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## SELF-EMPLOYED COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATION
## Strategies in emerging fields: a comparative perspective on Italy and Germany

Cognome / Surname **BORGHI** Nome / Name **PAOLO**

Matricola / Registration number **070803**

Tutore / Tutor: **MINGIONE TERENZIO ROBERTO**

Cotutore / Co-tutor: **LOHR KARIN**

Coordinatore / Coordinator: **BIFULCO LAVINIA**

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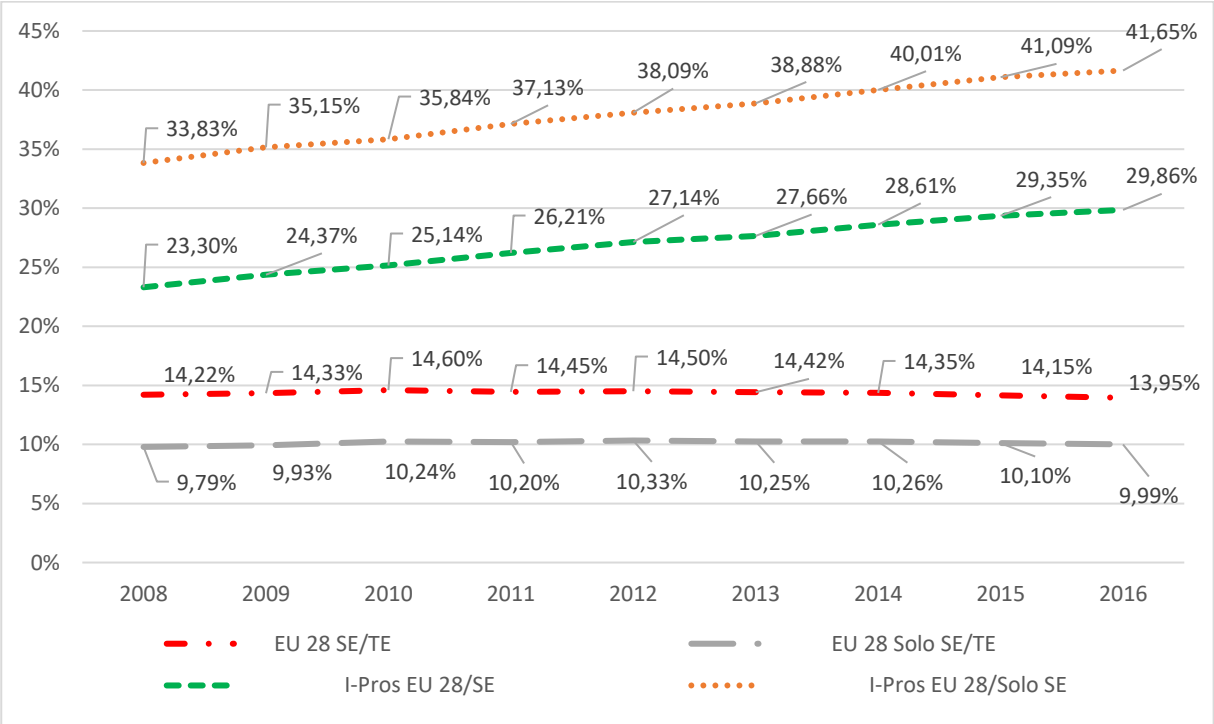
# 1 Introduction

The evolution of new forms of employment (Mandl, Curtarelli, Riso, Vargas, & Georgiannis, 2015) and, within this framework, the transformation of self-employment in Europe (Pedersini & Coletto, 2010) is rapid and, to a certain extent, uncontrolled. Its composition is, in fact, undergoing a process of change due to the growth of the service sector and the significant increase of the solo self-employed (Eurofound, 2017). Moreover, if we focus on the specific sub-group of independent professionals (Rapelli, 2012), we can notice that they are progressively expanding their presence in many countries (Leighton, 2014; Leighton & Brown, 2013; Rapelli, 2012) also with respect to the overall group of the self-employed (Borghi, Mori, & Semenza, 2018). The growth of I-Pros[1], is evident both in relation to self-employment and solo self-employment.

*Graph. 1 Self-employed (SE)/Total Employment (TE), Solo SE/TE, I-Pros/SE, I-Pros/Self-Employed, I-Pros/Solo SE in Europe. 2008-2016[2]*




Source: our calculation on Eurostat Data (ELFS)

[1] According to Rapelli's definition, I-Pros (independent prodessionals) are "independent workers, without employees engaging in a service activity and/or intellectual service not in the farming, craft or retail sectors" (Rapelli 2012a)
[2] See the addendum with data on EU 28, Italy and Germany (2008-2016).

The changes in self-employment and non-standard forms of work need to be considered within the wider debate on the fast-evolving European labour markets. The numerous reforms promoted by the European States since the 2000's and after the recent economic-financial crisis, have redefined the forms of employment protection, the unemployment benefit and the intensity of active labor market policies (Eichhorst, Marx, & Wehner, 2017). Despite all the efforts to limit the segmentation and dualization trends of the labour markets (Emmenegger, Häusermann, Palier, & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2012; Häusermann, Kurer, & Schwander, 2014; Häusermann & Schwander, 2012; Schwander & Häusermann, 2013), all these measures have achieved, at the moment, poor results (Eichhorst et al., 2017). In a similar way self-employment trends and the need for self-employed protection measures should be considered within the wider debate on non-standard and precarious jobs (Kalleberg, 2009, 2013; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000), precariousness and hybrid areas of work (Armano & Murgia, 2017; Brett Neilson & Rossiter, 2005; Standing, 2011). Already in the 90s the Supiot report (Supiot et al., 1999), commissioned by DG Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission, addressed and analysed changes in work and the overcoming of standard subordinate work towards flexible figures to be protected. In the same period Sergio Bologna and Andrea Fumagalli wrote a seminal text, *Il lavoro autonomo di seconda generazione. Scenari del postfordism in Italia*[3] (Bologna & Fumagalli, 1997) on significant changes that self-employment was undergoing. In more recent years the strong impact of technology is redefining roles, functions, hierarchies and, in a broader sense, the forms of work organisation with significant effects on both employees and self-employed, primarily in the context of digital platforms and gig economy (Berg, Furrer, Harmon, Rani, & Silberman, 2018; De Stefano, 2015, 2016; Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). Within these multiple macro-frames, the debate on self-employment has several focal points which are sustained by the different actors involved. On one hand, enterprises see self-employment as an answer to their continuous need for flexibility and updated skills, which are strategic in the tertiary sector. Moreover, in some cases, self-employment is conceived as a cheaper option to employment. On the other hand, public institutions think of self-employment as a possible instrument to promote employment through an active and direct involvement of those who, once the activity has been supported in the start-up phase, are totally responsible for their destiny. Workers, instead, are increasingly facing unstable and dynamic labour markets where self-employment is more and more

[3] Part of the analysis contained in this text has been taken up and updated in the recent book *The rise of the European Self-employed Workforce*, Milano - Udine: Mimesis International. (Bologna, 2017).

conceived as the privileged contract arrangement. Being self-employed today thus takes on very different meanings from the past, both for those who embark on a career in the liberal professions and for those who work in the wide and varied context of non-regulated professions. Deregulation and flexibilisation trends are transforming traditional work arrangements (Arum & Müller, 2004; Kalleberg, 2009), turning the grey zone of work (Castel, 2013; Countouris, 2016; Freedland, 2005) into in a continuous and dense nuance of conditions, from the most prestigious and guaranteed to the most fragile and marginal.

The extreme variety of professional and economic conditions experienced by self-employed workers calls into question the social sustainability, in the medium to long term, of a growing group of workers who do not enjoy all the social protection guarantees reserved for employees. Instability of professional careers and low earnings are considered an individual risk, but one which could become collective and require future intervention by public institutions.

All the above elements are behind the significant upheaval among traditional representative organisations (trade unions and professional associations) but above all among the new organisations that have been set up all over Europe to give voice to and try to protect the new, genuine, false, dependent or temporary self-employed[4].

**This work aims to study in a comparative perspective the traditional and new organisations in Italy and Germany which are structuring or restructuring strategies of representation specifically addressed to the self-employed and especially to independent professionals.** It was designed to combine a macro approach to the study of the organisations focusing on their relationships, in accordance with the theory of fields, with a micro approach focusing on internal dynamics, contradictions and subjective perspectives.

The comparative approach has been privileged because, the cross-national comparative organisational studies of self-employed organisation are still limited, especially those based on a structured qualitatative approach. I therefore felt that my contribution could go in this direction. Secondly, I chose to compare Italy and Germany as two relevant examples of Southern European and Conservative Welfare Regimes (Blossfeld, Buchholz, Hofäcker, & Kolb, 2011). Moreover in both countries, since the beginning of the 2000s, the first experiences of self-employed collective representation in the advanced tertiary sector, have been established. Finally, this research has

[4] See the addendum for an overview on the several definitions adopted by public institutions and scholars focused on the fluid evolution of self-employment and non-standard work.

provided for a territorial analysis in the cities of Milan and Berlin because, at national level, they are two of the cities in which the self-employed workers of the advanced tertiary sector are most concentrated; moreover, the two cities gather significant innovative experiences in terms of self-employment representation, making them an important point of reference both for their respective national territories and for emerging international networks of self-employed organisations.

My theoretical approach (Chapter 2) is based on the idea that both new and traditional organisations are involved in the same emerging strategic action field (Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). The concept of field will therefore be presented starting from the seminal work of Pierre Bourdieu, passing through the theoretical approach promoted by the Neo-Institutionalist School. In particular, the concept of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) will be considered. The works of Bourdieu and Powell/Di Maggio can be considered part of the strong basis on which Fligstein and McAdam developed the idea of emerging strategic action fields. The authors aim to overcome the disciplinary fragmentation in order to propose a theoretical approach which can consider the different contexts and players of the complex social environment.

For this reason, I decided to adopt Fligstein and McAdam's approach in order to define a general framework, selecting the organisations and defining the main dimensions to be studied. This focus involves great attention to the relational dimension and the dynamics among organisations instead of a static view of each organisation in its singularity. Each dimension selected for the study will therefore fit this approach.

The general approach adopted with the theory of emerging strategic action fields was complemented by the ethnographic perspective on complex organisations (Chapter 2.2.1) proposed by Barbara Czarniawska (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; B. Czarniawska, 2004, 2009). The idea behind this choice was to go beyond the formal positions taken and declarations made by the organisations studied in order to fully understand the reasons for their choices and positions. In this regard, it was also fundamental to consider a classic approach to the study of organisations that focuses on the sense-making process (Weick, 1979, 1995, 2009). In order to fully develop this approach, it was necessary to consider both an emic and an ethical perspective (Harris, 1976) with respect to the organisations studied. In particular, the subject-oriented approach (Armano & Murgia, 2013) applied to the key actors of the selected organisations made it possible to reconstruct the plurality of the existing perspectives within the organisations. It reveals the existing complexity

and richness of thought and analysis, thus avoiding conceiving and describing the organisations as static, impersonal and monolithic.

The decision to analyse the representation strategies of the organisations also required a brief but necessary analysis of the concept of representation, trying to understand how its founding elements could be translated and adapted to the context studied (Chapter 2.3).

The research design (Chapter 3) was built over nine phases: 1) mapping the organisations; 2) interviewing experts in order to fine-tune the borders of the mapping and integrate it; 3) selecting the organisations in Italy and Germany according to common criteria; 4) in-depth study through a multi-method approach (Creswell & Clark, 2007) with semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations, which allowed the data collected to be triangulated, contextualised and validated; 5) further study of six organisations through in-depth interviews, and through ethnographies, including via social networks; 6) archiving and coding all the collected documentation through Atlas-ti; 7) processing the coded data; 8) analysing the data processed; and 9) the transversal phase of the analysis of the literature, which accompanied all stages of the research.

The starting point of the fieldwork (Chapter 4) was the mapping phase (Chapter 4.2.2) of the important existing organisations in Italy and Germany. This activity made it possible to bring as close as possible the universe of existing organisations and then, based on common criteria, select the most relevant ones (Chapter 4.2.3). The first dimension analysed was the settimg up of the organisations (Chapter 4.3). Moreover, in accordance with the theoretical approach adopted, the shapes, structures, and rules governing the organisations were considered, as were their resources (Chapter 4.4). After that, the representations strategies were analysed and compared, in different organisations in the same countries and between similar organisations in Italy and Germany. Then, the external environment of allies, enemies and other important players such as public institutions, was considered from the point of view of the key actors and through analysis of documents (Chapter 4.6). Finally, the urban dimension (Chapter 4.7), as one of the important variables that influence the structuring process of self-employment representation, was considered and discussed along with all the other dimensions in the conclusions (Chapter 5).

# 2 Theoretical approach: field theory and organisational cultures

In this chapter, I discuss the main reference theories adopted for the analysis. Specifically, the theoretical approach is based mainly on a two-fold perspective. On one hand, I consider field theory (Bourdieu, 1985, 2008, 2013; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012) in order to study the organisations representing the self-employed; on the other, I adopt a subject-oriented approach to the study of complex organisations with a specific focus on the sense-making process within organisations (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; B. Czarniawska, 2009; Weick, 1995, 2009). Field theory allows us to understand how the collective representation of self-employment evolves thanks to the cooperation and competition between the organisations and the other players. The subject-oriented approach, mainly focused on the sense-making process and on a cultural perspective, allows us to understand how strategies are shaped and interpreted in the light of relevant dimensions such as shape, structure, rules, resources, organisational environment, and practices of the organisations, as well their cultural dimensions: frameworks and symbols. Moreover, the perspective of the key actors will be explored through the focus on the sense-making process in relation to the external environment (competitors, allies, institutions, labour markets, target population, and urban and territorial dimensions).
The self-employed collective representation constitutes, according to the research hypothesis, an emerging strategic action field where the new organisations (quasi-unions, cooperatives, new professional organisations) but also the traditional ones (trade unions, old professional organisations) struggle and cooperate in order to conquer a dominant position in the field. In doing so, they contribute to the structuring process of the field. The emergence of the field is fostered by multiple factors strictly related to the new working conditions of the self-employed, together with the structural changes which have impacted the global production system and the new division of labour.

The new model of capitalism mainly based on goods and services with a high symbolic content (Gorz, 2003) implies also a re-definition of the workforce and its organisations. The broad market of intangible and symbolic goods is based on a highly rationalised extraction system of raw materials, an efficient production and distribution system (especially high tech based), more and more dense networks of digital and physical infrastructures and, finally, on an increasing exploitation of natural and human resources. The emerging field of self-employment representation is therefore a first

reaction to the increasing emphasis on self-employment conceived as the privileged working arrangement of the new production system. The overall number of self-employed in Europe is still a small part - 13.95% - of the European workforce, with the independent professionals at 4.16% (Borghi et al., 2018). The increasing role of the latter within the new growing economies is fostering public debate. Indeed, what is at stake is their working conditions, their marginal inclusion in the national welfare systems, their potentialities and weakness in relation to the labour market, as well as the risks of an increasing precariousness fostered by the increasing competition promoted by the production system. To fully understand the conditions of specific groups of workers, the micro level of everyday working life must be seen within the broader framework of global trends which influence practices, habits, and the social and economic conditions of individuals, as well as the institutional regulatory mechanisms. The shift from micro to macro (and the reverse) is necessary since the local and individual dimension is continuously informed and shaped by global flows. Similarly, global trends are influenced by grass-roots cultures in a mutual exchange, which does not mean that a balance between grass-roots cultures and global trends exists. These are some of the reasons for considering the structural changes of the labour market through the new paradigm of cognitive capitalism: a new model where growth is based mainly on the creation, management, diffusion, exploitation, possession and implementation of knowledge (Fumagalli, 2012, 2015; Moulier Boutang, 2011; Negri & Vercellone, 2007; Vercellone, 2004; Vercellone, Monnier, Lucarelli, & Griziotti, 2014).

The immaterial and intellectual dimensions of production have become the basis for a "new historical system of accumulation" (Vercellone et al., 2014) and also the key elements for value creation through continuous innovation, based on an international division of labour (Mistral, 1986). The technological revolution has been the infrastructure for the shift from Fordism to a Post-Fordist production system creating a new capitalistic paradigm. At the same time, it has favoured the convergence of individuals and groups which, in the past, would probably never have shared common actions, thus giving substance to the so called *Network Society* which is based on 'flexibility, scalability, and survivability' (Castells, 2004, p. 6) both from an economic point of view and also in the context of social and political participation. The participation processes can rely on new possibilities for the discussion and the planning of common actions based on organisation, dialogue and agreement at a distance (Kamel, 2014). This implies access to new tools useful for the definition of a common minimum framework (Tremayne, 2014), the existence of multiple adhesion paths (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Pleyers, 2011) and a growing 'tendency to engage in multiple causes

by filtering those causes through individual lifestyles' (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011). More and more variegated networks of subjectivities, promoters of practices and alternative scenarios have emerged, and the main actor is no longer represented by a 'we' but by 'a combination of many I's', with potential impacts on the value system of the groups and of society as a whole (Alteri & Raffini, 2014). Such structural changes are affecting both social movements and workers' activism, giving shape to interesting experimentation, even if not always successful. These are the reasons why these structural trends need to be considered also within the studies of independent professional organisations. The need to face the same combination of individualities bringing about a possible common "We" is a common issue for each organisation or informal group focused on collective representation. Independent professionals can be considered a paradigmatic social group, in terms of fragilities, potentialities, inclination to flexibility and a 'specific workforce' (Rapelli, 2012); all these traits represent a challenge for trade unions as well as for the new organisations and, furthermore, for future social policies and working practices.

The reason for the focus on independent professionals and other hybrid self-employed, as hinted before, is related to their central role in the pervasive characters of cognitive capitalism. This role gives shape to the individuals and to society as a whole, reshaping social groups and classes, private and professional life, as well as the various types of employment relationships. Much of the literature produced on professionals in general and on independent professionals (I-Pros) specifically underlines how they are one of the highly innovative and efficient players on the capitalistic scene, based mainly on flexibility, continuous innovation, and customised goods and services.

On one hand, they seem to be extremely functional to fostering the new production system; conversely, they are less protected than employees. The possibility of recruiting highly skilled human capital on a global scale creates competitive processes which, in many cases, tend to reduce the cost of the services (Kenney and Zysman 2016), in some cases together fostering social and economic dumping trends. At the same time, these conditions can generate a rapid turnover of the workforce with consequent risks of work marginalisation which may also be determined by processes that lead to skills becoming obsolete'. For all these reasons, the professional representation of the self-employed in general and independent professionals in particular is becoming increasingly important in the public debate and among the new and traditional organisations involved in workers' representation. In the following sections the main driving concepts, field and representation, will be presented and discussed.

## 2.1 What is a field? Three leading and complementary approaches

From the beginning, the theoretical approach of this research has been influenced mainly by Bourdieu's field theory. Despite the considerable insights proposed by the French sociologist, I found it necessary to integrate his perspective on one hand with the approach promoted by Powell and DiMaggio (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), two leading scholars of the so-called New Institutionalism, and on the other hand with the analytical perspective offered by Fligstein and McAdam (Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012). The latter, in my opinion, offer an analytical approach which is particularly suited to understanding the internal dynamics of emerging fields. Moreover, their theoretical lenses make it possible to accurately grasp both the dynamic aspects of the interactions within a field and, at the same time, the influences exerted by external fields. For these reasons, the approach proposed by Fligstein and McAdam will be adopted in the analysis developed here.

### 2.1.1 Bourdieu's concept of field

The concept of *field* as well as the concepts of *capital* and *habitus*, is one of the cornerstones of Bourdieu's thought. Proof of this comes from its seminal presence in many of his works. The author explains and specifies its meaning and traits in several books focused on the specific social dimension studied: art, religion, politics and literature.

The first leading element for understanding what a field is concerns the relational nature of social reality. Social reality is the product of social relationships, thus there is no material basis for social relationships beyond social relationships themselves. In this sense, reality can be considered a fiction that actually exists insofar as it is recognised collectively (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 123). What matters is the relationship between the different players in the field because social reality springs from their interaction. The field is similar to a microcosm with its own autonomy within larger social worlds. Autonomy should be understood as a degree of independence given by the existence of specific rules governing the field (Bourdieu, 1985). To give some examples of what can be defined as a field, let us think, for example, of a country's academic system. It is clearly defined by rules governing its functioning, by defined roles for each level of its structure, by languages that define

the legitimate ways of expressing itself, by practices that every individual interested in acting in that context must learn.

The specific rules and practices governing a field distinguish one field from other adjacent ones. Taking the example just used, we can consider the multiple links that the university system has with public institutions, the economic and productive system, and local communities.

The interaction within a field and between different fields also implies the idea of *agency,* a driving concept for many scholars (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984; Goffman, 1959, 1974) and, of course for Bourdieu, too (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Each player in the common environment helps to define, change, maintain, or restructure the field. Due to the relational nature of the field, it can be mainly conceived as a «field of forces» (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 43) and an arena whose boundaries and shape are the result of the interactions between those taking part in the game. There is a structure that defines the set of opportunities and constraints, and an interaction process that transforms or maintains the structure. Generally speaking, the field is characterised by the presence of players with different aims, different resources and specific hierarchical positioning: «the tension between the positions, constitutive of the field structure, also determines the change through struggles in the name of stakes which are themselves the product of a struggle»[5] (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 61). Two important aspects can be found in this excerpt. The first is the focus on the position and power balance between different players; the second is connected to the relationship based primarily on the competition for the stakes. The positioning of the players and its redefinition are the core of the changing process within a field. The same process involves redefining or reaffirming the hierarchies between the players. The stakes, as Bourdieu says, are themselves the product of the struggles. The struggle between players operating in the same field also means redefining the general interests of the field itself. Returning to the academic sector example, we can easily imagine how those involved in that field can struggle for a strong and homogeneous university system all over the country, or they can opt for a system where a few universities focus on research and others, perhaps located in disadvantaged areas, are dedicated mainly to teaching. The struggle evolves at different levels, starting from the discursive one. Narratives become the plot on which competitors can build their strategies. Bringing these general reflections to the context studied in my research also means looking back at some of the

[5] My translation from the quoted Italian version.

milestones which defined the emerging field of self-employment representation, including the discourses, narratives, and labels produced over time.

