"We Have Two Engines, and We Must Keep Them Both Running."

The combination of Institutional and Symbolic Resources

in the "Socio-Emotional Organizing" of Solo Self-employed Workers

Abstract: The rise of solo self-employment has led to the emergence of increasingly broad categories of workers in search of collective representation, who find no support either in trade unions or in employer organizations. Based on the case of Redacta, an informal group founded in Italy and composed of solo self-employed (SSE) workers in the publishing industry, the article contributes to the debate on Resource Mobilization Theory and New Social Movements by showing that, along with other resources typically available to social movements and activist groups, it is mainly through the combination of institutional and symbolic-performative resources that a process of grassroots organizing – that we call *socio-emotional organizing* – can be successfully triggered, especially in the case of particularly underrepresented groups of workers, such as the SSE.

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Introduction

The rise of solo self-employment in labor markets poses persistent questions about current methods of collective representation (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2018; Jansen 2020; Keune 2013; Author et al. 2020). New self-employed jobs, characterized by self-regulation as well as responsibility and risk-taking, are indeed increasingly heterogeneous (Gold 2014) and associated with precarious and vulnerable conditions, due to rising levels of insecurity and lack of access to social protections (Conen and Schippers 2019; Mezihorak et al. 2021; Pernicka 2006; Schulze Buschoff and Schmidt 2009). Rarely included in traditional interests' representation, solo self-employed (SSE) workers – self-employed workers without employees – have thus had less access to resources than salaried employees, experiencing greater difficulties in collective mobilizations and organizing processes. They in fact vary widely in terms of working activities, interests, needs, and desires, challenging the well-established strategies of collective representation traditionally used in the European context by trade unions and employer organizations. Additionally, the organizations involved in representing SSE workers typically lack political references, support, and alliances (Bernhard-Oettel et al. 2018; Jansen et al. 2017; Litsardopoulos et al. 2022).

In this scenario, novel collective actors are emerging. Through a process of grassroots organizing (Alberti and Però 2018; Daskalaki et al. 2019), these nascent groups set themselves the difficult task of trying to mobilize people who are isolated in the labor market and are generally unwilling to get involved in activist groups and in processes of collective organizing.

This study explores the case of Redacta, an activist group organizing SSE workers of the publishing industry in Italy. The case of publishing is particularly interesting because it is a sector characterized by high levels of precariousness and low ability to negotiate remuneration. In recent decades, especially due to digitalization, outsourcing has increased, which means that the single SSE has to deal directly with the client, thus suffering from negotiation and information asymmetries. According to the latest survey conducted by Redacta in 2024, barely half of editors seem to be able to make a living from their work. Against this background, Redacta managed to mobilize the SSE and trigger collective action processes to claim better pay and working conditions.

By focusing on the capacity to mobilize the resources needed by unrepresented and isolated workers, we aim to contribute to the theoretical debate on Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) (Edwards and Kane 2014; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Oberschall 1973). While most RMT analysts focus their attention on the distinctions between types of resources accessed for concrete actions and their outcomes, we position our study among those that also emphasize the importance of less tangible resources, such as identity and processes of collective meaning-construction (Edwards and Gillham 2013; Edwards and McCarthy 2004; Ingalsbee 1996; Melucci 1989). Drawing on an ethnographic study conducted between 2019 and 2021 in Milan, our findings show how Redacta, the organization studied, was able to organize the SSE, even during the Covid-19 pandemic, through a collective process that we call 'socio-emotional organizing,' based on access to and mobilization of both tangible and less tangible resources.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section introduces the theoretical framework and points out strengths and limits of the addressed theoretical debate. Then, after illustrating the research context and the methodological approach, we present and discuss our findings. Finally, we conclude by emphasizing the original contribution of the paper and the relevance, for

organizations that want to approach unorganized workers, to simultaneously mobilize both institutional and symbolic-performative resources.

Resource Mobilization Theory and Surroundings

RMT is one of the traditional approaches among social movement theories (Darlington 2018; Gahan and Pekarek 2013; Johnston 2011; Kelly 1998; Manky 2018; Yang and Chae 2020). By emphasizing the rationality of the actors involved, this perspective is at root aimed at better understanding the capabilities of groups to mobilize resources for their development as social movements directed at channeling and managing discontent (Jenkins 1983; Zald and McCarthy 2002).

RMT analysts have focused on movements of institutional change that attempt to modify elements of social structure and/or the reward distribution of society (McCarthy and Zald 1977), organize previously unorganized groups or represent the interests of groups excluded from the polity (Edwards and McCarthy 2004; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McCarthy and Zald 2001). In this perspective, resources are at the center of the analysis of collective action, and individuals weigh the costs and benefits of their participation in social movements, which are defined as rational, goal-oriented social institutions, created by social actors with certain objectives. The focus is therefore mainly on how groups and organizations can overcome prevailing patterns of resource inequality in their efforts to pursue social change goals (Buechler 1993; Edwards and Gillham 2013; Edwards and Kane 2014).

With their attempt to draw classificatory schemes, RMT scholars have initially identified and distinguished a set of key resources relevant to the process of organizing, exploring the assets that are frequently mobilized by social movements such as money, professional knowledge, and recruitment networks in civil society (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Bob Edwards and John

D. McCarthy (2004), for example, identify five types of resources accessed by social movements: (i) *moral*, such as solidarity and sympathetic support for the movement's goals; (ii) *cultural*, including artifacts and products such as conceptual tools and specialized knowledge; (iii) *social-organizational*, such as social networks, which today also includes the use of social media to broaden participation by building organizational networks and coalitions (see Carney 2016); (iv) *human*, that is to say labor, experience, and skills; and (v) *material* resources, which refers mainly to financial and physical capital. By categorizing resource types, these authors seek to differentiate mechanisms of resource access, while avoiding the criticism of treating every means or capacity more or less available as a resource.

