Communion and Liberation: a catholic movement in a multilevel governance perspective

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Abstract
Communion and Liberation is widely known in Italy as a very important Catholic movement whose political power has been significantly increasing in the last fifteen years. It is an example of movement deeply rooted at the local level, where its activities range from grassroots meetings to business activities, to services provision.

In the sociological literature, CL has been studied either by focusing on its political ideology, or as a religious movement (often defined as fundamentalist). Introducing a specific focus on the political system allows to highlight the close relationships between the recent changes in the Italian political system and the reasons for CL local success. Indeed, it has been a process of mutual adaptation and influence. The political success of a Catholic movement in a Western democracy is relevant to understand the changing role of religion in the political arena. Christian movements can play a role of substitution of traditional political movement in countries where traditional parties became particularly weak and not capable of involving citizens. But the story of CL in Lombardia suggests also that something is changing in the relationship between national and local politics. CL is able of playing at different territorial horizons by using local, regional and national political spheres to promote its policies, mainly in the welfare sector. This is a huge signal of both a capacity of adaptation to a changing political system and of influencing these changes.

In this paper we focus on the relationships between CL and Italian politics in the Second Republic (1993-on going), by analysing CL representation of its political role as well as by pointing out the political opportunity structure in which its success took place.

1. Introduction

Communion and Liberation (CL) is widely known in Italy as a very important Catholic movement whose political power significantly increased in the last fifteen years. It defines itself as a religious movement that fosters a living, revolutionary faith – that is a faith that actualizes the Christian event in everyday life (Camisasca 2001, 2003 and 2006). Criticizing the secularist idea of a private and individual faith, CL maintains that Christianity is a way of life, more than a list of beliefs and practices: Christians should engage actively and critically in society. In this perspective, politics is a crucial field of commitment1, together with charity

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1 CL website reads: “In a committed Christian experience the political dimension naturally descends from the cultural dimension. Political action, in the conception of CL, is one of the fields in which a Christian is called with greater responsibility and ideal generosity to verify the unifying criterion that guides his existence in the face of the problems posed by the life of society and institutions. [...] The political action typical of the person educated in the movement must tend, thus, to create the conditions so that the individual and society, in
and mission (through personal witness). No official membership is required, only the attendance of the weekly catechesis “School of Community”. The movement is organized in comunità di ambiente (environment communities) – groups of people working or studying in the same place, or living in the same hoods –, and includes some internal groups (lay and clergy associations – see Giorgi and Polizzi 2011a). CL world also includes the Compagnia delle Opere (CdO, Company of Works), a network of small and medium-sized businesses, charitable and cultural associations, and not-for-profit organizations; the think-tank Fondazione per la Sussidiarietà (Foundation for Subsidiarity); AVSI, an NGO active in cooperation; and a few religious centres around the world. The most important moment in the movement life is the annual Meeting, which takes place in Rimini at the end of the summer. The Meeting is a moment of collective debates, and several important public and political personalities are invited to give a speech.

CL is a successful religious movement, whose political power and visibility has been increasing in the last fifteen years: it is frequent to find articles and reportages about the role of CL in Italian politics, and its dominant political and economic power in Lombardy, the biggest Italian region, is already part of the common sense. Nonetheless, few systematic researches have been done on the reasons of this success and on how this phenomenon is relevant to understand the features of the Italian politics during the Second Republic.

In this paper we analyse the role of CL within the third sector, by taking into account the political opportunity structure during the Second Republic (1992-on going). Specifically, we focus on the complex interactions between CL and the political sphere (political actors, electoral system, discursive opportunities, and political agenda), in order to point out the contextual factors of CL’s success.

The national and international literature could be divided into two main waves of analysis. The first mainly gathers Italian scholars’ studies, carried out between the end of the 1960s and the early 1980s (Bianchi and Turchini 1975; Cavallaro 1976; Centro Operaio 1975; Ottaviano 1986; Saraceno and Rusconi 1970). These critical studies focus on the political character of CL, and define it as an integrist group. The main directions of research revolve around CL story, the socio-economic composition of its members, the organisational structure, its ideology and political vision. The interpretative frame could be generally identified as a Marxist one. The first wave stops before the huge change of Italian political landscape occurred in the early nineties (the collapse of the traditional political parties, the rise of Berlusconi and Lega Nord and the beginning of the “Second Republic”).

The second wave of analysis, both national and international, uses a religious study perspective and frames CL as a religious movement with a political character. These studies focus on CL as a religious community, on its internal organisation and on its religious issues (Abbruzzese, 2001 and 1991; Almond, Appleby and Sivan, 2006; Bova, 2005; Gervasi, 2007; Guolo and Pace, 1998; Marzano, 1995; Pace, 1998; Zadra, 1994). Most of the second wave defines CL as a fundamentalist group. Nevertheless, the categories of integrist and fundamentalism seem to be mute with regard to the complex mechanism of interplay between religion and politics played by CL. Specifically, the movement has been really successful in

2 This year meeting titled “The human person: a state of emergency”. Among the speakers: politicians (the Prime Minister Enrico Letta and many deputies and senators); entrepreneurs (such as Nicola Villa, Cisco; Bertiò, CEO of Alstom Ferroviaria); and opinion leaders.

3 Apart from the two waves, we can find: CL publications (Camisasca 2001, 2003, 2006, Ronza 1976); Church-related publications (see, Favale 1991); and critical journalistic enquiries (such as De Alessandri 2010; Pinotti 2010).
balancing its local and community-based nature with the capacity of playing on a national political arena. Therefore we need to take into account the political capacity of playing at different territorial horizons, framing the relationship between CL and the political system in a multilevel governance perspective, while the previous analyses mainly focused either on the national or the local level. Hence, even though based on a single movement, this contribution provides useful elements for the analysis of the contemporary relationships between religion and politics.

This paper is a work in progress and it is draws on two sources. Firstly, an analysis of CL discourse and self-representation: we analysed 672 articles published between 1996 and 2011 on Tracce – Litterae Communionis the movement official magazine, monthly issued. Secondly, the outcomes of different research we both have been carrying out during the last six years on local politics, welfare changes, and religion. Here, we try to develop a framework (and a first test) for the analysis of the factors of CL success.

The paper is structured as follows: firstly, we describe our starting hypothesis and analytical scheme in par. 2; in par. 3, we relate on CL’s past and recent history; then, we focus on some case studies (par. 4 and 5) in order to point out the interactions between CL and politics; finally, in par. 6 we draw some conclusions.

2. Hypothesis and methods

In this paper, we argue that Communion and Liberation movement is characterized by the strategic capacity of shaping the, and adapting to, the political context. This ability characterized CL throughout its entire history, and it can be traced out in its activities at different territorial horizons, as we will show in the following sections.

In order to analyse CL’s role in the third sector and its relationships with the political sphere, we argue that it is useful to adopt a perspective that takes into account the complex interactions between CL and the political and discursive opportunity structures that characterize its context. In other words, the reasons of CL success in the third sector lie both in its specific features (and agency) and the context opportunities. We analyze CL’s features in par. 3 and 5, while here we focus on the political opportunity structure.

