

Emmanuele Pavolini, Roberto Pedersini, *Trade Unions and social policies: The Case of Italy*, in “Stato e Mercato, Rivista quadrimestrale”, 1/2022, pp. 155-192, doi: 10.1425/104421

Pre-print version (before final corrections)

EMMANUELE PAVOLINI AND ROBERTO PEDERSINI

Trade unions and social policies: The case of Italy

1. Introduction

Trade unions are often seen as protecting workers' interests in the employment relations, with a special focus on their members. Yet, they are usually a much more complex organization and less straightforward actor in terms of the interests they represent. Trade unions, in fact, can and usually do play quite different roles at distinct levels and in various occasions (Johnston et al. 2012). On one side, we expect that shopfloor stewards address the specific requests of their fellow workers, including supporting and advising individual employees in their relations with their employer. On the other, we tend to assume that top union officers would try to represent the interests of the whole workforce in their dialogue with governments about key employment or social policies (and sometimes they could even try to act as embodying a full-fledged «general» representation). In this sense, trade unions can combine both particularistic and universalistic forms of representation.

The multi-faceted character of trade union representation has been analytically developed, for instance, in Richard Hyman's triangle of union identity (2001), whereby unions appear torn between focusing their action on the labour market, on class relations or social integration. This triadic depiction of trade union agency identifies distinct points of view from which we can observe union initiatives, but it does not necessarily clarify the scope and breadth of representation, which could be inclusive or selective in all three standpoints. Each union can represent a broader or narrower set of interests (or occupations) in regulating the employment relationship, it can define the boundaries of its reference «working class» in different ways, and it can pursue social integration in quite distinct manners, by advocating diverse social and employment policies.

Indeed, this article intends to investigate one single dimension of trade union action by focusing on the initiatives aimed to foster social integration in a broad sense, which includes social policies as well as labour market policies. These initiatives, in fact, are potentially dilemmatic ones, due to the potential divergence between the sectional interests of members and the collective interests of the whole workforce, including the unemployed and underemployed, or even of the current workforce as opposed to the forthcoming generations. Such a dilemma becomes particularly pressing when, instead of securing more benefits than previously, trade unions take a position about reforms, which entail a reduction in protection levels, so that the main issue is how to distribute the burden and costs of reforms. These are, in fact, the situations that fueled the analyses and narratives about trade unions protecting insiders to the detriment of non-member outsiders. The relevance of such criticisms is undeniable and requires careful consideration. However, it should be underlined that they adopt an idea of union representation as simply *reflecting* the interests of their members and oversee the fact that trade unions perform a political role of *interpreting* (maybe better: *building*) the interests of their members through complex forms of framing and sensemaking. Representation is not merely about «looking back», but it also involves «looking forward and beyond». Clearly, the «creative» side of representation must rest on shared and established values and collective identities, which may support encompassing solidarity. There is a constant and underlying tension between the logic of membership and the logic of general representation, which trade unions have to manage carefully, in order not to

lose the support of their constituency, on which their legitimation as partners in social dialogue ultimately rests.

This article intends to investigate how Italian trade unions have addressed through time the issue of social integration, providing insights on whether and when they adopted a broad general representation viewpoint or a narrower focus on members' interests. The shifts between the two different orientations will provide indications on the factors that influence the positions of trade unions in the debates over social policies.

2. Trade unions and the welfare state: from advocates of social and labour rights to agents of dualism?

The role of trade unions in relation to social and labour rights has traditionally been one of the most debated and studied topics in welfare state and labour market regulation research. Until the 1990s, trade unions were framed as actors promoting the redistribution of income and fair treatment of employees: the «sword of justice», as Flanders (1970) labelled them, acknowledging however the tension with their role as carriers of «vested interests». The most common approach was the *power resources theory*, which argued that welfare reforms in the «Thirty glorious years», when and where they took place, were the outcome of the concerted efforts of left-wing parties and trade union movements (Korpi 1983, Esping-Andersen 1985). In fact, quantitative studies show a strong positive correlation until the 1990s between social expenditure and labour movement strength, measured by union density (Huber and Stephens 2012). For power resources theory, the roles of the main socio-economic actors were defined in a clear-cut way: on the one hand, trade unions as «friends» and «promoters» of social policy expansion and labour market inclusion, on the other, firms and employer associations as «antagonists» or «unwilling consenters» (Korpi 2006).

However, since the 1990s, the literature on the relationship between trade unions, social and labour market policies has started to follow other lines of interpretation, partially revisiting or openly criticising the power resources theory approach (Trigilia 2020).

The first integration came from the *varieties of capitalism approach* (Hall and Soskice 2001), which argues that cross-class alliances between (part of) business organisations and (certain) trade unions in favour of social policy expansion and reform, as well as labour market regulation, are possible and have taken place over time in several countries (Mares 2003, Martin and Swank 2012). The argument is that «institutional complementarities» can lead to comparative advantages for companies, not just trade unions, in supporting welfare expansion and labour market protection in order to attract and to retain a well skilled and motivated workforce (Ebbinghaus 2006, Estévez-Abe et al. 2001). At the same time, this literature introduces a set of explanatory variables, which go beyond union power resources, in terms of membership and political support. These variables are of three different kinds: companies' characteristics (size, sector, type of workers and skills required to be competitive); the labour force and the trade union membership composition (in terms of distribution by skills, gender, company size, and economic sector); the organisation of interest representation, both on the employer and the workers' sides (pluralist, sectoral, or macrocorporatist) (see Mares 2003 and Martin and Swank 2012). Depending on the interplay between these variables, cross-class alliances can take place, producing different outcomes.

The second type of integration, which provides a strong criticism – rather than a qualification – about the role played by trade unions, stems from what can be defined as the *labour market dualisation and social rights dualism* literature. This literature focuses mainly at what has been happening to social policy and labour market regulation since the transition in the 1990s toward a substantially new socio-economic configuration. In particular, research has focused its attention on the fact that segments of the labour market have been progressively exposed to commodification and liberalization through deregulation, meanwhile other segments have remained more firmly protected (Palier and Thelen

2010, Thelen 2014). Dualisation as a concept usually refers to the process of diversification of workers' rights in the labour market, whereas dualism refers to the same process but applied to their social rights (Emmeneger et al. 2012). The definition of labour market «insiders» and «outsiders» plays a key role in this approach, with the latter considered as a «buffer» in the workplace, preserving the permanent workforce from quantitative fluctuations (Rueda 2014) and (a more substantial) qualitative erosion of protections.

The dualisation literature incorporates largely the varieties of capitalism argument that different institutions shape how strongly dualism and dualisation affect countries. Among the institutions considered, there are also industrial relations and how workers and companies' collective action takes place in various countries. Within this approach, there are two main views of trade unions, which will be summarized in the following two subsections.

2.1. Trade unions' approach to dualism and dualisation as a constant: the structuralist explanation

The first view sees trade unions as (involuntary) consenters, if not protagonists, of dualisation and dualism (see Figure 1). The causal mechanisms behind theories arguing for trade unions as «agents of dualisation and dualism» are relatively straightforward.

First, there are three «external» socio-economic phenomena that put pressures on Trade Unions' (TU)s' position on social and labour market policies: globalisation and global competition; the shift from a (fordist-) industrial economy to a post-industrial one, based on an increasing differentiation between (high and low productivity) economic activities and (low and high) skill levels; low GDP growth rates compared to the «Thirty glorious years», which force governments to adopt (quasi-) permanent austerity measures.

Then, these external socio-economic phenomena interact with trade unions and industrial relations' characteristics. In recent decades, if we use union density and collective bargaining coverage as proxies (Dorigatti and Pedersini 2021), we can classify countries in terms of having weak, moderate or strong trade unions. At the same time, following Martin and Swank (2012), we can have three types of industrial relations' (IRs) institutional settings - pluralist; sectoral; macrocorporatist - which also depend on the (prevailing) level of bargaining (Dorigatti and Pedersini 2021).

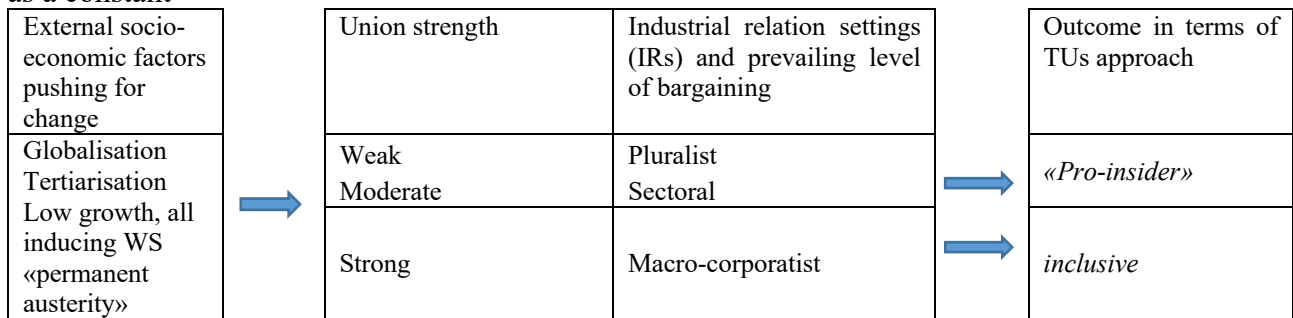
Finally, the interplay between external socio-economic pressures and the traits of trade unionism and industrial relations in a given country can influence if trade unions follow a «pro-insider» approach in social and labour market protection (practically in all cases where TUs have weak or moderate strength and IRs are pluralist or sectoral) or an «inclusive» strategy in representing social and labour rights (when they are strong and there are macro-corporatist institutions).