In the next paragraphs, I look at the theoretical implications related to the emergence of a new field whereas, in the following lines, I would rather refer, briefly but precisely, to some aspects that characterised the early stages of the emergent field. The first step in the building process of the new field of self-employed representation coincided with the opening of a public debate on the role of freelancers and their working experiences. The action of activists and organisations working on these issues produced an overall public discourse. It started from the pages of social networks, blogs, and websites and then went to traditional media; this movement from online self-produced information to the official information system generated a first level of narratives, albeit fragmented and not fully shared, in the public sphere. This first step may seem unimportant compared to what is now happening in the field of freelancers' representation but, if we want to fully embrace Bourdieu's theoretical perspective, we need to recognise that it is an extremely important founding phase. These are the early times, around the beginning of the new millennium, when the discourse on the new self-employed is redefined in order to build a new social narrative. It is a strategic step in the attempt to transform reality, as Bourdieu states: «the object of social science is a reality that encompasses all the struggles, individual and collective, aimed at conserving or transforming reality, and in particular those whose goal is the imposition of the legitimate definition of reality, and whose properly symbolic effectiveness can contribute to the conservation or subversion of the established order, that is the reality» (Bourdieu, 1985; p.221).

The temporal dimension and history are two other key aspects in Bourdieu's perspective. History is the product of the struggles, as Bourdieu states, in relation to the rules which govern the social system of the art: « It is not enough to say that the history of the field is the history of the *struggle* for a monopoly of the imposition of legitimate categories of perception and appreciation; it is in the very struggle that the history of the field is made; it is through struggles that it is temporalized.» (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 157). The author emphasises the dynamics generated within the artistic field and its governmental rules. The value of these remarks goes far beyond the field of art and can be taken as a reference for many other social contexts. Bourdieu introduces the concept of history in the field that includes shared or contested ideas about the present and the past which are always the result of a struggle. For this reason, history cannot be conceived as aseptic or objectively neutral. Therefore, the history of the field is always the consequence of a clash between the protagonists, in

the attempt to remain in the present, or, in other words, not to be relegated to the past. The fight is always a struggle between dominants and dominated.
The former are interested in maintaining and reproducing their identity as well as their position; the latter, in breaking the equilibrium produced by the dominants. In the author's words « *Faire date* is at once *to make a new position exist* beyond established positions, *ahead [en avant]* of those positions, *en avant-garde*, and in introducing difference, to produce time itself.» *(ivi)* Following these arguments, the distinctive signs play a strategic role. The words that define, the words that draw borders, the words that generate a space of inclusion or exclusion are specific tools of the struggle and they literally "do things". Through this process of definition, the field is built and, in the same way, the players take a position within the field.

In this regard, it is interesting to briefly resume some aspects that will emerge more clearly in the analysis of the fieldwork. The setting up of a new group or association passes through a structured communication plan where the new playeyr declares its identity, targets and interlocutors. Their effort to forge a public identity through concepts and words needs to be considered as part of their positioning strategy, therefore part of the struggle, within the field under construction.
If we go back in time to retrace the early stages in the setting up of new associations involved in self-employed representation, it is possible to recognise specific linguistic changes promoted by specific players. In Italy, for example, the introduction of the Anglo-Saxon term 'freelancer' coincided with the early stage of the emerging field. The use of new words in the public discourse can become a tool, or an argument that is the same, to certify a primacy or, in other words, the right to claim primacy with regard to the other players. The struggle is developed at different levels. The linguistic struggle plays a strategic role in the first phases, when the field and its boundaries have yet to be structured.
For several years, the generic term 'freelancer', at least in Italy, identified a specific group of solo self-employed of the tertiary sector, embedded in new working dynamics and conditions. After that first period, it was necessary to introduce a new term that could be measurable and less generic compared to the existing one. This is one of the reasons for the emergence of the new term 'I-Pros', independent professionals, which defines specific workers (own-account workers) in service activities and/or intellectual services, not in the farming, craft or retail sectors (Rapelli, 2012). It is significant that the term I-Pros emerges after the first phase when the basic traits of the emerging field have been structured. The term I-Pros (in contrast to the generic term

'freelancer') brings the possibility to speak about the emerging self-employment from a quantitative perspective which is an indispensable argumentative tool for lobbying. The emergence and coexistence of different terms relating to specific groups can therefore be considered a significant indicator of the structuring process of a new field where different players act, also through their specific language. The terms are part of the struggle and, at the same time, they are the bricks of the field under construction.

In Bourdieu's lecture transcribed in *Sul concetto di campo in sociologia* (Cerulo, 2010) the author tackles the concepts of the political field, the social sciences field and the journalism field. He reflects upon their existing relationships. As previously mentioned, each field has its own autonomy and, at the same time, is linked both to other fields and to society as a whole. According to the author, the effects that each field exerts on society can be understood through analysis of the invisible structures which connect the fields (external links) and through analysis of the structure of each field (internal links). A social field can be compared to a field of physical forces, although it cannot be explained completely by this metaphor. The field is populated by agents who react to the existing balance of power. In doing so they contribute to structuring and restructuring the field itself. The movement of the agents in the field is partly pre-structured by the rules which define the field but, at the same time, agents can take advantage of a certain degree of freedom that allows them to move around and play inside the field.

Bourdieu's suggestion is to replace a phenomenal view where the social universe is composed of, for example, journalists, politicians interviewed by journalists, sociologists giving interviews in newspapers or sociologists interviewing politicians and journalists, with a more abstract idea where these three groups belong to three different fields. Bourdieu suggests shifting the focus from individuals to relationships in order to understand the roots and meanings of their public interactions. The focus on relationships implies that when the groups act publicly, they act in specific ways because of their position in the field. The specific properties of the interaction transcend the individuals because they refer to something coming from their reference fields. The balance of power between journalists, sociologists, and politicians may, therefore, be explained both by the position of each in the field and by the relationships of domination that each field exercises over the others. From this perspective, a public debate involving journalists, politicians and sociologists can be interpreted as a place where different fields with specific languages, practices,

categorisation criteria, hierarchies, selection criteria, and strategies are in the process of facing each other.

Bourdieu reflects on two main interpretative approaches that can be assumed in the interpretation of specific social contexts. The first approach is called “internalist”. Considering for example the literary field, the internalist approach is based on the idea that the interpretation can emerge from reading the texts, ignoring the context in which they were produced, as in the hermeneutic tradition. On the contrary, the second approach, which is called “externalist”, requires the context in which the work was produced to be known and interpreted. In other words, the interpretation implies knowing who produced the work, the reference linguistic system and its standards, as well as the social context in which the work was produced. Bourdieu’s approach aims to overcome the internalist and externalist views, because the field includes all those playing a role in definiting the social universe surrounding the existence of a work (e.g., a literary text). The field is then configured as a microcosm in which each element plays its part, large or small, in the definition of its own rules and evaluation criteria.

Another fundamental aspect of the field to be studied concerns the degree of independence of the field in relation to the other adjacent fields. Bourdieu writes: «the greater the autonomy of the field is, the greater will be the number of aspects and the existing dynamics that can be explained through the internal operating logic of the field» (2010, pp. 66–67). There is, therefore, a direct relationship between the degree of autonomy of a field and the strength that the internal rules can exercise in shaping the actions, behaviours, and reactions of the agents.

Following Bourdieu’s line of reasoning, when a field is highly autonomous, we can explain agents’ actions and behaviours by focusing our attention mainly within the field; otherwise, when a field has limited autonomy, more attention must be paid to the external elements which interact with and influence the field. Agents acting in the same field, although they struggle to impose their own visions and decisions, share some basic assumptions concerning the operating rules of the field. Bourdieu speaks about an implicit «complicity», a «tacit agreement» that allows the existence of the field and its boundaries. Agents within a specific field orient themselves and interact through «implicit, tacit practical schemes which are very difficult to explain» (2010, p. 76), similarly to how each individual does in a generic social context. The tacit practical schemes are what Bourdieu calls *fides implicita* of *doxa* and the “specific doxa” is the system of implicit assumptions related to belonging to a field.

What is then the stake for agents who share the same field? The first and primary stake is the possibility of imposing their own categories and interpretations in order to legitimise and structure a specific division of the social world according to their description of it. Taking the cue from the above excerpt, I would add some appropriate considerations to the focus of this research: the strategies of the organisations involved in self-employed representation. In the construction process of this specific social reality, we can recognise the basic and fundamental starting point of any other daily strategy: the first and fundamental strategic act concerns the linguistic dimension where the struggle has taken place from the beginning. The description of the reference world is not a neutral action but an attempt to give shape to the reference field. Imposing labels and categories thus means building the structure of the field and, to some extent, its borders. Echoing Bourdieu's remarks, it is clear that the act of defining categories is itself part of the struggle. He points out that "category" comes from the Greek *kategorein* (2010, p. 78), meaning "to accuse publicly". The act of categorisation, therefore, requires the use of force which is, in this case, a discursive force able to impose a description. Each player tries to impose its own categories, which tend to contain an internal consistency; each has explicit or implicit principles that struggle with those presented by other agents involved. These clashes are aimed at acquiring the «symbolic kingship in the field» (2010, p. 79). Also in this case, Bourdieu goes back to the etymological meaning of the Latin term to explain the nature and the deep meaning of the act: «*Rex* comes from *regere*, which means "to hold", "to direct", and from *regere fines*, "to mark the borders", one of the main tasks of a king, as Romulus did with his plough. One of the functions of taxonomies is to indicate who is *in*, who is *out*, the citizens, the foreigners» (2010, p. 79).
In the latter part of the lecture, after the analysis of the common features in three different fields (politics, social sciences, journalism), Bourdieu tries to outline the specific traits of each field. Here I will take up some of the reflections which are useful to explore also the field covered by this research, namely the representation strategies promoted by the organisations representing the self-employed.

In the analysis of the political field, Bourdieu recognises a substantial difference between what he calls "idea-truth" and what he defines "idea-strength." The latter can be rebutted, and it reveals itself through the power. An idea becomes an idea of strength through the power shown when it imposes itself as a world-view principle. This kind of idea is based on the ability to mobilise. Let us think of a politician who organises a demonstration. When many people respond, the idea

acquires validity and becomes an idea-strength in that it is tangibly shared by others. In other words, imposing a worldview means mobilising and mobilisation is always aimed at changing the balance of power. These arguments arising from the analysis of the political field are quite important for this research, too. The reasons are numerous, and most notably the proximity of the field of representation to the political field. This proximity generates continuous exchanges, interactions and contamination of languages.

Bourdieu also poses the question of what "the existence within a field" means. He points out that the existence is always closely linked to a difference. To differ, therefore, means having a space for a recognisable identity, while the condition of uncertainty implies not having such a space and the risk of disappearing. Once again, consistent with what was previously explained, what matters is the relationship of opposition. At the end of the lecture, in an excerpt on the journalistic field, the importance of talking about the field instead of the individual elements that make it up appears quite clear. The focus on the field means, in Bourdieu's words, «to undertake a replacement of these visible agents that, like in Plato's metaphor, are nothing but the puppets whose wires need to be identified, with the structure of the journalistic field and the mechanisms that act in this process» (2010, p. 86).

### 2.1.2 Organisational field and isomorphism from Powell and DiMaggio's perspective

Another seminal work on the concept of 'field', within the Organisational Studies, was developed by the so called Neo-Institutionalist School. I will consider especially the perspective developed by Powell and Di Maggio (1983). The concept of 'organisational field' is the core of their theoretical approach. Powell and Di Maggio start form the previous works of Hannan and Freeman (1977), as well as of Laumann, Galaskiewicz and Marsden (1978), on population studies and their inter-organisational networks in order to improve the concept of organisational field. It is conceived of as a set of different (possibly in shape, structure, strategies, goals, or resources) organisations which produce reciprocal influences on the institutional area in which they are involved. DiMaggio and Powell argue that in the early years of an organisational field, organisations within the field can be very different, while over time, as a response to institutional pressures, they tend to resemble each other more and more. All the elements belonging to the organisational field are both the object and subject of the pressures that occur in the field, and the isomorphism is the result of these

peer pressures. They propose a new interpretation of what is defined as institutional isomorphism, previously elaborated by Hawley (1968), and Meyer and Rowan (1977): isomorphism is a «constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions. At the population level, such an approach suggests that organisational characteristics are modified in the direction of increasing compatibility with environmental characteristics» (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). They integrate this starting definition with Hannan and Freeeman's approach: isomorphism «can result because nonoptimal forms are selected out of a population of organisations or because organisational decision makers learn appropriate responses and adjust their behaviour accordingly» (op. cit.).
This process tends to homogenise the organisations playing in the same institutional field. For example, the existing organisations (which are the results of a social selection) try to appear more successful to organisations with the same status, in order to achieve the same level of success, if not higher. Following Meyer (1979) and Fennell (1980), DiMaggio and Powell distinguish between competitive isomorphism, which assumes a system of open competitive markets, and institutional isomorphism. DiMaggio and Powell consider the latter more suitable in order to understand the modern life of organisations according to Kanter's studies (Kanter, 1972): «Organisations compete not just for resources and customers [as in the competitive isomorphism perspective] but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness» (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).
Powell and DiMaggio developed the concept of isomorphism underlining that it is not a fading or unique common process that shapes all the organisations in the same way, but one which can take three different isomorphic forms: coercive, mimetic, or normative. The first, coercive isomorphism, «results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organisations function» (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991); while the second, mimetic isomorphism, is the result of a process of imitation of another organisation (or individual) as a result of uncertainty, or sometimes of failure in previous attempts. Organisations might choose this way when they feel that they cannot reach their goals or when they perceive their goals as ambiguous. Normative isomorphism is the result of «professionalisation as the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work» (ibidem).

### 2.1.3 The Strategic Action Fields, according to Fligstein and McAdam's theory

After exploring the concept of *field* elaborated by Bourdieu and referring to the contribution on the same issue provided by the New Institutional School, it is now worth dwelling on an extremely important work, *A Theory of fields* (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). The authors attempt to deal with several theoretical perspectives in order to develop a more efficient, general and adaptable field theory through the interpretative tools of different disciplines: economic sociology, neo-institutional political and sociological studies, and social movement studies. The declared intention is to provide a full explanation of how stability and change are pursued in circumscribed social arenas, as did previously scholars such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991), Scott and Meyer (1983), Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Martin (2003), and Fligstein himself (1996, 2001, 2009). The concept of 'strategic action fields' is the driving concept. It is defined as a «meso-level social order, as the basic structural building block of modern political/organisational life in the economy, civil society, and the state» (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). The second pillar of the theory is the embeddedness of a field with those nearby or with distant bigger or smaller fields, similarly to Bourdieu's field, which is connected to the larger social world by a homological relationship. The relationships between different fields are what define the structure of opportunities and challenges which can produce not only changes within the internal equilibrium of a field but also its demise, or the creation of a new field. According to the authors, in order to understand the dynamics generated within a strategic field, it is not enough to focus, as is traditionally done, on central issues such as interest and power, but also on what they call the «existential functions of the social» (ibidem p.3). The existential functions of the social are complementary to the materialist ones and strictly interrelated with the symbolic sphere of the players with their subjective needs. The focus on these dimensions makes it possible to find a coherent, deep explanation for their choices and actions, giving a coherent sense to their existence. This has been a crucial need since human beings conquered their 'outer perspective' (Nagel, 1986), described as «that state of detached reflection on what would appear at times to be the depressingly obvious 'truths' about the human condition» (Fligstein, 2001, p. 41). This perspective, deeply rooted in materialist and existential elements, gives shape to Fligstein & McAdam's idea of *social skills* defined as «the capacity for intersubjective thought and action that shapes the provision of meaning, interests, and identity in the service of collective ends» (ibidem; p.4).

In accordance with the vast literature on movement studies, sociology and organisational theories, they focus on how organisations can build new “cultural and social frameworks” giving shape, organising and sustaining new strategic action fields in order to face social changes. In the wake of numerous studies from different disciplines which have dealt with social organisations, the authors recognise that many of the cognitive efforts have been focused on understanding how the "rules of the game" are defined and how this process produces winners and losers. We can say that, if a field is conceived of as a process, and is for this reason in continuous construction, the existence of “institutional entrepreneurs” is constant. However, the authors point out that when there are strong phases of change, often connected to a crisis of the previous established equilibrium, some “institutional entrepreneurs” play a central role in redefining “cultural frameworks” and “logics of action” which have the objective of promoting, organising and innovating strategic action fields.

The authors’ approach is aimed at enhancing the contributions developed within the different disciplines (political sociology, social movement studies, organisational studies, economic sociology, political science) while overcoming the limitations related to the creation of multiple academic subfields along with their specific languages. In other words, they intend to explore the common aspects in different disciplines to get as close as possible to what they call the “foundational social reality at work” (ibidem; p.4). They distinguish the “strategic action field”, a space which is well-organised and recognisable by its specific rules, from the “unorganised social space”, when this lacks the specific and recognisable traits.

Fligstein and McAdam point out that over the years several studies have produced key concepts in the analysis of the "strategic action fields". Despite that, the authors recognise that concepts such as social space, status, culture, organisation, mobilisation, and collective action have not been integrated into a systematic theory in order to propose a more general perspective.

Their first objective, therefore, is to overcome the fragmentation of the several disciplinary approaches in order to propose a theory that can be applied to different empirical phenomena and not simply confined to specific contexts such as social movements, market dynamics, or enterprises. The second objective concerns the relationship between agency and structure, addressed by authors such as Giddens (1984) and Sewell (1992), and the relationship between macro-social processes and micro interactions (Alexander, Giesen, Münch, & Smelser, 1987; Coleman, 1986). The focus on institutional entrepreneurs as agents of change has, in many cases, overshadowed the focus on the social processes and skills which have allowed some individuals (or groups) to become protagonists in a

specific field. Similarly, the complex set of networks and connections linking the field studied to other social fields has often been underestimated. In interpreting the point of view of the authors a conceptual effort is needed, in order to include in the analysis the complex system of players, forces and social skills which contribute to the creation, maintenance and change of a strategic action field. Once again, this brings to mind Bourdieu's perspective in relation to the idea that each field is interconnected and then interacts with other related ones through a homological relationship. We could also add, but this aspect will be later detailed in the empirical part, that the interaction with other fields is necessary for two reasons. The first concerns the need to build the necessary bridges in order to gain legitimacy for the new emerging field throughout a collaborative approach. The second is apparently the contrary, as it concerns the need to find the founding reasons for an emerging field in the inadequacy of the existing ones.
In this way, the critical and conflictual dimension is an integral part of the legitimisation strategy. Conflict and collaboration could therefore co-exist because both are functional to the social legitimacy of the emerging field.

Returning now to Fligstein and McAdam's thought, we come to understand how to place their approach: the need to explore the relationship between agency and structure requires the definition of a meso-level theory of action where «action takes place between and within organised groups. By understanding more clearly the role of social actors in producing, reproducing, and transforming their local fields of action» (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012).

As mentioned above, we can consider a specific field as a process which, also in its maintenance phase, requires the active presence of players which sustain it and which, to a certain extent, introduce those minimal changes that help to make the field itself suitable for the surrounding social context and the changes affecting society as a whole. Similarly, the struggle within the strategic action field is constant because new entries can threaten the positions of those already in the field, and because the struggle between the latter requires constant action, whether in defence or attack. In this sense, we can find constant elements of change: in the internal balance (when the players remain the same) or in the composition of the players (when there are newcomers). The situation becomes even more complicated and hectic when we study «genuinely new social arenas or fields» (p.7)

The authors define two main problems to be faced, those of:

1) specifying the conditions under which this happens (how new fields are created); and

2) theorising the agency involved in these processes (who creates new fields and why).

The authors' main goal is «to offer a general theory of social change and stability rooted in a view of social life as dominated by a complex web of strategic action fields» (p.8), by focusing on seven key elements which are briefly listed below as they were also considered in the proposed research:

1. Strategic action fields

2. Incumbents, challengers, and governance units

3. Social skills and the existential functions of the social

4. The broader field environment

5. Exogenous shocks, mobilisation, and the onset of contention

6. Episodes of contention

7. Settlement

Strategic action fields are defined as «a constructed meso-level social order in which actors (who may be individual or collective) are attuned to and interact with one another on the basis of shared (which is not to say consensual) understandings about the purposes of the field, the relationships with others in the field (including who has power and why), and the rules governing legitimate action in the field.» (p.8)

The definition highlights important elements that help us to understand and identify the key elements that characterise a strategic action field:

- the players, individual or collective;
- the power relationships and the intentions connected to the power exercised;
- the "rules of the game" (to use an expression also employed by Bourdieu);
- a common awareness of the shared goals within the field.

On one hand, this definition allows us to accurately focus on the crucial elements of a strategic action field; on the other hand, the extension of the field is, following the arguments proposed by Fligstein and McAdam, extremely flexible and closely connected to the focus of analysis adopted by the observer.

Even collective actors can be conceived of as strategic action fields because all the above-listed key elements can be found in them; the more the fields are organised hierarchically and formally, the more they are nested like a Russian doll. Consequently, the concept of "meso-level" refers to contexts and dimensions that can be significantly different, and the level of the "meso-level" has to be determined by the observer.

The authors identify at least three main reasons at the basis of the social construction of the strategic action fields. Firstly, membership in the fields is the result of subjective and objective criteria, but the former plays a stronger role because it determines the boundaries of the relationships, interlocutors and subfields within the field. The example presented by the authors relates to the four-year system of American colleges and universities. We can argue that, from a subjective point of view, it is quite difficult to consider the whole group as a real benchmark, for different reasons concerning competition, proximity, common traits, organisational cultures and traditions. That strategic action field is, therefore, probably perceived as a narrower social area where competition and cooperation take place.

Secondly, the boundaries have a dynamic trait and therefore change according to the situation and the contingency. The contingent factors are determined by both the players in the field and the pressures and influences from other fields directly or indirectly connected to the field studied: «fields are constructed on a situational basis, as shifting collections of actors come to define new issues and concerns as salient» (p.9).

Thirdly, fields are based on a stratification of «shared understanding» produced by the members over time, which is often called "institutional logic" (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Scott, 2001). According to Bourdieu and Wacquant's perspective (1992), a first level of understanding is related to what is going on in the field, to what is at stake. This means that a common idea of what is happening is shared. We can argue that it is something similar to a common idea of the ground of the game and of the main movements which characterise the game in a certain moment, considering the distorting effects produced by different subjectivities in the field and the limited rationality (Herbert, 1957) of the players.

A second level of common understanding relates to a shared idea about how the power is distributed, and there is thus a common understanding about the positions of each player. It is clear that in this case some interpretative levels could be shared by all players in the same

strategic action field, while some other interpretative levels are more subjective and strictly related to the everyday changing context, to the contingent positions as well as to the trajectories and strategies of the other players. However, at a very general level, it can be assumed, as claimed by Fligstein and McAdam, that there is a shared vision of the public positions of those in the same strategic action field and the distinction between friends, enemies and competitors is relatively clear.