First, the theoretical perspective: to which extent can CL be considered and/or analyzed under a political movement/process perspective?

CL is a successful religious movement, in terms of growth and legitimization, which also plays a relevant political role. The literature on CL, as already mentioned, is usually focused on its internal structure and ideology, and it often labelled the movement as an integrist/fundamentalist actor. The analyses on its political activities, thus, are usually framed under an actor-centred perspective (see, for instance, Zadra 1994). As for the movement characterization, CL has been described, in recent and international literature, by using the category of ‘fundamentalism’ (Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2006; Guolo and Pace 1998; Pace 1998). Following the definition of the Fundamentalist Project (Almond, Appleby and Sivan 1994), we then codified the texts in order to specifically highlight CL representation of its own identity, politics and political activism, common good, relationship with the Catholic Church, and the role of religion in society.

4 We narrowed the analysis of CL discourse on politics (Van Dijk 1997: 25) to a specific arena (Krzyzanowski and Wodak 2008; Hardy and Phillips 2002): the self-representation of identity on the official magazine, addressed to an internal audience. The articles sample is based on the research topic, therefore we selected editorials, articles focusing on national and international political issues, on social problems, and on the role of religion in society. We then codified the texts in order to specifically highlight CL representation of its own identity, politics and political activism, common good, relationship with the Catholic Church, and the role of religion in society.

5 Specifically: the changing role of political elites in medium and small cities (Giorgi and Polizzi 2011); profiles and practices of civil society in Lombardy (BIORCIO and VITALE, forthcoming; Biorcio 2001; Forno and Polizzi 2012); subsidiarization and localization of policies, with a specific focus on Lombardy’s voucher system (Bifulco et al. 2008) Giorgi and Polizzi 2007).
we can identify nine fundamentalism basic features. With respect to the ideological features, the project defines fundamentalism a movement that: (1) has a reactive attitude towards the secularization process; (2) has a selective approach towards both the religious tradition they belong to, and the modernity; (3) has a Manichean/binary perspective; (4) has an absolute faith in the infallibility of religious ‘foundational characters’; (5) has a messianic attitude. As for the organizational characters, the project points out: (6) the definition of members as ‘elected’, or ‘chosen’; (7) strict boundaries; (8) authoritarian structure; (9) control over the time and space. CL has, indeed, some characters of fundamentalism: it is a transformative movement with specific boundaries. The aim of CL is to religiously engage with society, by living religion in the whole of life circles. Indeed, the adhesion to the movement is very inclusive, since the movement attends to all people’s necessities: friendship, job, and housing placement. The transformative attitude could be exemplified by the commitment in healthcare system, which in Lombardy, due to the introduction of the subsidiarity principle (Ferrera 2006; Kazepov 2010; Giorgi and Polizzi 2013), is a quasi-monopoly of CL-related structures (Gori 2005 and 2010). Nevertheless, the ideological characters of CL seem to be less in a fundamentalist framework. First, it had no problem in leader substitution, because the founding leader Don Giussani appointed himself Julian Carron as his successor. Second, the relation with modernity and society at large has reactive features, but the attitude toward society is more missionary than messianic. Moreover, even though the category of fundamentalism could be useful in describing CL as a movement, it fails in providing an analytical framework able to encompass the specific political role that CL plays within the Italian political sphere.

On the other side, the literature on religious movements also paid attention to the opportunity structure. Following Stark (1996), a religious movement is more likely to be successful if: its religious proposal is strictly connected to a major religious tradition, its relationship with society has a medium level of tension, and its members could be seen as a casual sample of the population and not as outliers. Moreover, a movement to be successful has to be able to: trigger an effective mobilization of its members, build and maintain dense and stable networks of activists, socialize and educate young members, react to secularization process. Finally, favourable conditions are a non-regulated religious-market, a weak religious tradition, and the possibility of achieving a visible success within a generation (see Bainbridge 1997: 411). Even though we do not follow the religious economy perspective, these elements of success could be a useful starting point for the analysis of CL. Most of the factors listed could be applied to CL and its context: it is a religious movement connected to a major religious tradition; it has a strong identity and proposes a “revolutionary” faith; it constitutes a powerful network for resources mobilization; its members, who usually enter the movement during high school, become part of a dense and structured network; and it has been able to gain success within a generation. Nevertheless, other factors prove to be less applicable to CL’s case: for instance, Italy surely cannot be defined as characterized by a weak religious tradition (Cartocci 2011; Garelli 2011).

In order to better understand the reasons for the success of CL and the role it plays in the Italian society, we decided to include in the analysis a specific focus on the political opportunity structure. Even though CL is not a political movement in strict terms and it does not foster a political protest, politics has a huge importance for its activities. Specifically, CL proposes and idea of “revolutionary faith” – in which the political activity is fully integrated. Therefore it could be useful to apply the analytical perspectives used for social movements.

The key topics of CL political activity in Italy are: “the respect for life from the earliest to the last moments, the defence of the family founded on marriage between a man and woman, the development of an economy respecting both people and the environment, the principle of subsidiarity, the parents’ right to the freedom of education for their children” Tracce, May 2007.
and, specifically, to adapt the political and discursive opportunity structures. In broad terms, the political opportunity structure’s perspective suggests that “exogenous factors enhance or inhibit a social movement’s prospects for (a) mobilizing, (b) advancing particular claims rather than others, (c) cultivating some alliances rather than others, (d) employing particular political strategies and tactics rather than others, and (e) affecting mainstream institutional politics and policy.” (Meyer 2004: 126). Recently, literature divided political from discursive opportunity structure. This latter is meant to underline that media practices favouring some topics or actors over others, and frames more or less diffused in a specific society have an influence on social movements actions and strategies (Polletta and Kai Ho; see also Cinalli and Giugni 2008; Koopmans et al. 2005; Koopmans 2004; Koopmans and Statham 2000).

Therefore, in our analysis we consider CL from a social movement perspective, taking into account that it is not a protest movement, even though it fosters a transformative attitude towards reality. Specifically, we aim to explain the movement’s policy outcomes in relation (also) to some exogenous factors that have to do with the political sphere, in terms of institutions, actors, rules, and frames. The movement’s outcomes that we take into consideration are: the influence over policy-making and implementation; the increase of its presence in specific policy programs; the capacity of running direct candidates for office; the influence over which frames are adopted in relation to specific policy topics (see Meyer 2004). The political and discursive opportunities that we take into account are: the changes in the political system, in terms of actors and rules; the changes in the religious landscape; the political debate and agenda.