Over time, different analytical perspectives emerged from critics of RMT (Kriesi 1989; Polletta 2006; Williams 2004). Several scholars have claimed that RMT's interpretative efforts to distinguish the key resources accessed by social movements overlook the importance of equally significant and less tangible aspects such as grievances, identity, and culture (Kirk 2018; Melucci 1995; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1978). Diana Kendall (2006), for example, underlines that RMT does not offer a sufficient explanation for the success of groups and movements with limited resources in promoting social change. Similarly, William Gamson (1990) suggests that the organization and tactics of a movement strongly influence its chance of success. According to Vincenzo Ruggiero (2001), RMT focuses on the effectiveness with which movements and their organizations use resources to achieve their ends, and it is therefore less concerned with who the actors are, what motivates them, or what wider historical or structural meaning a particular movement may have (Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

Questioning whether self-interest is the main reason for participation in social movements, New Social Movements (NSM) theorists are also concerned with the cultural dimension of collective action, shifting attention from the pragmatic mobilization of resources to the creation of cultural models and symbolic challenges of social movements (Ruggiero 2001). For

example, Melucci (1985, 1989) considered social movements as fragile and heterogeneous social constructions, and collective action as a process through which individuals communicate, negotiate, produce meanings, and make decisions within a particular social field. While collective action affects institutional change, NSM also produces less visible outcomes at the cultural level (Bruce, 2013; Rosenbaum, 2013). These 'collective action frames' operate both as important psychological rewards and as motivational incentives for individuals to take part in movements (Snow and Benford 1992).

In an effort to give greater prominence to the cultural and symbolic dynamics of social movements and to encompass the criticism developed by the NSM, some scholars, such as Jiang and Korczynski (2016), have claimed that RMT's central assumption – that organizations must mobilize resources for action – should be inseparable from questions of group consciousness. Actors are indeed actively engaged in a cognitive process and in a 'meaning work', despite having to face the challenges posed by individualized societies. This means that the NSMs struggle for cultural meanings as much or more than they struggle for material resources. Motivations for actors' involvement thus go beyond the explicitly stated extrinsic objectives of their movement, and participation in collective actions can be an intensely meaningful, transformative experience in which actors' definitions of self are expanded to become linked with the organizational and cultural systems of the movement (McAdam 1988; Sasoon 1984).

In his study on Earth First! activists, Timothy Ingalsbee (1996a) shows that the group studied (a radical environmental advocacy group founded in 1980) did not emphasize the mobilization of monetary or material resources from external sources, as conventional RMT would assume. Rather, they internally manufactured or mobilized symbolic resources (Zurcher and Snow 1981), which are conceptualized as symbols that help to organize, unify, and empower actors for collective action both physically and psychologically. In particular, a strong identity

construction around ecological issues helped to produce activist identities. In fact, such identity practices served as symbolic resources to motivate and reward activists' participation in movement activities, because it was mainly in collective action that activists were able to symbolically express their environmentalist consciousness. Mobilizing symbolic actions is thus considered a prime activity in NSM (Buechler 2013; Canel 1992; Ingalsbee 1996). These internal resources are mobilized from within activists' own communities, generated in the course of organizing and engaged in collective actions. They materialize in a variety of empirical objects, ideas, and acts that symbolize the unfolding collective consciousness of actors.

In this article, which is interested in investigating both tangible and non-tangible resources, we leverage the studies carried out on NSM and critically rely on RMT to investigate resources successfully mobilized in the case of an activist group engaged in organizing SSE workers. In doing so, we draw on the concept of *deep organizing* developed by McAlevey (2016) and further explored by Holgate and colleagues (2018), which differs from simple *mobilizing* in that it is not limited to the one-off activation of members and focuses on 'the whole worker', with their interests and identities, aiming to build a sense of hope and possibility to change the environment in which they work. In particular, we contribute to this debate by showing how activating deep organizing processes, able to affect change in the long term, needs to face the challenging task of activating both tangible and less tangible resources. Through the case of Redacta, we analyze how, when, where, and under what conditions the organization studied has managed to develop novel effective practices of collective organizing that we have defined as 'socio-emotional organizing.' Our empirical case allows us to theoretically stress the role played by the mobilization of symbolic-performative resources (see Buechler 2013; Ingalsbee 1996) in the process of organizing and, at the same time, by the ability to pragmatically and simultaneously combine institutional actions (see Pettinicchio 2012) without denying their

activist attitudes. We therefore argue that symbolic-performative resources reflecting the emotional intensity and passion of the members foster identity reward and collective recognition, but this is insufficient, as it is primarily through the combination with institutional resources that the conditions to elaborate a collective are created and a certain influence and legitimacy on the policymaking can be achieved.

Research Context

The rise of self-employment in Italy has been significant in recent decades. At around 21%, among European countries Italy has the highest rate of self-employed workers in the labor market (OECD 2022). This raises questions about the extent to which growing self-employment may expose workers to risks related to a lack of social protection and collective representation (Conen and Schippers 2019; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2018; Keune 2013; Author et al. 2020).

The publishing sector in Italy, in particular, has experienced in recent years a progressive erosion of the quality of labor. As revealed by a recent inquiry, it is a low-margin and high-risk sector where many books remain unsold (Bologna and Soru 2022). The impact of digitization on the entire sector, accelerated by the pandemic, has been substantial, especially in terms of new professional profiles both inside and outside publishing houses, increasing outsourcing of the production structure and the numerical and skills relevance of self-employment (Cavani and Soru 2021). The main trends identified in the sector include a drop in remuneration, information asymmetry on tariffs between self-employed workers and clients, increasing multi-tasking and work intensity, opportunistic use of labor contracts, exploitation of the current regulation on internships, and highly individualized bargaining. Years without a representative reference have worsened an atmosphere characterized by a lack of openness and cohesion

among non-organized workers, who are often reluctant to discuss pay and contractual conditions and, as in other creative fields, are willing to work more than a non-creative worker would be willing to accept for the same remuneration (Redacta 2020).

Compared to other sectors facing similar pressures, such as advertising or film and TV production, both of which experience low margins and high risks, as well as exploitation and digitization, the publishing sector is a particularly interesting case study due to the heterogeneity of skills sets and qualifications needed. Furthermore, the above-mentioned research conducted by Bologna and Soru (2022), based on the national labor force survey, shows that self-employment, in the Italian context, is much more prevalent in publishing than in TV and advertising. In this regard, it is worth emphasizing the low reliability and risk of underestimation of statistical data. As an example, the number of SSE workers in the financial statements of publishing houses is almost invisible, because the SSE are typically included in the broader definition of service providers, which encompasses various and differentiated outsourced activities. Much of the publishing work in Italy also takes place outside publishing houses due to the increase of digitization in recent decades; in particular, the introduction of desktop publishing software is having a significant impact, simplifying some tasks and facilitating the transition of semi-finished products from inside to outside publishing houses.