The third level of common understanding relates to the rules: «actors understand what tactics are possible, legitimate, and interpretable for each of the roles in the field. This is different from knowing what is generally at stake» (p.10).

Although the authors evoke the concept of "institutional logic", they clarify that it does not really fit into their perspective because it implies an objective dimension that never totally exists since each player occupies a specific position and, likewise, each interpretation relating to the positions, tactics and other fundamental traits of the field springs from that position. According to this perspective, the consensual reality "taken for granted" is more of a simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1979) and the normal condition is a continuous jockeying that implies an ongoing interpretation, positioning and repositioning of the players.

Fligstein and McAdam therefore try to overcome a static view of the field, as the institutionalist perspective tends to be, in order to introduce elements of dynamism into the theoretical conceptualisation of the strategic action field. This more dynamic view can help us read the field as a process where the players, whether in a dominant or challenging position, are immersed in a constantly changing environment. From this perspective, the game of interpretations and consequent tactics redefines positions, relationships, and equilibriums, sometimes minimally, sometimes in the strongest way: «Even in "settled times," less powerful actors can learn how to take what the system will give them and are always looking to marginally improve their positions in the field. Constant low-level contention and incremental change are the norm in fields rather than the image of routine reproduction that tends to define most versions of institutional theory» (p.12).

The contentious dimension is therefore the dominant element of each strategic action field and we argue that it is even more emphasised in emerging strategic action fields, where the legitimation process strongly depends also on the adjacent fields (mass and social media, public institutions, and scholars). An emerging action field is new and therefore seen as challenging in relation to the

“traditional” incumbent strategic action fields (e.g., the representation of the self-employed in relation to that of standard workers).

Inspired by the social movement theory, Fligstein and McAdam introduce the second structural element of their theory. This relates to the players and focuses on the differences between **incumbents** and **challengers** (Gamson, 1975) and governance units. The incumbents are those actors which can heavily influence the strategic action field with their ideas and actions. The asymmetric distribution of forces puts incumbents at an advantage because of their status and reputation. Similarly, the rules that define the field tend to favour the incumbents that, in many cases, actively take part in defining these rules. In contrast, the challengers occupy smaller spaces of the field, frequently covering niches unattended by the incumbents. Given the reduced possibilities of influencing the field by appropriating the dominant logics, but by virtue of their recognition, the challengers have the opportunity (or are forced) to develop and offer alternative proposals and discourses. Fligstein and McAdam stressed that the existence of incumbents and challengers does not mean that the relationships between the two groups are based on open hostility, on oppositional and confrontational logics. Moreover, the field can be structured and shaped by «internal governance units» (p.13) whose role is to see that the rules are respected and which thereby play a fundamental role in the reproduction of the strategic action field.

In the chapters dedicated to the fieldwork, the theme of professional bodies/chambers will be touched on, if only marginally. Indeed, professional bodies/chambers can only partially be considered internal governance units. They are, without doubt, a separate entity from the state but at the same time play a supervisory role recognised by the state, and therefore contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of the institutional field portion under their control. At the same time, they are involved in (and have to deal with) the common needs and problems of a growing portion of new generations of professionals. For these reasons, on a theoretical level, we believe it is appropriate to include in the study organisations dealing with both regulated professions and non-regulated professions. The professional bodies/chambers play an important role in the strategic action field of independent professionals’ representation: they are important players in the public debate on structural changes of professions, are closely involved in lobbying activities, and, finally, are perceived by the newcomers (challengers), whether new generations of regulated professionals or new professionals without a chamber, as conservative organisations focused mainly on building protective fences.

From Fligstein and McAdam's perspective, the internal governance units play several roles, some of which produce structural advantages for the incumbents: where new strategic action fields emerge, «they free incumbents from the kind of overall field management and leadership» (p.14), they naturalise the rules and provide a standardised and shared version of the information for incumbents and challengers, and, finally, are an important bridge between the strategic action field and other relevant fields which can influence, support, and sustain the strategic action field when they are involved.

What happens inside a strategic action field can be characterised by coercive dynamics, which can also involve the use of violence, as well as by competitive and cooperative dynamics. In this research, competition and cooperation will be mainly considered in order to verify how they contribute to the structuring process of the field and to changing the internal balance, and how they support the structuring of connections and ruptures with external fields. Coercion, competition and cooperation are considered ideal types: coercion and competition aim at gaining a dominant position in the field and, as a result, can allow access to and exploitation of the resources; cooperation aims at strengthening the field and means that the efforts are aimed at building a political coalition to obtain material existential and symbolic resources for the members.

The authors underline that beyond the ideal-typical figures it is possible to detect elements of coercion and hierarchical structuring in cooperation and, vice versa, that there may be elements of cooperation in a competitive dimension. They also clarify that in their ideal-typical scheme, hierarchies are mainly associated with coercion and competition while political coalition is mainly associated with cooperation. Despite that, they recognise that the connection cannot be too mechanically or rigidly interpreted because hierarchies can be the result of tacit consent by challengers and this consent can also be a way to obtain rewards and advantages.

The third fundamental element concerns **social skills and the existential function of the social**.

Fligstein and McAdam go back to a previous Fligstein work (2001) in order to define what they mean by strategic action: «the attempt by social actors to create and sustain social worlds by securing the cooperation of others.» (p.17). This statement can be broadly interpreted as a willingness to exercise control over a specific social context by influencing its dynamics of aggregation and consensus. In order to be successfully actualised, the attempt and the willingness need social skills: «a highly developed cognitive capacity for reading people and environments, framing lines of action, and

mobilising people in the service of broader conceptions of the world and of themselves» (p.17); once more, the approach is based on social movement studies (Jasper, 2004; Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986).

The authors distinguish between stable and emerging social worlds. In the former, the roles are clear, as is the division between incumbents and challengers. The extreme example in this first group are the "institutionalised social worlds" regulated by precise and shared codes, by meanings seen as acquired, and by actions that consider the "taken for granted" of meanings. The emerging social worlds or unstable worlds, are where the degree of uncertainty and the high non-definition of meanings leave room for the social players with the right skills to assume the role of what Fligstein and McAdam, taking up the work of DiMaggio (1988), define "institutional entrepreneurs." In these contexts, the players with the proper skills cannot focus on the status quo because the positions and hierarchies are still to be built or too unstable. In emerging social worlds, institutional entrepreneurs focus on the mobilisation of their referents, build connections aimed at defining political coalitions or, finally, act with the purpose of producing hierarchies in the field. The undefined state of an emerging social world requires a more dynamic approach and, for a social entrepreneur, the ability to further personal interests but, at the same time, the ability to self-identify in the role of other actors. We could say, in other words, that opening to the perspectives of others becomes, to a certain extent, a requisite for exploring possible opportunities of coalition building in order to consolidate the strategic action field. The opening, tension and potential included in this human ability are, according to the authors, closely connected to the ability and, at the same time, to human need, to establishing a sound basis of meaning for one's existence.

The fourth important dimension concerns the **interconnection of the strategic action field and the broader environment**. It plays a key role in defining and influencing the strategic action field because each field is embedded in a detailed and complex network of other fields. The authors emphasise the need to define the essential coordinates that identify the characteristics of this dense network. A first distinction concerns the **proximity** or **remoteness** of the fields. The nearby fields have more links and interactions with the strategic action field and thus exert a greater influence, while the distant fields have less possibility of exerting influence. The decision to consider the broader environment requires a broader perspective; this responds to the need to extend a study beyond the static, objectified and isolated dimensions. It intends to recognise that each social

phenomenon is the result of a great number of complex interactions between different actors belonging to different groups and social contexts. Each actor can influence, shape, or change the strategic action field from within and from adjacent fields.

A second important distinction concerns the qualitative dimension of the relationship between different fields. On one hand, there are relationships based mainly on dependence between fields. Dependence is mainly due to a difference of power, a formal hierarchy (legal, bureaucratic, or access to resources). On the other hand, there are parity relationships based on independence between fields.

The third and last distinction concerns state and non-state fields. The state fields exercise their formal authority and thus have a structural competitive advantage over other fields which are connected to the state fields, but lack the same formal authority.

Fligstein and McAdam go further when explaining their vision on state fields, rejecting the idea that these are solid and monolithic: «states for us are also dense collections of fields whose relations can be described as either distant or proximate and, if proximate, can be characterised as existing in either a horizontal or vertical relationship to one another. We therefore reject the all too common notion of a singular, hegemonic state» (p.19). It is worth proposing below some initial considerations, which will be deepened later, on what we define as the emerging strategic action field of self-employment representation and on the most influential adjacent fields.

The new independent professional employment is flexible, innovative and responsive to the demands and needs of the market. Moreover, it is extremely mobile because the places of work are now in unconventional spaces: private homes, areas for micro coworking and coworking that resemble factories, cafés and public spaces with a wi-fi connection. The new working conditions and the emergence of new professions have revitalised public debate on self-employment also thanks to the organisations set up to give voice and protection to the new workers. Even traditional organisations (in particular professional organisations and trade unions) have gradually considered the need to adapt their offer of representation to the new types of workers. On one hand, representation of independent professionals can be considered an indistinct part of the more general field of worker representation; on the other, there are many reasons to support the idea that it is the core of the emerging strategic action field of self-employment representation, with its own autonomy and distinctive features. At the same time, it is possible to recognise the

connections, weak and strong, with the adjacent fields and the wider environment. Both issues will be deepened in the chapter dedicated to the field work analysis. The first, maybe obvious, argument in favour of the emerging strategic action field of self-employment representation (and in particular that of independent professionals) is that neither the new working conditions nor the new generations of self-employed are comparable to those of the Fordist era. In many countries, new organisations were set up because the existing ones were unable to represent (or uninterested in representing) the new self-employed. This statement needs to be weighted country by country, because their dynamics, paths, and the protagonists of the emergent field are different. The non-uniformity deals with the distinctive features of the national territories (practices, work culture, work organisation, and corporate culture), national and local economies, the culture of the organisation and movements, and the role played by the political sphere with respect to the regulation of labour. A first significant difference between Italy and Germany, for example, concerns the role played by the unions. Italian trade unions have been slow to face the issue of self-employed representation, while in Germany the Ver.di union has been dealing with this issue since 2000. Why then speak of an emerging strategic action field?
Because even where traditional organisations have kept pace, they have been forced to explore professional contexts undergoing massive changes. The organisation of work and of the production system have undergone structural changes due to the technological revolution, the outsourcing and relocation process, de-industrialisation and the growth of the service sector. The interpretative frameworks applied for many years in the past have proven to be inefficient to understand and deal with the new conditions experienced by workers. Thus the emerging field includes several players (new organisations and traditional organisations) that explore the issues and outline attempts to respond to the new needs. In this specific case, the distinction between incumbents and challengers is much more nuanced for a number of reasons:

1) positions are not consolidated by a long history that has structured the field;

2) proposals for representation are built, especially in the early stages, starting from unstructured advocacy activities based on single issues;

3) the lack, in many cases, of clear, strong and solid counterparties like in the Fordist period;

4) the existence of many different productive contexts: if we take the point of view of one organisation, it is more difficult to develop the know-how and strategies covering multiple productive sectors;

5) the target: the independent professionals, who generally resist being constantly and actively involved in professional organisations not focused on business, either for reasons relating to individualistic tendencies or because they are more dispersed (sometimes isolated) and less socialised to unionisation compared to employees.

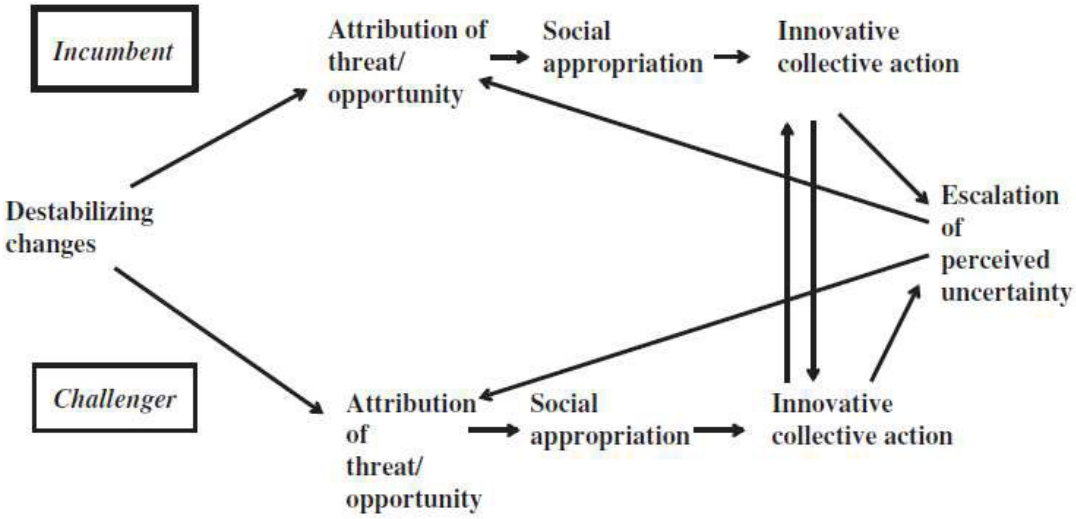
The broader environment, instead, is composed primarily of institutional fields which, at different levels, are involved in the regulation process: the EU and national governments with regard to guidelines and laws, and local institutions with regard to measures for supporting workers and their host structures (coworking, start-up incubators, policies for smart and creative cities, etc.). Secondly, the political field, when it proves its sensitivity to the issues promoted by the organisations, by acting as a broker between them and the institutional fields. Thirdly, the employers' organisations, where they exist and have real clout, foster dialogues (or conflicts) with the emerging and with institutional fields. Fourthly, the owners of spaces where independent professionals work (above all, coworking spaces). To consider all these adjacent fields means having the chance to understand the complex and multilevel game where a number of players are involved. Likewise, attention to the broader environment helps us to understand where and how representation strategies arise, and how they are promoted and developed.

The fifth important dimension proposed by Fligstein and McAdam concerns **exogenous shocks**, **mobilisation, and the onset of contention**. This dimension is closely linked to the previous one postulating the interdependence of the fields. It is based on the idea that interdependence is a distinctive and striking feature of contemporary society and therefore what happens in one strategic action field has consequences in the adjacent ones and, to a certain extent, on the whole of society. The authors use the effective metaphor of the ripples produced by a stone thrown into a still pond: the intensity, to be evaluated case by case, can, in extreme cases, destabilise a strategic action field. Much more often, however, the ripples from adjacent fields generate internal movements that can offer opportunities for challengers or, vice-versa, opportunities for incumbents to strengthen their position. The opportunities generated by the turbulence of the field must always be considered in relation to a context where the incumbents can usually rely on strong internal and external allies as well as on material, cultural and significant political resources. The disparity of resources and allies

is easily found in relation to well-structured and stable fields. At the same time, it is also possible to recognise disparity when we consider a new field in its early stages. However, we assume here that in these contexts there is more opacity with regard to the possibility of identifying the positioning of the players and of mobilising resources and alliances. In this sense, even when there is a disparity of opportunities, resources and allies between the players in a field, the results of the ripples are not largely predetermined by the disparity of the forces in that field.

Coming back to the argument proposed by Fligstein and McAdam, we now arrive at the core of their theory, according to which the changes determined by a threat or an opportunity are the product of the contingent mobilisation processes. The mobilisation process is depicted in detail in the figure below, which incorporates earlier studies (McAdam, 1999; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001) on social movements. The figure represents three connected mechanisms. The first concerns the collective attribution of threat/opportunity, and is closely connected to the interpretation of changes produced by both incumbents and challengers. The mere existence of threats and opportunities is not enough to trigger a reaction and a dispute between the parties. According to the authors, two essential things have to occur: the mobilisation of organisational resources oriented to deal with new threats or new opportunities and the emergence of innovative forms of previously nonexistent or banned collective actions. This means that the existing threats or opportunities have to be actively recognised by the social agents which mobilise resources towards a reference community by producing social appropriation and innovative action. The authors refer to the resounding example of the protest generated by Rosa Parks when, in December 1955, by refusing to leave her bus seat to a white man, she bent the rules and the existing power relationships. The episode was actively recognised by a wider community which mobilised resources aimed at fostering innovative actions oriented to re-discussing the established order. The boycott of the buses was one of the main symbolic innovative actions that fuelled the dispute, and was spread by black ministers in Montgomery who invited the black community to protest against the arrest of Ms Parks.

*Figure 1 - Mobilisation process (Fligstein and McAdam 2012)*




The last two dimensions considered by Fligstein and McAdam are the **episodes of contentions** and **settlement**. The episodes of contention in the context of a strategic action field have some exceptional traits compared to the standard features of common existing disputes in a given field. Indeed, such exceptional episodes stand out by their significant degree of uncertainty and intensity, which can potentially challenge existing rules and balances. The specific case presented in this study, the representation process of independent professionals as the structuring point of the broader emerging field of self-employment representation, matches two important aspects highlighted by Fligstein and McAdam. The first is the high degree of uncertainty; the second, the significant degree of intensity of the dispute. These two aspects must be connected to a third constituent/founding element, the *temporal continuity* of the contention, which in our case can be extended over several years. This third element acquires even greater significance when the strategic action field does not spring from the structural change of a previous existing field.
This case, we argue, is generated by the positioning of old and new social players in a structurally new field which is emerging from a vacuum, without a previous tradition, or with an earlier tradition which is totally inadequate to the new challenges/ opportunities. This is the case of the new working conditions of independent professionals, produced by a paradigmatic change of the production system (Fumagalli 2012; Morini and Fumagalli 2010; Moulier Boutang and Corsani n.d.; Negri and Vercellone 2007) of the third wave of globalisation (Breznitz and Zysman 2013; Straw and Glennie 2012).

Finally, institutional settlement is the resettlement process produced by incumbents and challengers. It is conceived of as the process of moving towards a new state of equilibrium based on new rules and cultural norms: «We can say that a field is no longer in crisis when a generalised sense of order and certainty returns and there is once again consensus about the relative positions of incumbents and challengers» (p.23).

## 2.2 Organisations: functional approach, cultures, metaphors and sense making

Dealing with the theory of fields implies considering a variety of organisations whose shapes, structures, and strategies differ enormously. The emerging field considered in this study, that of self-employed representation, is currently populated by new and old organisations. Each organisation brings its specific culture, expresses an internal debate (sometimes partially hidden), and can be interpreted by considering its activities and its position on specific issues over time. In turn, each organisation can be studied as a «field of forces» (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 43) especially if it has a long history, is strongly structured with several departments, focused on different sectors, and present at a national level. Additionally, individuals with their knowledge, experience, personality, and initiative play an important role in maintaining the organisational culture as well as in organisational change. Each organisation is therefore a complex social construct which to be fully understood would require a dedicated research project. The approach presented here favoured an overall vision of the field, including its changes and developmental trends, by collecting and analysing enough evidence to gain significant insight into the organisations considered. Thus the intention is not to unveil the complex mechanisms behind organisational choices and changes, but to codify important elements which can explain how organisations consider emerging topics which are potentially consistent with their strategic goals (as is the case of self-employment representation) and how they structure their actions taking into consideration others - competitors or allies - focused on the same issue. Two premises are necessary: the terms “competitors” and “allies” have a rather relative value. The multiple plans of reality and its intrinsically processual dimension prevent us from giving permanent definitions. Each definition is temporally located and must be considered in terms of its relative value, which means relative to the context (a public debate, an audition, etc.) and therefore limited to a specific situation. Like any evaluation, it should be considered an attempt to explain, even partially, the sense of a continuous and important change that involves continuous

evolution of the relationships for the organisations studied and the individuals to which they refer. My main theoretical references within the organisational studies, to be briefly presented below, are the necessary complementary elements to the field theory that defined the general approach of this study. They are also to be considered my personal reference points within a heterodox exploration of the analytical possibilities offered by such literature. The aim, therefore, is not to establish hierarchies or distinguish what is valid from what is not, because a complete in-depth analysis of the literature would require more time. What is certain is that all the authors quoted here have positively influenced my attempts to find useful tools to enhance this study. Consequently, the presentation of the theoretical references will be accompanied by the reflections, which it is hoped are useful, they have aroused.

### 2.2.1 Czarniawska's critical approach to Etzioni and Perrow's organisational studies

The starting point was the seminal book by Barbara Czarniawska, *Exploring Complex Organizations* (1992); a strategic text both for returning to and reconsidering the precious insights of classic authors such as Weber, Parsons, Crozier, and Etzioni, and for focusing on the essential cultural perspective that makes in-depth interpretation of contemporary organisations possible. Etzioni's functionalist approach is examined in the second chapter of Czarniawska's book, where she starts from the definition of an organisation:

> *By organisation we mean, following Parsons… social units dedicated primarily to attainment of specific goals. Organisations discussed in this volume are complex and have many of the characteristics Weber specified as 'bureaucratic'. Thus in this volume organisation stands for 'complex bureaucratic organisation'* (Etzioni, 1961, p. xi)

Czarniawska underlines how Etzioni's functional approach implies a clear separation between the organisation and its sociocultural context, and the second implicit assumption of this perspective is that this context of the organisations studied by Etzioni is quite homogeneous. Conversely, the cultural perspective of the author notes mutual influence between the organisations and the sociocultural context. In other words, Czarniawska's cultural perspective identifies a mutual poietic and dynamic process where organisations are shaped by the sociocultural context, but at the same time the sociocultural context is also a product of the organising process (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992, p. 37).

One of the main focuses of Etzioni's analysis is dedicated to the concept of compliance, defined as the «relationship consisting of the power employed by superiors to control subordinates and the orientation of the subordinates to this power» (Etzioni, 1961, p. xv). Czarniawska underlines how this definition allows Etzioni to develop his analysis at a structural and an individual level (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992, p. 10): power can be studied through the focus of its overall distribution within the organisation and in the wider socio-economic environment (at a macro-level) but, at the same time, it can be the focus of the individual relationships (at a micro-level). Czarniawska argues that Etzioni introduces the concept of compliance as an a priori theoretical construct without empirical justification; moreover, the concept is connected to other strategic organisational variables (e.g., organisational goals, consensus, communication and socialisation, and charisma - *ibidem*). She also argues that although over the years several scholars have problematised all the variables which can be connected to the concept of compliance, the way of observing certain complex variables such as charisma, consensus, communication and socialisation remains quite doubtful. In contrast, I argue that compliance could be a strategic and measurable (observable and evaluable) structural dimension shaping individual and collective social relationships. How can it be measured? This is clearly a complex question, but we can argue for certain that the internal structure of each organisation foresees formal roles, duties, specific rituals and margins for action, and hierarchies. Therefore, compliance is in some cases an implicit (or, in others, explicit) structural necessity, a necessary tool to maintain the identity and the performance of an organisation. The recognised and accepted unequal distribution of power is entangled with dynamic processes where competencies, knowledges, strategies, and goals are shared, discussed, and performed within a necessary division of labour. The division of labour and the hierarchisation process (and therefore the unequal power distribution) can be considered strategies to explore efficiently the specific social environment of the organisation ("the field" in the field theory approach). Through the ethnography and daily closeness to the members of an organisation, power relations (and compliance) can be recognised. We can assume that compliance is continuously performed and negotiated by individuals and groups within the organisation. In this perspective, we can consider compliance the result of a shared agreement oriented to strategic goals (to confirm organisation identity, explore opportunities, and obtain specific results). At the same time, we can recognise that compliance is never a mechanical process but an action where individuals and groups can find creative ways to innovate, negotiate, and rebalance (or confirm) power relationships. In this sense, compliance is

not simply a top-down process (power exerted by superiors towards subordinates) but a circular one where the active role of each player involves creativity and opportunities for innovation and change.