The point in this approach is that the increasing heterogeneity in workers' and employers' interests and strength, which depends on the great variety of skills that workers have and companies require, makes it relatively easier to draft alliances between certain segments of labor and business in specific economic sectors, and harder for collective action within the broader trade union movement. This is due to the rise of intra-labor cleavages, as well as across companies in different sectors, like, for instance, between export-oriented firms and those sheltered from foreign competition.

Therefore, in those countries where trade unions represent primarily «specific-skilled» employees (e.g. blue collar workers in manufacturing companies with medium-high productivity) and «high-skilled» ones, these collective actors would tend to protect their core membership (mostly made by adult males) thanks to their members' higher bargaining and earning power, striking collective agreements and supporting public policies that benefit primarily their membership - made by «insiders» - and letting that the costs of social policy and labour market reforms fall on the shoulders of «outsiders» (Hassel and Streeck 2003, Rueda 2005, Palier and Thelen 2010).

Insiders and outsiders are not defined only in terms of labour contracts and gender/age, but, often, in terms of employment by economic sector (Seeleib-Kaiser et al. 2011, Pavolini et al. 2022). For instance, as argued by Thelen (2014), in countries such as Germany, economic sector differences become key to understand where to find a high quota of outsiders, in a context in which cooperation between labor and capital in the core sectors – export-oriented manufacturing - remains stable. At the same time, a growing periphery is concentrated in service sectors, such as retail and accommodation, characterized by different institutional arrangements and worse labour conditions.

Figure 1. The explanation of trade union «pro-insider» drift in the dualisation and dualism literature as a constant



The bleak outcome of this theory is that, unless potentially «outsiders» live in Nordic countries (and in very few other contexts) - where trade unions are strong and industrial relations have a macro-corporatist nature with a prevailing nation-wide bargaining level - they will end up punished by the state, the market and... by trade unions' «pro-insider» strategies.

2.2. Trade unions' approach to dualism and dualisation as a variable

There is also a second stream of literature, which has been so far less formalized in terms of theoretical approach, that argues that the explanatory model presented in Figure 1 does not necessarily apply, since some relevant variables are left out. Such missing variables essentially refer to agency, and notably TU agency. It is important to underline that this second approach does not deny that often dualism and dualisation emerge following the causal mechanisms described above, but the key point is the idea that Figure 1 does not describe a constant phenomenon but a variable one, which is also influenced by other factors that are not just unions' strength and industrial relations institutional design. We propose a framework where we put together the common elements of this second approach (Figure 2).

In this second approach, a set of facets are important.

First, *a distinction must be drawn between trade unions being «promoters» of «pro-insider strategies» or (unwilling) «consenters»*, which seek for second best solutions when facing a socio-political environment that makes them weak or unable to influence the general direction of policy change. Several scholars argue that power resources are still crucial to understand trade unions' positioning in relation to labour market and social policy reforms (Davidsson and Emmenegger 2013, Emmenegger 2014, Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015). In particular, trade unions might agree to policies fostering dualisation and dualism only as a second best solution, if that allows them to retain institutional power in the policy process. Therefore, intra-labor cleavages do not necessarily translate into trade union conflict. Trade unions representing high-skilled and less-skilled workers might increase their cooperation with one another in order to push for the highest degree of inclusiveness, which is viable, given the circumstances. It could be argued that this possibility is already implicit in the «dualisation and dualism as a constant» approach, which considers union strength as a core

variable to explain the likelihood that unions will adopt a «pro-insider» strategy or not. However, the argument helps to analytically distinguish between unions «supporting» dualisation and dualism (a rare situation) and unions «unwillingly consenting» to dualisation and dualism (a more common situation).

Second, the degree to which *trade unions act protecting and representing «outsiders» depends* not only on unions' narrow interests (given the membership base they have), but *also on their identity* and cultural-historical legacies that inform labour movements (Crouch 1994, Meardi 2011, Benassi and Vlandas 2016, Cigna 2021). As argued by Hyman (2001), unions do not only follow their narrow economic interests, but are also animated by normative orientations (Regalia and Regini 2018), and they need to be considered complex socio-political actors moving within the triangle of «market», «class» and «society» (Hyman 2001). For instance, Durazzi (2017) shows clearly the mechanisms at work in the Italian case: «Italian unionism is the archetypical union movement situated between class and society..., operationalized by the two main labour confederations, CGIL and CISL, around the concept of solidarity, inherited from their roots in socialist and catholic traditions, respectively» (p. 277). Identity and ideology can also change over time, depending on many factors, one being the internal composition of trade unions (who are the represented «insiders»?). At the same time, Durazzi (2017) shows the multi-dimensionality of the concept of trade union «identity», once applied to trade unions' strategies toward «outsiders» in Italy. On one hand, the concept of «workers' solidarity» plays a central role in explaining unions' attempts to include «outsiders» (atypical workers in Durazzi's research) in terms of salary and job protection, as well as access to training (Burroni and Pedaci 2014). On the other hand, «an identity built around the worker, as opposed to the citizen, explains the lack of commitment by the unions in support of a more universal system of income protection» (p. 279).

The overall outcome might be unions' support towards *inclusive, yet selective, pro-outsiders policies*. In the Italian case, as reconstructed by Durazzi, trade unions tried to fight the negative consequences of labour market dualisation for outsiders, but not the negative consequences of dualism in terms of social protection. Indeed, this strategy might be understandable, since dualization may spill over insiders and affect their own terms and conditions of employment, in the medium term, while dualism can be much less threatening, as it is incorporated into institutions, which are stable and are less affected by labour market dynamics.

Third, competition to trade unions' role by other socio-political actors (different from the traditional left-wing parties) in advocating for labour and social rights for «outsiders» can trigger a shift toward an «inclusive» strategy (Natili and Puricelli 2021, Durazzi, Fleckenstein and Lee 2018). The emergence and mobilisation of social and political competitors may endanger the «political legitimacy» of trade unions – i.e., their role as defenders of the weaker segments of the labour force and potentially of the population at large. Especially in economic crises times, new political parties, social movements and/or radical trade union organisations might support «outsiders'» mobilisation and vocally criticise the traditional unions, picturing them as actors who serve the interests of their members at the expense of the rest of society. However, it must be underlined that also the opposite can take place. Especially since the 2010s there has been a rise in *radical right populist movements and parties advocating often not just for «welfare chauvinism» (against migrants) but for “insiders” protection*, given that an increasing part of their electorate is made by working-class and middle-class «insiders» afraid of losing ground (Jessoula et al. 2021). Currently, trade unions face a double threat in terms of competing actors, who aim at representing workers' social and labour rights, which were less present in the past. «From the left», by new social movements and parties attacking traditional trade unions for having become the voice of the «insiders». «From the right», by movements and parties, criticising them for not taking enough care of the “insiders” (defined in ethnical but also labour market position's terms).

Fourth, it is important to consider *the role of the government*, which always act as the gatekeeper when it comes to policy-making. The government has the political legitimation and the institutional

responsibility of proposing and implementing (new) policies. Even if social partners may have some formal prerogatives to participate in policymaking, through formal tripartite bodies or other procedures envisaged by legislation, governments always retain the capacity to use such tools in very different ways and are in a position to shifting from mere ex-post information to ex-ante full involvement in policy design. The government's willingness to engage in talks with trade unions over social policies is hence very important, regardless of the underlying motives, be they driven by values or interests. A simple way to identify this variable is distinguishing between anti-union, non-anti-union and pro-union governments. It should also be noted that the government attitude can influence the type of representation that unions express. Social concertation requires some sort of general responsibility, while a focus on the narrower interest of members can prompt a confrontational stance and a radicalisation of requests.

Fifth, not just general industrial relation institutions, but also specific labour market and social protection institutions influence trade unions' strategy. For instance, Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser (2015) show that, as for pension policies, unions' reasons to follow a strategy as inclusive as possible differ according to the pre-existing institutional design of domestic pension systems: «as unions have proved incapable of stopping the trend toward retrenchment and privatization of pensions, they have tried to mitigate its consequences and to avoid dualization. In countries that had only basic public pensions and relatively large coverage of employer-provided occupational pensions, trade unions representing high-skilled segments of labor have allied with the rest of the labor union movement to push for the expansion of supplementary pensions to the whole of the workforce, thereby reducing existing dualisms in coverage. In countries that had generous public pensions and a marginal coverage of occupational pensions during the postwar period, trade unions representing high-skilled workers, particularly those in the manufacturing industries, have continued defending generous public pensions. However, faced with governments' increasing commitment to pension retrenchment and privatization, they have tried to counter the expansion of individual retirement savings plans managed by commercial financial services companies and sought to expand encompassing and not-for-profit occupational pension plans through industry-level - rather than firm-level - collective agreements with employers. Unions representing workers in the metalworking industries have been at the forefront of this strategy; they have seen it as a means of preserving their role as pacesetters for other sectors of the economy and other segments of labor» (p. 137).

