto della riclassificazione delle istituzioni per settore di attività

Italian non-governmental organizations employ 789,000 paid workers and have 5,5 million volunteers. On average an organization has 2 paid employees and 16 volunteers.

The majority of paid workers are engaged in service activities: 86,1% of them is engaged in social assistance activities, health, education and economic development. The majority of volunteers, around 3 million, is engaged in the fields of culture, recreation and sports. Despite the increase in the number of volunteers the last years (+ 16,2% compared to 2011), the percentage of Italians who participate in volunteering or in other forms of social activism is low. According to recent studies, in 2013 only 16,2% of Italians declared that they belonged to associations and only 6,1% declared to be members of trade unions (Istat, 2013). The data concerning the period from 1997 and 2006 showed that the majority of people engaged in civil society actions were more than 40 years old. In general, the participation seems to be more popular among high-educated persons living in big cities and in the Northern regions (Biorcio and Vitale, 2016).

According to data from 1999, 61% of Italian civil society organizations' revenue came from fees for services provided by the organizations, property and membership contributions. Only 37% of revenues came from public sector and 3% from philanthropy (Barbetta, Cima, Zamaro et al. 2004). Compared to other EU countries Italian organizations received less economic support by the state (58% in EU). It is worth to notify that when it comes to third sector cooperatives Italy, in 2005 their revenues from contracts with public authorities amounted to 67,4%. Around 40.0% of these revenues were obtained through competitive bids for tender, 40% following direct negotiations and 20% from other types of contracts (Borzaga and Fazzi, 2014).

Central coordinating bodies within CS (federation, umbrellas, capacity-building centers)

Forum per il terzo settore (representing the sector at national level, see above)

CSVnet l'associazione nazionale dei Centri di Servizio per il volontariato (national organization for the centres for volunteering)

Key challenges and transformation processes are at play in Italy. New organizations and actors. Who is the challenger and who is the challenged?

Both research on civil society and on political elites has in the last few years focused on the financial crisis' impact on Italian society and civil society. Italy has been one of the European countries most affected by the economic crisis since 2008. This situation has had negative consequences in terms of cuts to the welfare state and increasing inequality (Kousis, Giugni and Lahusen 2018). Being the Italian civil society structurally and historically dependent on public policies and funding, austerity policies have affected the relationship between state and solidarity world. The high reduction of funds to civil society and third sector organizations has strongly increased their competition because over scarce resources. Moreover, the welfare state retrenchment has caused the increase of regional differences in terms of services provided to the most vulnerable groups.

As in other European countries, the persisting crisis has favoured a rapid expansion of new alternative forms of resilience beyond established civil society organisations (Kousis, Giugni and Lahusen 2018). Even if the "expansion phase" of the Italian third sector has been stopped by the crisis, the organizations are experimenting with new fields of activity such as local development, social agriculture and entrepreneurship, ethical banks etc. (Fazzi, 2011). Some scholars have stressed that the number of newly founded civil society actors has been higher than the number of organizations that have ceased to exist, during the period of economic crisis. They have also shown that the number of employees has increased in the largest, traditional organizations during the last ten years (Barbetta, Ecchia and Zamaro, 2016).

Another consequence of the economic crisis has been the development of populist and neo-nationalist socio-political forces in the European Union. In Italy, traditionally there has been a strong consensus that Europeanization was the solution to the problems caused by clientelism and corruption at domestic levels. While the crisis does not seem to have impacted on the political elites' pro-Europeanist stances it has widened the gap with the increasingly euro-sceptical masses (Conti et al. 2016). This phenomenon has also been facilitated by the so-called "refugee crisis", sparked off in Italy since the summer of 2015, as the results of the national elections in 2018 seem to confirm. The new Italian government is formed by two euro-sceptic, populist and anti-migrant parties: the League of Matteo Salvini, a historical right party born as a Northern Italian independentist movement in the 1990s, and the Five Stars Movements (MS5) of Luigi Di Maio, led by the comedian Beppe Grillo and born as an anti-elitist and anti-political movement in 2007 (Ruzza et Fella 2013). The connection between these two parties and the national civil society and third sector is complex. Some authors have stressed (Ruzza, 2010; Ruzza and Fella, 2013) the importance of the utilization of civil society by the Italian right-parties in the last decades as an idealized instrument to fight against the old political elites, to protect and represent the people's voice. For the League, which was in power within the centre-right coalition headed by Berlusconi from 1994 to 2011, the Northern civil society consisted in:

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“the morally healthy public sphere of North Italy’s population of artisans and shopkeepers inspired by the values of hard work and traditional morality and respect for local community” (Ruzza, 2010:268).

The League is linked to civil society organizations with a conservative ideology mostly based in the Northern part of the country. When it comes to the M5S, defined by its members as a post-ideological (neither right nor left), anti-party – structured as a bottom-up movement - the connection with civil society is more ambiguous. At the beginning of its history, the movement considered civil society as the highest instrument of representation of the “Italian people” at the point that the members of the movement proposed Gino Strada, founder of the international medical charity association *Emergency* and engaged in the pro-migrant cause, as one of the candidates for the election of the President of Republic in 2013. But during the last years, mostly since the M5S came to power, the relationship between the party and the associative world has changed.