At the basis of these evaluations is the idea that the reinterpretation of some theoretical approaches and the creative use of some concepts can enrich the analysis, even if neither belongs to our school of thought, as in the case of Etzioni's approach. In this regard, it is worth recalling further reflections proposed by Etzioni's functionalist perspective because they could be useful tools to interpret - and therefore give order to - the numerous organisations active in the emerging field of self-employed representation.

Etzioni distinguishes between coercive, remunerative and normative compliance. Coercive power is based mainly on the use of force; remunerative power, on extrinsic rewards such as salaries or other benefits; while normative power plays on intrinsic rewards such as identification with goals and/or ideological approach, and pleasure or pride in playing a role or performing a task. Each type of exerted power stimulates a different involvement: coercive power generates alienative involvement, remunerative power produces calculative involvement based mainly on a purely utilitarian evaluation of advantages and disadvantagres, while normative power plays on common values or affinities. Certainly, this classification risks oversimplifying and reifying the complex nature of organisations, but if we consider it a useful tool for enhancing the investigation process, an explorative tool not a static or absolute cage where organisations are trapped, it can help understanding of the complex dynamics within an emerging field.

Another important author considered by Barbara Czarniawska is Charles Perrow. He likens organisations to beasts, and scholars to visitors to a zoo (Perrow, 1980) where the organisations are observed in captivity, away from their habitat, and with little information given about their behaviours. Moreover, the partially visible part we can reach is frequently used to explain the whole organisation. According to the author's premises, organisational theories are similar to sandcastles, with some, but not important, differences. Czarniawska comments (1992, p. 17) that Perrow's point of view implies three important consequential attitudes: relativism, pluralism, and modesty. We should recognise that the study of complex organisations needs to start from a specific point of view, but this should partial and subjective, never demiurgic. It can allow us to reach information and specific knowledge, but we must recognise that this is the product of the specific position of the observer. This reminds us of the need to maintain strong awareness of a researcher's specific positioning and the consequences it involves, with such awareness being, basically, what

the anthropological approach recommends. In addition, pluralism is a necessity in order to grasp, bring together and compare different partial points of view, whereas modesty is closely connected to the idea that the extreme variety of organisations and the innumerable combinations of variables mean that each theory can be considered no more than an indispensable and exciting, but fragile sandpile.

Below, I consider Perrow's definition: «Organizations are tools for shaping the world as one wishes it to be shaped» (Perrow, 1972, p. 11), also quoted by Czarniawska (1992, p. 19). Although the metaphor of the tool seems somewhat in conflict with the previous one of the organisation as an animal in the zoo, we can argue that both evoke clearly defined players with a defined structure, aim, and goals. The study of a living being (an animal) or of an inanimate instrument (a tool) could be quite different. But we must admit that organisations exist because they are experienced, shaped, and manipulated by members, and influenced by the external environment. We can, therefore, conceive of them as animals with a unique and oriented will, or as tools where different wills, those of individuals and groups of Lilliputians inside the Golem (or the Mechanical Turk), are continuously at stake in a general shared common framework that prevents excessively schizophrenic choices thanks to a shared idea on compliance. What are the obligatory choices, the negotiating opportunities within an organisation? Who can negotiate goals, issues and changes, and when? Metaphors are useful images which can shape the immediate perception of an organisation, after which each organisational study, going beyond the overall image, has to deal with relationships, conflicts, rituals and practices informed by written and unwritten rules, which we can call culture. To conclude, I propose my own definition of organisation, taking into consideration all the above theories and approaches:

*Organisations are collective open systems aimed at specific goals. They are the meso level, between individuals and society as a whole. They are tools made of humans (therefore living organisms) and their existence is continuously shaped by the internal members' relationships and by the external environment, both culturally informed and mutually influencing each other*.

This definition does not aim to compete with, or contest, the already numerous existing ones, but more simply aims to be an intermediate, and therefore temporary, summary of the ideas developed so far.

### 2.2.2 Metaphors: an essential but tricky way to describe organisations. Organisations as digital machines

Metaphors are an essential element of discourse; and can transmit an immediate and effective image of an idea, concept, feeling or concrete object. They are therefore powerful communication instruments. As Morgan states, they are «a way of thinking and a way of seeing» (Morgan, 2006, p. 4) in each human context, from everyday life to science. Due to their force, metaphors can highlight distinctive traits, or more frequently one, at the same time hiding others, in the same way that a point of view or way of seeing involves positioning, perspective, visibility and something that remains hidden.

Considering the huge use of metaphors in organisational studies, we can argue that they are indispensable for an effective discursive strategy but, at the same time, they have to be managed with caution, because the effects of fascination and persuasion can generate distortions and misleading interpretations. They cannot cover the analysis; the analysis cannot therefore be structured exclusively around one metaphor. Moreover, in my view, they should be used like public transport, where you sometimes have to change to another vehicle to reach your destination.

Some additional considerations can help clarify the potential of metaphors, which can be used to highlight distinctive features of organisations. Combining and bringing together a number of metaphors is useful and necessary in preventing the highlighted traits from giving back a distorted image that hides the complexity, contradictions and inconsistencies that are part of everyday life in every organisation. In addition, metaphorical pluralism can enrich insight and analysis by highlighting, from different perspectives, the pluralism of coexisting practices and contexts. These approaches, which were made in organisational studies, involve an external view of the observer and thus an etic approach, where the researcher uses metaphor to describe the organisation. At the same time, however, the metaphor can also generate interesting interpretations if used in an emic approach, where the point of view of the interlocutor is adopted. Understanding how organisations see and interpret their social environment of reference and how this vision can be summarised through metaphors, can be equally fruitful. The selection of metaphors is always arbitrary and come from the researcher's sensibility, but metaphors can also emerge through dialogue with members of organisations or in their documents. I adopt the approach of symbolic realism (Richard H Brown, 1978, p. 24), that is to say, that reality

exists outside but it can be reached only through an interpretative act that makes sense of (and therefore gives shape to) the reality outside us. In his seminal book, *Images of Organization*, Morgan (2006) considers several commonly-used metaphors in organisational studies. Organisations could be interpreted as machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, fluxes, or instruments of domination. Starting from Morgan's work, the organisation conceived of as a machine will be briefly discussed, as will its version updated to the current digital environment. The organisations considered here are informed by different cultures, and have different structures, dimensions, and assets. The variety of organisations considered should therefore correspond to a variety of metaphors. The reason we will focus on the metaphor of the machine, and even more on its digital version, is because machines are a pervasive image that everyone can perceive in their everyday life. Its pervasiveness exerts an unconscious pressure on individuals and groups not only acting and interacting through machines but also as machines, in terms of rhythms and expected performances or efficiency. Machines, and even more so digital machines, can thus be considered the unconscious pervasive reference point of individuals and society as a whole.

Machines are everywhere, and they perform a number of tasks tasks previously carried out by humans. Moreover, their influence has deeply affected science, philosophy, and psychology through the mechanistic interpretations made, over the centuries to today, of nature and the human mind and behaviour (Morgan, 2006, p. 12). As one would expect, since the Industrial Revolution, the labour environment, too, has been shaped by the pervasive idea of the organisation as a machine. Over the centuries, the influence of machines has increased and the impact of *The Principles of Scientific Management* (Taylor, 1914) established the idea of labour (and its organisation) conceived of as a mechanical machine. Workers had to be trained in order to be as quick and efficient as possible, in line with the scientific planning of the production line. The idea of work as socially embedded had to be eradicated in favour of an individual perspective: workers had to be selected, motivated and trained to the top of their productivity, and their resistance overcome, in particular the idea that individual efficiency could damage other workers. During the post-industrialisation phase, strongly influenced by a structural change in the value chain supported by the digital revolution, the idea of the organisation as a machine had to be adapted. This means that it has not disappeared, and we can say that it is still dominant, despite the fact that other powerful organisation systems co-exist.

The important shift concerns the digital dimension, which transformed the mechanical machine to a digital one. In general, in industrialised coutries, but also in many other parts of the world, and primarily in large cities, the "machine" has moved from the secondary sector to the tertiary, from products to services. The new digital machine is based on scientific management governed by algorithms, with considerable effects on consumers and workers. Digital Taylorism can thus be conceived of as a reinterpreted version of Taylor's scientific management principles augmented by the new technologies. It is cautiously interpreted as «a new wave of employment opportunities for developing countries» (International Labour Organization, 2014, pp. 72–73), while at the same time it is a clear strategy aimed at reducing the costs of knowledge work (P. Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2010, p. 8). Moreover, what must be accepted as a fact is that digital Taylorism implies new and understudied effects on workers' and citizens surveillance (Morozov, 2015), and the scientific management of workers' performances. Finally, if we focus on digital labour intermediated by digital platforms, and the even more widespread free labour (in terms of data production processed, aggregated and sold by digital platforms) produced all over the world by millions of users of socials network and digital tools (Jin, 2015, p. 129), we can perfectly understand the potentialities, risks and possible evolutions of organisations conceived of as digital machines.

We can assume that the extreme examples of organisations as mechanical or digital machines are more fitting for the productive sector (industries and services), including the extreme environment of digital platforms, but digital Taylorism could be less important in relation to the organisations selected in this study. Despite that, we need to consider two important perspectives, both of which evoke the metaphor of the digital machine and are also totally consistent with the organisations studied:

a) the digital environment plays an important role in terms of communication, thus influencing everyday visibility, reputation, and accessibility (from/to the target); b) the dense communication environment supported by new technologies also shapes the internal environment.

Let us consider the first perspective: the communication environment (especially the digital one) surrounding the organisations. The digital environment becomes more and more strategic as a primary interface with the world; we can say that organisations "are in" the digital machine, governed by specific rules, needs, rituals, and standards. They, therefore, have to act as perfect machines and "are" the digital machine. Indeed, being in the communicational digital environment means structuring a totally coherent image aimed at convincing potential members, public opinion, public institutions and, in general, the whole range of stakeholders. The scientific

construction of the public image is one of the strategic models; in this sense, the organisation needs to resemble, or at least needs to become closer to a perfect robot, instead of showing its internal inconsistency. It is a matter of exposure: the digital environment amplifies the possibilities of the public image toward a potentially total and continuous exposure. This possibility involves new needs and output which evoke the industry of communication/information and thus continuous production, a communication/information machine. The digital environment is therefore the skin of each organisation, one of the main contact point between the organisation and its stakeholders.
Let us now consider the second perspective: the dense communication environment within organisations. Members, activists, professionals and volunteers within organisations are continuously under pressure and continuously receiving information and requests from several different channels and devices. This constant flow influences the way of working (greater responsiveness and flexibility; multitasking become essential), the standard level of performance required, working rhythms and availability (potentially 24/7 and everywhere). On one hand, technologies empower the workers, activist and volunteers within the organisation; on the other, they reshape the relationships, priorities, and tasks. Technologies challenge people within the organisations, as well as in other social contexts, because by empowering people they set new standards, new ways of acting and new rhythms, exposing people to an overload of information, tasks, and requirements. The implicit requirement is to become as efficient as the technologies we (and organisations) use, in other words, the implicit requirement could be to perform as well as a digital machine.
The machine evokes the idea of performance and efficiency; and the digital machine, rapidity and ubiquity, but in both cases the individual disappears or is imagined as an android. Mechanical metaphors are closley connected to the idea that knowledge, practices, and roles are codified and routinised, just like in bureaucracies.

### 2.2.3 Weick's sense-making approach

According to the definition given by Weick in *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (Weick, 1979), an organisation is the product of an interaction between individuals whose purpose is to develop common actions and activities. The results of these actions are constantly and retrospectively compared with the reference environment with the aim of defining a meaning by reconstructing in

significant blocks the experiences lived. This means that in the reconstruction process individuals define labels and links between the significant blocks in order to generate an internal consistency. Individuals maintain the experiences thus rearranged in their minds by generating causal cognitive maps, which become a fundamental tool for carrying out their tasks and maintaining a sufficient structure of meaning to justify what they are doing. Weick is therefore interested in understanding such mechanisms, which significantly contribute to giving shape and substance to the actions undertaken by an organisation.

Thus the minimum basis of an organisation emerges when through repeated and prolonged interactions individuals calibrate their behaviours in order to deal with those ambiguous areas of meaning that structurally exist in each interaction. The result of this effort is the removal of ambiguities through the negotiation of a widespread consensus on the common actions to be undertaken and methods to be adopted. In other words, an organisation exists (or continues to exist) when the cognitive causal maps of its members achieve sufficient convergence to define collective action-oriented agreements. Sensemaking is that process of convergence: the individual thought becomes collective because it is shared. Adopting this perspective, an organisation is thus essentially the product of a mental process that guarantees the collective elaboration of ideas and interpretations necessary to perform them (Weick & Bougon, 1986). Weick's perspective has for a long time influenced organisational studies and has itself evolved over time, emancipating itself partly from its cognitive origins to approach social constructivism. Moreover, the most recent evolutions of his perspective are oriented to the analysis of language, rather than to cognitive processes as a place of the sensemaking process (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014).

Some important considerations have already emerged from this short journey through the concept of sensemaking. Firstly, the sensemaking process has a pervasive and fundamental character: pervasive because it impacts the main areas of meaning that individuals recognise as a point of reference; and fundamental because it affects those areas of sense recognised as necessary by individuals to define the minimum basis for collective action and thus for creating or maintaining an organisation. Secondly, the process involves negotiation, which impacts the daily existence of the organisation and of the individuals working there. Thirdly, the process is subject to continuous adjustments made necessary by the dynamism of events and of the environment in which the organisation acts. Fourthly, the process is pervasive also in relation to time because it concerns the present, past and future. Individuals share ideas with the purpose of reaching agreements and bringing together their causal cognitive maps in order to act. This means that convergence is rooted

in the present because of the surrounding context which needs to be interpreted. At the same time, however, this convergence incorporates a common vision of the future within which the actions of the organisation acquire and maintain their meaning. Finally, the past is also a strategic element in the sensemaking process since the history of the organisation and, therefore, its identity, is in the past. In the same way, the histories of individuals participating in the life of an organisation are conserved and renewed in the past, as are their public identities and reputations.

## 2.3 Representation theories and perspectives

The concept of representation has a centuries-long history and has been approached by a number of philosophers, jurists and social scientists. This is not the place to retrace this long history, although it could be useful to remember some traits of the origins. In this way, we can grasp the meaning that remains at the basis of the representation principles in the political sphere and in the specific context of this work focused on independent professionals' representation. The basic elements of modern representation originated in those complex processes which shaped contemporary states, starting from the French Revolution. Indeed, at that time, some of the basic principles of modern democracies took shape: the need for a constitution, and awareness that the legislative power could no longer remain in the hands of the King, but should belong to the nation. Moreover, in the same period there emerged the need to give real representatives to the nation, a need which included a clear distinction between constituent and constituted power as well as the existence of citizens (not subjects of a monarch) with equal rights (Duso, 2003, p. 55). At this stage, the universalistic perspective took shape. It would accompany, not without tensions and contradictions between theory and practice, the development of modern states and their laws. At the same time, and in close connection with the universal perspective, the idea of society as a whole, closely linked to the rights of individuals, found its roots. The radical implication of this historical moment lies in an equally radical change of perspective. Rights are not an instrument to limit the constituted power, but are themselves the origin of a new power based on the will of individuals rather than on royal concession. Consistent with these radical ruptures, the idea of freedom, too, changes radically since it drastically changes the object to which it relates:

«It is no longer the various freedoms that were constantly invoked in the eighteenth century political struggles against the threat of absolutism, that is exemptions, immunities and privileges of commons, orders, universities and bodies. [...] It is during the Revolution that the idea of freedom,

already appeared in the political philosophy of the seventeenth century, is spreading. It implies its attribution to all individuals equally, beyond the age-old doctrine that conceived some men as free, thanks to no freedom of all those who, through their work, freed the first from the needs and their related occupations, thus making them available to political life.» (Duso, 2003, p. 57). With the idea of a rising constituent power, the need to establish a political body takes shape: the Constituent Assembly, which is able to embody the "general Representative will" and is no longer based on belonging to different bodies of the society, but on the will of the individuals who are part of a common social body. The paradigm shift is evident in at least two basic dimensions: the first is the transition from class to individual; the second concerns the way of representation. In the previous phase, the representative process was focused on the interests of social bodies or corporations. In this new phase, the representative process can no longer rely on the pre-existing interest groups, but must result from an indistinct complex of individual will. The election of representatives thus becomes the instrument to give legitimacy to a power that is an expression of the will of the social body as a whole. The new conditions in which the representation shapes its structure make it impossible to define a binding mandate, but define the basis of legitimate representation with which voters will identify and to which they give their authorisation and trust. In this framework, the interest can be only the general interest of the nation and not the specific interest of a group or class.

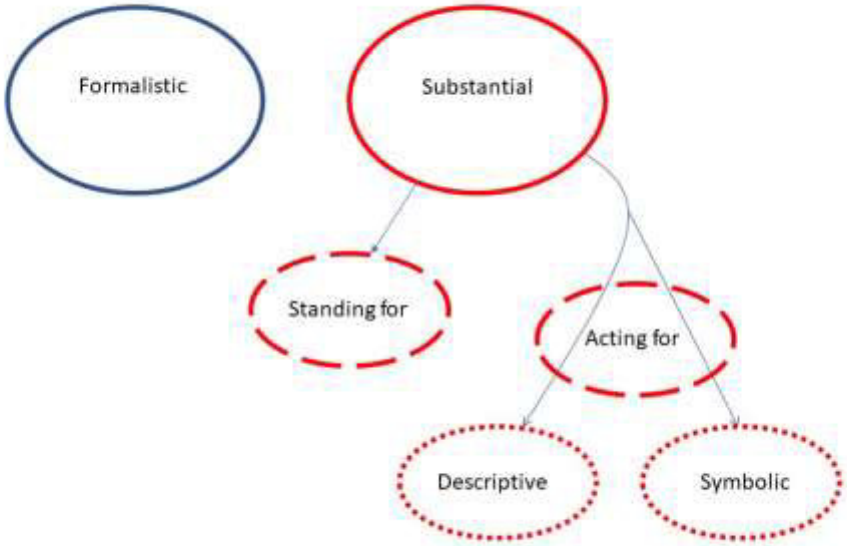
Political and interest representation are two extremely broad issues. Given the countless studies on them, it is not possible to make a detailed review here. For the purposes of the research, we considered it useful to focus attention on the elements at the basis of the concept of representation, which was first developed in the context of political studies.

A further problematic aspect regards the fact that concepts such as political representation can take on many different meanings. Indeed, we can think of political representation in the strict sense as that action in which some players represent others within the democratic arena defined by the rules, institutions and procedures. At the same time, we can think of political representation in other ways. We can define political representation as all those actions carried out by a player speaking on behalf of others with the aim of redefining the rules governing those who are represented. In this case, the representation of the interests of an organisation such as a trade union becomes, in effect, political representation, because it aims to affect political decisions in the strict sense. The political representation of interests thus constitutes a particular condition of

political representation in a broad sense. This field is certainly defined by specific rules and practices (whether codified or informal) that can differ from those of political representation in the strict sense. Indeed, the general interest that can be evoked in the context of political representation is here to be redefined, because the players in the field studied are always the bearers of the particular interests of a limited group of citizens, workers, organisations, or companies. We can therefore speak of general interest as a product or result of the mediation between the stakeholders and the political spheres that recognise and translate these particular interests into laws and provisions aimed at adapting the regulation of social functioning. In this case, the particular interests are considered important for the general interest of the society included in a nation, federation of states, or region. Let us now consider the basic elements of the concept of representation. According to the classic theory, the concept of representation is based on four elements: 1) some party that represents (this can be an individual; a formal group such as a political party, trade union, or association; or an informal group such as a movement or a grass-roots group of citizens or workers); 2) some party that is represented (e.g., voters, workers, clients, enterprises, or citizens); 3) something that is represented (e.g., ideas, opinions, economic interests, rights, or needs); and 4) a setting within which the representation can be developed. (Dovi, 2017). The meanings of the political representation are the core of the seminal text "The Concept of representation" by Hanna Pitkin (1967). In this text, the author outlines the fundamental traits of political representation conceived of as a multifaceted concept. Pitkin outlines two different ways (with some specific sub-dimensions) to conceive of political representation, each with specific traits and each giving a different insight into the concept. According to the analytical perspective proposed by the author, the first variation is **formalistic representation**. The theories and conceptualisations of formalistic representation develop around two main dimensions. On one hand, there is the *authorisation* process, its characteristics and traits, through which the constituencies give shape to the representative; on the other, there is *accountability*, the representative's possibility of motivating or obligation to motivate his or her choices, with a consequent evaluation made by the constituencies on the basis of his or her actions.
Another conception of political representation is **substantial representation**. Studies focusing on this address their attention to the concrete practices that build the representation relationship. In this case, the interpretative effort focuses on the actions performed by the representative on behalf of those represented. According to Pitkin's approach, substantial representation can be divided into two major strands: on one hand, political representation is conceived of as *standing for*

someone or something that could be an idea, claim, or principle; on the other, political representation is seen as *acting for* someone else (an individual or group). The former (*standing for*) is further divided into two categories: **descriptive representation** and **symbolic representation.** Both the *acting for* and the *standing for* (and its subcategories: descriptive and symbolic representation) concern the quality of the relationship established between the representative and the represented. If we consider the substantial representation performed through the *standing for*, we need to recognise that the relationship between constituencies and representative implies similarity between the two. Whereas in the substantial representation performed through the *acting for*, the focus shifts to the way the representative acts on behalf of a represented person. In this case, similarities between constituencies and representative can exist (or not) but they are less important than the mode of action.