Lastly, *trade union membership has been changing over time*. With the shift to a post-industrial society, members are increasingly not only the traditional «insiders» (male blue-collar and, white-collar, employees in the core industrial sector). Actually, unions had to shift their attention elsewhere in search of «revitalisation». This required a redefinition of priorities and objectives, with a view to extend membership in new sectors. As such strategies succeed, the resulting differentiation (and inclusion) in membership and constituency affects unions in many ways. For instance, tertiarization brings to the forefront women and public administration and welfare state services (from education to healthcare). The increasing membership heterogeneity requires a different definition of who the «insiders» are, compared to the past. *It is not just an issue of structural changes in the membership composition, but also of its socio-cultural preferences, re-shaping trade unions' identity*. For instance, workers in the welfare state services sector (from teachers to nurses to social workers) are not only becoming some of the most unionised labour market segments, but they are also more often than other social groups advocating for universalism of social and labour rights (Beramendi et al, 2015).

Figure 2. The explanation of trade union «pro-insider» drift in the dualisation and dualism literature as a variable

External socio-economic factors	Union strength (US)	Membership base	Government	IRs and prevailing level of bargaining	Other intervening variables			Outcome in terms of TUs approach
	Weak	Segmented (large firms, specific sectors, PA)	Anti union	Pluralist	Trade unions' identity	External competitor	Changes over time in TUs' "insiders" composition	
	Moderate	Industrial	Non-anti union	Sectoral	Narrow group of workers	Pro-insiders	Weak	
Globalisation Tertiarisation Low growth pace inducing WS "permanent austerity"	Strong	Cross-industry, including PA	Pro union	Macro-corporatist	Solidarity for all Workers		Moderate	Pro-insiders
					Citizenship	Pro-outsiders	Strong	Inclusive, yet selective
								Inclusive

3. Why is Italy an interesting case to study?

With a view to comparatively test the analytical frameworks presented in the previous paragraph, analysing the positions and actions of trade unions in Italy over a long time span (from mid-1960s to the early 2020s) in relation to social protection policies is a useful exercise for mainly four reasons. First, it helps to show that adopting a clear-cut distinction between unions' strategies and priorities during the «Thirty Glorious Years» and afterwards does not suit well empirical facts. In this respect, looking at trade unions' identity helps to better explain trade unions' positions than simply focusing on the interests of their members.

Second, Italy is a good example of the fact that trade unions adopt often a mix of pro-insider and pro-outsider strategies within the same policy field and across different policy fields.

Third, compared to many other Continental and Southern European countries, Italian trade unions have been able to retain a relative strength over decades, and as a result, they have partially transformed their membership. So, in a way, the argument that trade unions had no choice but to accept dualisation holds to a more limited extent than in other contexts. Tables in the appendix illustrate in detail the point. We report here the main facets of the Italian case, also to show that the membership has been under transformation over time, which changes the definition of who are the «members» and their respective «interests». This might be taken in fact as a confirmation that membership matters. Certainly, we do not want to deny that. But the main point is that membership should not be taken for granted and especially trade unions themselves are not expected to do so, or they would be deemed to disappear. Membership is in flux and changes through times depend on the organising strategies that trade unions develop. Therefore, the causal link does not necessarily go (only) from membership to strategies, but strategies are meant to influence membership as well. Inclusive or exclusive representation is therefore not a fate, but something that trade unions shape actively.

Fourth, we believe that the analysis that follows provides evidence that the approach that frames trade unions' position in relation to dualism and dualisation as a variable is far more promising than relying exclusively on structural elements and consider it as a constant.

As reported in the tables (A3), the union density rate decreased over time in Italy, but it remained relatively stable at medium-low levels in the last three decades (around 35%), and at the end of the 2010s it was higher than in all other EU countries apart from the Nordic ones and Belgium. TUs lost just partially the strength they use to enjoy until the 1990s. A similar conclusion can be reached also

for the private sector density rate (Table A4), which is relatively low (24%), but it is still higher than in all other European countries, apart from the Nordic ones and Belgium. And it should be noted that this stability took place at times of expanding employment, so that membership effectively increased and could include more service sectors and workers, as a sign of the preserved representativeness in a changing employment system.

If we look at membership and how it has been changing over time (Tables A1 and A2), the Italian situation is characterised by four groups in terms of their representation that we defined as: stable outsiders; outsiders getting closer to insiders; new insiders; traditional insiders. The relative and changing importance of such groups depends on the combination of the underlying composition of the overall workforce and on the recruiting strategies of trade unions.

- *Stable outsiders: young workers* (15-24 years) represent just a very limited share of union membership in Italy (4.2%) and this is typical of all EU countries. At the same time, this facet should not be surprising in political economies where an increasing number of young people stay longer in the education system and postpone their entry into the labour market. Even if a large part of the labour force works for *small companies*, Italian trade unionism is scarcely present in this type of companies (the union density is very low – 11.8% and in line with most EU countries apart from the Nordic ones and Belgium – as well as their share in union membership – 8.5%).
- *Outsiders getting closer to insiders: workers employed in commercial services* (retail, accommodation, etc.) have been often on the losing end of dualisation (Pavolini et al. 2022); in Italy they represent 26% of union membership, a share that has only slowly increased over decades. This figure is in line with what happens in most other countries; the density rate is around 23.5% - it is relatively low, but in comparative terms almost twice higher than in most other EU countries, apart from the Nordic ones and Belgium. Compared to most of other countries, Italy has a relatively high share of *fixed-term contract workers* both in terms of union density rate (31.8%) and trade union membership (19% of total members). Again, in both respects Italy comes after only Nordic countries and Belgium in terms of union density, and the share of fixed-term contract workers is the highest in the EU after Ireland. The *female share in total TU membership* has increased in Italy (table A5) but women are still a minority within the TU base (43%). In this respect only the other Southern European countries, Austria (35%), Germany (36%) and the Netherlands (39%) fair worse than Italy. At the same time, a partial explanation of this relatively low rate has to do with the fact that women's participation in the labour market is still more limited in Italy than in many other Western countries: in 2019, the feminisation rate of subordinate employment was 46% in Italy, and 49% in the 'old' EU-15.
- *New insiders*: trade unionism in Italy, as in many other countries has become increasingly linked to the *public sector* (including PA, but also healthcare, social care, and education); around 45% of members are employed in this sector, while they were 29% in the 1980s; such high share is second only to CEE countries and Anglo-Saxon ones. They can be regarded the new insiders in two ways: first, they are becoming the core of union membership; second, the recent reforms in the public administration have reinforced the role of unions and industrial relations, as opposed to legal regulation (with possible some attempted reversals in recent years – Bordogna 2016).
- *Traditional insiders: large firm workers* represent a good part of trade unionism in Italy, both in terms of trade union density (55%) and membership (53%). At the same time, there are several countries where the membership share is quite higher than in Italy (the Netherlands, France, Germany, Poland, the UK, Hungary, and Slovenia have at least 66% of the union members who work in large enterprises). Furthermore, the union density rate in large companies is in Italy quite higher than in most EU countries, similar to the Belgian one, and only second to Nordic countries. *Industrial sector workers*, typically the backbone of Italian

trade unionism in the past (in the 1980s, 46% of total members was coming from this economic sector), represent a still significant, but smaller part of the total membership in recent years (35%) compared to the past. This is a common trend for all EU countries; however, Germany and Italy have still the highest share of members from the industrial sector, even if declining. At the same time, the density rate in the sector remains very high (44%), which again is the highest in the EU apart from Nordic countries and Belgium.

- *Traditional insiders: pensioners.* Besides economically active members, whose composition has been described above, an additional and peculiar feature of trade union membership in Italy is the presence of specific federations of retired workers and their level: some 4.9 million additional members of the three main confederations are pensioners. They are organised in separate federations, which are invariably the largest federations in each confederation, and represent some 42% of their overall 11.7 million members (2019 figures, see Leonardi and Pedersini 2022). For the focus of this article, social policies, this segment of the total union membership is very important for two reasons. First, they carry specific and significant interests in the field of pension policies; second, pensioners' federations are very active at local level and are often involved, especially in certain central and northern regions, in negotiations with local authorities on social and care services.

4. Italian trade unionism and its positions on social and labour market policies over time

We have chosen to look at what happened since the mid-1960s, because it is when the modernization of the Italian welfare state started (Ascoli 1984). Compared to many other Western European countries where there is one main (if not only) trade union confederation, Italy has been characterized historically by the presence of three major trade unions, with the first one, the CGIL (the most left-wing one), able to collect only half of confederations' members, followed by CISL (a trade union with catholic roots that had reached around a third of members), and then by UIL (with around 12-16% of members)¹.