The increase of SSE workers in the sector and the changes that are affecting the industry also pose new challenges in terms of collective organizing, paving the way for experimentation (Bologna and Soru 2022). A first attempt to mobilize workers was made by ReRePre (*Rete dei Redattori Precari*), a network of precarious editors in the publishing industry active from 2008 to 2013 in Italy (Zambelli et al. 2014), which in 2012 promoted – also in collaboration with the trade union CGIL – a survey on 'invisible publishing.' This resulted in obtaining the intervention of the labor inspectorate in the editorial offices of the publishers Mondadori and Rizzoli, some of the major actors in the country, imposing employment as standard employees

on several precarious workers and bogus SSE. This episode set an important precedent, but the experience of the activist group ReRePre ended shortly thereafter, and the trade unions did not pursue the objective of protecting non-employees.

Compared to ReRePre, Redacta – the activist group we studied – took a different approach. The group was created within the Italian freelance association ACTA, initially with the aim to carry out an independent inquiry into working conditions in the book publishing industry. This activist group initially wanted to show misuses of employment contracts but over the years its primary aim has been to promote improvements in SSE working conditions, collective representation, social protection, and earnings. Other than Redacta, there are no other collective actors in Italy that unite the SSE of the publishing industry. Two experiences are worth mentioning, however: the first, 'Strade,' promoted by the CGIL trade union, only deals with one profession (publishing translation) and one specific case (the copyright transfer agreement). The second, 'Tramiti,' was launched in 2023 within ACTA, the national freelance association, and deals only with those who carry out multimedia translation.

Methods

The qualitative case study was conducted in Italy between October 2019 and December 2021, mostly in the Milan area, because most publishers and workers in the publishing industry are located in this city. Initial contact with Redacta came through ACTA in the frame of a research project on collective practices of organizing developed by SSE workers in Europe (see Author et al. 2020). ACTA stands for '*Associazione Consulenti del Terziario Avanzato*' [Association of Advanced Tertiary Consultants] and is self-described as a quasi-union. It was founded in 2004 as the first national SSE association in Italy, with a focus on the need for collective representation of self-employed workers without employees in the advanced tertiary sector. In

this frame, Redacta was selected as a case study as its collective practices appeared to be particularly innovative compared to those traditionally used by organized SSE workers. We therefore opted for the selection of an "atypical" case study, which can "challenge and assist theorizers to account for enigmatic counterexamples at the margins of generalized explanations, offering invaluable opportunities to improve abstracted representations of social phenomena" (Mabry 2008:218). In the case of Redacta, although the practices of organizing were not atypical per se – as they are historically typical of the labor movement – they showed their originality in the context of solo self-employment, where representative organizations are usually focused on providing services, training, and networking opportunities for members (Jansen 2020).

Access to members of Redacta was negotiated thanks to ACTA's role in both the public and academic debate on knowledge work and specifically self-employment. Sergio Bologna, an internationally recognized independent labor theorist (see Bologna 2018), is in fact the coordinator of ACTA's scientific committee, of which Author 1 has also been a member in the past in the role of secretary. Although neither of the two authors was connected to the organization when we started the fieldwork, we could nevertheless benefit from a privileged relationship with its members. In carrying out the research, which lasted two years but continues over time, mainly through co-organizing events and joint writing with some members of the organization, particular attention was paid to the process of immersion in the field. As pointed out by Dumont (2023), there is a tendency in organizational ethnographies to spend limited time in the field and not actively participate in the phenomena studied, raising doubts as to whether immersion is more invoked than practiced (see Van Maanen 2011). In conducting the case study, we were therefore inspired by the four methodological principles thematized by Dumont in an attempt to optimize: "*involvement*, by establishing a social role; *engagement*, by adhering to participants' ways of thinking; *duration*, by aligning with the temporal pacing of

the field; and *sites*, by constructing the field as a space for social action" (2023:442). This approach strengthened the relationship with Redacta members, and positively affected the quality of the ethnographic data. During the fieldwork, the immersion therefore occurred gradually, in practice and in thought. Through this methodological design, we were able to access the world of research participants and to gain reciprocal trust. In particular, we were allowed to participate in public and several private meetings, public events, demonstrations, and to conduct qualitative interviews (Rubin and Rubin 2011) with most members of the organization. We were also provided with a range of materials intended for internal and external use, such as reports or internal studies. Moreover, we conducted a systematic analysis of texts posted on the website and in the Redacta newsletter. Another key tool was the field diary, which included both descriptive and reflexive fieldnotes as a critical instrument to make the best use of this methodological strategy while tracing the iterations of the ethnographic inquiry during the fieldwork (Emerson et al. 2011).

This approach helped us to detect the key issues the studied activist group faced over time, but also to identify the interviewees. In addition to participant observation conducted during both public and internal events, we formally interviewed members who were particularly active in Redacta's activities and who were engaged in various types of editorial work, from editors to copy editors, from ghost writers to production staff and indexers. More specifically, we conducted 15 qualitative interviews, conducted mainly in Milan in locations chosen by the interviewees, be they coworking spaces, cafeterias, university offices, private homes and, in some cases, online communication platforms. Interviews lasted from 90 to 120 minutes and were recorded and converted into textual documents. Formal interviews with members of Redacta focused on individual professional trajectory, participation in Redacta, relationships with ACTA, degree and motivations of commitment, and strengths and weaknesses of the organizations. A project information sheet was provided to the participants with written

informed consent. Permissions were also obtained both to publish photos and to use the name of the association.

The empirical material collected, consisting of field notes, transcribed interviews, online communications, and reviewed documents, was then subjected to thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998; Brawn and Clarke 2019), following an inductive approach. The content of the transcribed interviews was read, analyzed in relation to the fieldnotes, and coded in three different steps to identify the specific resources accessed and mobilized by Redacta. First, we detected and grouped the resources described by the respondents into thematic cores. Second, we identified the differences between two broad types of resources mobilized, namely tangible resources and less tangible resources. Third, we analyzed the characteristics of each relevant resource accessed by the activist group studied and explored how they were combined.