During the first phase of the Italian republican history (known as “first Republic” – 1948-1992), the political role of religious associations was strictly connected to the Christian Democrats – a conservative religious party (see Galli 1984; Garelli 2011; Scoppola 2006; Segatti 1999; Parisi 1979; Verucci 1999). Religious associations supported the party, through civil activism in society, as well as by the commitment and mobilization of Catholics in public and political life (Giorgi and Ozzano 2012; Tosi and Vitale 2009). In the 1990s, the social, cultural, and economic changes, and the increasing corruption scandals, which affected many within the leadership of the ruling parties (DC included) at all levels, caused an earthquake in Italian politics. The implosion of the DC was accompanied by the end of the Cold War, which created room for a new role for leftist forces, as the country was no longer trapped in Cold War dynamics. This process, together with civil society mobilization to moralize politics, led to the dismantling of the electoral rules that underpinned the political system, suggesting a new foundational pact for a Second Republic.

a) New rules and new actors

This change of political scenario constitutes a first political opportunity for CL to play a relevant political role. Traditional parties disappear or undertake a transformative process, and new political actors have been founded, specifically the Lega Nord and Forza Italia. In April 1993, when the corruption scandal already destroyed the popularity of the traditional ruling parties, a referendum introduced a new electoral law based on the majority system. The parliament also introduced the majority system in the municipal, provincial and regional elections, and the direct election for mayors and local presidents. Until then, and for almost 50 years, Italy was a sort of a blocked democracy, with two big parties but no real competition between them (Galli, 1984), based on a proportional electoral system, on centrist coalitions running the national government and on a big Communist Party always on the opposition side. After these reforms, the Italian party system polarized in two big coalitions running for the national government: centre-left, mainly composed by former communists and the leftist part of the former Christian Democrats; and centre-right, mainly composed by Forza Italia, the brand new party led by the media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, Alleanza Nazionale, the
former new-fascist party, and Lega Nord. In 1994 elections, only two months after its foundation, Forza Italia became the largest Italian party and the centre-right coalition won the national elections. The big electoral strength of Berlusconi’s party mainly came from the huge popularity of its leader and its great media power, but the party itself lacked organisation and political leaders at the local level.

In the first period after the 1993-94 political ‘revolution’, CL political leaders gathered in a little party of former Christian democrats, with no alliances and weak electoral strength. Then, they suddenly changed their mind. In 1995, two months before the regional elections, CL allied with Forza Italia to candidate its leader Roberto Formigoni for the presidency of Lombardy. The centre-right coalition gained the regional elections in almost every Northern region, and Formigoni became Lombardy’s President for the first time. CL was able to take advantage of a rare political opportunity: Berlusconi’s party was a powerful electoral weapon but an almost empty political room. By joining the coalition, CL could easily fill this room, through its well-organized activists and its skilled local leaders. Therefore, it had the possibility of making its key themes a coalition priority.

b) Religious issues and the political agenda

The introduction of the majoritarian electoral system, together with the huge crisis of the traditional parties, also affected the Italian political cultures. First, the proportional and the majoritarian system have substantial differences in terms of representation and the construction of successful electoral coalitions. Second, the traditional political parties (especially DC and the Communist Party) were built upon an ideological system that undertook a wide transformation after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of USSR. Third, the globalization process and the territorial redistribution of policy competences increased the political role of value issues. Fourth, new parties tried to gather the supposedly disperse catholic vote to build their political consensus, giving importance to religious issues in their political programs. Moreover, other processes (such as the increase of migration and, as a consequence, the change of the Italian religious landscape; or the development of biotechnologies) also brought ethical and religious themes at the centre of the political debate.

Thus, as a consequence of all these processes, religious issues have been highly politicized: opposing coalitions support different ethical positions, amplifying their distances and restructuring them in a left–right system (Ricolfi 2001; Segatti 2006). In this perspective, an organized religious movement, able to mobilize voting, could have a huge negotiation capacity. Indeed, Italian politics shows several examples of religious-political lobbies: for example, the Catholic network “Forum of Family Associations” proposes during the electoral campaigns a Manifesto to be signed by candidates who want to certify their attention towards some religious issues (such as the defence of family).

c) New church/associations attitude

Without a unified political reference point, both the church and the Catholic associations were forced to reshape their social and political presence. The Catholic Church chose not to support a single party, acting instead as an independent player by exerting pressure on political parties and institutions, relying on its credibility and its territorial organization. Thus, it fostered Catholics’ unity in the moral and social realms, while their political unity progressively waned. This new public image of the church has been described as an extra-parliamentarian church, leaving the party for the pulpit (Magister 2001; Ceccarini and Diamanti 2007). The wide network of religious associations also redefined its political role: internal differences emerged, in what is called the “Catholic Archipelago” (as Colozzi and Martelli define it, 1988, see also Diotallevi 2002); In terms of strategy, today religious associations are divided between those that favour neo-collateralism close to the political
lobbies and those that opt for advocacy activities focusing on pragmatic relationships with local politics. In recent years, with the crisis of the right-wing coalition (see par. 3) catholic associations started to play an increasing political role trying to overcome their internal differences to build a unified network supporting a political program (Manifesto – la buona politica per tornare a crescere, see Giorgi 2013). In this scenario, CL has been able to gain its own role by adopting a double strategy: pragmatic relationships with representatives belonging to different political coalitions; and lobbying activities and interactions with the centre-right coalition (and, more recently, the support of the Letta Cabinet) at the national level.

d) New policies opportunities

Both international and domestic processes stimulated the principle of subsidiarity of public policies. The crisis of political legitimation resulted in strong demands for local administrations’ autonomy from the central government, and for the empowerment of civil society actors. The decentralization process, which had begun in the 1990s and accelerated with the constitutional reform of 2001, moved many policy domains such as welfare, health care, education, industrial development, environmental policies from the central government to the local level. Besides shifting resources to the local administrations, the devolution of policies also increased the power of local political elites. At the same time, the subsidiarity of public policies, and particularly the externalization of welfare services, moved a huge portion of the public funds from public-driven structures to private organizations – such as religious associations operating in the welfare sector – increasing their local political power as well as their competitions (as it occurs in other contexts, see Marwell 2004; Scheitle 2009 – on religious associations and third sector see also De Graaf and Ruiter 2006; Itçaina 2010; Janowski and Wilson 1995). As many scholars pointed out, Italian welfare State lie upon unpaid female care work and church-related social assistance in the field of marginality (Lynch 2009; Ferrera 2006). Thus, in recent years, and especially in the aftermath of the financial crisis, religious associations operating in the field of welfare progressively increased their role and importance in the welfare policies because of the externalization of welfare services provision.