The presentation of the Italian case will follow a double criteria: time (through a distinction among different phases); type of social policy (by looking, on one hand, various cash transfers – from pensions to unemployment to social assistance -, on the other hand, services – from health care to child care).

In relation to time, we distinguish between three phases and two critical junctures, as proposed by Jessoula and Pavolini (2022). The first phase covers the quarter century that goes from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s. In this period reforms were inspired by a Keynesian approach and aimed to modernize the Italian social protection system (Ascoli 1984, Ferrera 1984, Ferrera, Fargion and Jessoula 2012). The second phase covers the period from the mid-1990s to the end of the first decade of the 2000s. It was a phase in which (timid) attempts to recalibrate the fiscal and welfare system alternated with neoliberal pressures aimed at substantially transform it, with the latter prevailing. The last phase began in 2014. It is a period in which the structural difficulties of economic growth in Italy have become increasingly evident and the ruling parties need to regain political consensus after the austerity measures adopted during the sovereign debt crisis. The continuity between these phases was

¹ It should be noted that, besides the three main confederations, many independent or autonomous unions and confederations are present, especially in the public administration, where they have around 430,000 certified members. Their presence in the private sector is more scattered and comparatively less relevant – but non-marginal in certain subsectors. Their overall membership, including the abovementioned members in the public administration, can be estimated at around 1 million workers, which would put the overall union density at some 40% (Leonardi and Pedersini 2022). However, if we take into consideration the role of trade unions in policymaking, CGIL, CISL and UIL are undoubtedly the most prominent actors.

interrupted by two «critical junctures» - relatively short periods, full of policy innovations for the Italian welfare state. The first took place in the period 1992-95, and the second in the years 2010-13. Both periods were characterized by several crises affecting: public finances, the currency (the Lira in 1992 and threats about the sustainability of the Euro in 2010), the economy and employment, as well as political institutions (Ferrera and Gualmini 1999, Jessoula 2013, Sacchi 2015). In these short periods, the choices made by governments led to significant deviations from the previous «institutional path» (path shifts or path departures in neo-institutionalist jargon, cf. Pierson 1996), and opened new trajectories of institutional and policy development in social policies. We stop the analysis on the verge of the pandemic.

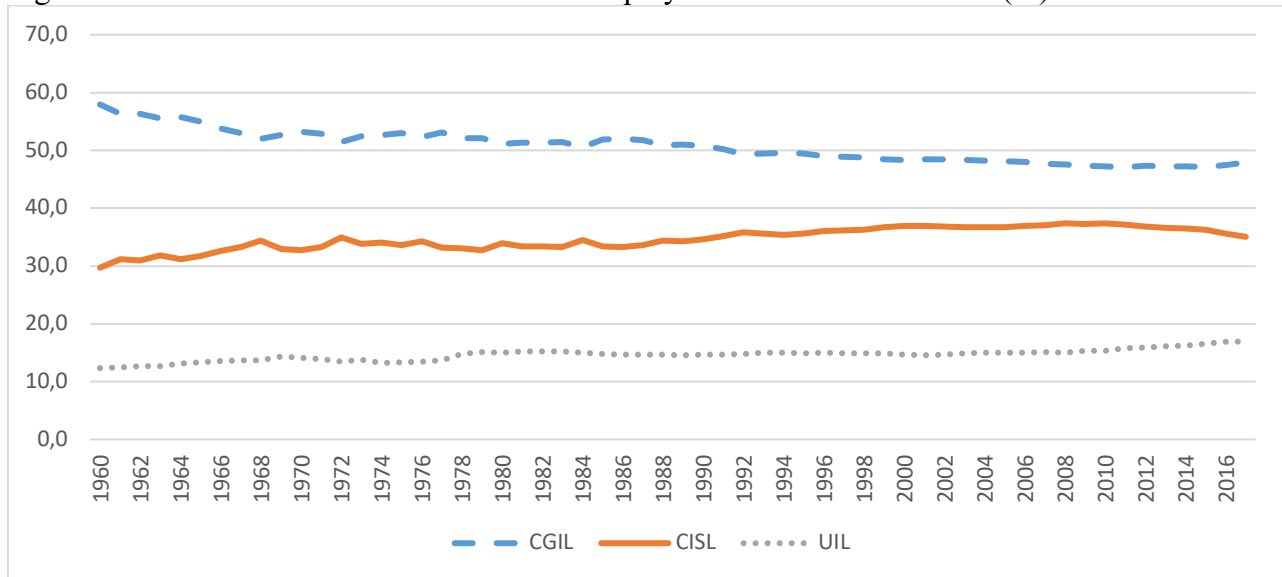
Before discussing the positions of trade unions over social policies in more than 50 years, it is important to bear in mind two facets: their role in relation to policy making changed over time (see scheme 3), as well as the relative «strength» of each of the main confederations (figure 1).

In the first phase until the early 1990s there was a partial collaboration (especially with those trade unions culturally closer – CISL and UIL - to the then governing parties), alternated by conflicts with the most left-wing trade union (CGIL). The first critical juncture (1992-95) and during the centre-left governments in the second phase (1995-2009) were marked by a strong collaboration between governments and trade unions, with the involvement of the latter in policy-making. Such collaboration and involvement were less intense and limited mostly to UIL and CISL when centre-right governments (1996-2000, and 2006-07) were in power in the second phase. Starting with the second critical juncture (2010-13) and then in the third phase (since 2014), trade unions found themselves less involved in decision-making than previously. It is important to bear in mind this distinction because it helps to understand when trade unions had a real say on social policy decisions from the «inside» of policy-making and when they tried to influence it from the «outside».

Figure 3. Trade unions' positions on social policies in Italy by type of benefit and recognition of their role by governments over time

		Type of benefit		Role recognized by governments to trade unions in policy making
		<i>Social transfers</i> (Pensions, Unemployment benefits, Social assistance and family benefits)	<i>Services</i> (healthcare, social care)	
Time	First phase (mid-1960s to 1991)	Pro-insiders	Inclusive	Partial role recognition: partial involvement
	First critical juncture (1992-95)	Inclusive, yet selective		Role recognition: collaboration
	Second phase (1996-2009)			Role recognition: collaboration with centre-left governments Limited role recognition: partial conflict with centre-right governments
	Second critical juncture (2010-2013)	Inclusive, yet selective in health care	No role recognition: conflict	
	Third phase (2014-2020)	Inclusive in social care	Mostly no role recognition: conflict	

Figure 4. Distribution of trade union membership by confederation over time (%)



Source: own elaboration on ICTWSS 6.0

4.1. Contrasting logics (mid-1960s-early1990s): trade unions as champions of the insiders in social transfers, and supporters of inclusion in welfare state services

Main policy changes

The period was characterized by the attempt to modernize the Italian welfare state, which was a system traditionally very fragmented on categorical-professional lines and not particularly generous. The modernization attempt took place through the expansion of social protection in the direction of increasing the types of social risks covered as well as including some social groups previously scarcely protected (all the main categories of self-employed workers and old people at risk of poverty). As underlined by Jessoula and Pavolini (2022), this expansion was inspired more by the idea of a universal welfare, able to cover all the main social needs even, with diversified protection levels, than a strictly universalistic one, based on relatively homogeneous benefits for all beneficiaries (Ferrera 1993).

This modernization attempt brought about some significant results in relation to welfare state services, with respect to the principle of universalization of risks' coverage. The main success regarded healthcare, which changed radically with the introduction in 1978 of a National Healthcare System (NHS). Also the legislation on kindergarten (1968) and nurseries (1971) was an important step in the establishment of a public childcare system, although in practice coverage remained low and uneven across regions.

The modernisation attempt achieved more limited results in terms of universalism in the main policy areas covered by social transfers (Ascoli 1984, Ferrera, Fargion and Jessoula 2012, Ascoli and Pavolini 2015). The expansion of the pension system in 1965-69 was very strong. However, the increase in expenditure went along with a highly fragmented system, a whole series of inequities - from privileges in the contribution-benefit ratio for self-employed workers, to «baby pensions» for civil servants -. Even the introduction for the first time of a universal scheme protecting poor elderly people (the «social pension») was characterised by the very scarce generosity of the programme (Ferrera 1984, Regonini 1984, Jessoula 2009, Giorgi and Pavan 2021).

In the field of passive labor policies, public coverage and generosity increased as well. At the end of the 1960s, short-time work schemes were expanded and special unemployment benefits were introduced, and, at the end of the 1980s, unemployment benefits began to be paid not as a flat-rate

economic contribution, but in proportion of the previous working income, and special unemployment benefits were introduced for those with a limited contribution history (Sacchi and Vesan 2016). At the same time, these reforms did not change the overall fragmented framework of interventions, linked to an insurance logic and not oriented towards the establishment of universalistic tools to cover needs (Regalia 1984, Sacchi and Vesan 2015). Furthermore, the remarkable growth of short-time work schemes, restricted mainly to core workers in the industrial sector («insiders»), crowded out the strengthening of unemployment benefits. Reforms in the early 1990s were not really able to limit the role played by these schemes (Tassinari and Sacchi 2021).