Findings

The start of Redacta: From an internal mailing list to a street parade

When we started to follow Redacta in 2019, our first impression was that we were dealing with a publishing market-focused initiative of some young members of ACTA, the Italian association of freelancers. These workers had recently carried out an internal inquiry aimed at delving into the problems of workers in the publishing industry. We then realized that this survey was actually aimed at creating a coalition, seeking new solutions, effective and pragmatic proposals, improving the working conditions of SSE workers, and bringing together freelancers in the publishing sector. While Redacta was born in the shadow of ACTA, we soon realized that several members had a political background rooted in social movements and activist groups mainly based in Milan.

Moreover, we soon realized that the relationship between Redacta and ACTA was based on reciprocal support and open confrontation, but these two entities were different. Redacta, as noted above, is the section of ACTA that brings together those who work in book publishing. ACTA, the national association of freelancers, was founded in 2004 to defend the interests of those who, working independently but not in regulated professions, were de facto excluded from social protection and collective representation.

Through conducting surveys among SSE workers, drafting welfare reform proposals and bills, and organizing a series of protests against institutions (carried out with flash mobs, fax bombing, tweet bombing, and the like), in the 2010s ACTA managed to become an institutional interlocutor on self-employment and to see a series of demands recognized, including the blocking of the increase in contributions for the social security fund, the approval of the Statute of Self-Employment, and the expansion of the scope of rights such as sickness and maternity (Pesce 2016). However, the strength of being a cross-sectoral collective actor was not sufficient when attempts were made to build forms of collective organizing. As far as tax and social security are concerned, the differences between, for example, a translator and a trainer are not particularly relevant. But when it comes to developing collective actions to protect the SSE in the market and managing relationships with clients, the differences between professions and industries become crucial. Indeed, the labor market is fragmented into many small markets with their own rules, dynamics, networks, and languages. Redacta was then created to measure itself against this challenge: to build a collective actor to fight the exploitation of people who work autonomously, atypically, and precariously in a specific industry: book publishing.

Within this framework, Redacta then marked a discontinuity from ACTA, which has always favored a cross-sectoral approach to self-employment. The birth of Redacta in 2019 even necessitated the amendment of ACTA's statute, which originally did not envisage a federative structure. Redacta only officially became part of ACTA (as a 'Section') in 2023. Other relevant

differences between the two organizations are as follows: first, while for ACTA the specificity of the profession and the negotiation of remuneration and work content remain in the individual dimension, Redacta's collective action is based on the pooling of these aspects. Second, while ACTA mainly addresses the government and parties, for Redacta the natural counterparts are companies and employer representative bodies; from the outset its focus has therefore been on building a base of workers that could be mobilized.

The self-investigation of working conditions was conducted by Redacta in tandem with the first public initiatives and meetings among workers of the publishing sector. The practice of enquiring was not only an indispensable tool in the early stages of the organizing process, but it also facilitated the recruitment of new members and the sharing of information between workers. In the administered survey, one of the key issues analyzed was remuneration, as the following excerpt shows:

> As soon as I entered Redacta, *** [name of a member] showed me this Excel file about tariffs in which people wrote: publisher X pays 1 euro, publisher Y pays 2 euro. Every now and then people would post comments saying: "No, they can pay 1 euro and 20 cents," so I said: wait, if we want to do something beautiful, we make it different. So, we did an anonymous survey. It was a long project, but it was essential. It was a bit like the launch of Redacta.
>
> [Interview Redacta C13]

Here the interviewee emphasized the key role of enquiry as an initial, constitutive part of the process of organizing. Indeed, she used her skills to improve the knowledge and activities carried out by the freelance association. Thanks to her skills in data analysis, she promoted the conduction of a survey on tariffs and remunerations, which is one of the most important topics

for SSE workers, not only in the editorial sector. This approach fueled the possibility to recruit and aggregate volunteers, and acted as the 'yeast' needed to grow the group. The involvement of workers in the organizing process was also connected to the first meetings (that at certain moments "recalled the dynamics of Alcoholics Anonymous," as one member stated ironically during a conversation), and to the exchanges of details about working activities and tips on how to interact with the different publishers. This sharing process also helped to create a first embryonic affinity group.

> At the beginning there was this sharing process, apart from the meetings, but then also via WhatsApp and therefore it has become a normal thing, like "Guys, I can't work on this book. Be aware that if they [*the publisher*] call you, there are these risks or traps…"
>
> [Interview Redacta C13]

Through the instant messaging tool and other information and communication networks, SSE workers started to gain a constant stream of communication among members and to meet, coordinate, and share information useful for the labor processes, warning each other about possible risks. The chat groups provided a more democratic platform for members to share their grievances and ideas. Also, through the ongoing inquiry on the working conditions in the publishing system, from the beginning Redacta members shared the obtained results with other workers in the sector. These activities of mutualistic exchange of information – suggestions with respect to the type of publishing houses, tariffs, problems and expedients – were perceived as part of advocacy and collective organizing. The process of building trust happened very spontaneously, driven by the objective of contrasting a working model based on cooperation and transparency to an opposing one based on competition and individual negotiation.

In this way, the editorial workers were able to trigger a process of sharing the common problems related to their job, beyond the heterogeneity of working conditions in the publishing sector and beyond the borders of Redacta. And since sharing means caring, with these activities they were also creating the conditions necessary to foster greater cohesion and collective organizing in the long run. By sharing information about their individual working conditions, the members strengthened social relationships and developed friendship networks around problems related to their daily work. Through Redacta, concerns for their working conditions expanded beyond their own welfare to include others and improve the working conditions of all SSE workers in the sector. Over the years, more and more workers, with different abilities, experience, and expertise, began to devote time and energy to Redacta, which at the same time motivated the individuals and fueled the search for new members.

> It's a commitment – I wouldn't say daily, but daily we talk, not among everyone, there is an operational core of people who have been working for a few years. We talk among ourselves every day about what can and cannot be done.
>
> [Interview Redacta C16]

The member of Redacta here explained the ongoing coordination between workers deeply involved in the organizing process but also the daily commitment conducted by an operational core of about twenty people who had worked for the gestation of Redacta, even before the launch of the first survey on working conditions in the publishing industry.