We briefly traced the main changes in the Italian political scenario that can be seen as broad shifts in political opportunities: new political actors and new political rules; a growing importance of religious issues within the political agenda; the current role of the ‘extra-parliamentary’ Catholic Church and the wide Catholic Archipelago; and the reforms that affected the Italian welfare policies. In the following paragraph we focus on CL story in relation to these changes
3. CL process of engagement in the multilevel governance

3.1. Origins of a shifting involvement in politics

Throughout the almost 60 years of its story, Communion and Liberation has shown a complex relationship with politics. Even if its deep attitude toward the political dimension has been stable over time (Abbruzzese 2001, Camisasca 2003), through a brief analysis of its different seasons we can detect in the movement a remarkable capacity to adapt its relationship with politics to the changes in the overall political context. When don Giussani founded CL in the middle of the 1950s, in Milan, the movement didn’t have any explicit political objective. The young priest, who taught religion in a prestigious high school of the city, started organizing a community of students with the aim of making them rediscover the sources and the proudness of the Christian faith. After fifteen years, the movement, then called GS, Gioventù Studentesca (Students Youth) became the leading young catholic organization in the city, its militants being active in every important school and university of Lombardy and in many charity activities.

At the end of the 1960s almost half of GS members decided to leave the religious organization to follow a more deep political engagement inside the overall youth movement that emerged in’68 all over Europe. After this split, at the beginning of the 1970s Don Giussani re-founded the organization, changing its name in CL (Communion and Liberation), and started contrasting every leftist interpretation of the Gospel message. In the following 20 years the movement became one of the biggest new Catholic movement in Italy and reached many cities and regions, as well as other countries, both in Europe and in the rest of the world.

Only in the middle of the 1970s CL started engaging some of its members in the political arena, inside the Christian Democrats party (DC) at the municipal and regional level (Camisasca 2003), by founding an organized group inside DC, called Movimento Popolare (Popular Movement). The participation in the political arena became much more intense in the 1980s, when important CL members were elected also at the national and European institutions and managed to reach leading positions in the municipal and regional governments. In the early 1990s, with the crisis of the First Republic and the collapse of its most important party, DC, CL decided to step down from a national political engagement, by closing the experience of Movimento Popolare. In the meanwhile, Don Giussani and the leading group of CL decided to direct many resources toward the economic and business dimension, founding little and medium size firms all over the country, both for profit and non-profit, and collecting them in a new umbrella organization to connect and develop these business activities: the CdO, Compagnia delle Opere (Company of Works – see par. 5).

In the mid 1990s, after some years of absence from the political arena, CL begun a new season of intense political engagement, with a different strategy. In the new bipolar political system where the Christian Democratic party was collapsed and no other party could play its hegemonic position, CL leaders took two important strategic decisions: CL entered the strong but almost empty political room of the Berlusconi’s coalition, with its skilled local leaders and well organized activists (Giorgi and Polizzi; 2013) and at the same time, since the national level of their party was totally dominated by Berlusconi’s inner circle, they decided to concentrate their political resources at the local level, by placing their leaders in some important local institution, as Regions and big municipalities. The most important local institution conquered by CL leaders was the Lombardy Region, where Roberto Formigoni was elected President in 1995.

By playing its political role at the local level, CL was able to occupy institutions whose importance was more and more growing, because of the devolution process that Italy was introducing in those years. In 1993 and 1994 new laws were approved by the parliament changing the electoral system of municipalities and Regions: they introduced the direct election of mayors and Region presidents. This change allowed the local governments to strengthen their legitimization toward the citizens and their autonomy toward city and regional councils. After just a few years, in 1997, the national government managed to pass a reform (the so called Bassanini laws), to devolve new powers and autonomy to local governments. In 2001, the constitutional reform of the fifth part
of the Constitution (see par.4) institutionalized this devolution process at its highest level. Welfare policies, such as health care, social care, and vocational training were crucial elements of the new local governments. In particular, because of the institutional reform, Region presidents could play a central role in these policies. They had the chance to design and implement their own welfare model. The presidential centrality of this new institutional system (Bifulco 2008; Musella 2009) let them become the hegemonic actor of the local politics, not only in the welfare sector but also in the urban planning and housing policies.

These new rules were producing a new political scenario, more open to actors deeply rooted in their local contexts and able to play their role in a multilevel system. In this scenario, CL could build a local system in which its visions, its policies, its members and its economic wing, CdO, could enormously extend its action, its influence, and power over society.

From 1995 to 2011 CL managed to deploy its members and the ideology of subsidiarity (see par.4) in the Lombard Region but also at the national level. Its most important leader, Formigoni, was considered for a long time the natural successor of Berlusconi as leader of the centre-right coalition. The annual cultural convention organized by CL, the Meeting, was one of the most relevant political events of the country, where almost every government member had to go during their mandate, and (as a consequence legitimizing?) legitimize both CL and its political campaigns.

The strength of CL in the political arena increased in a period of crisis, between 2011 and 2012, when both the national and the regional governments were hit by political and personal scandals. At the national level, Berlusconi’s consensus within Italian civil society was weakened by the sexual scandals in the first months of 2011 and by the financial crisis in the summer of the same year. Two of the Italian most important social institutions, Confindustria (confederation of the Italian firms) and the Catholic Church, explicitly criticized Berlusconi and asked for a government change. This change was possible only in November, under the pressure of the financial speculation over the Italian sovereign debt and the loss of the parliamentary consensus for the Berlusconi’s government.

At the local level, Formigoni’s regional government was hit in 2010 and 2011 by the corruption scandals that caused the arrest of five of its current and former members. Formigoni himself was accused of corruption by the judges of Milan in 2012. The allegations dealt with the allocation of huge amount of economic resources directed from Formigoni’s government toward health care services led by some of his friends. This scandal touched directly CL, since the most important object of these allegations were CL members. After many months during which Formigoni resisted to the attacks of the political opposition and a wide part of public opinion, he finally resigned in December 2012, announcing not to run for another mandate in the election of February 2013.

After these crises at both national and regional level, CL political engagement became a public issue. The traditional opponents of CL, like the left parties, the newspaper Repubblica and important intellectuals, accused the movement of being just a lobby organized to enlarge the power of its members, without legal constraints or moral values. Even traditionally CL-friendly newspapers, like the Corriere della Sera, started criticizing the movement because of the strong connections of CL with people involved in the corruption scandals.

CL reacted to these problems with the same strategy used 20 years before when the scandal of the First Republic crisis had involved its members: that is, by changing its most problematic political leaders and following the new trends of the political power. In this case, CL spiritual leaders, such as the president and Don Giussani successor Don Julian Carron and the Milan Archbishop Angelo Scola7 smoothly criticized the behaviours of its members involved in the scandals8.

At the same time CL political leaders decided to strongly support the big coalition government

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7 Cardinal Angelo Scola is the most important Catholic bishop coming from CL, nominated by Benedict XVI in 2011 archbishop of Milan and considered by many observers as the favourite candidate for the papacy in the march 2013 conclave that elected Cardinal Bergoglio as the new pope.

8 In May 2012, Don Carron wrote a public letter to the more important newspaper of the Italian centre-left area, admitting that some CL members had wrong behaviours, even if he did not indicate explicitly who they were.
(centre-right, centre-left and centrist party) led by Mario Monti that was established after Berlusconi’s government crisis. Some of them even helped Monti to build his new party for the election of February 2013, Scelta Civica, which aimed to gain the consensus of Berlusconi’s voters. Other CL leaders kept on supporting Berlusconi’s party, but after the deadlock result of the general parliamentary elections, where both centre-left and centre-right didn’t managed to gain a majority, all of them found a common path in supporting the new big coalition government led by Enrico Letta. In the new government, CL leaders gained two of the most important ministers, Mario Mauro as Minister of Defense and Maurizio Lupi as Minister of Infrastructures.