In relation to family policies, the important reform introducing a «family allowance» in 1988 was characterised, on one hand, by an increased generosity of provision and, on the other, by confirming the differential treatment of Italian families with similar needs, but characterized by a different position in the labor market: indeed the scheme was basically covering employees only (Saraceno 2003).

Apart from the new scheme for poor elderly pensioners, no reform was drafted in relation to social assistance and the financial protection of people at risk of poverty, although a Commission had been appointed in the 1980s by the Government (*Commissione Gorrieri*), whose work had presented very alarming analyses in relation to income poverty in Italy.

Trade unions' positions and actions

Italian trade unions followed two different logics during the decades of the welfare state modernisation from the mid-1960s until the early 1990s.

On one hand, a logic of «employment-based social rights» was at the core of trade unions' proposals for social transfers. The guiding principle was that social transfers were forms of «deferred» salary, and therefore they had to be strictly connected to workers' position and conditions in the labour market (Paci 1984). The outcomes of such approach, which was carefully elaborated in several trade unions' documents during the 1960s and 1970s (Giorgi and Pavan 2021), were manifold. First, pensions played a central role in the requests of trade unions, and advocating for more generosity (for those workers who could already access them) was the unions' primary goal more than extending the coverage to those who were excluded from the pension system. Although trade unions were in favour of a «social pension» for those not having access to a regular pension based on social contributions, it was not their primary goal to obtain it and their mobilisation in favour of better pensions never put this goal on top of their agenda (ibidem). Second, the same logic applied to income maintenance schemes during working age. Again, in this case, trade unions were keener to improve the generosity of short-time work schemes (*Cassa integrazione guadagni*) for core workers, as a joint job and income security measure, than to discuss how to strengthen the unemployment benefit system, which was neither generous nor inclusive (Tassinari and Sacchi 2021). Third, the same logic applied to family cash benefits that were reformed in 1988 with the introduction of «assegni al nucleo familiare» (family allowances). Also in that occasion, trade unions advocated for a funding formula based on compulsory social contributions (mostly paid by employers), that strictly linked the access to the scheme to being an employee with a permanent contract (excluding among other categories, all self-employed) (Saraceno 2003). Finally, social assistance was totally out of trade unions' request. The idea of a minimum income scheme for those in a weak position in the labour market was not considered acceptable and it was ruled out of trade unions' requests to governments (ibidem).

Overall, labour market «insiders» (male employees with a permanent position in the core – industrial - sectors of the labour market) were at the core of trade unions' requests in the phase of the Italian welfare state modernisation, when the issue of social transfers was at stake.

It should be kept in mind that the strategy to follow a logic of «employment-based social rights» in Italy developed in a context quite different from most of other Western European countries. According to Eurostat data, in the years between 1984 and 1991, only 72% of workers in Italy were employees, compared to 89% in Denmark and Germany, 87% in the UK, and 84% in France. In other

terms, when trade unions in other countries advocated for an «employment-based social rights» logic, the structure of the labour market made *de facto* this logic more inclusive than in the Italian case.

However, as anticipated, the logic of «employment-based social rights» was not the only one followed by trade unions until the early 1990s. In welfare state services, a logic of «citizenship-based social rights» was adopted by trade unions, especially in relation to healthcare and, to a lesser extent, to social care. In particular, starting from the 1960s and intensifying during the 1970s trade unions were among the most vocal actors advocating for a national healthcare system (Vicarelli 1998, Ascoli 1984, Paci 1984, Giorgi e Pavan 2021). Although not with the same strength and commitment, they were also in favour of the reforms for an extended public childcare system, including kindergarten (voted in 1968) and nurseries (1971). Since the 1970s, they acted supporting the construction of a local and regional system of social services (Regalia 2003).

Is the logic of membership enough to explain trade unions' positions in relation to welfare state issues in that period? Partially, it is. Trade unions' base was made in the 1970s and 1980s in Italy by male employees (at least 65% of members), often working in the industrial (47.2%) and private (73.9%) sector (see Tables A5, A6, A7, A8, and A10). Trade unions were relatively strong, enjoying a union density equal to around 45% in total (around 38% in the private sector and reaching 53% in the public one). In the industrial sector density was around 47% (in the 1980s it reached 49.3% on average), but even in the service sector it was around 40%.

At the same time, the fact that unions followed two different logics in relation to social transfers and welfare state services shows that a logic of membership and based on interests is not enough to explain their position. Identity and their ideological approach to social issues and rights is also a powerful tool to interpret how they acted.

Furthermore, in the case of welfare services there were other social actors that, on one hand, pushed trade unions into action and, on the other, joined forces with them to ask for reform. These actors were different types of civic society organisations and social movements, also made by doctors (Vicarelli 1998; Giorgi e Pavan 2021).

4.2. The first critical juncture: Adapting to radical policy changes (1992-1995)

Main policy changes

The first critical juncture in the early 1990s (1992-95) represented a major change in pension policies and healthcare. The pension reforms in 1992-93 and 1995 marked the shift to a multipillar system and the adoption, albeit after a long-time transition period, of a system based on defined-contribution, instead of the defined-benefit principle. Healthcare in 1992-93 introduced managed competition in the National Health System (NHS). At the same time, the 1992 reform attempted to partially privatize the NHS with the introduction of the possibility for citizens to opt out for «Differentiated forms of assistance», meant as potentially substitutes for those provided by the NHS. Already the following year, however, the 1993 reform replaced the concept of «Differentiated forms of assistance» with that of «supplementary forms of healthcare».

Trade unions' positions and actions

Trade unions played an important role in shaping the reforms in both sectors and they partially followed the priorities that they had set in the previous phase. In particular, they became very vocal when the government in 1992 introduced a healthcare reform (Law 502/1992) that might have jeopardised the NHS universalism (Vicarelli 2015). In particular, it was among the actors that acted against the proposal and one general strike was called to explicitly protest against it (*ibidem*).

In pension policy, trade unions' position was more complex to define in terms of being «pro-insider» or «inclusive». On the one hand, trade unions advocated for greater homogeneity of treatment between occupational categories: in other terms, trade unions were in favor of a reduction of the inter-

category cleavage, in particular with a reduction of pensions' generosity for self-employed workers and public employees. In this respect, as in the German case reconstructed by Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser (2015), the acceptance of multipillarisation can be framed as a «second best» or least negative solution by trade unions, given the financial situation and the high Italian public deficit.

On the other hand, they indirectly supported the strengthening of an inter-generational cleavage. The general tightening of pension access requirements for younger workers was accepted by the unions in exchange of a rather long transition period to the new pension system in order to safeguard the rights of workers relatively close to retirement. If all countries that changed their system adopted a transition period, exactly to protect older workers, Italy stands out for the very long length of this transition period: 16 years, compared to all other EU countries that introduced reforms in the same years, but adopting a quite shorter transition period (Natali 2007).

Given this mix, we can label their position and action as «inclusive, yet selective».

4.3. The second phase: The age of (almost) permanent austerity (1996-2009)

Main policy changes

Overall, in this phase, governments, on one hand, implemented the innovations introduced in the critical juncture of 1992-95 (for example, the creation of a multipillar pension system), on the other hand, there were timid attempts at welfare recalibration, mostly matched by cuts in spending and compression of social rights (retrenchment).

The only limited innovation toward a more inclusive and universalistic welfare state came from services, although with far more limited effects than in the first phase. A renewed attention in healthcare brought the attempt to return to the inspiring principles of the 1978 reform, pushing towards an integrated type system and an approach oriented towards forms of 'administered cooperation', replacing the previous model based on 'administered competition' introduced in the early 1990s. In the area of social services, an important reform was approved (Law 328/2000), aimed at implementing universal policies towards people with social needs. However, the subsequent constitutional reform of 2001 largely frustrated the implementation of Law 328, giving the Regions «exclusive competence» in the design of social services, and thereby promoting variable institutional arrangements and levels of protections.

In relation to social transfers, if radical changes did not take place in pensions, labor policies introduced more flexibility in the forms of employment (first in 1997 and then in 2003). At the same time, the reform of the social safety nets system proposed by the Onofri Commission in 1997 never came to light (Guerzoni 2008), with respect to ordinary unemployment benefits, short-time work schemes (Jessoula and Vesan 2011, Sacchi and Vesan 2016) and above all in the field of minimum income schemes (Jessoula and Madama 2015, Saraceno 2008, Natili 2019, Jessoula and Natili 2020).

Trade unions' positions and actions

Trade unions followed the same positions they had expressed since the 1990s, which can be labelled as «inclusive, yet selective» in social transfers, and inclusive in services. In particular, they supported the expansion of services (e.g. long-term care and childcare) (Ascoli and Pavolini 2012, 2015), whereas they maintained their preference in a policy field such as pensions (Jessoula 2009).