In the following months, meetings and gatherings were organized on a regular basis, and more than one hundred members were kept informed through periodic newsletters and posts on their website. By making the initiatives visible online, Redacters acted with the knowledge that the publishing companies could monitor their activities. However, this awareness did not prevent

them from pursuing their initiatives. As one member explained, preventive measures were always taken, for example no photos or videos were allowed during meetings. Social media were also used carefully, groups were never created, trying to avoid exposing who was a member of Redacta. Nonetheless, some publishers observed Redacta's activities and there were cases in which, because of a like on social media, some 'Redacters' were singled out and received personal reprimands from publishing houses.

Despite these difficulties, at each new meeting, we noted the presence of new workers interested in Redacta's activities. Thanks to the previous relations that some Redacta members had with the militant milieu in Milan, some meetings were held in squatted spaces known in Italy as *centri sociali*, namely self-managed, extra-institutional and autonomous places of political aggregation, created after the occupation of a public, private, or abandoned place, generally driven by committed groups of activists. During a meeting in the *centro sociale* 'Kasciavit' in Milan, the focus on the need to develop collective awareness emerged, as can be seen from the following field notes:

> The first question that M. asks the whole group is: "How are you?" Everyone in turn answers this question in their own way. S. intervenes and complains between the serious and the facetious. She is happy to share this moment with the other members of the group. She seems glad to socialize her condition and recent 'adventures' at work. We drink beers. We are seated around a long table. There are more women than men. Whoever takes the floor begins jokingly to introduce sensitive work issues, alternating with seemingly surreal anecdotes, about this or that publisher, about this or that embarrassing book title. Some dialogues are self-referential, and I do not immediately understand what they are talking about. Almost all issues are shared (the tones are at times of astonishment, e.g. *…You too? Me too!"* or *"No way! Did you see how crappy that draft was?*)."

A context devoid of representative references, alongside the political backgrounds of the members and the relationships with the national freelance association ACTA, led Redacta towards a multi-faceted strategy. From the outset of the fieldwork, we detected that one of Redacta's main problems was acquiring funds, money, or other facilities to organize a long-term collective action strategy. The meetings with the members, for example, were generally organized online, in open and public spaces (when possible) or in other places such as *centri sociali* that offered hospitality thanks to interpersonal political relationships between members of Redacta and other activists of squatted buildings, as the previous example shows. These meetings were conceived as moments of exchange among members, to discuss jointly the ongoing labor issues and to coordinate on operational matters. Most of the collective work went through moments of intense discussions, and the decision-making process was based on a criterion of direct and assembly democracy. Some issues required longer conversations than others, but the effort to reach a synthesis between the different positions was clear.

During one of these meetings in a public open space in Milan, while we waited for the activists to arrive, an informal conversation with M. took place, focusing on organizational difficulties, especially in the absence of available financial resources:

> M. and I start talking. He stresses the lack of cohesion among non-organized SSE workers and labor isolation in the publishing sector… I ask him if they have some kind of financial support. Without mincing words, he smiles and replies by making it clear that there is no money. He seems to be very keen to point this out. The principle is: "you work with what you have."

[Field notes Redacta n.2, Milan, Parco Biblioteca degli alberi]

The main material support arrived from ACTA, which provided Redacta members with many tools, advice, institutional contacts, and (little) financial support. ACTA was already recognized as an association, with strong institutional relations and contacts with universities, and Redacta had the opportunity to take advantage of these contacts. Moreover, ACTA managed the website, which allowed Redacters to address an established membership base of about four hundred associate members. In addition, Redacta was able to benefit from ACTA's expertise, such as the research tools of some executives, or the creative skills of some board members. As an example, they obtained the services of a well-known Italian cartoonist, part of the board of ACTA, who designed free illustrations for Redacta activists' campaigns.

In light of the growing intensity of Redacta's activities and membership, in November 2019 Redacta members decided to organize an event aimed at making the organization known to the outside world and the Milanese publishing environment for the first time. The event was called the "Way of the Cross in the book publishing industry." The religious reference of the Way of the Cross relies on a series of images showing Jesus Christ on the day of his crucifixion and accompanying prayers. The objective of the stations of the Cross is to help the Christian faithful to make a pilgrimage through contemplation of the Passion of Christ. Generally, a series of images is arranged along a path. Worshippers move in order, stopping at each station to say prayers and their devotion reflects a spirit of reparation for the sufferings and insults that Jesus endured during his passion. Redacters took a cue from this religious ritual to represent the mortification of their work and display it publicly. They held this initiative during the cultural event "Bookcity Milano," which involves several local and national cultural institutions and foundations linked to publishing houses, including the Italian publisher association. Bookcity is generally organized into a three-day event during which meetings, presentations, dialogues,

exhibitions, and shows are promoted. The "Way of the Cross in the book publishing industry" was organized in this context:

> The *Via Crucis* [the Way of the Cross] was an event a bit 'goliardic' within a public initiative. We were still at the beginning, we wanted to make ourselves known, we organized the event not as an official event, but unauthorized, and it was a sort of street parade in Milan, in which we stopped in certain significant places connected to publishers… the procession of the passion of the editorial work, that is, the one who does a job for passion but then dies for this passion, and the passion becomes precisely a passion in the sense of the passion of Christ. People were curious, they listened… it was the first time we appeared in some way.
>
> [Interview Redacta C15]

Fig. 1: Piles of books thrown on the ground during the Way of the Cross. Bookcity Milano, November 2019

Fig. 2: A Redacter wears a crown of thorns (symbol of the Passion of Christ) during the Way of the Cross. Bookcity Milano. November 2019

As underlined in this excerpt, this unofficial performance (within an official event) titled "Book, what a passion!" was intended to exorcise the "passion trap" of those working in the publishing sector. The "passion", indeed, indicated not only the pleasure for the job, but also the suffering of workers, who carry the cross of the cultural industry. Six stations of the *Via Crucis* of the editorial work were identified – six cult places of the publishing sector in Milan – while workers described the vicissitudes related to their daily job:

> Somewhere in the world, every day, a young graduate, or recent graduate wakes up, can't find a job, and hopes that his or her passion for books might be the key. So, they enroll in a master's degree in publishing, 'invest' in one internship after another, start to entangle themselves in the jungle of collaborations. They do not take out a mortgage and begin to think that the only thing to 'switch on' instead are the stacks of bestsellers in the windows of chain bookshops. Redacta stages the parable of a passion that becomes Passion, a

journey that will take you through six stations that every publishing professional is forced

to go through to descend from the paradises of culture to the abysses of editorial offices,

round after round.