CL had managed to regain a central position in the political arena, after just a few months from its deep crisis of 2011 and 2012.

4. Subsidiarity: ideology and instrument of CL power

The systematic penetration of CL members in crucial points of the multilevel governance in Lombardy was not a mere strategy to widen the movement power, resources and hegemony on the whole society. This strategy relies also upon a strong ideological apparatus through which the CL penetration can be justified both to its members and to external observers.

The main basis of this ideological apparatus is the concept of “subsidiarity”. In its general definition, subsidiarity is the duty of the upper levels of an institution or a community to help its lower levels to reach some shared goals, when lower institutions are not able to reach them by themselves. It can be considered also as an organizing principle of decentralization of public decisions, actions, performances. Usually, scholars divide “vertical” subsidiarity (decentralization of functions from higher to lower levels of government) from horizontal subsidiarity (decentralization of functions from public/State institutions to private/civil society organizations).

CL started using the subsidiarity concept in 1987, when Don Giussani indicated the horizontal subsidiarity, which means the concrete organization of local action to support economic and social activities, as path of political commitment. In the ’90 and after Formigoni became president of Lombardy Region, subsidiarity has become the key concept of all the political action of CL and by far the most used title given by the Regional administration to its policies (Gori, 2005; Donati and Colozzi, 2005; Pesenti, 2005). Every public declaration of the Regional government members referred to the subsidiarity principle as the framework of every important decision. In CL view, the subsidiarity principle is conceived in opposition to the State intervention providing public services. This opposition between State and society is evident in slogans used by CL in its political campaigns, such as “more society, less State” (Vittadini 1997, 1998). In CL discourse, this interpretation of the subsidiarity principle means that civil society organizations should be free to provide public services to citizens, without any interference of public institutions, both local and national. State institutions should use their position to define a minimal set of rules to allow private organization operate in the service market and to pay citizens, both directly and indirectly, to buy these services. In this view, demand and supply of public services must be matched by a market in which citizens are free to choose their favourite providers. We could define this view as a market-driven model of subsidiarity.

This model is not the only possible interpretation of the subsidiarity principle, at least in Lombardy region. Subsidiarity is in fact an ambiguous word, which entails a large set of different meanings, connected to . Following a liberal point of view, CL underlines the element of freedom of the lower levels toward the upper ones: while the freedom element plays the almost unique role in defining what is subsidiarity, other elements implied by the subsidiarity principle do not deserve an institutional attention, such as the process of reaching a common set of goals among levels, or the right of the upper levels to intervene if the lower level are not able to guarantee to reach these goals. Through its public discourse and political campaigns, CL has managed to promote this specific interpretation of subsidiarity in the policy arena and to impose it as its only possible definition.
Nonetheless, the subsidiarity principle has a much more complex definition process in the Italian and European context. There is a rich literature about how the concept of subsidiarity has been introduced in the philosophical and political vocabulary of the Western democracies in the Ninetieth century. It was the Catholic social teaching the first institution to use explicitly this concept at the end of the Ninetieth century. In its interpretation, subsidiarity means the need for modern States to preserve the primacy of intermediate groups over the State and to support their role in sustaining and educating people (De Choisinet 1990; Cardia 2000). In the first decades of the twentieth century, the term was officially used for the first time in the teachings of the pope Pius XI (Encyclical letter Quadragesimo anno 1931). Albeit its explicit presence in the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church, the subsidiarity principle was ignored for a long time by the main democratic political streams of the twentieth century: the totalitarian vision of Communist and Fascist didn’t conceived any real autonomy for civil society, while the socialist and conservative parties of the post-war Europe were much more interested in defining the limits of State, unions and market, without paying much attention to the organized civil society groups. The concept of subsidiarity was rediscovered in Europe only in the 1980s and the 1990s, when the crisis of the “Glorious Thirty Years” showed that the dominant role of central States and markets in providing public services was not able anymore to guarantee quality and efficiency. The European Commission had an important role in promoting the subsidiarity principle in the public policies, particularly under the presidency of Jacques Delors (D’Agnolo 1998, De Pasquale 2000, European Commission 1993).

In Italy this principle became more and more important in the 1990s, as the crisis of the traditional parties and the huge public debt accumulated in the previous twenty years made it clear that a decentralization of the public services and a larger role for civil society could support a welfare innovation, in terms of efficiency and efficacy. In this framework, the subsidiarity principle became a sort of “mantra” used by many political actors to justify every reforms aiming to give a larger role to citizens in the public affairs.

In the public debate, the pundits of subsidiarity came from the three main traditions of the Italian political landscape: socialists, Catholics, and liberals. All of them rediscovered tracks of this principle at the roots of their tradition and promoted to recover it in the policy making process (Cotturri 2001, Arena 2006).

In this political climate, the ground was favourable to introduce the first reforms based on this principle. As a matter of fact, in the 1990s many reforms were passed, both at the national and at the local level, to extend the freedom of private actors to provide public services to citizens with the financial support of public institutions. One of the policy sectors that were more affected by this process is the social service sector. At the national level, the childhood care reform (l.285/1997) started building a system for engaging third sector organizations in the policy making at the local level. After just a few years, the overall system of the social services was reorganized (l.328/2000), by acknowledging the central role of the municipalities in the social service planning and making it mandatory for them to involve citizens associations and third sector organizations in the planning process.

At the local level, many Regions approved new laws to implement the subsidiarity principle in the governance of welfare services. Lombardy, in particular, developed a constant and accurate plan of subsidiarization of both health and social service, by giving to private providers a large level of autonomy to sell their services to citizens, mainly through a voucher system (Giorgi e Polizzi 2008, Bifulco 2005).

This process of subsidiarization reached its symbolic climax and most important institutionalization, in 2001, when even the Italian Constitution was changed by the parliament to introduce subsidiarity as a leading principle in the organization of the public services. This reform was then approved by the citizens in a national referendum, which took place in October 2001.

\[\text{Art.118 of the Italian Constitution.}\]
Throughout the process of institutionalization of the subsidiarity principle in the Italian political arena, CL played an important role. The movement promoted and used this process at the same time. The idea of promoting a larger role for non profit in the organization of welfare services was already present in the late 1980s, as the movement started dealing systematically with economic activities and founded the Compagnia delle Opere (CdO). Only in the middle of the 1990s CL started organizing a campaign to promote the subsidiarity principle all across the country. In that period, the political pressure to introduce this principle in the policies had already produced many proposals of reform (mainly but not exclusively from Catholic scholars) and some laws inspired by this principle (such as l.142/1990). The public debate ground was ready for the beginning of a massive campaign to promote the subsidiarity principle in the debate about the reforms of the multilevel governance that both the national parliament and the Regions were about to debate in those years.