Political and social actors in this phase had to act within a «permanent austerity» situation, which meant that social policy expenditure expansion was not financially feasible (Pierson 1996) and «zero-sum- solutions» had to be found (meaning that the expansion of expenditure on a policy measure had to be – often more than - compensated by the reduction or the containment of another). Furthermore, as explained in the introduction of the present section, trade unions' involvement in policy making depended heavily on the type of coalition in government. While centre-left governments (in 1996-2000, and 2006-07) generally collaborated with trade unions (and the latter were able to act as

«societal veto player»), centre-right governments attempted (with success) to involve only CISL and UIL and to substantially exclude CGIL.

4.4. *The second critical juncture: Marginalisation (2010-2013)*

Main policy changes

The Monti government intervened, on the one hand, to contain drastically both current expenditure - with severe cuts in services (health and social services) - and pensions, and on the other, to liberalize the labor market. The pension reform had the objective of guaranteeing the safety of public social security accounts by drastically raising the retirement age with immediate effects, abolishing the seniority pension and extending from 2012 to all workers the defined-contribution system (pro rata) (Jessoula and Raitano 2017, 2019). As far as labor policies are concerned, the government introduced greater flexibility in contractual forms - and no longer just «at the margins» as in the previous phase - accompanied by more universalistic measures of income protection (Jessoula and Pavolini 2022).

Trade unions' positions and actions

As already reported in scheme 3, trade unions were explicitly not involved in policy making in this phase, especially in relation to the pension reform. Trade unions became more vocal in protesting against the reforms and social cuts, but their effectiveness in influencing policy-making was highly limited. At the same time, their position in relation to social transfers did not change, remaining mainly inclusive, yet selective (Ascoli and Pavolini, 2015). Meanwhile, changes took place in relation to healthcare. On one hand, trade unions maintained their general commitment to the NHS, on the other hand, they actively supported the expansion of healthcare funds through branch collective agreements that introduced an increasingly differentiated access to healthcare (especially prevention, rehabilitation, and outpatient care) depending on the occupation (Pavolini et al. 2013).

4.5. *The third phase (2014-2020)*

Main policy changes

The third phase was characterized by an expansive dynamic of social protection in various policy fields, although not in all of them. Interventions in pension policy were essentially of two kinds: the strengthening of protection for pensioners at risk of poverty and the selective softening of the conditions of access to retirement for different categories of disadvantaged workers, through a series of measures among which stood out the possibility - introduced by the government made by the Five Stars Movement and the League government - to retire (in the period 2019-21) before the legal retirement age for workers who had already accumulated at least 38 years of contributions and 62 years of age - the so-called «Quota 100» (Jessoula 2016, 2017, 2019).

As regards labor policies, the strategy, already inaugurated with the Monti government but pursued more radically by the Renzi reform agenda, of integral flexibility of the labor market, with the dismantling of article 18 of the Workers' Statute, continued. As with the Monti government, this strategy was accompanied by the adoption of more universal measures to protect income in the event of unemployment and, in recent years, by the attempt to strengthen active labor policies.

Finally, significant innovations have been registered in the context of policies aimed at combating poverty. In 2018 the first national and structural minimum income scheme was introduced with the «Inclusion Income» programme (REI). This measure was soon replaced by the much more generous Citizenship Income in 2019.

Trade unions' positions and actions

Also in this third phase, trade unions did not regain an important role in policy-making. The main difference compared to the past was that also centre-left wing governments (especially the one guided by Renzi) decided for the first time not to involve workers' representatives in decisions. In the case of the Renzi government, it was an explicit and publicly declared choice.

In relation to social transfers, trade unions introduced some changes in their positions, but showed also several lines of continuity. The major change took place in social assistance, with the decision to join those social movements and social actors advocating for a «universal minimum scheme». The explanation of this change has been reconstructed by Natili and Puricelli (2021), who convincingly argue that trade unions had to face a new social competitor, the Five Stars Movement, aiming at representing those segments of the population and of the labour force that did not benefit from the social protection system («outsiders»).

In relation to unemployment policies, their position remained stable around the traditional approach; especially the CGIL (less the CISL) were interested in strengthening again short-time work schemes (after the Renzi labour market reform had weakened them) and less interested in the universalisation of the unemployment benefit system, introduced by the same reform in 2015 (Tassinari and Sacchi 2021). Also in relation to pensions, trade unions indirectly sustained the populist government in 2018-2020 in its successful attempt to lessen temporarily the pension requirements (the so-called «Quota 100»): a choice that resembled the «pro-insiders» measures of the 1970s-80s, given the profile of the beneficiaries (Stamati 2020).

At the same time, their increasing support to the expansion of healthcare funds through branch collective agreements had deepened segmentation in the access to healthcare between those who can count on a fund and those who can rely just on an NHS that has been increasing impoverished by several years of retrenchment and cuts (Jessoula and Pavolini 2022).

5. Concluding remarks

This article makes the case for a multidimensional approach to studying (and explaining) trade unions strategies and actions, with a specific focus on the involvement on policy-making. Our exploratory analysis of the Italian case shows clearly how trade union positions on social policies change through time and cannot be read exclusively through the lenses of members' interests.

First, in the field of policymaking, trade unions (and employer organisations for that matter) are confronted with a general representation role – or arena, if they represent narrow interests – and are therefore driven to take into consideration a broad range of positions and interests. For encompassing organisations, which are usually the main players in social concertation, including in the highly fragmented Italian interest representation domain, this means that their actions would move to «interpreting» interests rather than simply reflecting those of members. Collective identities and values then become relevant in the choices about what interests to represent and how to promote them. As we have tried to show, the major Italian confederations have a long and established tradition of representing broad interests, notably through services, like those providing social security and fiscal services to all citizens, those catering the needs of the weaker segments of the labour market, like migrant workers, or in the negotiations over social assistance at local level with municipalities. Moreover, the membership basis is not a constant, and the general trends can hide significant variations in the underlying composition. In Italy, density has remained stable in the latest decades, while membership has increased, with an expansion in the service sector and in non-standard employment. This can be regarded as both the premise and the effect of the capacity to represent new interests, which are then channeled in the organisational definition of goals and strategies. Trade unions, especially confederations, which take organising seriously, have to be inclusive, if they want to avoid the fate of progressive marginalisation.

In all this, the role of governments remains crucial. Policy concertation involves strategic interaction, but the government is the prime mover and firmly holds the fundamental political legitimation. It is, in fact, the only effective veto-player in social concertation. Political circumstances, such as the relative strength of parties and unions, the potential competition vs. cooperation between the two, or their ideological and factual connections, contribute to define the room for social concertation. Quite simply, we can recover the use of traditional concepts of «pro-union» and «non-anti union» to characterise an environment, which can support the involvement of trade unions in policymaking and promote a general representation role, with a corresponding accountability.

So far, we mostly underlined agency. That of unions, in interpreting interests, organising new interests, cooperating with governments and employers; and that of governments in involving and sharing responsibilities with social partners. Certainly, institutions are also important, since they provide the essential scaffoldings on which action is developed and built. However, the point we want to make here is that representation is more a matter of dynamic transformation, rather than stability, and one of its pillars is the creativity of social actors. Indeed, resilience, a recent catchword, should be referred more to actors than to institutional arrangements. The capacity to represent broader and new interests is probably a fundamental component of the resilience of interest organisations, and it can be a valuable asset and possibly a necessity, if they want to remain important players in policymaking. We believe that this can be a promising avenue for understanding recent and future developments in the role of trade unions in social policy formation. More research is needed, on Italy, and in a comparative perspective in order to deepen and specify our attempt at developing and applying a more dynamic and less deterministic analytical framework.

REFERENCES

- Ascoli, U. (ed.) (1984), *Welfare state all'italiana*, Bari: Laterza.
- Ascoli, U. and Pavolini, E. (2012), *Ombre rosse: il sistema di welfare italiano dopo 20 anni di riforme*, in *Stato e Mercato*, 96(3), 429-464.
- Ascoli, U. and Pavolini, E. (eds.) (2015), *The Italian Welfare State in a European Perspective*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Benassi, C., and Vlandas, T. (2016), Union inclusiveness and temporary agency workers: The role of power resources and union ideology, in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 22(1), 5–22.
- Beramendi, P., Häusermann, S., Kitschelt, H. and Kriesi, H.P. (eds.) (2015), *The Politics of Advanced Capitalism*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Burroni, L. and Pedaci, M. (2014), Collective bargaining, atypical employment and welfare provisions, in *Stato e mercato*, 34(2): 169–94.
- Cigna, M. (2021), Looking for a North Star? Ideological justifications and trade unions' preferences for a universal basic income, in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1–18.
- Crouch, C. (1994), *Industrial Relations and European State Traditions*, Oxford: OUP.
- Davidsson, J. B., and Emmenegger, P., (2013), Defending the organisation, not the members: Unions and the reform of job security legislation in Western Europe, in *European Journal of Political Research*, 52(3), 339–363.
- Dorigatti, L. and Pedersini, R. (2021), Industrial relations and inequality: the many conditions of a crucial relationship, in *Transfer*, 27(1) 11–27.
- Durazzi, N. (2017), Inclusive unions in a dualized labour market? The challenge of organizing labour market policy and social protection for labour market outsiders, in *Social Policy & Administration*, 51(2), 265–285.