*Figure 2 - Pitkin's representation model*




## 2.4 A brief summary of the theoretical approach

The theory of fields, based on the pioneering work of Pierre Bourdieu, developed later also by other scholars such as Powell and DiMaggio and generalized by Fligstein and McAdam, allows to keep a broad look at the organizations representing the self-employed, whose borders include many different players. The interaction between organisations is in fact influenced also by other players

such as enterprises and public institutions; both play a relevant role in the legitimization of the organizations and in the regulation of the labour markets to which the organizations studied refer.

The approach promoted by Fligstein and McAdam is particularly useful in this study because it develops a theory of emerging strategic action fields. They are, in fact, new cultural and social frameworks which arise from interaction, cooperation and conflict between collective actors and/or individuals. Each field is characterised by specific rules of interaction and knowledges and it exists also thanks to the mutual recognition of the players involved. Moreover, the emerging strategic action fields, as well as the more consolidated ones, are connected to other adjacent social fields with their specific rules. The recognition and analysis of an emerging strategic action field therefore allows to evaluate significant changes in specific social contexts in order to fully understand their origin and complexity focusing on the interactions between players (how they are moving, how they position and reposition themselves, how they strategically play their knowledge and skills to improve their power in the field itself).

The broad and diachronic approach (macro-level) ensured by the theory of fields requires a theoretical integration provided by the cultural approach to the organization studies. In particular, the theoretical and methodological proposal promoted by Barbara Czarniawska combined with a specific focus on the sense making process help us in understanding the micro level: how organizations and their most relevant members interpret reality and define their representation strategies.

Retracing the meaning of representation going back to its origins allow us to correctly assess the points of views promoted by the organizations with respect to their targets and their ideas of representation.

Finally, the exploration of other approaches to the study of organizations led me to consider the metaphor as one of the useful tools to describe the organizations representing the self-employed, the cultural environment in which they act and the . The careful study of Morgan's seminal book, *Images of Organization* (2006), led me to reinterpret the metaphor of organization as a machine in the light of the new digital infrastructure that surrounds society as a whole and organisation specifically shaping the crucial field of communication.

The whole theoretical approach here proposed is based on the idea that the study of complex organizations requires the combination of multiple focal points and theories. Only through the combination of the macro-level (the social and economic processes) the meso level (the environment composed by the organisations studied through the field theory) and the micro-level

(the sense making process within the organisations and the points of view of its members) stems an analysis capable of grasping the complexity of the studied phenomena. Moreover, the combination of different theoretical approaches allows to exploit as much as possible the significant amount of data collected always considering the three indispensable attitudes suggested by Barbara Czarniawska: relativism, pluralism, and modesty.

# 3 Research design and methodology

## 3.1 Research hypothesis, goals and questions

The starting hypothesis is that a new social framework of self-employed representation is under construction, stimulated by the growth of the tertiary sector where a growing number of solo self-employed professionals is concentrated. It can be considered an emerging strategic action field (Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012) and its structuring process implies the definition of common rules (and languages), the inclusion and the interaction of a growing number of different organisations, mutual recognition among the actors involved, and renovation of representation practices. Moreover, the starting hypothesis includes the idea that the emergence of the strategic action field of self-employed representation is influenced by global trends, but it takes different shapes in different national contexts.

The main goal of this research therefore is to study two national contexts, Italy and Germany, and two local contexts, Milan and Berlin, in order to understand whether and how the emerging strategic action field of self-employed representation is taking shape. In doing so, the analysis will consider different relevant dimensions: 1) the setting up of new organisations representing the self-employed and the innovation processes within existing ones; 2) the shape, structure and rules governing the relevant organisations selected; 3) their representation strategies; 4) their interaction with the external environment (competitor, allies, institutions); 5) the influence of the urban dimension in the structuring process of self-employed representation.

The project aims to answer the following questions:

1. Does the emerging strategic action field exist in both countries?
   If so, how and why is it taking shape?
2. What are the main representation strategies in the emerging field, if it exists?
3. To which extent do the representation strategies differ among the organisations of the same country?

4. What are the similarities and differences in terms of representation strategies between similar organisations (trade unions, cooperatives, quasi-unions, umbrella organisations, grass-roots groups) in Italy and Germany?
5. What are the main analytical perspectives of the key actors?
6. How does the urban environment influence the representation of the self-employed?

## 3.2 Research phases at a glance and timeline

The research project was planned in nine phases. These research phases are briefly presented below in order to have an overview of how the research was designed. The phases will then be analysed in detail, explaining the methodology used for each of them. **The first phase** consisted in mapping the organisations representing the self-employed in Italy and Germany; the mapping was developed at national level with a special focus on the local territories of Milan and Berlin. This was a strategic step for carrying out a first evaluation of the existing organisations and their essential characteristics.

**During the second phase** of the research project, a first exploratory step into the core issues (the conditions of the self-employed and the attempts to represent them) was developed through in-depth interviews with experts in the labour market and organisations, and in particular with those involved in self-employment representation. Both national and European dimensions were considered. The in-depth interviews made it possible to calibrate the assessments previously carried out on the mapped organisations. The interviews with experts with different disciplinary backgrounds also helped to evaluate the numerous social contexts and players (public institutions, other organisations, civil society) that interact with the organisations involved in this study. In addition, the exploratory interviews were useful to reconsider (and, in some cases, integrate) the mapping of the organisations, with the consequent result of a comprehensive picture of the important ones involved in the representation of self-employed workers.

**In the following (third) phase**, the most important organisations were chosen for the investigation. In the selection process, common criteria were considered to guarantee comparability at both national and transnational level. The selection process considered the need to maintain the heterogeneity found in the mapping phase in order to understand how different organisations contribute to define the emerging field of self-employed representation.

The emergence of a new field of representation, that of self-employed workers, is one of the hypotheses that stimulated this research.

The in-depth study **(fourth phase)** was carried out thanks to the combination of different research approaches: qualitative semi-structured interviews with the key figures of the organisations selected, collection of official documents produced by the organisations, and monitoring of the communication channels (websites and social networks – Facebook and Twitter) directly managed by the organisations for their core communication activities. The focus of the in-depth study was on collecting data about the history of the organisations selected, their organisational dynamics, representation strategies and other important dimensions which will be detailed in the following subsection. Once this phase was completed, the information collected made it possible to evaluate a further study of some of the organisations already investigated through in-depth interviews and document analysis.

Indeed, in the **fifth phase**, the research focused on six organisations, three based in Milan and three in Berlin. Further interviews were planned, and on some occasions it was possible to carry out an extremely useful ethnographic activity to understand the internal dynamics of the organisation from a privileged point of view. Also in this phase, useful documents for analysis were collected and the monitoring of websites and social network profiles continued. This made it possible to understand the evolution of the positions taken by the organisations as well as to evaluate the actions they promoted.

All the collected documents (exploratory interviews, semi-structured interviews, official documents of the organisations, field notes and other material such as newspaper articles and articles of scientific journals focused on self-employed representations) were archived and codified with Atlas-ti, a specific software for qualitative analysis[6] (**sixth phase**).

After the end of the fieldwork, all the data collected, archived and codified through Atlas-ti were processed (**seventh phase**) in order to develop the analysis **(eighth phase)** of the relevant dimensions selected: 1) the origin of new organisations and the organisational change of the traditional ones; 2) their structures, rules and resources; 3) their representation strategies; 4) their point of view on the external social environment and the role played by public institutions. In addition, 5) a specific analysis was developed in relation to urban development and economies

[6] Please refer to the table in the addendum for an overview of the number of primary documents collected, archived and analysed.

with the aim of studying how self-employment is strictly intertwined with them. The points of view of the organisations (through their key members and official documents) were integrated with the analysis of the experts and other relevant analysis from scientific reviews and newspapers. **A preliminary and at the same time transversal phase was the analysis of the literature**. Over the last few years, academic and non-academic interests have emerged on the topic of self-employment representation. This extremely interesting evolution was therefore monitored throughout the whole research period. At the beginning, it was useful to understand the existing approaches to the self-employed and their organisations. During the research activity, the monitoring of new publications on these topics made it possible to understand recent evolutions in this field. Even on the academic side, the representation of self-employed workers is becoming a topic of specific interest helping to renew the debate in the disciplinary sectors that have traditionally dealt with work and its changes (industrial relations, legal studies, labour sociology, economic sociology). The emergence of a more structured public debate on the role of self-employment in the production system strongly shaped by the new technologies is shedding light on new work dynamics that involve all workers and in particular the growing number of self-employed workers. The graphic of the research phases and timeline is given below.

*Figure 3- Research phases*

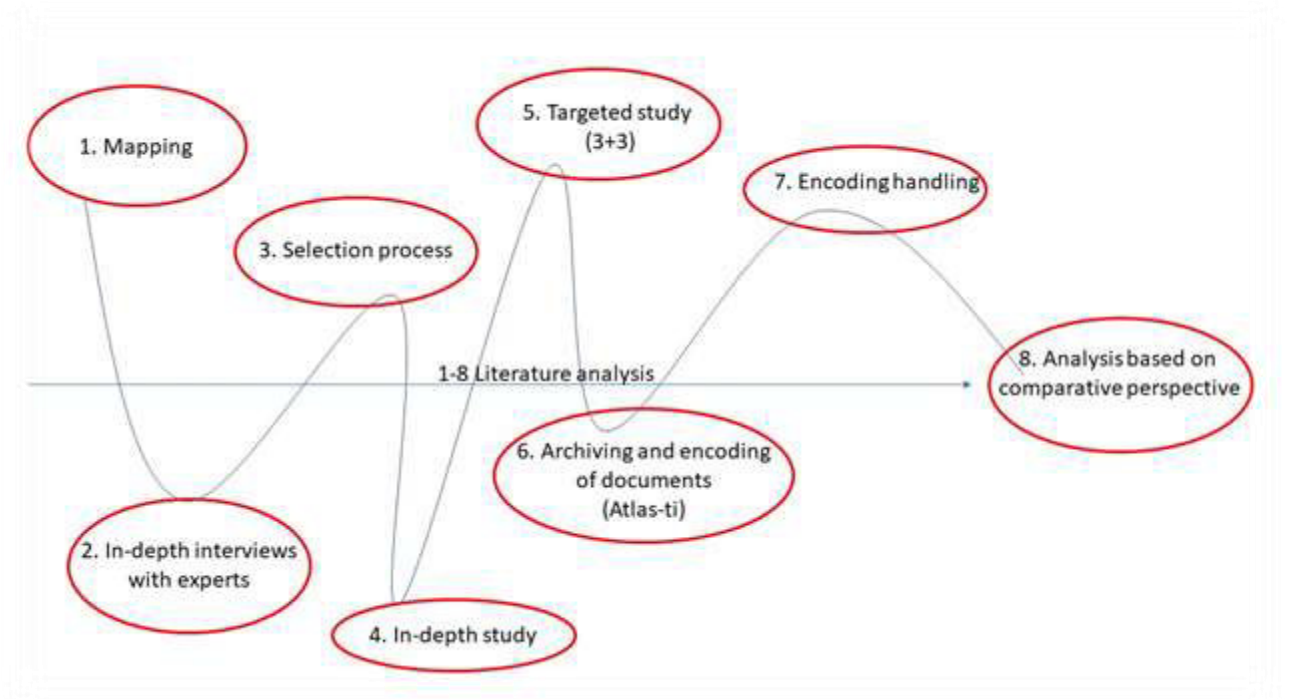


*Table 1 - Timeline 2014-2015*

| TIMELINE | 2014 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2015 | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Writing and refining research project | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Mapping IT and DE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. In-depth interviews | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Selection of the organisations IT and DE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. In-depth study IT and DE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Case studies IT and DE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Archiving and encoding of data collected | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Data processing | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Data analysis | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9. Literature analysis | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Writing | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*Table 2 - Timeline 2016-2018*

| TIMELINE | 2016 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2017 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2018 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Writing and refining research project | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Mapping IT and DE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. In-depth interviews | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Selection of the organisations IT and DE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. In-depth study IT and DE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Case studies IT and DE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Archiving and encoding of data collected | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Data processing | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Data analysis | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9. Literature analysis | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Writing | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

## 3.3 Research design and methodology in detail

In this section, further details will be given on the research phases presented above and the methodology applied.

**At the beginning of the mapping phase (first phase)**, the existing literature on self-employed representative organisations was examined. This made it possible to exploit what had already been done in previous researches, despite the latter being partial or limited to certain professional areas or territories. The existing literature constituted a useful starting point to implement the mapping through online research further enriched by the information collected through the exploratory interviews. The mapping of the existing organisations in Italy and in

Germany made it possible to gather the necessary basic information for a first evaluation of the existing organisations.

In the initial phase, it was decided to map as many organisations as possible in order to understand their heterogeneity in terms both of targets and variety and extension of their supply. In this sense we proceeded to identify several different organisations: 1) the traditional organisations oriented towards liberal professions; 2) the trade unions focused on the self-employed; 3) the new organisations which had emerged in the past twenty years and which strongly renewed the public debate on self-employment; and 4) other grass-roots organisations and movements dealing with the same issue. Through their websites, basic information on their juridical nature, reference productive sector or professions and territorial diffusion was collected, as well as the names and contacts of key members.

Already at this stage evident differences emerged with regard to communicative style and quality of the information provided. In some cases, the information collected was exhaustive for a first evaluation; in others, it was necessary to contact the organisations directly to resolve certain doubts about the nature and target population of the organisation. The rapid evolution of the professions and their roles in the production system make the boundaries between different types of workers more flexible; in the same way, the border between self-employed workers and classic entrepreneurs becomes more variable and vague. Moreover, even the same worker experiences very different contractual conditions and professional roles, ranging from dependent work to self-employment and entrepreneurship. The extreme variability is also reflected in the representative organisations that are set up or restructured in the attempt to give an answer to these rapidly- evolving phenomena.

The mapping activity made it possible to identify over one hundred organisations in each of the two national territories involved in the research. The variety of the organisations proved to be extremely wide, both in terms of types of organisations and in terms of capacity for action (from local to trans-national level), as well as in terms of targets and supply of representation.

The variety of organisations ranges from national trade unions with strong international networks to local organisations set up for specific needs of the areas and their productive environments. Informal groups focused on a specific sector or profession were also identified. Furthermore, the variety concerns also the structures of the organisations: traditional organisations are often characterised by articulated and vertical structures, while new ones are often less structured and more oriented towards horizontal relationships.

Finally, numerous differences exist in relation to the activities and the offer of representation proposed by the organisations. Indeed, while there are numerous organisations specifically set up to improve and protect the rights of the self-employed, there are as many organisations mainly oriented to business. The latter then become representatives, and therefore valid interlocutors in the debate on work regulation, by virtue of their ability to bring together workers and/or companies on the basis of specific business interests. It is therefore clear that there are different paths towards representation; all of them have to be considered because they all contribute to the structuring of what is here defined as the emerging field of self-employed representation.

During the mapping phase, the organisations were classified by type, and an initial assessment of their targets and productive sectors of interest was made. In addition, precise information was collected on their territorial presence, as well as on the reference persons for in-depth interviews.

**After the mapping, the interviews with the experts were begun (second phase)**. It was essential to better understand the broad and heterogeneous context of workers' representation with a special focus on non-standard and new self-employed workers. The interviews with experts were also useful for completing and refining the mapping that was integrated with their comments. Twelve experts with different profiles and competences were interviewed. The selection process included:

- two trade unionists with specific skills on national and European levels;
- five researchers with specific expertise on labour markets, new forms of work, urban economies, and precarisation processes;
- five experts on the advanced tertiary sector (e.g., publishing sector, services to enterprises, communication) and new urban working contexts.

Six of the twelve interviews were conducted directly; three were made by telephone or via Skype. All the interviews were recorded. The remaining three interviews were realised remotely via email. In all cases, the information collected was supplemented by additional data collected by respondents via email.

**The selection process (third phase)**, as explained also in the chapter concerning the fieldwork, considered some general criteria able to guarantee the representativeness of the organisations identified. The first of the four criteria concerns the territorial coverage of the organisations: the selection included the most important organisations operating on a national scale as well as those that, while acting in a circumscribed territory (regional or metropolitan), have shown

themselves to be highly active and innovative, especially in the local territories of the research focus: Milan and Berlin.

The second criterion concerns the field of action: it was decided to favour organisations focused on self-employed workers without a professional body. Both in the research hypothesis and in the empirical evidences gathered at the beginning of the mapping, the new organisations of self-employed workers without a professional order played a strategic role in activating public debate on new self-employed workers. This stimulated the definition of new representation practices and a new common framework between traditional organisations and new ones. At the same time, however, it was decided to consider in some circumscribed cases also some organisations representing self-employed workers with a professional order. This allowed the view of the study to be widened to better understand the kind of relationship between the new organisations focused on self-employed workers without a professional body and the organisations focused mainly on liberal professions. The choice is consistent with the approach of this study, which aims to test the existence of the new emerging field of self-employed representation.

The third criterion concerns the number and variety of activities promoted by the organisations. The more active organisations have been privileged in the selection process.

The fourth and last criterion adopted concerns the level of innovation. Certainly, it is not easy to define the operative dimensions capable of accurately assessing the innovativeness of an organisation before an in-depth study. In any case, it was evident from the first steps of the fieldwork that there is a close connection between the digital environment and the attempts to promote new representation proposals.

The close relationship between innovative communication strategies and the innovativeness of representational proposals was clearly evident from the beginning. The digital environment has not yet been totally experienced by all the organisations studied. Nevertheless, those that invested more in promoting their ideas through the web and social network, have also changed the way of spreading information and mobilising the self-employed. The digital environment fosters new forms of interaction between the organisations and their potential referents; new forms of dialogue, different from the past, emerge, similarly to what is happening for social movements (Gerbaudo, 2012; Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015). Communication and action coexist in the same environment, the digital one, which allows each to get in touch with a broad audience, to increase visibility but at the same time to propose

forms of collective action on the web and outside. Of the organisations selected for an in-depth study, 29 were in Italy and 22 in Germany. The selection process tried to guarantee variety in each national area as well as the possibility of carrying out a comparative analysis at national and transnational levels.

Once the selection was made, the organisations were directly contacted to define exploratory meetings and semi-structured interviews as part of the in-depth study **(fourth phase)**. In some cases, a first contact via email was sufficient to define an appointment, in other cases it was necessary to go personally to the organisations' headquarters to collect useful information and define targeted appointments. The combination of email and direct contacts made it possible to reach all the selected organisations. Furthermore, the decision to include also some political parties to test their contribution to the debate on the representation of self-employment proved useful for the general analysis of the emerging field of self-employed representation.

Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the headquarters of the organisations or in other places proposed by the respondents. In some circumscribed cases the interviews were planned via Skype. In both cases the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The interviews were based on a common track for both the Italian and German organisations. The common track of the interviews aimed at exploring the relevant dimensions relating to the setting-up and development of the organisation, the assessments made by its key members regarding competing organisations, the role played by the institutions in relation to the emerging needs of the self-employed, the role played by enterprises and clients, the evolution of the labour market, the evolving traits of the self-employed. Moreover, a part of the interview was then dedicated to understanding whether and how the territorial dimension, with its economic, social, and urban specificities, has a positive or negative influence on the definition of an offer of representation for the self-employed. The interviews lasted ninety minutes on average. Between January 2015 and September 2018, forty-four semi-structured interviews were made: 22 in Germany 20 in Italy and 2 in Belgium in relation to the European context of the cooperative SMart, one of the case studies (both in Germany and Italy). In addition, the analysis of the Italian fieldwork was enriched by 14 semi-structured interviews with members of organisations representing self-employed and atypical workers, made in a previous period (2012-2013) within a national

research project on the emerging needs of young self-employed and atypical professionals in Milan[7].

The information and the analysis collected with the interviews are complementary to those contained in the documents produced by the organisations and published on their websites or their digital social networks. **These documents were collected before and after the interviews during the period dedicated to the fieldwork**, from January 2015 to December 2017. Furthermore, in some cases it was possible to collect from respondents additional documents not available directly on the website. The selection of the documents was developed according to some common criteria. The documents selected contain important information on the needs and conditions of self-employed workers, evaluations of the role of institutions with an important role in the regulation of self-employment (e.g., position papers), texts containing the founding values and principles of the organisations (e.g., statutes), official texts with relevant information on their setting up and evolution, and political programmes. A total of 90 documents were collected from the Italian organisations and 75 documents from the German ones. To complete the information gathered, a concise and targeted press review was carried out. Based on newspaper articles available online, this made it possible to monitor how the public debate on self-employment was evolving. It was also useful for understanding how the representative organisations have been able to conquer space in the traditional media as a result of a strong commitment in the field of online communication. The evaluation of the public debate is therefore based not only on the frequent attendance of contexts such as conferences, public meetings and seminars on the topic of self-employment, but also on a corpus of 90 news articles.

Particular attention was always paid to the European dimension, both during the interviews and during the collection of relevant documents, including news. Once this research phase was completed, a first evaluation of the collected material was made. The evaluation revealed the utility of a further targeted study **(fifth phase)** on at least three organisations in each country. The selection of the case studies considered the need to maintain the heterogeneity previously found as well as the need to compare similar organisations in Italy and Germany, so a union, a cooperative and a grass-roots organisation were selected in each country. The in-depth study

[7] "Youth and deficit of representation: The transformations of work and new social risks in Milan" (PRIN 2009) – Research Unit: Department of Sociology and Social Research – University of Milano Bicocca coordinated by prof. Enzo Mingione

included a) further in-depth interviews aimed at deepening the themes dealt with in the previous interview, and b) an ethnographic work focused mainly on public events promoted by the organisations. In some circumscribed cases the ethnography was extended to internal activities of the organisations such as member assemblies and board meetings.