<div align="right">[Flyer for the event, Redacta, 16 November 2019]</div>

For a new activist group such as Redacta, the development of performative activities to involve

and activate people who are isolated in the labor markets, unorganized and generally unwilling

to get involved in social movements, seemed to be a key turning point.

The consolidation of Redacta: From pandemic to alliances with other workers

The Covid-19 pandemic started in Milan in February 2020 and did not favor the process of

collective organizing, but it did not discourage the group of activists either. Redacta members

expressed over time the need to invest in identity reward, fostering coalition in an even more

atomized working environment because of the strict and long lockdown. They managed to

continue doing so, despite the pandemic response's restrictions.

> From the very beginning, our meetings were mostly about hearing stories and doing an
>
> analysis of the working conditions, because this was the main purpose. […] But even
>
> now, at least half an hour is about listening to complaints. I think it's crucial to begin to
>
> have mutual trust, mutual sympathy; if you can't trust someone it's very hard, so we start
>
> with that, and in the second part we try to get organized. […] Something crucial is the
>
> fact that we are not only studying freelancing, but we always understood this as a way to
>
> mobilize people. Our strength is the fact that we have ACTA, the advocacy part, a

pragmatic part, and also the mobilization part, which is something that differentiates us. We have these two engines, and we have to keep them both alive.

[Interview Redacta C13]

On the one hand, therefore, the need to mobilize by forming a cohesive affinity group based on mutual trust emerged from the outset and developed through the difficult period of the health emergency. On the other hand, the possibility of access to material resources and institutional contacts was emphasized by the interviewees. This double movement characterized Redacta's approach and orientation in the shadow of ACTA.

Despite the effects of the pandemic and the need to work under poor conditions, the group managed to move forward in its cohesive effort. In this regard, one of the main discussions that characterized most of the meetings among members of the group during the first wave of the pandemic was the action organized against a well-known Italian publisher. In early 2021, this publisher suddenly informed the SSE that their services would no longer be required, deciding to cut ties with the workers who had hitherto constituted its de facto external editorial staff and who handled about eighty percent of the publisher's total books in the previous year. At that point, the activists decided to publicly demand an explanation; the publishing house then received an unexpected letter from Redacta, which asked, "with one voice", the reasons for this decision. The letter's signatories were concerned about retaliation or being blacklisted by publishers for their activism, but also determined to receive clarification. Thus, "the specter of collective action peeped into the world of self-employment."[1] Redacta asked through a public letter addressed to the publisher the reasons for their abrupt exclusion. This collective action triggered an exchange of responses that turned the spotlight on the issues of SSE workers in

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[1] Redacta (4th June 2021) "I freelance dell'editoria e la vertenza col Saggiatore. La necessità di un'azione collettiva", *Monitor Italia*, https://www.monitor-italia.it/i-freelance-delleditoria-e-la-vertenza-col-saggiatore-la-necessita-di-unazione-collettiva/, accessed 10 November 2023.

the publishing sector for a while. It further legitimated the position of Redacta in the editorial sector and activated external support by celebrities of the cultural industry to the goals of the group thanks to the visibility gained through the action, as a member stated in the following excerpt:

> After the action, we received attention with a series of posts on social networks, as well as a series of media amplifications. *** [*a well-known intellectual in Italy*] exposed himself on the website *** and others from the publishing industry mentioned the Redacta case. *** was a bit Christian Democrat, he could have done more [*laughs*], but we appreciated the attempt to reactivate the public attention, also because if people don't talk about it, they forget.
>
> [Interview Redacta C17]

As already mentioned, the affinity and relationships of some members of the group with the environment of grassroots political activists often reciprocally fueled the initiatives undertaken. As time passed, the two main vocations of Redacta became clearer: investigating editorial work and promoting collective action. It appears these two dimensions were intertwined and that one drew strength from the other, in a continuous cross-referencing between understanding the context and the drive to change it.

Whereas in the previous example Redacta received solidarity after the collective action against a publishing house, the following case shows how Redacta expressed solidarity to other workers involved in another dispute. After the first wave of the pandemic an important cycle of struggles affected the logistics sector, which in Italy has been the scene of conflicts and mobilizations for years. The activists of Redacta held an initiative jointly with the activists of the *centro sociale* in Milan "Cox18" titled "Paper/Fight. Books in the hands of working people.

From editorial office to warehouse." The idea was to dialogue and forge relationships not only with a wide variety of publishers and the associations that represent them, but also with other groups of workers on strike, such as logistics workers. Along this line, the idea of meeting the workers of a grassroots union which worked in publishing logistics at the warehouses of Stradella (near Milan) was developed. Most books distributed in Italy pass through this logistics platform. A few weeks before the initiative, book distribution was blocked by a ten-day strike, and the dispute ended with a victory for the logistics workers. Redacta members considered it right to have a discussion with them in a politically appropriate space like a squatted building, to get to know each other and participate together in a public discussion to make all the work behind a book visible, from the editorial office to the warehouse and back.[2] From the flyer distributed at this initiative, the following excerpt can be read:

> Innocent books have never existed. Behind and inside every page there is work: translation, layout, editing, draft rounds, but also printing, storage, handling, distribution. For a long time, we were resigned to the fact that this work was doomed to be poorly paid, sometimes free, almost always invisible. Then workers took back the floor. From the editorial office to the warehouse, the supply chain is us, the books are in our hands.

Fig. 3: Redacta expresses solidarity to other workers. "Paper/Fight. Books in the hands of working people. From editorial office to warehouse."