- Durazzi, N., Fleckenstein, T., and Lee, S. C. (2018), Social solidarity for all? Trade union strategies, labor market dualization, and the welfare state in Italy and South Korea, in *Politics & Society*, 46(2), 205–233.
- Ebbinghaus, B. (2006), Trade union movements in post-industrial welfare states, in K. Armingeon and G. Bonoli (eds), *The Politics of Post-industrial Welfare States*, London: Routledge, pp. 123–42.
- Emmenegger, P. (2014), *The Power to Dismiss*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Emmenegger, P., Hausermann, S., Palier, B e Seeleib-Kaiser, M. (eds.) (2012), *The Age of Dualization: The Changing Face of Inequality in Deindustrializing Societies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1985), *Politics against markets: The social democratic road to power*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Estévez-Abe, M., Iversen, and Soskice, D. (2001), Social Protection and the Formation of Skills, P. Hall and D. Soskice (eds.), pp. 123-152.
- Ferrera, M. (1984), *Il welfare state in Italia: sviluppo e crisi in prospettiva comparata*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Ferrera M., Fargion V. and Jessoula M., (2012), *Alle radici del welfare all'italiana. Origini e futuro di un modello sociale squilibrato*, Venezia: Marsilio Editore.
- Flanders, A. (1970), *Management and unions: the theory and reform of industrial relations*, London: Faber.
- Giorgi, C. and Pavan, I. (2021), *Storia dello stato sociale in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Guerzoni, L. (ed.) (2008), *La riforma del welfare: dieci anni dopo la" Commissione Onofri"*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Hall, P. and Soskice (eds.) (2001), *Varieties of Capitalism. The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, Oxford: OUP.
- Hassel, A. and Streeck, W. (2003), Trade Unions as Political Actors, in J. Addison & C. Schnabel (eds.), *International Handbook of Trade Unions*, London: Edward Elgar.
- Huber, E. and Stephens, J. D. (2012), *Democracy and the left: Social policy and inequality in Latin America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hyman, R. (2001), *Understanding European Trade Unionism*, London: Sage.
- Jessoula, M. (2009), *La politica pensionistica*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Jessoula, M. (2016), “Le pensioni al nodo dell’equità: dalla Riforma Poletti-Renzi alla «Fase 2»”, in *Rivista Italiana delle Politiche Sociali*, 3-4.
- Jessoula, M. (ed.), (2017), Welfare occupazionale e welfare state: incastri virtuosi?, in *Rivista delle Politiche Sociali*, vol. 2/2017.
- Jessoula, M. (2019), La previdenza complementare: limiti e sfide in una prospettiva sistemica e comparata”, in M. Jessoula and M. Raitano (eds.), *Le pensioni in Italia, oggi e domani?*, in *La Rivista delle Politiche Sociali*, no. 3.
- Jessoula, M. and Natili, M. (2020), Explaining Italian “exceptionalism” & its end: minimum income from neglect to hyper-politicization, in *Social Policy and Administration*, n. 4, 2020.
- Jessoula, M. and Vesan, P. (2011), Italy: limited adaptation of an atypical system, in J. Clasen and D. Clegg (eds.) (2011), *Regulating the risk of unemployment. National adaptations to post-industrial labour markets in Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jessoula, M. and Raitano M. (2017), Italian Pensions from “Vices” to Challenges. Assessing Actuarial Multi-pillarization Twenty Years on, in D. Natali (ed.), *The New Pension Mix in Europe. Recent Reforms, Their Distributional Effects and Political Dynamics*, Brussels: Peter Lang.
- Jessoula, M. and Raitano, M. (eds.) (2019), Le pensioni in Italia: oggi e domani, in *Rivista delle Politiche Sociali*, 3.
- Jessoula, M., Graziano, P. R. and Madama, I. (2010), Selective flexicurity’ in segmented labour markets, in *Journal of Social Policy*, 39(4): 561–83.

- Jessoula, M., Natili, M. and Pavolini, E. (2021), 'Exclusionary welfarism': a new programmatic agenda for populist right-wing parties?, in *Contemporary Politics*, p. 1-22.
- Jessoula, M. and Pavolini, E. (eds.) (2022), *La mano invisibile dello stato sociale. Il Welfare fiscale in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Johnston, A., Kornelakis, A. and Rodriguez d'Acari, C. (2012), Swords of justice in an age of retrenchment? The role of trade unions in welfare provision, in *Trasfer*, 18(2), 213–224.
- Korpi, W. (1983), *The democratic class struggle*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Korpi, W. (2006), Power Resources and Employer-Centered Approaches in Explanations of Welfare States and Varieties of Capitalism: Protagonists, Consenters, and Antagonists, in *World Politics*, 58(2), 167–206.
- Leonardi, S. and Pedersini, R. (2022), Trade unions in Italy: pluralism and resilience, in J. Waddington (ed.), *Trade unions in the European Union*, Brussels: Peter Lang.
- Mares, I. (2003), *The Politics of Social Risk: Business and Welfare State Development*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, K.J. and Swank, D. (2012), *The Political Construction of Business Interests*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Meardi, G. (2011), Understanding trade union cultures, in *Industrielle Beziehungen*, 18(4): 336–45.
- Naczyk, M., and Seeleib-Kaiser, M. (2015), Solidarity against all odds: Trade unions and the privatization of pensions in the age of dualisation, in *Politics & Society*, 43(3), 361–384.
- Nagel, T. (1997), *The Last Word*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Natali, D. (2007), *Vincitori e perdenti. Come cambiano le pensioni in Italia e in Europa*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Natili, M. and Puricelli, A. (2021), Expanding welfare state borders: Trade unions and the introduction of pro-outsiders social policies in Italy and Argentina, in *Journal of Social Policy*, 1-19.
- Natili, M. (2019), *The politics of minimum income: Explaining path departure and policy reversal in the age of austerity*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Paci, M. (1984), *Pubblico e privato nei sistemi di welfare*, Napoli: Liguori.
- Palier B., and Thelen, K. (2010), Institutionalizing dualism: Complementarities and change in France and Germany, in *Politics & Society*, 38(1), 119–148.
- Pavolini, E., Fullin, G. and Scalise, G. (2022), Labour Market Dualization and Social Policy in Pandemic Times: An In-depth Analysis of Private Consumption Services in Europe, in *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*.
- Pavolini, E., Ascoli, U. and Mirabile, M.L. (2013), *Tempi moderni. Il welfare nelle aziende in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Pierson, P. (1996), The New Politics of the Welfare State, in *World Politics*, 48(2): 143–179.
- Regalia, I. (1984), Le politiche del lavoro, in U., Ascoli (ed.), *Welfare state all'italiana*, Bari: Laterza, pp. 115-35.
- Regalia, I. and Regini, M. (2018), Trade unions and employment relations in Italy during the economic crisis, in *South European Society and Politics*, 23(1), 63–79.
- Regalia, I. (2003), *Negoziare i diritti di cittadinanza. Concertazione del welfare locale a tutela della popolazione anziana*, Milano: F. Angeli.
- Regonini, G. (1984), *Il sistema pensionistico: risorse e vincoli*, in U. Ascoli (ed.), *Welfare state all'italiana*, Bari: Laterza, pp. 53-75.
- Rueda, D. (2005), Insider–outsider politics in industrialized democracies, in *American Political Science Review*, 99(1): 61–74.
- Rueda, D. (2014), Dualization, crisis and the welfare state, in *Socio-Economic Review*, 12(2), 381–407.
- Sacchi, S. and Vesan, D. (2015), Employment policy: segmentation, deregulation and reforms in the Italian labour market, in U. Ascoli and Pavolini, E. (eds.), pp. 71-95.

- Saraceno, C. (2003), *Mutamenti della famiglia e politiche sociali in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Saraceno, C. (2008), Le politiche per la famiglia, in L. Guerzoni (ed.), pp. 245-261.
- Seeleib-Kaiser, M., Saunders, A. and Naczyk, M. (2011), Shifting the Public-Private Mix, in P. Emmenegger, Häusermann S., Palier B. e Seeleib-Kaiser M. (eds.), pp. 151-175.
- Stamati, F. (2020), Il sovranismo alla prova del welfare. Previdenza e assistenza tra innovazione, continuità e ritorni al passato, in M. Moschella and M. Rhodes (eds.), *Politica in Italia. Anno 2020*, pp. 229-247.
- Tassinari, A. and Sacchi, S. (2021), A Biased Pendulum: Italy's oscillation between concertation and disintermediation, in B. Ebbinghaus and J.T. Weishaupt (eds.), *The Role of Social Partners in Managing Europe's Great Recession*, London: Routledge.
- Thelen, K. (2014), *Varieties of liberalization and the new politics of social solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Triglia, C. (ed.) (2020), *Capitalismi e democrazie*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Vicarelli, M.G. (1998), *Alle radici della politica sanitaria in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Vicarelli, M.G. (2015), Healthcare: Difficult Paths of Reform, in U. Ascoli and Pavolini, E. (eds.), pp. 51-70.