All the interviews (those planned during the phases 2, 4 and 5), were transcribed and archived through Atlas-Ti **(phase 6)**, a scientific software for qualitative analysis. The same was done for the documents, fieldnotes and news collected. The archiving process considered and maintained the differences between types of documents and between national territories (see addendum). All the data archived were codified according to the key issues which emerged during the interviews, as well as according to the specific aims of the analysis focused on the sense-making process of the key members on the selected dimensions. Below is an overview of the macro-issues considered during the labelling of each part of the documents collected[8]:

*Table 3 - Macro issues (macro labels)*

| MACRO-ISSUE | NOTES |
|---|---|
| Employment and Industrial Relations | Information and evaluations relating to the state and the evolution of Employment and Industrial Relations |
| Labour | Evaluations on changing labour processes and the role played by the self-employed |
| Organisation | Information and evaluations relating to the organisation studied and competitors |
| Policymakers | Information and evaluations relating to policymakers: interaction with the relevant organisations, official positions, public declarations |
| Public institutions | Public declarations and legislative measures |
| Representation | Information on and evaluations of what representation means and what it should be |

[8] The macro issues are the main topics explored during the interviews, the ethnographies, the selection of the relevant documents and news. Each macro issue has been detailed before the beginning of the fieldwork and fine-tuned during the fieldwork in order to reach a stable grid of the relevant topics useful for the study of the organisations selected and their representation strategies.

| | |
|---|---|
| Specific issues | Information on and evaluations of specific issues such as health, public and private insurance, pensions, taxes |
| Workers | Information on and evaluations of the position and conditions of the self-employed in relation to the labour market and other workers. |

Each macro issue was detailed through specific codes according to all the relevant micro-dimensions which emerged. To give an example, the interviewee, coordinator of a professional association, explains how an individual can become a member. This part of the interview is labelled "Rule of access" under the macro-issue "Organisation". Similarly, if the interviewee expresses evaluations on competitors, this part of the interview is labelled "Evaluation of competitors" under the macro issue "Organisation". A complete list of the labels (and their related macro-issues) can be found in the addendum. Each label is relevant to understand how an organisation is structured, how it works, what are its strategies, how it relates to its stakeholders, as well as how the sense making process takes shape.

Each document (Primary document) inserted in Atlas-it preserves its name (the name given to the file) to which a progressive number is associated, e.g. *P63: Current coordinator of the Board of Professions, CGIL*. The progressive number and name of the primary document are always given after the quotation.

Once all the documents were archived and encoded, all the codes useful for the analysis were extracted.

The extraction of the encoded texts **(phase 7)** was planned considering two relevant aspects: 1) the possibility of grouping several codes belonging to the same family (macro issue) in order to fruitfully combine the existing data; and 2) a reasoned extraction based on the type of documents available (exploratory interviews, in-depth interviews, fieldnotes, news, official documents published by the organisations), and on the basis of the origin of the documents (Italian, German or the EU). This made it possible to order and explore the rich data collected through a segmentation process built in accordance with the previously planned path of analysis.

The analysis **(phase 8)** aimed first at understanding the dynamics entwined with the possible emergence of the strategic action field of self-employed workers' representation. In this sense, particular attention was paid to the emergence of new organisations and to the innovation

phase of existing ones. This allowed us to grasp the innovative elements which fostered a structural redefinition of the context including the parallel emergence of public debate on the same issue. The analysis then focused on some of the relevant structuring dimensions of the organisations: the shape, access rules and resources dedicated to fostering the structuring process of self-employed representation.

The following step in the analysis aimed at exploring the representation strategies primarily conceived as the set of attempts and activities proposed by the organisations studied. Afterwards, other important dimensions were considered: the external environment populated by competing and allied organisations, the evolving labour markets where the self-employed are more concentrated, the urban dimension with its possible influence (positive or negative) on the structuring of an offer of representation, the institutional environment and its role in the regulation process.

Through different sources such as in-depth interviews, documents and field notes it was possible to compare and cross-validate the data collected in order to strengthen their validity.

Another validation method consisted in sharing the public declarations of one interviewee with another, or the public documents of one organisation with another. Such sharing makes it possible to generate an extended reflection on the topics of the research, and is also useful for testing how much information or how many projects or ideas cross the boundaries of the organisation to reach others working in the same field. In many cases, the evidences show a limited detailed knowledge of the activities and projects implemented or being implemented by other organisations. In other words, it is evident that most of the energies of an organisation are used to develop projects and ideas, but only in circumscribed cases does an organisation look for a connection with other similar projects through a detailed analysis. This stimulates reflection on the reasons for this limited connection. In some cases it must be recognised that any attempt to build a network between similar projects requires resources and energies that are often lacking in organisations. In other cases, the existence of competitive dynamics prevents setting up a network, and is one of the reasons why the existence of similar projects does not automatically imply a sharing of efforts and strategies. Visibility, reputation, and authoritativeness are valuable capital to use when lobbying public institutions and clients. In many cases, therefore, networking and sharing ideas and projects can risk diminishing this capital. In other cases, the risk is necessary in order to obtain results. It is between these two poles that the representation match is played. On some occasions,

the sharing of information and perspectives promoted by other organisations has encouraged the process of collaboration between the organisations, helping to clarify the meanings of certain choices or declarations. In other cases, this sharing has stimulated evaluations and comments useful in recalibrating the statements collected by other interlocutors.

Indeed, an important aspect of the analysis concerned the need to weigh and fully understand the value of the statements collected. A precise evaluation always involves knowledge of the facts that goes beyond the simple collection of data whose validity must always be measured according to the objectives of the interlocutor.

In these cases, there is a strong need to cross-validate the sources and combine the classic instrument of the interview with other data collection methods such as that of ethnography. The establishment of a relationship of trust that can go beyond a circumscribed moment, as in the case of an interview, allows access to considerations and opinions which are less formal, more relevant and closer to the decision-making process of the organisations studied.

Finally, the use of various sources (documents, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, fieldnotes) make adoption of both an ethical and emic point of view possible. In other words, on one hand it was possible to evaluate the data collected considering and weighting them as objective elements; on the other hand, it was possible to explore the subjective perspective of the protagonists of this study. The quantity of the documents required long analytical work as well as a selection of the material to be quoted.

The selection process necessarily implies a certain degree of arbitrariness that influences the analysis and its narrative. It is therefore possible that a different selection process of the material could lead to partially different conclusions. However, a significant effort has been made to reduce the degree of arbitrariness in the selection. Therefore, the quotations given correspond to common criteria such as the authoritativeness of the source, the cross-checking of their declarations and the evaluation of their consistency with the actions undertaken by whoever made these declarations.

The analysis develops along the following relevant dimensions: a) origin of internal organisations or innovation b) forms, structures, access rules and resources c) representation strategies d) external environment composed by allies, competitors, and public institutions e) urban dimension. The analysis has considered the two different national contexts. The comparison has concerned both similar organisations and organisations that differ in their origins, structure, strategy and perspectives, operating in the same national territory. The analysis includes the

cross-country comparison focused on similar organisations (e.g., unions with unions, cooperatives with cooperatives etc.) in order to understand the reasons at the base of their positioning, choices, strategies.

Generally speaking, the analytical effort is aimed at studying the evolution of self-employed organisations through the interpretation of the sensemaking process of the key actors. At the same time, through the analysis of documents and field notes, the aim is to combine the assessments collected, with a broader spectrum of empirical evidences.

# 4 Fieldwork: from the mapping to the analysis

## 4.1 Introduction to the fieldwork

Addressing the issue of self-employed representation means considering the highly diversified and ever-changing landscape of the old and new organisations involved in this field. The focus on Independent Professionals (Rapelli, 2012) excludes a significant number of organisations, although the number and variety of those included remain high. For these reasons, a first mapping was necessary in order to define the boundaries of the study and to consider the existing varieties of organisations.

During the exploratory phase, a broad view was necessary in order to make a proper selection. Efforts were made to keep the focus on the important national and local organisations based in Milan and Berlin, the two metropolitan areas selected for the research. Likewise, the intention was to also include organisations showing evidence of growth in other areas in Germany and Italy. Lastly, the mapping also includes some emerging organisations or informal groups based mainly on the web and social networks and thus outside the physical limits of traditional representation processes.

The mapping was carried out via three main tools: in-depth interviews with experts (in some cases complemented by subsequent mail exchanges), consultation of previous researches, essays and books on the self-employed and their organisations, and analysis of the organisations' websites. The need to manage the complexity of the research context emerged at the very beginning of the mapping, and some of the main issues that arose right away are outlined below.

## 4.2 The mapping and selection process. How to deal with the various blurred boundaries of working arrangements, professions, and organisations

A first complexity is the variety of professions and professional conditions existing among I-Pros. The rapid growth of the tertiary sector, along with the continuous technological innovation and growing mobility of people generated rapid changes in labour markets, professional identities and the distribution of workers across national and international territories. The emergence of new professions and radical change in existing ones is reflected in the variety of names they take and in the process of aggregation of old and new professionals.

A recent report by Eurofound (Mandl et al., 2015) monitored the emerging trends of new employment forms through a mapping and subsequent analysis of several case studies. Nine broad new types of employment were identified and studied with the aim of understanding their effects on working conditions and the labour market. All nine - employee sharing, job sharing, interim management, casual work, ICT-based mobile work, voucher-based work, portfolio work, crowd employment, and collaborative employment[9] - are modifying standard jobs based on open-ended contracts and the traditional idea of self-employment, fostering trends towards flexibility which are mainly oriented to the contingent needs of the market and production system.

Similarly, a systematic review of the labels defining new and old professions would be necessary. This would require precise exploration of numerous productive sectors in order to understand how the old labels have changed, in which way the new generation of labels is redefining the perception of professions, and to what extent English is gradually colonising the professional jargon shaping a global professional imaginary. As an example of the latter, on a well-known Italian marketing and communication blog[10], a list of the most in-demand digital professions includes Data Scientist, IT Security Manager, Chief Technology Officer, Mobile Developer, Big Data Architect, Digital Copywriter, Community Manager, Digital PR, Digital Advertiser, E-Reputation Manager, SEO, SEM Specialist, and Social Media Marketing Manager. Along with the dichotomous division between employment and self-employment, the variety of labels aims to define a very fluid and overlapping area of professional conditions of non-standard work which is considered mainly autonomous (Eurofound, 2017). Consideration of this fluidity and overlapping is the first step to addressing the theme of self-employment representation.

[9] The definitions of the nine labels as well as a broad list of labels and related definitions referred to non-standard employment, self-employment and non standard work arrangements can be found in the addendum.

[10] Communication Village: https://www.communicationvillage.com. All the terms listed are in English in the original text.

The term Independent Professionals (I-Pros) was only recently introduced by Rapelli (2012) to indicate, according to the author, the most dynamic component of workers in the tertiary sector. I-Pros is therefore an analytical category and its added value can be traced back to a quantitative database, the European Labour Force Survey, through the selection of certain productive sectors (NACE Rev.2)[11] with a greater presence of Independent Professionals without employees. This selection allows us to consider a macro level (the European one) overcoming the national fences determined by the different legal definitions of self-employment, while at the same time, it focuses on a specific segment of self-employment. However, the merit of this analytical category is also its demerit: the focus on the self-employed without employees excludes consideration of many hybrid conditions. In many cases, I-Pros who hire one or more employees do not automatically become entrepreneurs because their professional life, in practice, does not change. This is the case of many start-ups in the early stages, of professionals who hire an employee for secretarial work and, more generally, of professionals who temporarily hire a worker to handle peak workloads. Similarly, rigorous use of this definition would prevent us from considering many professionals who work with non-standard contracts (e.g., mini-jobs in Germany, and collaboration contracts - *collaborazione occasionale* or *co.co.co.* - in Italy).

In this research, I-Pros was considered the reference term during the mapping phase and selection process of the organisations because, from a purely practical point of view, it was useful in identifying the organisations representing self-employed workers in the tertiary sector; it helped focus attention on those workers with middle-high skills or deal with specific professional sectors; and it made it possible to exclude, as a matter of principle, those focused exclusively on entrepreneurs. During the subsequent dialogue with the organisations, I-Pros was considered along with other main categories listed below.

The term I-Pros emerged in the scientific debate on the conditions of the self-employed in the tertiary sector. Rapelli's study was followed by European research coordinated by Patricia Leighton and Duncan Brown (Leighton & Brown, 2013) and promoted by EFIP, the European Forum of Independent Professionals. The two studies introduced a new perspective on self-employment, highlighting that in Europe, I-Pros grew even during the years of the crisis, despite having fewer rights and protections compared to other workers. Today, the term I-Pros is known and partially

[11] Information and communication (NACE key J); Financial and insurance activity (key K); Real estate activities (key L); Professional, scientific and technical activities (key M); Administrative and support services (key N); Education (key P); Human health and social work (key Q); Arts, entertainment and recreation (key R); Other service activities (key S).

used in scientific debate, sometimes in wider public debate and, obviously, among the organisations of the EFIP European Network. The target of many organisations considered in this study includes I-Pros (totally or partially), but the organisations call them by other names. “Freelancer” is one of the most common, especially with regard to the new generations of the self-employed in the media, cultural and creative industries, IT and consultancy to enterprises. It refers to someone who works on different projects with different companies instead of being a company employee. Freelancers are the target group of the Freelancers Union, the most important and visible US union of self-employed workers. In the UK and USA, they are considered a specific and recognised part of the workforce, but the word “freelancer” always requires further explanation because it lacks certain boundaries. It is not formally confined to any sector or professional area, and is a legal concept neither in Europe, nor in the UK (Kitching & Smallbone, 2008)[12] where the term was created, nor is it considered in statistics - the European Labour Force Survey only distinguishes between the self-employed with employees and without employees (own-account workers). Despite this, the term freelancer appears in several studies (Armano and Murgia 2017; Avdikos and Kalogeresis 2016; Burke 2012; Ryans and Gage 2015; Heckscher and Carré 2006). Similarly, the term “self-employed” is too broad, because it includes all sectors and professional areas and does not distinguish between manual and knowledge work, but at least it makes it possible to differentiate between self-employed workers with or without employees in order to separate entrepreneurs from freelancers who usually work alone.

In order to overcome the multiplicity of labels during the research activities, I chose to introduce the interviews with a short definition of I-Pros. After that, I left the interviewees free to adopt the terms they use most frequently. At the same time, I kept my focus on self-employed workers of the tertiary sector with medium-high skills, excluding pure entrepreneurs.

Finally, it was necessary to address the variety of organisations encountered during the mapping and the selection phase. I adopted the following classification, which was based on a previous

[12] According to Kitching & Smallbone (2008) “Freelance work is not a legal concept. Rather, the term is a customary one used by workers, end-users of labour services and other organisations in a range of work settings. […] Conventionally, freelance workers are skilled professional workers who are neither employers nor employees, supplying labour on a temporary basis under a contract for services for a fee to a range of business clients. Each of the criteria embedded in this conventional definition are examined: worker in/dependence; skill/occupation; nature of the client base; number of client relationships; and duration of client relationships. It is, of course, possible that individuals might define themselves as freelance independently of these criteria.”

classification proposed within the European project I-WIRE[13]. Important changes were made in order to fine-tune the classification of all the organisations found:

- *Trade Unions*
- *Employer Associations*
- *Professional Bodies*[14]
- *Associations*
- *Quasi-Unions*
- *Umbrella Associations*
- *Informal groups*
- *Movements & coalitions*
- *Cooperatives*
- *Coworking spaces*

Some of the categories are quite familiar and require no detailed explanation. **Trade Unions**, **Employer Associations** and **Professional Bodies** are recognised players of social dialogue. They have important roles and visibility at national and international level through their umbrella associations and play an important role in the field of self-employed representation, despite being strongly contested by the new organisations. Similarly, **associations** have a formal hierarchy, high visibility in the reference professional context and strong ties with institutional and political levels. Their role is important because they are often focused on specific productive sectors and in many cases reproduce corporative approaches focused on sectorial interests. In other cases, some associations play a different role because they were set up to meet the new needs of young professionals who were poorly represented by the old and well-established associations. For some other categories listed above, a brief comment is required on how and why they were considered in this study.

According to Heckscher and Carré, focused on the evolution of self-employed representation in the US, **quasi-unions** are new organisations and movements created in order "to fill the gaps in the system of representation" (Heckscher and Carré 2006, p.605). The aggregation process includes temporary coalitions which can act in a coordinated strategic way. Quasi-unions generally emerge

[13]The I-WIRE project was aimed at studying the conditions of the new autonomous workers in the advanced tertiary sector in Europe and their collective representation. The project was funded by the European Commission (Apr. 2016-March 2018; http://www.i-wire.eu/projects/)

[14] IT: Ordine professionale/DE: Berufskammer

where Trade Unions are absent or ineffective, in order to support workers' voices (*Ibid*, p. 606) and improve their rights and working conditions. They are quite popular among low-skilled workers (above all, immigrants) and among white-collar and knowledge workers working mainly in the service sector. There are other distinctive traits which distinguish quasi-unions from traditional ones: they are focused on unrepresented workers, especially those excluded from collective bargaining; they are frequently based on weak hierarchical structures; and the decision process is mainly focused on peer-to-peer discussion. In addition, their membership is based on weak ties: it is foreseen but not imposed, their connection with the organisations is frequently and strongly mediated by the web and social networks, and the mobilisation process is frequently web-based. For these reasons, the "followers" play a central role in the quasi-union's reputation. In the same way, online reputation and visibility become a more and more important tool in legitimising lobbying.

**Umbrella organisations**, considered in both the mapping and the following phases, are the highest level of the formal structure and quite common among a large number of organisations (trade unions, associations, employer associations, professional bodies). In addition, in many cases, they are where the specific interests of single organisations are mediated and re-composed in a more general framework. In some cases, the focus on umbrella organisations allowed the attention to be focused downstream of the summarising process instead of on the specific, sectorial and often corporative positions of the members. Moreover, umbrella organisations play an important role in lobbying, strongly influencing the decision-making process of policy makers at national and transnational level. Due to their highly hierarchical structure, which also involves a clear division of tasks, they are the natural tool for lobbying at a European level and the privileged speaker for other cross-national organisations.

During the mapping, some important **informal groups** were found among professional groups in an early aggregation stage. They have no legal status because either they are still focused on defining the group identity or they refuse to adopt a legal status (that is the case of the more politically engaged groups); informality does not mean limited efficacy or visibility. Informal groups often share important traits with quasi-unions and, in many cases, can be considered like them. Despite that, I chose to distinguish between quasi-unions and informal groups in order to recognise different levels in their structuration process and, in some cases, significant differences in relation to strategies and goals. Some informal groups are mainly oriented towards networking and community business, which are also important in relation to the representation

process, but not automatically if networking and community businesses are merely oriented to giving answers to the market without the explicit aim of challenging unequal power relationships.

Moreover, there are limited but interesting examples of **movements** and **coalitions** focused on the advanced tertiary sector. These are wide networks of different groups and individuals, oriented mainly to giving voice to the heterogeneous world of the self-employed, in some cases with a strong political engagement oriented towards a radical structural change of the productive system, as is the case of the Platform Cooperativism Movement (Scholz, 2016).

The last two categories considered here are cooperatives and coworking spaces. The cooperative movement has an age-old history throughout Europe, and played a strong and recognised role in empowering workers during industrialisation. Nowadays, it is particularly the **cooperatives** in the service sector that have been playing a strong and purely economic role in labour markets (especially in Italy), and are thus ambiguous in relation to their democratic structure, which is aimed at fostering equity, participation and transparency among members. They act as enterprises in the subcontracting chain, playing a strategic role in providing a low-cost workforce to public and private entities. Despite that, there are also recent and contrasting trends towards the rediscovery of the founding values of cooperativism and mutualism as an alternative to the logics of capitalistic exploitation. There are several examples of freelancers' cooperatives, networks of cooperatives, and mutual funds recently created with these purposes all over Europe: Mediapart[15] and Bigre![16] in France, Broonfonds[17] in Holland, and SMart[18] (considered in this study) in Belgium, France, Spain, Sweden, Hungary, Austria, Netherlands, Germany and Italy.

Finally, **coworking spaces** have been seen as strategic places for the circulation of information, aggregation and, in principle, for the creation of new groups and representative organisations. During the enhancement of the study, this hypothesis was significantly revised towards the idea that, excluding some significant exceptions, coworking spaces are a social *dispositif* (Agamben, 2006; Foucault, 1975) mainly oriented to business; they are often neutral sites where the circulation

[15] Mediapart is a cooperative of journalist funded by Edwy Plenel in 2008: https://www.mediapart.fr/studio

[16] Bigre! Is a network of ten cooperatives dealing with a broad number and types of freelancers. It was created in 2014: https://www.bigre.coop/

[17] Broodfonds is a mutual health fund created in 2006 for Dutch freelancers, not covered by the national health system: http://www.broodfonds.nl/

[18] SMart is a Belgian Foundation and a European network of cooperatives created in 1998 that represents a wide range of freelancers (artists, creatives, trainers, riders, consultants): http://smart-eu.org/

of information on freelancer's organisations is provided as long as it does not interfere with the activities of the business. Nevertheless, significant exceptions were found.

### 4.2.1 The mapping phase

The mapping work was necessary to understand the extent and variety of the set of organisations focused on the self-employed. It started from the analysis of academic and non-academic texts on the topic of self-employment representation; a preliminary approach to define a temporary starting framework. It then continued with extensive online research on Italian and German organisations. During this exploratory phase, some important elements emerged. First, that there is a variety of organisations in terms of objectives, structures, resources and visions. Second, the online overview made it possible to identify national organisations and those acting at a regional or local level. Third, it revealed that the issue of self-employment is tackled from different angles and that the organisations select sub-targets which are often a small portion of the entire national population of self-employed workers. The targets of the organisations result from their approach to self-employment: some are oriented towards specific professional sectors or professions; others towards a broader overview of productive areas (tertiary, or advanced tertiary). In addition, each organisation has its specific interpretation framework in relation to their reference self-employed (high-/low-skilled self-employed, entrepreneur, start-ups founders, professionals, freelancers, etc.). At the same time, each builds specific images of the self-employed they wish to represent (precarious, innovators, freelancers, or neo-proletariat).

During the mapping, a plurality of visions and objectives emerged from the organisations. In many cases they are partly complementary in that they are oriented to specific productive sectors and different self-employed. In some cases, however, there is a partial overlap of visions and objectives. These points of intersection are at the same time a space for potential constructive dialogue aimed at addressing common efforts and a space for competition: at stake is representativeness (even considering the significant changes the term has undergone with respect to its classic meaning). Representativeness remains a central element for negotiating and exercising strong lobbying, but is interpreted differently by different organisations. What does an organisation do to achieve adequate and sufficient representativeness? Which choices does an organisation makes to promote its ideas and interpretations? This is an extremely complex subject if we consider the range of choices made by the organisations mapped. This variety of choices is due to a phase of strong

experimentation typical of an emerging field, such as that of self-employed representation. At the same time, the variety of actions planned by the organisations challenges the classic idea of representativeness based mainly on territorial coverage and membership. In many cases, the new organisations override these two factors, especially at the beginning of their existence, in order to act and build their representativeness through the web and social networks. The reputation that they build via these channels becomes a key factor in access to the traditional media.