In this context, CL took the chance of Roberto Formigoni’s victory in the regional elections of 1995 to set a plan to reform every important sector of the regional policies under the principle of the market-driven subsidiarity. In particular, in 1997 the reform of the health care system (l.31/1997) prompted a big enlargement of the private structures role in the health care service. In the same years the vocational training reform (l.196/1997) produced a liberalization of the sector that opened the market to a large number of new actors. In 2008, the social service reform (l.13/2008) institutionalized a voucher based system which had already been introduced incrementally in the previous years in many under-sectors of the regional welfare.

Subsidiarity became a sort of flag that identified the Lombard way of governance, and CL became its most enthusiastic cultural entrepreneur. At the same time, at the national level, CL members promoted also the birth of a parliamentary intergroup (composed by members of Parliament coming from different and even opposite parties). Among the most important members of this inter-group we can find important leaders of both centre-right and centre-left parties, such as the current prime minister Enrico Letta, one if his most important ministers Maurizio Lupi (CL member) as well as the former leader of Democratic Party Pierluigi Bersani. The climax of such a process was reached in 2011, when CL managed to organize one of the main events of the official celebration of the 150 years of the Italian unification (1861-2011): a big exposition called “150 years of subsidiarity”, inaugurated by the Italian President Giorgio Napolitano. The main objective of this exposition was to show how subsidiarity was not a recent goal but a feature of the Italian cultural tradition, deeply rooted in its civil society actors.

5. Multilevel CL

Following our analytical perspective, the previous paragraph focused on subsidiarity as a both political and discursive opportunity structure. Here, we present some examples of CL political action at different government and policy level, in order to highlight (1) how CL is able to move between and throughout different political levels; and (2) the interplay between its capacity of both open new and take advantage of political opportunities.

a) Banco Alimentare (Food Bank). From the local to the national.

The Fondazione Banco Alimentare\(^{10}\) (Food Bank Foundation) has been founded in Milan, in 1989, by Don Luigi Giussani (the leader of CL) and Danilo Fossati (an important Italian entrepreneur working in the food industry – STAR). Banco Alimentare’s aim is to collect the production surplus of the food supply chain and to redistribute this surplus to charity organizations all over Italy. As many other organizations spread all over Europe, Banco Alimentare [BA] mainly collects surplus from food industry: rice, pasta, olive oil, fruit, milk, and similar products. Since its foundation, BA developed in a large network spread all over Italy, established connections with

\(^{10}\) See: http://www.bancoalimentare.it/
similar experiences abroad, and organized several parallel activities in order to raise civil society awareness, collect food, and gather funds – such as the National Food Collection Day, during which BA volunteers invite people at supermarkets to buy extra-food for the needy. At the end of the 1990s, BA was able to launch a new program – SITICIBO – in order to collect also food from organized large-scale retail trade and catering services. In 2003, indeed, a law was passed ruling over the possibility of redistributing cooked food. This law, familiarly called “Good Samaritan Law” (L. 155/2003), listed a series of hygienic requirements for civil society organizations in order to collect and redistribute the food surplus to charity organizations. The law increased the chances of food collection, and it was made possible because of the lobbying activity of BA and two powerful women, the first wife and the sister of Corrado Passera, who served as Minister of Economic Development, Infrastructure and Transport in the Mario Monti Cabinet and at the time was the CEO of Banca Intesa (the richest Italian bank group). Cecilia Canepa and Bianca Passera asked Mario Ciaccia, a former magistrate, chief of the Department for the Institutional Reforms at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers at the time, then CEO of Banca Intesa’s bank focused on public finance, to write a law proposal – which was subsequently presented at the Parliament by a Senator of Forza Italia, Luciano Falcier, former DC representative. The law proposal was presented in the pertinent parliamentary commissions (Constitutional Affairs; Regional Affairs; State-Regions; Budget; Finance and Treasury; Industry, Tourism, and Trade) and finally approved. The law 155/2003 is of great importance for different reasons. It is the first law (and the only one, until now) approved in Europe that gives the chance of collecting food from large-scale retail and catering – and it is inspired by the City Harvest experience (New York). The difficulties in approving such legislation lie in the hygienic requirements it implies. The Italian law was promoted by BA, Cecilia Canepa and Bianca Passera, and fostered the opportunity for the third sector to improve its social assistance activities. Unfortunately, until now only one activity not connected with BA was founded following the law guidelines. The huge BA network sustains charities and soup kitchens associated to the wider Catholic network of associations and organizations operating in the field of social assistance and care. After the law was passed, and BA enlarged its capacity of intervention with SITICIBO, Lombardy government started a huge experimentation (L. 25/2006). Specifically, the regional government allocated 2.1 million of euros for a three-years project against extreme marginality to be developed with BA (see Mesini and Dessi 2010).

The case of BA is a clear example of CL’s capacity of moving from the local (municipality) to the super-local (parliament) by selecting and activating the suitable voice channels. On the one side, BA benefited from the exogenous opportunity (“Good Samaritan law”): it has been able to enlarge its activities beyond the regional boundaries, improve the recollection of food surplus, and reorganize the network of soup-kitchens assistance. Moreover, the law and its effects triggered a further positive outcome, which is the agreement with Lombardy region (together with the regional financing). On the other side, BA actively promoted this opportunity, by supporting the law

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11 Banca Intesa Infrastrutture e Sviluppo (Intesa Group), which then merged with OPI, the bank devoted to public finance owned by the SanPaolo group.

12 Forza Italia (1993-2009) was founded by the political tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. In 2009 it merged with Alleanza Nazionale (political right) and a new political party was founded, the People of Freedom, led by Berlusconi as well.


15 Bianca Passera declared to “Famiglia Cristiana” (the most widespread Catholic weekly magazine) that she was upset by the food waste in her children’s school, therefore she decided to resort to a suitable expert, Ciaccia, for writing and presenting the law (see Famiglia Cristiana 48/2009).

16 Last Minute Market, a spin-off of Bologna University ([http://www.lastminutemarket.it/](http://www.lastminutemarket.it/)). See also the parliamentary report on food waste and alimentary emergency ([http://documenti.camera.it/leg17/resoconti/assemblea/html/sed0063/leg.17.sed0063.allegato_b.pdf](http://documenti.camera.it/leg17/resoconti/assemblea/html/sed0063/leg.17.sed0063.allegato_b.pdf)).
proposal and successfully mobilizing its connections. Indeed, it was not a topic discussed in the public sphere, nor it was connected to Parliament policy initiatives.

b) Voucher – Regional activities.