Trade unions and social policies: The case of Italy

Summary: This article presents an exploratory investigation of how trade unions address the issue of representation in the domain of social policies, especially when they have the capacity to influence policymaking, both through political pressure and involvement in social concertation. After presenting two contrasting approaches to trade union representation in the policy domains, one firmly rooted in reflecting the members' interests and the second more open to consider the proactive interpretation of those interests and other institutional and political factors, the case of trade union confederations in Italy is taken into consideration. A first analysis of the positions of Italian confederation in the area of social policies since the 1960s shows some distinctions between different policy areas: while their attitudes on social transfers maintained a focus on the interests of members, the positions on social services have consistently supported inclusion. Moreover, even in the field of social transfer, a more inclusive approach has progressively emerged in recent decades, including because membership changes through time and organisational revitalisation almost necessarily involves renewal and expansion of the membership base. Although it must be considered a preliminary result, the analysis shows the importance of developing and applying a more dynamic and less deterministic analytical framework to trade union representation in the field of social policies.

Keywords:

I3 Welfare, Well-Being, and Poverty

J51 Trade Unions: Objectives, Structure, and Effects

J5 Labor-Management Relations, Trade Unions, and Collective Bargaining

Emmanuele Pavolini, Department of Political Science, Communication and International Relations, University of Macerata, Via Don Minzoni 22a, 62100 Macerata. e.pavolini@unimc.it

Emmanuele Pavolini obtained his PhD from the University of Brescia in 2000. He is full professor in economic sociology at the university of Macerata. Between 2007 and 2017 he was Senior Lecturer at the same University. His research focuses on welfare state studies from a comparative perspective, inequalities in the access to welfare state provision, occupational welfare, welfare mix and third sector organizations, as well as on labour market research and economic development,

with a focus on the changing roles of professionals, networks among enterprises, and the role of migrants in the labour market.

Roberto Pedersini, Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan, Via Conservatorio 7, 20122 Milano. roberto.pedersini@unimi.it

Roberto Pedersini teaches Economic sociology at the Università degli Studi di Milano. He recently published, with Lorenzo Bordogna, the book *Relazioni industriali. L'esperienza italiana nel contesto internazionale* (2019); with Lisa Dorigatti, the journal article *Industrial relations and inequality: the many conditions of a crucial relationship* (2021); and, with Salvo Leonardi, the edited book *Multi-employer bargaining under pressure. Decentralization trends in five European Countries* (2018).

Appendix

A1. Union membership (UM) composition in Italy (% share on total TU members)

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
<i>Socio-demographic characteristics</i>					
Women		35.0	36.7	38.3	43.2
Foreign born					16.1
Aged 15-24					4.2
Aged 25-54					67.2
Aged 55-64					27.6
Fixed-term contract workers					19.0
<i>Company characteristics</i>					
Small firm workers					8.5
Medium firm workers					38.5
Large firm workers					53.0
Public sector workers	23.2	29.0	35.4	41.7	44.5
<i>Economic sector</i>					
Industrial sector workers	49.3	45.5	43.2	39.8	35.1
Service sector workers	36.0	37.0	44.5	50.8	56.3
Commercial service workers	16.9	18.9	21.3	23.7	26.0
Social service workers	19.5	18.3	24.8	28.3	30.7

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A2. Trade Union Density (UD) in Italy (% share of employees)

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
<i>Total density rate</i>	45.6	43.7	37.2	33.6	35.7
<i>Socio-demographic characteristics</i>					
Female		45.8		31.2	34.7
Male		49.3		34.8	37.6

Aged 15-24				19.1	8.0
Aged 25-54				36.9	40.0
Aged 55-64				38.1	35.5
<i>Type of labour contract</i>					
Fixed-term					31.8
Open-ended					39.3
<i>Company size</i>					
Small firm					11.8
Medium firm					41.3
Large firm					54.9
Private sector	38.5	36.5	30.4	24.4	24.0
Public sector	46.8	59.6	54.1		50.0
<i>Economic sector</i>					
Industry	43.7	49.3	43.6	39.7	44.3
Services	41.2	38.7	30.2	28.6	30.2
Commercial services	n.a.	37.9	25.0	26.7	23.5
Social services		37.4	29.1	31.7	39.5

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A3. Total union density rate over time

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Denmark	68.2	77.4	75.4	70.4	69.0
Germany	33.8	34.2	29.8	21.7	17.8
Italy	45.6	43.7	37.2	33.6	35.7
Netherlands	37.5	28.8	24.6	20.8	18.2
Spain	31.3	12.4	17.6	16.8	17.0
Sweden	72.4	81.2	84.3	73.4	62.3
United Kingdom	46.8	47.2	35.1	27.9	25.1

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A4. Private sector density rate

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Denmark	62.1	72.8	69.8	61.7	62.0
Germany	29.1	31.8	21.0	17.1	15.3
Italy	38.5	36.5	30.4	24.4	24.0
Netherlands	29.7	23.3	23.5	20.4	16.0
Spain	n.a.	n.a.	15.0	15.2	14.0
Sweden	n.a.	78.8	76.3	71.0	64.5

United Kingdom	45.6	33.2	20.0	17.1	14.0
----------------	------	------	------	------	------

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A5. Female union membership (share of total TU members)

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Denmark	33.7	44.2	47.7	40.0	51.3
Germany	18.6	23.6	31.1	32.5	36.4
Italy	n.a.	35.0	36.7	38.3	43.2
Netherlands	11.6	15.8	26.3	33.2	39.2
Spain	n.a.	n.a.	29.2	38.3	41.9
Sweden	38.9	48.7	52.0	51.9	51.7
United Kingdom	27.3	32.8	42.9	50.2	56.0

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A6. The situation in the 2010s by type of employment

	Fixed-term workers UD	Fixed-term workers UM	Large firm workers UD	Large firm workers UM	Small firm workers UD	Small firm workers UM	Workers aged 15-24 UM
Denmark	58.1	11.0	70.8	35.0	58.2	14.6	6.8
Germany	9.8	9.9	22.7	70.0	6.4	6.4	7.2
Italy	31.8	19.0	54.9	53.0	11.8	8.5	4.2
Netherlands	8.8	8.2	20.5	73.0	12.6	5.0	4.6
Spain	8.0	14.9	22.2	36.0	6.2	15.6	8.9
Sweden	40.4	17.6	77.5	34.0	53.0	15.5	5.5
United Kingdom	15.0	11.5	35.0	66.8	14.4	22.0	4.7

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A7. Public sector workers UM

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Denmark	28.2	35.7	40.3	43.2	36.3
Germany	33.4	34.6	38.3	37.6	36.8
Italy	23.2	29.0	35.4	41.7	44.5
Netherlands	38.0	50.3	44.7	46.1	38.2
Spain	n.a.	n.a.	28.6	37.0	37.0
Sweden	34.9	38.5	48.0	44.5	40.0
United Kingdom	40.6	49.3	52.4	56.7	59.6

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A8. Industrial sector workers UM

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Denmark	51.9	35.0	29.6	27.6	21.5
Germany	60.2	57.8	55.4	43.9	38.9
Italy	49.3	45.5	43.2	39.8	35.1
Netherlands	47.4	37.6	31.4	27.8	22.5
Spain	n.a.	43.5	36.2	25.7	22.2
Sweden	45.4	36.4	28.6	23.1	19.5
United Kingdom	50.8	39.8	28.3	18.2	12.8

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A9. Industrial sector workers UD

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Denmark	94.9	99.1	82.8	79.9	77.0
Germany	38.1	44.0	42.7	29.7	22.6
Italy	43.7	49.3	43.6	39.7	44.3
Netherlands	41.6	38.2	32.8	30.1	24.5
Spain	n.a.	13.0	18.4	14.3	16.6
Sweden	78.4	92.5	85.6	77.5	70.6
United Kingdom	50.9	52.5	35.3	23.7	17.8

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A10. Commercial services sector workers UM

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Denmark	20.3	27.5	28.6	26.7	32.0
Germany	20.1	21.7	21.1	23.5	26.0
Italy	16.9	18.9	21.3	23.7	26.0
Netherlands	15.5	18.1	25.0	26.2	27.2
Spain	n.a.	15.5	23.6	27.0	35.8
Sweden	22.7	21.7	21.9	27.6	38.5
United Kingdom	14.2	15.1	24.9	24.3	23.8

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0

A11. Commercial services sector workers UD

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Denmark	n.a.	57.0	65.4	56.2	61.3
Germany	26.3	24.4	14.8	17.1	11.5
Italy	n.a.	37.9	25.0	26.7	23.5

Netherlands	21.6	15.9	16.9	16.2	13.8
Spain	n.a.	n.a.	15.9	13.6	13.8
Sweden	56.4	64.5	66.6	63.5	60.5
United Kingdom	22.1	20.8	23.1	16.7	13.7

Source: authors' elaboration on ICTWSS database 6.0