A few months after this solidarity campaign, Redacta decided to hold another initiative during the 2021 edition of "Bookcity Milano." Redacta members considered this event an opportunity to take the floor in the public debate. For each presentation throughout the city, they prepared a series of questions to be addressed to the reading public through the slogan "Breaking the ice, breaking the silence about books." Among the questions to be asked (and posted daily on the Instagram profile of the activist group) were: "Has the translator already been paid? And how much? How many interns does the publishing house employ? Does it pay them? And how often are they rotated?"

This public event was also an opportunity to express solidarity and to draw attention to the workers of Grafica Veneta, a leader in the production cycle of books based in in north-eastern Italy. Among the questions to be addressed by Redacta members, the following was also included: "Will you continue to have your books printed by Grafica Veneta?" In this latter case,

the owners of the company organized a punitive action that could also serve as an example for other workers willing to denounce the company's exploitative system. A group of migrant workers from Pakistan had been kidnapped, beaten, stripped of their belongings, and abandoned bound and gagged in nearby villages. The discovery of one of the victims triggered investigations that led to the arrest of several people, including two managers. The working conditions that emerged told a story of slavery: twelve-hour working days, fifteen-minute lunch breaks, pay of four euro and fifty cents per hour. Some members of the cultural and publishing world expressed outrage at what the investigation revealed and supported the demands of workers. A member of Redacta was also interviewed on the issue of Grafica Veneta by national radio and took the opportunity to talk about the exploitation of Pakistani workers. The goal, in addition to soliciting public opinion on the working conditions of these migrant workers, was also to express solidarity with other workers involved in the publishing sector, beyond the different working and contractual conditions.

Along the lines of the previous examples, another initiative organized by Redacta was carried out in 2021 at Palazzo Isimbardi, in the headquarters of the metropolitan city of Milan, in the frame of the European Freelancers Week, created in 2006 by a group of activists from several EU freelance associations with the goal of bringing together SSE workers under a common umbrella. Redacta members participated in a roundtable during this week in their own way, with workers from different sectors, debating between those who work in the cultural sector and local authorities, such as AFOL, a local public authority that provides training and guidance for workers. Within this institutional framework, the activists of Redacta organized a tarot card reading to question in a sarcastic way the future of SSE workers in the publishing industry. The title of the initiative was: "What will happen to freelancers of the editorial sector? Ask the Tarots!"

The lives of freelancers are united by precariousness, by exposure to the whims of the market, of contingency, of fate. We have always looked for points of reference in the "carte" [*in Italian "carte" means both "cards" and "papers"*]: in the laws that enshrine our rights, in the contracts that put black on white compensation, obligations, amount of work. But we know very well that when faced with unbalanced power relations, or trivial bad luck, there are no *carte* [papers] that hold, and we always keep ourselves ready to navigate by sight without too many certainties. When we want to peek into the future, then perhaps it makes sense to ask for help from other *carte*, and from one of the oldest self-employed workers: the fortune-teller […] Tarot has always linked individual questions to a broader context. We can only change things by joining forces, by finding questions that concern as many people as possible and by recognising in everyone's questions something that also concerns ourselves. There is no shared fate that can truly frighten us.

[Redacta website, 21 September 2021]

This initiative shows, again, how Redacta was able to mobilize different type of resources. As we shall see in the next section, our case study showed a combination of different resources accessed to build successful forms of collective organizing. This strategy was relevant both for the formation of coalitions and for the development of common interests and meanings among previously atomized SSE workers.

Discussion

Our empirical findings showed that the activist group of Redacta was born within ACTA and moved in several directions: first, Redacta members carried out a permanent self-inquiry on

working conditions in the publishing sector, fostering internal cohesion, producing information on legal and tax issues to raise workers' awareness and collective identity; second, they promoted regular meetings and organized collective actions and campaigns aimed at exposing the dubious or unfair practices of publishers. Drawing on the Resource Mobilization Theory and on the criticism levelled at it by the NMS, the data collected showed several resources mobilized by Redacta to allow collective actors to pass from grievances to action (Buechler 1993; Edwards and Gillham 2013; Edwards and Kane 2014; Jenkins 1983; Zald and McCarthy 2002). In particular, by looking at the resources accessed for concrete actions and their outcomes (Edwards and McCarthy 2004), Redacta were able to mobilize, first, *human resources*, a tangible resource expressed through the work, experience and skills of Redacta members, who used their competences to design the survey to be administered to SSE workers through ACTA, the national freelance association. Furthermore, the connection with ACTA also favored the possibility to access a broader range of *socio-organizational resources*, especially in terms of advice, suggestions, institutional contacts, and some material support. On this last point, as pointed out in the findings, Redacta members managed to overcome a lack of financial resources by mobilizing other *material resources*, such as free illustrations for their campaigns and access to spaces for their initiatives, both through their relationships with the militant milieu in Milan and through ACTA's institutional contacts. Focusing instead on more intangible and immaterial resources, Redacta was able to mobilize, on the one side, *moral resources* through the action against a well-known Italian publisher, which turned the spotlight on the issue and favored solidarity from various celebrities of the publishing system. Moreover, they were able to promote reciprocal practices of solidarity support, not only by receiving solidarity, but also by expressing it to other workers, as the initiative "Paper/Fight. Books in the hands of working people. From editorial office to warehouse" showed. In this case, Redacta met with booksellers and logistics workers from publishing sector warehouses by involving grassroots

unionists already engaged in strikes within the main Italian publishing warehouse. At the same time, so-called *cultural resources* were also mobilized, such as Redacta's predilection for sarcasm in campaigns, organizing public performances, exposing industry secrets, being transparent and sharing information with SSE workers not involved in RedActa, and co-opting larger events such as book fairs or the European Freelance Week.