We are witnessing several points of contrast between the government and the civil society. First of all, there is an open contrast when it comes to the issue of migration policies. One of the first actions of the government has been abolishing key forms of protection for migrants, stopping asylum seekers from accessing the reception system and blocking the entry of NGO-rescue ships into Italian ports. The government has dismantled several reception centers for asylum seekers managed by social cooperatives so that numerous workers are losing their jobs. This political operation is justified by a process of de-legitimation of NGOs. In this process, NGOs have been defined as actors that support criminals offering migrants free passage to the EU. As a result, civil society leaders and people linked to the movement for refugees’ rights such as Gino Strada have come to be labelled as people who are “profiting” of the migration issue. Similarly, Domenico Lucano – former mayor of a small town in the South of Italy where he founded the association “Città Futura” to give life to a widespread reception system involving refugees in that rural community – has been arrested by the authorities on charges of aiding illegal immigration. This situation has brought some other civil society leaders to organize demonstrations against the government such as the “red-t-shirt” event organized by Don Ciotti. Don Ciotti is the president and founder, amongst others, of a national association, *Libera*, fighting against Mafia and caporalato (a form of system for exploitation of migrant workers). In such a difficult situation it is worth noticing that some new forms of civil society actions, linked to local institutional administrators, are developing. The association RECOSOL (Rete per i comuni solidali, Network for solidarity Municipalities) born in 2003 in order to promote local solidarity actions towards migrants, has risen from 100 members to 500 members. In general, we are witnessing an increase of elected mayors who are engaged in civil society in order to criticize and challenge the national government on its migration policy. If in the migration field the government and non-governmental institutions find themselves on collision, their relationship in other fields seem to be more articulated and less conflictual, not least because of the differences between the two parties in power.

For instance, the official political objective of the new government is fighting against the established political and economic elites (at national and at European level), against their corruption and power. The criticism of the government is mainly addressed to the

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left parties in power during the last decade but also to the civil society actors which are supposed to be linked to those political elites, such as the largest trade unions and the organizations directly linked to politicians. A new law for instance, requires non-governmental institution to change their legal status to be on par with political parties, if they have at least one leader being present or past (in the last 10 years) member of the government, of the national or EU parliament or other institutional committees, or members of a political party or local administrators. Over the last weeks, representatives of the Italian third sector are negotiating with the government in order to modify this provision as the consequence would be not only a change of the legal status of the civil society organization but also a high increase in the taxes paid by the organization. Moreover, this law follows another one with which the government has tried to increase the amount of taxation for civil society and third sector organizations. According to the Forum del terzo settore, the risk is the shut down of numerous civil society institutions:

We are not parties, we are people who spend their own time helping other people. It would be unreasonable to be submitted at the same obligations of political parties (Fiaschi, national president of Forum del terzo settore)

The objective of this new law, called *Spazzacorrotti* (sweep away corruption), is to fight against corruption but can also be seen as an instrument to reduce the linkages between civil society and politicians. In fact, even though there are no recent data about the amount of politicians or ex-politicians moving out from the political field to civil society, the historical evolution of Italian civil society suggests that this kind of boundary crossing is still high (Biorcio and Vitale, 2016). The public strategy for reducing the corruption and the power of established “elites” also goes through a process of delegitimization of the largest trade unions, which are in a less powerful position than in the past but still active in the national context. From this perspective, the government proposed to cut the so-called “golden pensions” of trade union leaders claiming that they are part of the Italian political elite. On February 2019, for the first time, all the national trade unions (left and right) organized a protest against the government. Maurizio Landini, head of the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL), is the person who most represents the contrast between the government and Italy's labor organizations. Elected on January 2019, in his first public speech as General Secretary he attacked the government migration and labor policies and as xenophobic. The reaction of the government has been to claim that he cannot represent the people as part of the elite. During an interview on a tv program he defended himself from the accusation of being part of the elite by saying:

I'm not an elite. My salary is public and assured by the contributions paid by the members. It's me who pays the salary of the parliamentarians, not the contrary
(<https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/02/28/pensioni-doro-landini-sui-sindacalisti-di-maio-dice-sciocchezze-poi-rivela-il-suo-stipendio-da-segretario-generale/5004033/>).

The last and most recent point of contrast concerns the World Congress of Families (WCF) XIII held in Verona at the end of March. This congress was created in the USA in

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1997 and is an event organized by pro-life organizations for campaigns against abortion and same-sex unions, and for those in support of the conservative family, so-called *natural family*. The WCF is strongly supported by the League of Matteo Salvini and by the Ministry of the Family, created by the new government, at the point that the government has decided to finance the event and its logo had been used for promotion.