Lombardy is the richest Italian region and it was led by Roberto Formigoni (CL) from 1995 to 2013, when Roberto Maroni (Lega Nord) gained the regional elections. It is a region characterized by a certain degree of internal diversity (at list five different territorial sub-cultures) and a high level of social capital and people’s involvement in civil society associations (see Biorcio 2001 and forthcoming; La Valle 2004). Moreover, the regional third sector is one of the most dense and developed, counting several organizations, associations, network and initiatives (Caltabiano 2002 and 2003).

The organization of its system of health-care and social assistance has been reformed during the Formigoni governments (starting in 1999 with the regional law dealing with family, LR 23/1999 – see par. 3) and is called the “Lombardy system” in order to highlight its peculiarities (Gori 2005 and 2010). First of all, it is based on the subsidiary principle in a “market” perspective: funding entities and services providers are separated, in order to equate public and private services providers and foster a “healthy” competition (which is supposed to improve their outcomes). The legal requirements for services providers are quite modest and, once credited, they can be included in the Region’s lists as certified providers. Who is entitled to receive health care or social assistance is given a “voucher” that can be used in any of the certified entities. The system is based on what is called the “freedom of choice”, that echoes CL definition of subsidiarity, and aims at promoting a “welfare community” – that is, a self-organizing society that provides by itself for its own needs. As Marotta (2010) also suggests, the “Lombardy system” has two pillars, or theoretical roots: CL and New Public Management theories.

CL supports the subsidiary principle, by comparing it to the standard State action and privatization. Subsidiarity is considered as a way of managing the public for the common good, which is the guarantee of individual freedom (see par. 3). It is a modernization of solidarity as a ‘third way’ between capitalism and state-oriented economy. In this perspective, subsidiarity is seen as a way of protecting individuals and social initiatives from both the state and the market. New Public Management (NPM) refers to the hypothesis that the introduction of market-oriented principles within the public sector would improve its efficiency and outcomes – and it can be defined as governance via instruments/objectives (Thévenot 2010; Lascoumes and Le Galès 2004). NPM theory has many similarities with CL perspective: specifically, it fosters the introduction of the market management procedures in the management of welfare systems, in order to improve its efficiency and outcomes.

Of course, the notion of community doesn’t come without ambiguities: we will come back on that in the conclusions.

Vittadini, former leader of CDO (the business network of CL), stated, for instance: “The ideal guidelines of public choices are synthetically three. The first is the old statism, that for someone seems never to wane, and for someone else seems to represent the possibility of a new local power. According to this approach, the government should, by itself, meet all the public policy needs, by directly managing every service it is responsible for, while each private action is labelled as a source of distortion of public funds and against the interest of the people, especially the poor. On the contrary, the existing state system operating in our country for decades produced budget deficits no longer sustainable, inefficiency and low quality services, as well as high income and political dominance for politicians who are full of promises, and yet unable to handle their tasks. The second approach is that of wild privatization, which considers the mere dynamics of the market forces as capable of responding to social problems. This approach does not consider the failure of the first privatization processes in our country (bipartisan!), the responsibility for these ideas in the financial crisis of recent years and, especially, that certain social goods cannot be managed to maximize profit for shareholders. A third set of criteria with which to manage the "public" is that of subsidiarity based on solidarity, which involves an alliance between the public, private and social realities and stresses the value of active initiatives of everyone for the common good”. (“Alle Urne. Un criterio per scegliere”, Tracce, May 2011).
efficiency. Moreover, it supports the idea that competition between providers will improve welfare services’ outcomes. Scholars dealt extensively with the possible outcomes of a welfare marketization (Backman and Smith 2000, Le Grand and Bartlett 1993, Kazepov 2008, Maloney et al. 2007), and many studies focused on how the contractualization of the welfare services may affect the (political) relationships between actors (Bifulco and Vitale 2006). Among the possible negative outcomes we can include: the depreciation of welfare jobs, the increasing dependency on volunteers, the oligopoly.

In Lombardy, the institutionalization of the voucher system occurred in 2003, in the fields of healthcare and social assistance (Giorgi e Polizzi 2007). The voucher system encompasses several welfare services, including education, with two main measures: *buono scuola* (then *dote scuola per la libertà di scelta*), and *dote scuola* (literally, school dowry), both based on the principle of freedom of education. The “*buono scuola*” (school voucher) was introduced in 2000 (LR 5/2000)\(^{19}\), aiming at giving an economical support to those families who desired to enrol their children in a private school. This policy, which integrated the national school vouchers, triggered a huge political debate, echoing the national long-term debate over private Catholic schools and the role of religion in education, connected to the persisting lack of public funds for education. The regional school vouchers have different requirements for families, depending on its destination - private or public schools; the vouchers for the latter have stricter requirements for entitlement and significantly lower amount of money. Partially as a consequence, 80% of regional school vouchers are used for students enrolled in private schools (who are the 9% of the total). Since in Italy (and in Lombardy likewise) most private schools are Catholics, and they have been engaged in an equation campaign for decades, the introduction of the school voucher has been criticized as a “gift” for Catholic schools. In other words, the school voucher can be framed as an exogenous opportunity, potentially profitable for everyone, which proved to beneficial almost exclusively for private Catholic schools. In 2007 the school voucher has been renamed ‘school dowry’ and a new regional law (LR 19/2007) re-organized the regional funds for education, by the inclusion of vocational education/training.

Most private schools and vocational education institutes are connected to the wide Catholic world, or associated to CdO network (CL). Education is one of the (or, better, the most important) pillar of CL’s religious mission. Since the beginning, CL self-definition revolved around the mission of education (see Giorgi and Polizzi 2011): indeed, being founded in a high school, the movement’s focus was to support the students, by taking care of their enquiries and difficulties in becoming adults. In “Il Rischio educativo” (the educational risk) Don Giussani maintained that education means to teach, by the example, to be critical towards the reality and loyal to the family (2005). During the years, the focus on education slightly enlarged its target, including adults as well. Education is intended as a method, and is a constitutive part of CL’s religious and missionary identity\(^{20}\).

The regional laws and the introduction of the school voucher are a concrete example of the implementation of the subsidiary principle as described and meant by CL (among others). In this case, the national opportunity (consisting in the introduction of the subsidiary principle and the national school voucher) has been redefined at the regional level, where it proved to be an

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\(^{19}\) In Italy there is a public system of education (from nurseries to universities) – and education is compulsory under the age of 16. Starting from 1998 and 1999, private schools can be equated to public schools (meaning that also private schools can benefit from public funds, in that they have a “public” function). In the following years, various measures have been implemented, progressively increasing funds for private schools. At the national level, the school voucher has been introduced in 2000.