These and other topics will be dealt with extensively in the following chapters. During the mapping phase over a hundred organisations were considered in each country (see Addendum). The mapping was focused mainly on organisations oriented towards the high-skilled self-employed in the service sector, including liberal professionals with professional bodies and non-regulated professions. Despite that, some of the organisations considered (e.g., trade unions) are not exclusively focused on the self-employed and include both high- and low-skilled self-employed; while other organisations include the solo self-employed, self-employed with dependants and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, different types of organisations were considered, from informal groups to umbrella associations and coalitions. In this respect, and in order to explore the blurred boundaries between corporative and inclusive representation, the mapping was not limited to organisations with a traditional offer of representation oriented toward rights protection but also included those oriented mainly to fostering professional careers and the business community. The information collected during this phase concerned the name of the organisation, its size and area covered, a short description, its target population and sector, contacts and website, foundation year, and contact person. In the next sub-section, the selection criteria and organisations selected are presented.

### 4.2.2 Selection process: general criteria and selected organisations

The selection process considered a series of criteria that could guarantee the relevance and significance of the study. First of all, an assessment was made in relation to the **territorial coverage** of the organisations. National, regional and local organisations were selected, provided they carried out significant activities in Milan and Berlin, the metropolitan areas considered in the study. Some important exceptions were made: the selection includes organisations without a physical headquarters but which carry out an important part of their activities on the web, and organisations based in other cities but with active members in Milan or Berlin. Secondly, although

the online exploration was mainly oriented towards **organisations focused on the self-employed without a professional body**, some organisations also focusing on the liberal professions (e.g., architects, lawyers, engineers, or psychologists) were considered in order to test their links with the general debate on self-employment as well as their connections with the other organisations studied.

This choice was motivated by the fact that the self-employed in the liberal professions and the self-employed without a professional order have common needs and fragilities, so in principle, they could have elements in common and, in some cases, they do. Moreover, during the mapping phase it emerged that, especially in the case of Italy, the organisations of liberal professions are now extending their offer of representation to non-regulated professions, with a similar trend also occurring in the opposite direction. Third, an **evaluation of the activities carried out** was made in order to consider the most active organisations. Finally, the selection process considered the need **to balance the variety within the two territories studied**, in order to comply with the comparative purpose. The possibility of using previous, albeit partial mappings, facilitated the selection process, while the online exploration allowed us to make targeted although not exhaustive assessments. Some communication opacities required further investigation to better evaluate the relevance, purposes and intensity of the activity of some of the organisations.

The Italian and German organisations selected for in-depth study through interviews, document analysis, and ethnography are given in the two tables below.

*Key*

| |
|---|
| Organisation studied through semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, document analysis, ethnography |
| Organisation studied through semi-structured interview, document analysis |
| Organisation studied through document analysis |

*Table 4 - Italian organisations selected*

| ORGANISATION | TYPE | SECTOR & TARGET | YEAR FOUNDED | SHORT DESCRIPTION AND DIMENSION (LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Confprofessioni** | Umbrella association | Liberal professions; liberal professionals | 1966 | Brings together 20 organisations distributed over five different areas:<br>**Economics and Labour** (Chartered accountants and accounting experts, labour consultants, auditors);<br>**Law and Justice** (Lawyers, Notaries);<br>**Environment and Territory** (Engineers, Architects, Agronomists, Geologists, Technicians);<br>**Health** (General Practitioners, Dentists, Vets, Psychologists, Paediatricians); and<br>**V Area** (Professionals and Artists, Archaeologists).<br>**NATIONAL** |
| **ANASF - Associazione Nazionale Consulenti Finanziari** | Association | Financial Sector; financial planners | 1977 | Trade association representing exclusively financial promoters, with over 12,000 members. Founded 1977 with the main objective of obtaining recognition and protection of the profession through creation of the register, later established by law n. 1/1991**. NATIONAL** |
| **ADCI Art Director Club Italiano** | Association | Communication; professionals | 1985 | Association bringing together professionals and experts in the "Communication" field, dedicated to recognising and supporting the value of creativity as a fundamental element and the competitive advantage of institutional social and business communication. **NATIONAL** |
| **CGIL-Agenquadri** | Trade Union | Cross sector; professionals | 1994 | Professional association affiliated to CGIL, representing professional and highly professional workers. **NATIONAL** |
| **Assoconsulenza** | Professional Association | Financial Sector; financial planners | 1996 | Association of financial consultants specialised in online trading investments. **NATIONAL** |
| **CGIL - NIDIL** | Trade Union | Cross sector; non-standard workers | 1998 | Trade union structure of the CGIL representing temporary and atypical workers. The NidiL's organisation of is on two levels, national and territorial. **NATIONAL** |
| **CoLAP - Coordinamento Libere Associazioni Professionali** | Umbrella association | Cross sector; non-regulated professions | 1998 | Non-profit association bringing together over 200 free professional associations. Its main goal is to implement and support the dual system of professions in Italy.<br>**NATIONAL** |
| **San Precario** | Movement | Cross sector precarious work; precarious workers | 2004 | Grass-roots movement focused on precarisation processes and free work. Promoters of the Euro Mayday parade. **NATIONAL** |
| **ACTA** | Quasi-union | Advanced tertiary sector | 2004 | Freelance Association focused on the valorisation of freelance work, fair and inclusive welfare, fair taxation. The first freelance association set up in Italy. **NATIONAL** |
| **UGCdL - Unione Giovani Consulenti del Lavoro** | Association | Work advisory; Work advisors | 2005 | Professional Association of young labour consultants. It aims at promoting the professional, intellectual and social figure of the young Labour Consultant. **NATIONAL** |
| **GPL - Giovani Psicologi Lombardi** | Association | Psychology; psychologists | 2006 | Professional association of young psychologists set up to foster networking among young professionals and their participation in professional policy. **REGIONAL** |
| **Assofinance** | Association | Financial Sector; financial professionals | 2007 | Association of independent financial advisors set up to support the professional activity of independent financial advisors: lobbying and promotion. **NATIONAL** |
| **Unbreakfast** | Association | Cross sectors; Managers | 2007 | Set up to support managers, middle managers and high professionals who have temporarily suspended their work activities. It helps them find new job while maintaining a network of interpersonal relationships.<br>**LOCAL** |

| ORGANISATION | TYPE | SECTOR & TARGET | YEAR FOUNDED | SHORT DESCRIPTION AND DIMENSION (LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Re.Re.Pre** | Informal group | Publishing sector; editors and other professionals | 2008 | Set up to meet the needs of the precarious workers in the world of publishing, in particular editors and iconographic researchers, or leading figures in the process of creating a book. The aim is to give voice to the growing number of precarious workers in the publishing houses or working as subcontractors in publishing studios. (**NATIONAL – network of independent local nodes**) |
| **Impact Hub Milan** | Coworking | Cross-sector; freelancers | 2009 | Part of Impact Hub, an international network of physical spaces where entrepreneurs, creative people and professionals can access resources, be inspired by the work of others, have innovative ideas, develop useful relationships and identify market opportunities. The first centre in Italy dedicated to innovation, social entrepreneurship and those who promote them. **LOCAL** |
| **CGIL – Consulta delle Professioni (Board of professions)** | Trade Union | Cross sector; professionals | 2009 | Permanent open board promoted by the CGIL, the main Italian trade union, where professional associations and informal groups discuss issues of self-employment. **NATIONAL** |
| **FELSA-CISL** | Trade Union | Traditional self-employment (e.g., retail, newsagents, travelling shows) | 2009 | Category of the trade union CISL dedicated to temporary workers, self-employed and atypical workers. The idea to set up vIVAce!, an online community for freelance workers, started from FELSA trade unionists. **NATIONAL** |
| **CRESCO - Coordinamento delle REaltà della SCena COntemporanea italiana** | Umbrella association | Artists | 2010 | Network of production companies, cinemas, theatres, residences, festivals, exhibitions, artists, critics, live entertainment workers operating nationwide. Some CRESCO members were involved in the start-up phase of SMart.it. **NATIONAL** |
| **MGA - Mobilitazione Generale degli Avvocati** | Association | Lawyers | 2011 | Lawyers' union set up to defend, above all, the weakest groups of legal workers, from the census selection that the legal institutions are indirectly supporting by exploiting the extremely serious crisis suffered by lawyers in recent years. **NATIONAL** |
| **IVA6partita** | Association | Architects and Engineers; self employed | 2011 | Grass-roots group of architects and engineers later becoming an association. Its main focus are the new generations of architects and engineers marginalised by the increasing competition and penalised by the professional bodies. **NATIONAL** |

| ORGANISATION | TYPE | SECTOR & TARGET | YEAR FOUNDED | SHORT DESCRIPTION AND DIMENSION (LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **UIL-TuCS – Networkers** | Trade Union | IT and crowd-workers | 2012 | Entirely online trade union consulting platform aimed at ICT professionals and workers. The project was set up within the national UILTuCS, the category of the UIL dealing with union representation in the tertiary sector. The aim is to support these professionals in the labour market with a series of information and consulting services. **NATIONAL** |
| **CNA professioni** | Umbrella association | Cross sector; professionals | 2012 | Part of the CNA system of overall representation of the affiliated Professional Associations and associated professionals. It aims to protect the interests of non-regulated professionals who fall within the scope of the definition of Law 4/2013. **NATIONAL** |
| **CLAP** | Quasi-union | Non-standard work; precarious self-employed | 2013 | CLAP, the Chambers of Independent and Precarious Labour, were set up by bottom-up groups in different areas of Rome. CLAP's primary goals are to i) organise or favour self-organisation of non-organised people, free work (trainers and trainees), the unemployed, and the self-employed on low incomes and combat insecure and intermittent work without rights; ii) win rights and welfare, starting with a basic income; iii) promote solidarity and new forms of mutualism. **NATIONAL** |
| **Confassociazioni** | Umbrella association | Cross sector; Self-employed, Entrepreneurs | 2013 | Confederation of Professional Associations of non-regulated professions in Italy and Europe. It aims to protect and promote the associative system of the professions, enhancing its role in terms of equal opportunities in the Italian constitutional, legislative, economic and social system and the corresponding European contexts. **NATIONAL** |
| **SMART-IT** | Cooperative | Cross sector; Artists and freelancers | 2014 | Cooperative working with artists and creative professionals, and part of the network of cooperatives active in nine European countries, set up with the support of SMart Belgium. **NATIONAL** |
| **Coalizione 27 Febbraio** | Coalition | Cross sector | 2015 | Coalition of different organisations focused on self-employment, precarious work. The organisation's part of the coalition refers to the analyses developed in the book "Il Quinto Stato" by R. Ciccarelli and G. Allegri. **NATIONAL** |
| **GASP** | Informal group | Cross sector | 2016 | Self-organised group of the self-employed, researchers and journalists interested in organising the self-employed, freelancers, PhD students and researchers living in precarious conditions. **REGIONAL (North west)** |
| **CISL-VIVACE** | Trade Union | Cross sector; Freelancers | 2016 | On-line community of freelancers promoted by the second biggest Italian trade union. Members have access to trade union services, but do not automatically become union members. **NATIONAL** |
| **PD - Partito Democratico** | Political Party | Cross sector; self-employed | 2007 | Centre-left Italian political party founded October 2007. **NATIONAL** |

*Table 5 - German organisations selected*

| ORGANISATION | TYPE OF ORGANISATION | SECTOR & TARGET | FOUNDATION YEAR | SHORT DESCRIPTION AND DIMENSION (LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DGB (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) BEZIRK BERLIN-BRANDENBURG** | 2nd level Trade Union | Cross sector | 1949 | DGB (German Trade Union Confederation) is the umbrella organisation for 8 German trade unions:<br>1) IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt (IG BAU) - Industrial Union Construction, Agriculture, Environment;<br>2) IG Bergbau, Chemie, Energie (IG BCE) - Industrial Union Mining, Chemicals, Energy;<br>3) Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW) - Union for Education and Science;<br>4) IG Metall - Industrial Union for Metalworkers;<br>5) Gewerkschaft Nahrung-Genuss-Gaststätten (NGG) - Union for Food, Beverages, and Catering;<br>6) Gewerkschaft der Polizei (GdP) - Police Union;<br>7) Eisenbahn- und Verkehrsgewerkschaft (EVG) - Railway and Transport Union; and<br>8) Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (Ver.di) - United Services Union. **NATIONAL** |
| DJU Deutsche Journalistinnen- und Journalisten-Union (part of Ver.di) | Trade Union | Journalism | 1951 | DJU (The German Journalists Union) is part of the Media Section of the United Services Union (Ver.di). Of the nearly 22,000 members in Germany, over two-thirds are freelance journalists. It first belonged to IG Druck und Papier, founded in 1948, then from 1989 to IG Medien, which merged with other unions in 2000 to form the United Nations Trade Union. DJU is a member of the International Journalists Federation (IJF). **NATIONAL** |
| Literaturübersetzer - VdÜ | Association | Publishing | 1954 | Professional association of literary translators, and member of the Association of German Writers (VS) since 1974 as a national section of translators. It represents the interests of literary translators. It has 1,263 members (Spring 2018).<br>**NATIONAL** |
| **BDÜ - Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer e.V.** | Association | Professional interpretation and translation | 1955 | Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators representing about 80% of all translators and interpreters belonging to a professional association in Germany, and a point of contact for trade, industry, policymaking and education since 1955. It has 7,500 members (translators and interpreters). **NATIONAL** |
| WeiberWirtschaft | Subsidiary organisation: co-operative | Cross sector; Female self-employment | 1987 | With around 1,700 members, one of Europe's largest women's cooperatives focused on female owners and entrepreneurs. In Berlin-Mitte.<br>**NATIONAL** |

| ORGANISATION | TYPE OF ORGANISATION | SECTOR & TARGET | FOUNDATION YEAR | SHORT DESCRIPTION AND DIMENSION (LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I.S.I. e.V. Initiative Selbständiger Immigrantinnen | Association | Cross sector | 1990 | Non-profit association of international women supporting adult immigrant women of different nationalities and educational backgrounds who wish to create their own jobs and become economically independent. It offers start-up courses, compact seminars, events and the opportunity to network. **LOCAL** |
| **Initiative Urheberrecht** | Umbrella association | Authors | 2000 | Brings together over 35 associations and trade unions representing around 140,000 authors and performers. **NATIONAL** |
| **Verband der Freien Lektorinnen und Lektoren (VFLL)** | Association | Translation | 2000 | Professional association for freelance copy editors in German-speaking countries. It looks after the professional interests of its 880 members, who include editors and proof-readers. **NATIONAL** |
| **Ver.di - Selbstständige** | Trade Union | Cross sector | 2000 | Union with around 30,000 members representing solo self-employed in Ver.di. It supports a collective idea of self-employment as well as sustainable and affordable social protection measures for the self-employed. **NATIONAL** |
| Gründerinnenzentrale | Project/Association | Cross sector; Female self-employment | 2006 | Project of the Gründerinnenzentrale eV, funded by the European Social Fund and Berlin Senate Department for Health, Nursing and Gender Equality. It provides orientation, information and networking for women who wish to become self-employed. **LOCAL** |
| Tanterenate | Coworking | Cross sector | 2008 | Coworking space in Berlin-Kreuzberg with individual workplaces in a 230m$^2$ area. LOCAL |
| Betahaus | Coworking | Cross sector | 2009 | Coworking space and community for people who wish to work on their own projects. Part of a global coworking network which includes cities such as Barcelona, Sofia, and Hamburg. LOCAL |
| Supermarkt | Coworking/node of movement | Digital art/design | 2010 | Independent project space in Berlin-Kreuzberg where projects, workshops and conferences on digital culture and alternative economies are organised. **LOCAL** |

| ORGANISATION | TYPE OF ORGANISATION | SECTOR & TARGET | FOUNDATION YEAR | SHORT DESCRIPTION AND DIMENSION (LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| VGSD - Verband der Gründer und Selbständigen e.V. | Quasi-union | Advanced tertiary sector | 2012 | Set up to give founders and self-employed an independent voice. It aims to represent the interests of all self-employed, regardless of industry and income level. It has 3,236 club members and 13,824 community members. **NATIONAL** |
| SMART-DE | Association → cooperative | Artistic/cultural | 2013 | Cooperative working with artists and musicians. Part of the European network of cooperatives active in nine European countries, created with the support of SMart Belgium. **NATIONAL** |
| Welance | Coworking & professional group | Web design & communication/ cross sector | 2014 | Coworking for highly specialised freelancers focused on realising sophisticated and innovative online-projects. LOCAL |
| IG-Metall/Fair Crowd Work | Trade Union | Cross sector/crowd-workers | 2016 | Special project collecting information on crowd work, app-based work, and other "platform-based work" from the perspective of workers and unions. Uniquely, the site offers ratings of working conditions on different online labour platforms based on surveys with workers. Joint project of IG Metall (the German Metalworkers' Union), the Austrian Chamber of Labour, Austrian Trade Union Confederation, and Swedish white-collar union Unionen, in association with research and development partners Encountering Tech and M&L Communication Marketing. **NATIONAL** |
| | | | | |
| **Architektenkammer Berlin** | Professional Chamber | Architecture | 1985 | Public corporation and self-governing body of over 8,700 members from the fields of interior design, architecture, urban planning, and landscape architecture. It maintains the register of architects and city planners and protects professional qualifications. A large part of the activitiy is carried out by volunteer members organised in various committees. **LOCAL** |
| CDU - Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands | Political Party | Cross sector | 1949 | Political Party. Christian Democratic Union of Germany. **NATIONAL** |
| CSU - Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern | Political Party | Cross sector | 1949 | Political Party. Christian Social Union in Bavaria. **REGIONAL** |
| BÜNDNIS 90 / DIE GRÜNEN | Political Party | Cross sector | 1980 | Political party formed from the merger of the German Green Party (West Germany in 1980 + East Greens in 1990) and Alliance 90 (founded 1989–1990 in the GDR) in 1993. **NATIONAL** |
| DIE LINK | Political Party | Cross sector | 2007 | Democratic socialist party, considered left-wing. Created by the merger of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG). **NATIONAL** |

With this selection, it was possible to maintain the wide approach required to investigate whether and how the emerging field of representation of self-employment has been structured in Italy and Germany. Moreover, the differentiation of the investigation tools made it possible to collect a plurality of information, the richness of which can only be partially reported in this work. It is foreseen that the collected material will be subject to further analysis in the future.

## 4.3 The creation of new groups dedicated to independent and non-standard professionals

In accordance with the field theory approach, a number of different organisations (as regards their origins, structures, aims, and strategies) involved in self-employment and I-Pros representations was analysed and compared in order to understand possible trends in the evolution of that field. The radical change in the productive system, with the strong growth of the service sector all over Europe, along with the digital revolution, has affected the traditional working environments of employees and the self-employed. The traditional organisations involved in workers' representation had to deal with all these radical and rapid changes in order to avoid becoming obsolete. We can therefore consider that changes within an organisation are continuous processes of adaptation to the changing environment, although continuous does not mean gradual or progressive. Radical changes in society as a whole, and in the models, conditions, and organisation of work in particular, have been produced by the shift from a productive system based mainly on material goods to a productive system whose fundamental assets are oriented towards immateriality (Gorz, 1988, 2003), knowledge (Cortada, 1998; Drucker, 1998; Foray & Lundvall, 1998; Joseph, 2005), information (Castells, 1993), and networks, rather than towards hierarchy (Castells, 2004, 2007).

The traditional workers' organisations and, more generally, all those involved in workers' representation, have relied on the skills and the organisational and cultural patterns built on the model of the industrial society. Even when they have had to deal with self-employment, they have maintained a framework built on the same model. When the transition was made from the industrial production system to a heavily organised economy based on the control, organisation and value-making of information, the so-called "cognitive capitalism" (Moulier Boutang, 2011; Vercellone, 2007), workers' organisations had to deal with a new and unknown generation of workers without having the proper knowledge, tools or strategies. The shift from industry to services, associated with the growth of non-standard forms of employment, the spreading of small workplaces and new forms of employment relationships are some of the trends which affected the traditional system of

industrial relations and the traditional set-up of professional environments. Trade Unions and traditional associations have both progressively lost their reference points in relation to a growing workforce with different needs, different cultural and political references, and different expectations. The crisis of European trade unions has been noted in numerous studies (Baccaro, Hamann, & Turner, 2003; Baccaro & Pulignano, 1999; Bernaciak, Gumbrell-Mccormick, & Hyman, 2014; A. Martin, Ross, & Baccaro, 1999; Waddington, 2005). Similarly, professional organisations have often dealt with change by focusing their efforts on protecting the insiders rather than addressing the much more complex problems of the new generations of professionals. The same trends can be found in the redefinition of the European welfare systems (Ferrera, 2007). Focusing our attention on non-standard work, we consider outsiders a heterogeneous set of workers who, starting in the 1990s but even more so in this century, have faced a much less stable job market than in the past. Moreover, they have to face job markets increasingly oriented towards the flexibility and unpredictability of professional careers, fast changes and innovation, and global competition less and less constrained by physical barriers and governed by the digital economy (Langley & Leyshon, 2016; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2016) and digital platforms (Fabo & Drahokoupil, 2016; Huws, 2016; Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Srnicek, 2016; van Doorn, 2017). Since the 1990s, a growing number of non-standard workers, and among them a significant number of self-employed workers, especially in the service sector, have no stable or effective representatives within the Trade Unions or traditional associations. The reaction of these organisations to the profound economic and social changes had still to start or was in the early stages. Similarly, confused and uncoordinated bottom-up experimentations generated genuine upheaval leading to the emergence of new problems and new needs of workers. That was the starting point for the definition of new representation frameworks and for the innovation of representation processes.

In the following section, the reasons behind the setting up of new organisations involved in the representation of self-employed workers will be explored. In the same way, the ideas and reasons of the existing organisations will be analysed in order to understand why and how they opted for organisational change. The analysis will not concern, except indirectly, the role of the professional bodies. The latter are certainly one of the players that influence the development of self-employment representation, but their role mainly concerns the regulatory function, which is closely linked to an institutional mandate. We thus decided to prioritise the other organisations that have contributed more directly to structuring the field of self-employed representation.

### 4.3.1 Italy: the role of personal biographies and political engagement in new organisations and in organisational change

There are innumerable social, economic and political factors which have favoured the emergence of new organisations and fostered significant organisational change in the existing ones. Retrospectively, we can reconstruct an orderly and coherent background scenario where macro factors can at least partly explain the evolution of the scenario. The complexity of social phenomena, however, rarely allows us to identify clear and coherent causal relationships. That is why it is worth investigating the beginning or changes of an organisation adopting the point of view of the members who actively contributed to those processes. This way it is possible to discover the strategic role of the agency of individuals in creating new aggregations and redefining the cognitive and cultural frameworks of the existing ones. The shift from a macroscopic viewpoint to a subjective and partial point of view implies that we have to leave the omniscient position of the demiurge in favour of the subjective, partial, and sometimes apparently inconsistent actions and thoughts which are the material ground of the social processes (Bourdieu, 1977).