Like other scholars belonging to NSMs, we found that these types of resources identified by RMT – human, social-organizational, material, moral, and cultural – and accessed by Redacta members were not sufficient to explain their successful practices of organizing. Indeed, while RMT focuses primarily on efforts to pursue social change goals, the way in which subjects collectively organize themselves also influences their chances of success. Motivations go beyond explicitly stated extrinsic goals, and participation in collective action can be an intensely meaningful and transformative experience in which actors' definitions of self are expanded to become connected to the organizational and cultural systems of the movement (McAdam 1988; Sasoon 1984). In line with this perspective, our findings showed that the mobilization of institutional resources was entangled with the investment in symbolic resources mainly observed in social movements (Jiang and Korczynski 2016; Ruggiero 2001; Snow and Benford 1992). In particular, we define this entanglement of symbolic-performative resources and institutional actions as practices of *socio-emotional organizing*, which simultaneously reflect and incorporate both the emotional intensity and collective identity of Redacta and the institutional resources that grant it a certain influence and legitimacy over policymaking. Although it is still too early to assess the results achieved in terms of improving working conditions, this collective organizing approach has nevertheless proved successful, as it has led to a growth in the numbers of contacts and memberships, initiatives and event participation, as well as the invitations Redacta has received from institutions such as public bodies and universities, including to speak to students interested in a career in the publishing industry. In

addition, some publishing houses have started to use the information produced by Redacta's surveys to get an idea of fair compensation. The founder members reported that only five years ago this would have been unimaginable. In Redacta's case, therefore, the success lies more in the fact that collective organizing practices have flourished and not stopped, even during the pandemic, than in the fact that collective action has been successful in terms of quantifiable results.

The effort to trigger a process of 'socio-emotional organizing' was visible in most of their actions, from "the Way of the Cross in the book publishing industry" to the Tarot card reading at Palazzo Isimbardi. The Way of the Cross, for example, was organized by Redacta members and conceived as an unofficial and situationist performance within an institutional event. In this case, Redacta members traversed urban spaces carrying their bodies through the streets, wearing symbolic elements of the Way of the Cross – such as the crown of thorns on their heads – and stopping at each main stage related to the editorial sector to reaffirm their professional status within an official event. In this way, the members staged the parable of a passion that becomes Passion, a journey through six stations that every editorial professional is forced to pass through, round after round. Similarly, within the institutional framework of the European Freelancers Week in the headquarters of the Metropolitan City of Milan, the activists of Redacta organized a tarot card reading, expressing in a sarcastic way the uncertain future of SSE workers in the publishing industry, thereby reaffirming that the lives of freelancers are united by precariousness, by exposure to the vagaries of the market, of contingency, of fate. The element of strength we observed in their practice of organizing was thus both the effort to mobilize symbolic-performative resources and the ability to combine them with institutional ones, therefore uniting tangible and non-tangible resources. During the analysis, in several cases it was not even possible to distinguish the types of resources because they were so entangled with each other.

In the case of Redacta, the combination of institutional and symbolic-performative resources proved to be the key to organizing SSE workers. By looking at the resources that enabled this group of workers to collectively organize, we detected a systematic strategy aimed at self-identifying as part of a collective organization with common interests and goals. At the same time, this activist group also tried to access limited, socially embedded resources under unfavorable conditions to develop a collective representation (see also Della Porta et al. 2012). On the one hand, Redacta members needed to identify and start by themselves, but on the other they also needed to be legitimized as a category of workers in need of protection and representation, by breaking the stereotype that frames them – not only legally but also in terms of identity – as entrepreneurs or as precarious and bogus SSE workers in search of stability. Since its first initiatives, Redacta has not shied away from sitting at institutional tables, but without losing the attention to symbols and more immaterial resources that help to organize, unify, and empower SSE workers as activists for collective action. In particular, the case of Redacta showed that the activation of the symbolic dimension as a process of collective meaning-making alone was not sufficient to be conceived as a resource. As we saw in the empirical results, it was when the symbolic dimension met the institutional context that resources could be combined, and collective practices of organizing could be developed and involve an increasing number of SSE workers.

Conclusions

By emphasizing the rationality of the actors involved, RMT is at root aimed at better understanding the capabilities of groups to mobilize resources for the development as social movements directed at channeling and handling discontent (Jenkins 1983; Zald and McCarthy 2002). RMT analysts typically define social movements as rational, goal-oriented social

institutions, created by social actors with certain objectives (Buechler 1993; Edwards and Gillham 2013; Edwards and Kane 2014). Over time, however, several scholars have claimed that the RMT's interpretative efforts to distinguish the key resources accessed by social movements overlook the importance of equally significant features such as grievances, identity, and culture (Kirk 2018; Melucci 1995; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1978). NSM theorists, in particular, are interested in also pointing out the cultural dimension of collective action, shifting the attention from tangible resources to less material ones (Melucci 1985, 1989; Ruggiero 2001; Snow and Benford 1992).

In this article, interested in investigating both tangible and non-tangible resources, we leveraged the studies carried out on NSM and critically relied on RMT to investigate resources successfully mobilized to organize SSE workers. While we agree that RMT remains partial or incomplete due to its rejection of the social-psychological dynamics of social movements and to its underestimation of symbolic resources, we also argue that the symbolic dimension, to be translated into successful practices of organizing, must go hand-in-hand with the institutional one. Redacta activists argue that "We have two engines, and we must keep them both running," highlighting the need to mobilize at the same time both institutional and symbolic resources. This capacity, which we have defined in terms of 'socio-emotional organizing,' is in our view at the basis of the concept of "deep organizing" (Holgate et al. 2018), which is about the involvement and activation of people who may not initially get involved but who, through a process of collective organizing and the development of grassroots leaders, can self-identify as part of a community with a shared objective in seeking to challenge injustice (Heery 2018; Jiang and Korczynski 2016). In this perspective, a 'deep organizing' can be achieved when socio-emotional resources are the currency of mobilizations, and when there is a novel combination (and not simply the simultaneous presence) of tangible and symbolic-performative resources. Symbolic-performative resources foster identity reward and collective

recognition, but we argue that this is not enough, and that it is primarily through the coupling of the symbolic and institutional level that the conditions to elaborate a collective identity capable of including diverse subjects are created and a certain influence and legitimacy on the policymaking can also be achieved, in the publishing sector as well as in other sectors largely populated by SSE workers and more generally by workers usually poorly represented and with little social protection. In conclusion, according to our findings, the organizing process becomes *deep* when it manages to mobilize socio-emotional resources, in a dynamic in which feelings of frustration over poor working conditions and precariousness in the publishing industry are 'donated' as resources to be organized towards building solidarity among SSE workers and producing advocacy campaigns. The case of Redacta therefore shows that unrepresented or under-represented categories of workers can not only collectively organize, but they can also do so by both promoting a collective identity and by influencing policy making and policy implementation.

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