\(^{20}\) A famous Don Giussani’s sentence, reported in several CL’s documents (and in the website as well) reads: “From the first hour of school […] I always said: ‘I am not here so that you consider as yours the ideas that I pass to you, but to teach you a true method to judge the things that I will tell you. And the things that I will tell you are an experience which is the result of a long past: two thousand years long.’ Compliance with this method has characterized our commitment to education from the outset, stating its purpose in a clear way: to show the relevance of faith to the needs of life.” (see for instance: http://english.clonline.org/whatiscl/default.asp?id=531).
opportunity for the development of CL activities, and a room for expressing its vision of subsidiarity – especially in the field of education, that is to leave the parents free of choosing how their children have to be educated. Vittadini, former CdO president, explicitly includes the school voucher among CL’s success (see further on).

c) Bridges and key role

Finally, the third case we want to consider is the role of CL exponents in key positions, for the interplay of different government level. Like the national case of food bank, also in the case of local politics the role of actors in key positions is crucial (as the literature suggests Segatori 2003). Among the long-term Italian cleavages (church-state, owner-worker), centre-periphery experienced a late politicization (or, better, its channels of voice changed), especially at the beginning of the Second Republic (see Tosi and Vitale 2011). In the early 90s, the crisis of political legitimisation that affected the traditional political system, together with the overall pressure to the localisation and subsidiarization of policies, provided an occasion for new actors to present themselves as the subjects who could change the old political system. A strong demand for local administrations autonomy from the central government mainly came from the party of Lega Nord, which was becoming very powerful in those years by asking a federalist state reform (Biorcio 2003; Bellucci and Segatti 2011). Moreover, an even stronger demand for the empowerment of civil society actors (non-profit associations, entrepreneurs, non-partisan professors and intellectuals) was been raised in the public discourse by the most important Italian newspapers, as well as by the most popular opinion leaders. At the same time, in a general frame of public resources decrease, the shape of the local political system changed, in the direction of a more visible role for local mayors and elites and a progressive localization of policies (see par. 4). The growing literature on medium and small cities points out the changing role of local political elites. Until the 90s (especially in the Northern and Centre regions) were the national political parties that guaranteed the mediation of local and territorial interests through internal mechanisms – and, as a consequence, local affairs were fully integrated in the national political system (see Tosi and Vitale 2011). During the 90s the “local” changed its role, within the (in turn, changing) political cultures of the Second Republic (Diamanti 2003). The analysis of this change would lead us too far: we want to underline that, because of the deterioration of the mechanism of transmission between the local and the national operating within the political parties, the importance of key political positions dramatically increased. A recent research focused on the Northern area of the Milano province highlighted the bridging role of exponents of local elites whose overlapping membership operated as political leverage from the local (municipality) to the super-local (region). Specifically, in the case of Legnano, the chances of receiving funds or to be chosen as local partners for economic public projects proved to be highly dependent on administrative (non political) figures. In this dependency on specific personalities, some networks have better chances of developing and profit by the open opportunities than others: in the case of Legnano, a large part of civil society and certain economic sectors have been excluded and their role has been weakened. This bridging role (between the local and the regional interests) is based on reputation, trust, and confidence. In this perspective, the role of networks based on confidence and friendship (such as the Compagnia delle Opere, the business network of CL) emerges as really important in building and mobilizing the necessary trust and channels of voice, as well as in building relationships, coalitions and alliances (Giorgi and Polizzi 2011).

As already mentioned, CdO is the business and charity organizations network of CL: founded in 1986, CdO is an example of devotion within the economic field and of what the movement means by community and mutual support. CdO former President Giorgio Vittadini, in presenting a new section of CdO connected to the third sector, maintained: “The first project of CdO concerns the single business and it is carried out by the single associate. Starting from our shared ideals, everyone tries to make their business an example of creativity and charity, respecting the market rules. The second project, that is in fact both a desire and an encounter, is accomplished when our associates join a network of operative friendship in order to promote jobs, development and
solidarity. […] Services that we are developing are meant to support everybody’s development. Today, we want these services to support families and youngsters, too: this is the aim of CdO Persona. Associations of individuals (attorneys, accountants, physicians, nurses, dentists, architects, pharmacists) make even the professionals important actors of CdO, similarly to the medieval guilds. […] Many of the entrepreneurs of CdO, as well as in their own businesses, invest in what is commonly called "welfare", i.e. in those works related to the needs of all. They are works of charity, education, culture, that are not supported by ‘professionals’ of volunteering, but by entrepreneurs who understand the need to help through their capacities and means also the development of others. Finally, in recent years the ‘political’ weight of the CdO has increased, not as a power but as a judgment and cultural proposal. Interventions on school and non-profit, and the introduction of the word "subsidiarity" in the Italian Constitution are examples of the CdO historical incidence also on the shape of Italian State. The "less State, more Community" could be more than just a dream. In Lombardy and in other regions is already a meaningful reality, let us just think about the educational vouchers, the freedom of choice in healthcare and assistance. These are our plans for the near future.” (“Il desiderio e il bene”, Tracce, November 2001).

This brief overview on three cases of interactions between CL and politics, summarized in table 1, showed the high capacity of the movement of mobilizing different channels and resources in pursuing its aims, and a wide political ability in operating at different territorial levels.

**Tab. 1**

<table>
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6. Conclusions

The main objective of this paper was to set up and test a possible grid for the analysis of the success of a religious movement in the political field by considering the interplay between its internal features and its context. After describing CL and the changes in the Italian political scenario, we focused on three case studies, identifying the political opportunities produced by this interplay. Here, we focus on some outcomes for further investigation: the analysis of the strategic action of a religious movement; the long-term effects of promoting the role of the third sector through market-
oriented welfare policies.

Firstly, Communion and Liberation Movement is constitutively a political actor, as it emerges from its self-definition: politics is naturally a field of Christian commitment. Therefore CL engages in political campaigns and political parties, it promotes cultural campaigns in a hegemonic perspective, it plays in different political arenas by adopting different strategies, it has an important role in decision- and policy-making. Being a political actor, we argued that it cannot be analyzed only as a religious movement. At the same time, CL is strictly a religious movement: our focus was not to analyze the movement as a rational and tactical actor, but to underline how its specific features, together with its long-term strategy and political capacity, made it a successful actor in contemporary Italy. On the other side, its specific features fit the current political context, characterized by the decrease of traditional political parties’ strategic capacity of playing at both the local and the national level\textsuperscript{21}, and the growing role of civic society in politics.

A second element we want to focus on deals with CL’s action in the welfare sector. The reforms designed and implemented by Formigoni’s regional government built a welfare system in which the third sector has been fostered more than in any other Italian region. The presence of new actors with new methods and new organizational features can be considered a possible element of social innovation of welfare service. Nonetheless, the market orientation of these reforms seems to foster a professionalized kind of third sector organizations as we saw in the voucher based social service system, or in the redistribution of the surplus food. The more informal third sector organizations involved in welfare activities didn’t find many opportunities for their possible social innovation action. In other words, the CL capacity to play a highly influencing role in the multilevel governance of welfare policies produces more a kind of selective innovation, where only some market oriented actors have been fostered by the policies. Even the case of the Legnano area shows how the political brokerage of CL actors placed in strategic place of the multilevel governance, brought a selective development, and not an encompassing opportunity growth for the local civil society – in this perspective, as many scholars underlined, civic society could promote inclusion as well as exclusion (Skocpol 2003).

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