The relationship between the League and the Catholic conservative and pro-life organizations is increasingly tight, mostly in the North of Italy and in Verona. After a strong mobilization of pro-gender and feminist groups spearheaded by the activists of Non Una di Meno (No one less) and after the mobilization of the Democratic opposition party (PD), the M5S has started criticizing the presence of the League at the event and wanted the logo of the government administrative office to be removed from the event's website. Also the Church and some catholic organizations have dissociated themselves from the event considered too radical.

Concerning the Church and its catholic organizations, during the same day of the WCF, the 41th national conference of Caritas, one of the most important and historical catholic institutions, was held in Matera. The aim of the conference this year was to promote a culture of charity against the governmental rhetoric of "Italians first". This conference marks the willingness of the Church to assume a role of advocacy against populisms. The main intent of the Italian catholic community seems to be the building of a new catholic political party through the mobilization of the catholic organizations' leaders.

The CEI (Episcopal Conference of Italy), through its statute, asked to Caritas to promote just and good laws according to the Constitution (Don Suddu, national director of Caritas)

Concluding remark –stability/change

Considering the historical evolution of the Italian civil society from its birth to the present day, two major and contradictory characteristics seem to appear. On one hand the history of the Italian civil society, mostly since the 1970s -1990s and mainly during the last years, is marked by a strong dynamicity and by conflicts with the state. On the other hand, the Italian socio-political context is based on a kind of historical stability. In the 19th and 20th centuries the growth of Italian civil society was characterized by the contrast between the Church, as hegemonic solidarity actor for long time, and the state. After World War II civil society organizations started a slow process of independence from the control of the main dominant actors: political parties and the Church. Since the 1970s civil society has changed its features and its relation with the state several times at the point that scholars tend to divide its historical trajectory in decades. New non-governmental actors have emerged, new alliances, consortia, movements are born during the last 30 years.

With the economic crisis, the social and political changes have followed at high pace. Recent research shows that since 2008 alternative action organizations, mostly involved in informal and local community actions, have increased, reaching around 44% of the new solidarity actors in Italy (Kousis, Bosi, Cristancho, 2016). This dynamic reflects the trajectory of the Italian State that seems to live in a permanent condition of economic and political crisis and to

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be traversed by continuous and rapid changes. The level of economic inequalities in the Italian society is increasing. According to ISTAT in 2017 the percentage of poor households in relative terms increased with respect to 2016 (12.3% in 2017 from 10.6% in 2016). In the last years, we have witnessed a rise of the level of distrust among Italians in political parties and public institutions and a spectacular growth of new anti-elitist political movements, as the composition of the new government suggests.

Despite continuous economic and political crises, rapid changes, new movements and actors, the structure of both the Italian elite and the Italian civil society seems marked by stability (Kaiser et Edelman 2016). The legitimacy of the Italian civil society is still strongly connected to the traditional institutions such as the Church, the state and the political parties. The number of Italians engaged in solidarity actions is quite stable and the majority of third sector organizations is still service-oriented. Concerning the political elite, even if there are some signs of discontinuity in term of party structure (the M5S is an exemple of that) it is still characterized by a strong stability in term of social background, mission, values and relationship with the civil society. As Carlo Ruzza (2013: 50) stressed

if the M5S is distinctive in distancing itself from traditional right-wing populism, there are however key traits that appear to reflect Italian political culture in its rejection of aspects of representative democracy. These relate to an emphasis on civil society as a new grand narrative which juxtaposes a fundamentally moral civil society—the undifferentiated populist category of ‘the people’—with a corrupt elite” (2013: 50).

The Italian case is of particular interest for a reflection on the relationship between the state, including local authorities, and the whole civil society. In that perspective, it is worth taking into consideration the role of politicians and local administrators in the Italian solidarity movement. For example, is an association made of mayors, critical to the national government, a civil society actor? Or is it to be understood as an expression of a conflict between levels of public administration? And even so, is this conflict taking place within the public sector or within civil society?

It is also worth considering the impact of the law Spazzacorrotti on the features of the Italian Civil Society. For the government a “good” and “healthy” civil society is a civil society without politicians. Does it mean that civil society has to reduce its political dimension and become more conform to the service-oriented cooperatives of the third sector? Or will we observe a change of the third sector from a service-oriented actor to a political-oriented one in order to become representative of the whole Italian civil society?

In doing that, it may be necessary to think about the correspondence between the *civil society* and the *third sector*. Some scholars argue that the Italian third sector, with its cooperatives, is loosing its relationship with civil society. For instance, the Forum del Terzo Settore seems to be aware of its incapability to represent all Italian organizations and not only the biggest, most structured and institutionalized ones. A critical reflection on those linkages and their innovative power is needed.

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Appendix 1. Key academic resources for empirical work

Research centers/university departments

Data bases available with info on CS in each country

Key events (annual conferences or similar)

Research books necessary to read

Appendix 2. Key sector-based/related resources for empirical work

Umbrella organizations

Training centers

Government departments

On-line resources/web-pages

Events (award ceremonies, conferences, etc...)

Appendix 3. Person gallery to each report

Key persons in CS

Key organisations in CS

Appendix 4. Log book

Contacts and engagements, update, change and comment upon