Individual initiative, coupled with personal skills and personal biographies, is at the basis of the organisational change. Indeed, if external challenges were not actively taken up early by some individuals within the organisation, the change process would be even slower or, in some cases, aborted. It is not a matter of following the change, rather that of bringing about in the organisation a breakthrough which is both strong enough to start a change process and can be tolerated by the organisational structure. There are many reasons for resistance to innovation: cultural, political and organisational orientation, resource allocation, reorganisation of recognised competencies and roles, or fear of the unknown. Within structured organisations, therefore, we can note that the division between incumbents and challengers is reproduced among their members. Despite that, the confrontation process happens in a context governed by rules which, in some cases, can slowly orient innovative demands, transforming them from potential destructive threats into opportunities.

This is the case of the biggest Italian trade union, CGIL[19]. The innovative demands on self-employment arise from members with previous significant roles in the trade union (especially in NIDIL[20] and AGENQUADRI[21]), with a consolidated reputation and visibility but, at the same time some heterodoxic traits. This is the case of the founder of the Board of Professions, a national and regional open board within the CGIL where associations, umbrella associations, activists and trade unions can discuss, share ideas and plan lobbying strategies.

> *Davide Imola certainly had his special personal history and he was able to bring it into the Board of Professions. He came from NIDIL, which had its own network within the union, but its positions were not shared by everyone in the union. At the beginning, he was rather ostracised; many federations within the CGIL saw the Board of Professions as a place where third parties entered in the trade union debate, even though they were not part of it. Years later, we can say that the debate within the Board of Professions was also useful within the union.* ***(P63: Current coordinator of the Board of Professions, CGIL)***

The strong involvement of the founder created the preconditions for a change in the union culture. This is an important and non-isolated example that highlights how, in a large organisation, individual agency can generate calibrated shocks that trigger long-term changes. The troubled start is confirmed by both the founder and one of the colleagues who from the beginning followed the internal debate which led to the Board of Professions being set up.

> *As often happens, the greatest difficulties were inside the trade union. It was not easy to accept such an innovative act, the Board of Professions, which included in the discussion external associations and groups of professionals in order to plan common policies and actions. It was not easy to accept such a change for those who thought they would manage the representation of all work regardless of our capacity to exert real representativeness. In over a hundred years of our organisation's history, this was the first time that this happened. Negative reactions were inevitable, especially from those who were not correctly focused on the new conditions of the self-employed.* **(P14: founder of the Board of Professions, CGIL)**

In various situations where it was possible to follow the debate within the union, as well as in official statements and interviews, similar stories emerged confirming the ability of the founder of the Boarding of Professions in mediating and, at the same time, supporting the innovative demands of its proposal.

> *It is quite common that organisational dynamics are influenced also by individuals. If there had not been a person like Davide Imola in the national headquarters, all the issues relating to freelancers and*

[19] Italian General Confederation of Labour (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro)
[20] CGIL-NIDIL (*Nuove Identità di Lavoro*): the category within the largest Italian union in charge of non-standard workers included, formally, the self-employed.
[21] AGENQUADRI (Associazione Generale Quadri Professionisti e Alte Professionalità): association affiliated to CGIL, focused on highly skilled professionals.

> *the history of the Board of Professions would have been even more complicated. In the end, organisations are also made by individuals with their own flaws and virtues. This is a rather obvious fact in unions and political history.* **(P118: President of Agenquadri-CGIL; June 2017)**

In a very similar way, the process of organisational change that took place in the second largest Italian trade union, CISL[22], started from the initiative of one its officials whose experience in the union has deep family roots in that her father was one of the founders of the street vendors' union in CISL. Since 2001 she has, in turn, worked in CLACS, the department of the union created in 1989 to coordinate certain traditional self-employed unions (street vendors, newsagents, gas station attendants and other similar professions), then moving to ALAI, the union association for non-standard workers, which later merged with CLACS to form a new association by the name of FELSA[23].

> *In 2014, when I joined the national board of FELSA, I continued my work with non-standard workers. In November 2015, during the national congress in Riccione [...] I made a public speech on new jobs. I openly said that the trade union approach to freelancers was old and unsuitable. My speech was really heated. The reaction of the national board was essentially this: "If you're so good on these issues, you've to do something." In February 2016, I left the national board of FELSA, joined the national board of the trade union and now I've been creating a new association for independent workers. It is almost ready and will be an online community of independent workers. It will be called vIVAce!* ***(P64: Coordinator of vIVAce!, CISL; June 2016)***

The innovative experiences focusing on the new self-employed occurred recently in Italian trade unions, whose delay in engaging on such emerging issues must be set in the long transition of the Italian industrial relations system which included a long season of labour reforms. This system was characterised by a structural conflict between the main actors of collective bargaining, management and trade unions, with no form of workers' participation in business decisions and strategies (co-determination) similar to the German model. During the oil crisis of the 1970s, the unions had to manage a difficult mediation between workers' interests and business survival and had to sign new agreements which included worse conditions than before. The crisis of Italian unionism started in the 1980s but, despite the fall in their membership, the unions have played an increasingly strategic role in the political, economic and institutional sphere since the 1990s, when the main Italian political parties came under investigation (*Mani Pulite*[24]) for widespread corruption. In the same period, the industrial relations system was characterised by the so-called *concertazione* (concertation): quite different from the German *Mitbestimmung* (co-

[22] CISL - Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori: the main trade union, historically connected to the Christian Democracy party.
[23] FeLSA CISL - Federazione Lavoratori Somministrati Autonomi ed Atipici
[24] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani_pulite (last vist: 30/06/2016)

determination), it prevented industrial conflict through the strong involvement of trade unions, institutions and employers' organisations in a continuous dialogue at a macro level which framed policies on wages and contracts. Starting in 1997, several labour reforms were introduced in the name of a more liberalised labour market based on flexibility, easier firings, and incentives for individual bargaining (Cirillo et al., 2015). The first reform in 1997 was the so-called 'Pacchetto Treu' (law 196/1997), which introduced apprenticeship schemes, part-time employment, temporary contracts and private temporary work agencies. In 2001, the possibility of temporary contracts and the terms for their use were extended. Similarly, a further extension was introduced in 2003 with the second labour reform ('Legge Biagi' - Law n.30/2003), including the use of staff-leasing contracts, part-time work and non-standard forms of employment relationships. The need for further structural reforms was debated during the 2008 financial and economic crisis, and in 2012 the 'Legge Fornero' (Law 92/2012) further weakened workers' power reducing the effectiveness of the 'Articolo 18' (Law 300/1970) protecting workers with open-ended contracts from unfair dismissal. 'Articolo 18' was definitively abolished for all new open-ended contracts by the most recent labour reform, the so-called 'Jobs Act' (Law 183/2014), which also reviewed the unemployment benefits system. As a result of these reforms, the share of temporary employment in the labour market increased from 8% to 14% between 1998 and 2015. The effect on new entrants to the labour market, those aged 15-24, was more dramatic: in the same period, their share rose from 20% to 60% (Cirillo et al., 2015).

By the end of the 1990s, these structural changes and the inadequacy of the existing organisations, whether trade unions or professional organisations, stimulated the setting up of new ones. Once again, personal histories played an important role in encouraging individuals to become personally involved. Unlike in the existing organisations, the structural advantage of the new ones was the freedom to define targeted structures and actions that did not need to be harmonised with a pre-existing organisational structure. The widespread feeling of there being a representation vacuum, together with her personal experiences as mother and freelancer were behind the personal involvement of one of the of the founders of ACTA, a new organisation for freelancers in the advanced tertiary sector:

> *The origin of ACTA comes a little bit from my personal history, which was very similar to that of many others. I had two children but no maternity allowance, I could not send my daughters to the public nursery school, because being self-employed, you would have to pay the highest fees. All these things made me feel I had no citizenship. These problems were not just mine, many of my colleagues were in the same situation. We'd been looking for someone who could somehow*

> *represent our category, but the unions did not even know we existed. Eventually we decided to try directly. Twenty of us founded the association.* ***(P74: co-founder of ACTA, quasi-union)***

In a similar way, other organisations were set up because their founders directly experienced the absence of adequate representation to interpret the new mechanisms governing the labour markets and the fragilities of the new generations of professionals. This issue concerns a wide range of professions, including the liberal ones and, as the following quotations testify, uncertainty and lack of support is endemic among psychologists, engineers and architects, too. In this context, professional orders play a limited and essentially institutional role.

> *The Association of Young Psychologists in Lombardy was officially set up in 2006 on the spontaneous initiative of myself and some young colleagues who were, after finishing university, a bit fearful about the uncertainties of the professional environment. Of course, we have our professional body, but beyond its institutional tasks (focused on administrative and deontological issues), it doesn't cater for any other professional needs. That is why we set up the association.* ***(P333: co-founder of Giovani Psicologi della Lombardia, association)***

Similar reasons emerge from one of the two founders of IVA sei Partita, a self-organised group of architects and engineers. There is a widespread feeling that the younger generations are undergoing a process of professional marginalisation caused by limited inclusion in the welfare system and by a labour market that tends to exploit the new self-employed without, however, offering real career opportunities in return.

> *The idea of Iva sei Partita came from me and a colleague of mine. We opened a blog and only after did we create physical groups. Without the web, it would have been impossible to reach such a number of users, trying to give answers and solve the same doubts we had about the social security system, the tax system. After a first period, we were conscious that there was a real need for a place where social protest could be expressed. I have been working as an architect for five years (my colleague, ten) as a bogus self-employed worker in an architectural firm. We saw that our friends were in the same condition. So it was clear that it was not a personal failure in claiming my rights at work but a structural problem in the working system.* ***(P335: co-founder of IVA sei Partita, quasi union)***

The approach proposed by the field theory gives access to a very broad view of the context studied. This also implies the possibility of 'capturing' and comparing the subjective perspectives of the protagonists, the individual experiences intertwined with the professional and political ones. It is therefore important to emphasise that the social upheaval generated by paradigmatic changes in the production system and work organisation produced individual and collective reactions. These include the need to interpret and to live life (collectively and individually) through shared and common frameworks (Goffman, 1974) which are the basis of collective actions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). This is clearly the case of many bottom-up groups of activists which

cannot count on existing structures, stable resources or institutional support. The common framework needs to be strongly intertwined with a clear and comprehensible identity framework that brings together different people whose professional and personal experience is neglected or concealed in the public discourse. In this context, it seems interesting and productive to explain how and when concepts such as 'precarity' (Berton, Pacelli, & Segre, 2005; Bett Neilson & Rossiter, 2005) and related concepts such as 'precariousness' (Armano & Murgia, 2013, 2017; Della Porta, Hänninen, Siisiäinen, & Silvasti, 2015; Gherardi & Murgia, 2013) shifted in Italy from non-standard workers to the self-employed.

The path of these two concepts - from a topic supported by a minority of critical voices to a mainstream theme, from non-standard workers to self-employed professionals - should be carefully considered to track an 'order of speech' characterising the interpretations and actions of the several organisations studied here. After the first wave of labour reforms around the turn of the century (Treu's in 1997; Biagi's in 2003), aimed at introducing more flexibility to the Italian labour market, it was quite clear that the growing non-standard workforce (especially the young generation) was experiencing worse working conditions than in the past, while entrepreneurs were benefiting from new, cheaper contracts compared to the standard ones. The term precarity became the keyword of several bottom-up groups of activists in Italy and Europe (Bett Neilson & Rossiter, 2005) as well as the everyday way for activists and trade unions to speak about non-standard workers. The main idea among trade unions was to limit the abuse of non-standard contracts and to stabilise the non-standard workers through standard contracts. In the same period, the public discourse on self-employment was being structured, at least among researchers, experts and activists. Slowly but constantly, the disparity between self-employed workers and employees was emerging with regard to inclusion in the welfare system and, more generally, to the existing protection measures for the two groups. At the same time, the mainstream narratives about the self-employed, especially those made by associations, focused on the dichotomy between the bogus and the real self-employed. The main purpose was to cement the public idea that the genuine self-employed were increasingly contributing to the economic life of the nation despite the adverse bureaucratic, administrative, fiscal and welfare conditions. It was the period before the economic crisis, and the widespread idea was that, despite all the difficulties, there was room for the growth of a new class of self-employed workers able to ride the long wave of innovation.

In the meantime, and in a rather marked manner, some productive sectors such as communication and publishing underwent strong restructuring processes, with a massive increase in the non-standard workforce. The term precarity was increasingly used to describe the working conditions of the new service workers and, in particular, those in the knowledge economy. The perception of precarity was growing due to structural changes in the labour market but also because of a shift by the mainstream media, which in the early 2000s began to acquire and share the precarisation framework which had previously been discussed only in the most critical and politicised organisations. Something in the slick narrative of capitalistic promises was starting to break. As Neilson and Rossiter (2005) state, precarity became the focus of several protests and events all over Europe: EuroMayDay (2004 Milan and Barcelona; 2005 in seventeen European cities), Precarity Ping Pong (London, October 2004), the International Meeting of the Precariat (Berlin, January 2005), and Precair Forum (Amsterdam, February 2005). In that period, the idea of precarity could no longer be confined to some weak social group, such as immigrants, or to some category of the labour market, such as low-skilled workers - it became part of everyday life for young, highly-skilled knowledge workers, too. It was not limited to the first step in the labour market, but became, paradoxically, a more and more stable working condition for new workers. The economic-financial crisis which broke out in 2007 played an important role in the extension of precariousness to those self-employed who, until a few years before, saw themselves mainly as privileged and strategic participants in the new 'Spirit of Capitalism' (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). During the crisis, the self-employed and I-Pros, too, became part of the discourse on precarity and precariousness.

One of the main initiators of the public discourse on precarity and precariousness was San Precario[25], a network of activists that has been studied by researchers and scholars (Accornero, 2006; Bruni & Murgia, 2007; Cindio & Peraboni, 2010; Giorgi & Caruso, 2015; Standing, 2011):

> *The structure and strategy of San Precario originates from an earlier experience which started in 1999 called Chain Workers. This was a collective engaged in political and cultural activity on precariousness; we created the Mayday Parade, the first of May of precarious workers. In this way, precariousness became a public issue at a national* [Italian] *level; we contributed to changing the until then dominant public imaginary. San Precario was set up in 2005 after this experience and basically everything started with a proposal from a lawyer who wanted to deal with precarious workers.* **(P323: co-founder of San Precario, quasi-union and movement; October 2012)**

[25] http://kit.sanprecario.info/

Understanding the social trajectories of certain concepts - precarity and precariousness - is essential in understanding how the public discourse and the image of self-employment took shape, at least in the Italian context. The activities promoted by San Precario contributed to the official sanctioning of previously taboo concepts. Although their actions were directed towards workers inadequately protected by the trade unions (non-standard workers and logistics workers, as well as precarious fashion workers in a strategic sector for the Milanese economy), only in very recent times did some San Precario activists begin to deal in a structured way with self-employed workers, and their discursive codes were adopted by other organisations:

> *We organise union mobilisations for precarious workers like us: freelancers working in communication, research, journalism. We share out competences with other activists and workers in order to foster a mediatic impact of the mobilisation, to foster common claims and opportunities for collective negotiations. […] We created CLAP, the chambers of self-employment and precarious work, first in Rome and a little later in Padua and Naples. We have been trying to recreate the spirit of the Chambers of Labour, the origin of trade union movements in Italy - and not only in Italy, because the references are mainly French, partly Belgian and Spanish. The basic idea is that today a union can grow only through territorial, horizontal and heavily self-managed practices. Our main idea is to bond, to connect together the protection for all precarious work. The notion of precarious work has no precise perimeters, it is extended more and more to a greater number of workers every day.* **(P77: co-founder of CLAP, quasi-union; January 2017)**

So far, we have explored the dynamics that marked the emergence of new projects in the two major Italian trade unions, the emergence of some quasi-unions and associations, and the role of some organisations with strong political engagement in redefining the frameworks of public discourse on non-standard and autonomous workers. In all these cases, the importance of personal histories in generating a process of change has emerged clearly. In the case of trade unions, perception of the inadequacy of the existing divisions, and the external pressure generated by the new organisations encouraged direct engagement to foster the process of internal change. Although ostracised or looked on with suspicion, these attempts were metabolised by the union structures. In other cases, personal life experiences raised awareness of a representation vacuum that could not be filled by the existing organisations, and awareness of this vacuum strengthened the need to create new organisations. Moreover, in the case of the emerging groups with a strong political leaning, their intention to act on (and their role in) redefining the public discourse and the public image of non-standard and autonomous work emerged.

The organisations or organisational changes considered so far have a national origin; in other words, they were generated by national or local players. It is obviously possible to outline foreign reference

models, but they were at most a source of inspiration. In none of the cases considered here was there a direct and structured attempt to replicate in Italy models already tested abroad. The exception is Smart IT, which is basically an offshoot of the Belgian mother-house, and it is important for several reasons. The first reason concerns the rather trivial fact that in a landscape of work heavily influenced by national labour laws and labour markets, a new organisation is developing protection and support measures for freelancers in different European countries. Its strategy involves considering the national legal framework but with a common organisational model applied in nine European countries. It is based mainly on the cooperative model and the start-up phase is basically supported, with economic and human resources, by the Belgian Foundation connected to the cooperative. The second reason concerns the type of proposal that seeks to safeguard the positive aspects of self-employment (freedom of organisation and professional choices, opportunities to apply entrepreneurial skills) by supporting self-employed workers through forms of mutualism and favouring access to the welfare-system. Indeed, the members of the cooperative can choose to work as self-employed or for the cooperative; in the latter case, Smart becomes the employer interfacing with clients and taking on business risks. The third reason is the intense work in the media and in the substantive field of networking with other organisations which produces positive synergies in terms of representation and visibility. In this respect, the origin of the Italian headquarters, as quoted below, shows a strong ability to build strategic alliances, take advantage of local resources and plan a sustainable development strategy:

> *SMartIt was set up in October 2013 following a feasibility study funded by the C.Re.S.Co. (national coordination of live-performing artists), SMartBe Foundation and the Cariplo Foundation. The project was planned on the business model of SMartBe ("Société Mutuelle pour Artistes") which has been working in Belgium since 1998. The SMartBe Foundation is the main sponsor of the Italian project and is also responsible for coordinating SMart projects in nine countries in Europe. The values that unite the nine structures in Europe are those of facilitating the work of artists, the mutualism mechanism in guaranteeing timely payment for their work, and facilitating their international mobility. […] During its second year, SMartIt was managed with a minimal structure. All the administrative and managerial functions were carried out by the President, and by the Chief Executive Officer advised by the Accountant and the Audit Supervisor . In February, an administrative assistant was taken on with a full-time contract.* **(P287: Corporate Sustainability Report 2015 - official document, SMart.IT, cooperative)**

To conclude the overview on the Italian organisations investigated, it is worth considering briefly some of the second-level organisations, also known as umbrella associations, and at least one example of a coalition.

The focus on second-level organisations makes clear the dual system of Italian professions. On one hand, we have the largest association of Italian liberal professions, Confprofessioni[26]; on the other, three significant organisations: CoLAP[27], the umbrella association of professions without a professional body, set up in 1999; Confassociazioni, another association, set up in 2012 after some member associations left CoLAP; and CNA Professioni[28]. It is worth pointing out that CoLAP was set up from the start with the aim of aggregating the area of professions without a professional body in order to obtain a reform of the so-called intellectual professions **(P266: Manifesto, CoLAP, official document)**. The relative law on professions without a professional body was approved only in 2013 (Law 4/2013)[29]. Although the law was criticised by some organisations as ineffective in representing self-employed workers, it assigned new responsibilities to the organisations included on the official register of associations managed by the Ministry of Economic Development (MISE) in relation to the accreditation and certification procedures of professionals and also introduced measures for consumer protection. The law brought formal recognition and therefore full legitimisation for many professions, despite being more oriented to opening new markets (training, accreditation, and certification) for the representative organisations rather than fostering active participation and aggregation among professionals. Five years after its creation, the ministerial register, composed of three sections, counts: a) 12 associations with the basic legal requirements for inclusion on the register; these organisations do not intend to comply with other requirements in order to authorise their members to use the reference of their membership as a quality certificate of the services they offer; b) 144 associations that can authorise their members to use their membership as a certificate of quality and professional qualification; and c) only two associations (CoLAP and PIU' – Professioni intelletuali unite), in the third section reserved for the umbrella organisations. Despite the increase in the associations on the register, no monitoring measures were planned in order to weight the real effects (their increase or efficacy) of the ministerial register of certifications. Law 4/2013 certainly marked an important step in constructing the emerging field of self-employed representation. It helped to strengthen the dual

[26] Set up in 1966, it brings together 19 organisations of accounting officers and accounting experts, labour consultants, auditors, lawyers, notaries, engineers, architects, agronomists, geologists, technicians, doctors, dentists, vets, psychologists, and paediatricians.
[27] CoLAP is a heterogeneous group of more than 200 associations of professionals working in different sectors such as wellness, health, creative, counselling, consultation, and IT.
[28] CNA Professioni is similar to CoLAP in terms of heterogeneity; it brings together 33 organisations.
[29] Disposizioni in materia di professioni non organizzate. (13G00021) (GU Serie Generale n.22 del 26-01-2013). Available at: http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/01/26/13G00021/sg

system of regulated and non-regulated professions by bringing the latter closer, albeit symbolically, to the former and, at the same time, it defined a new framework for the discussions between existing organisations, thereby influencing their development. In the following section, I sketch the evidences from the German context with regard to the emergence of new groups and organisations focused on independent professionals and the self-employed.

### 4.3.2 Germany: multiplicity and settled fragmentation. Towards a redistribution of interests?

The analysis of the German organisations and groups representing independent professionals (and, more in general, the self-employed) will, as far as possible, follow a similar path to that adopted for the Italian case to facilitate the comparison to be developed in the subsequent section. The analysis starts with an exploration of what has happened within the trade unions, continues with consideration of the area of quasi-unions and groups with an explicit political focus, and then examines the role of cooperativism and umbrella organisations.

Unlike the Italian unions, the German ones seem to have been dealing with the issue of self-employment more decisively and more clearly since the turn of the century. They did not stop at internal discussion, but in at least one case, that of the Ver.di trade union (*Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft* - Union of Services Sector Trade Unions), they invested resources for a dedicated structure - *Ver.di Selbstständige* - dedicated to self-employment in the tertiary sector. The opportunity was taken up when a new union was set up through the merger of five existing trade unions: *Deutsche Angestellten-Gewerkschaft* (DAG), the union of state employees; *Deutsche Postgewerkschaft* (DPG), the union of Post Office Employees; G*ewerkschaft Handel, Banken und Versicherungen* (HBV), the trade, banking and insurance trade union; the media industry union, *IG Medien* (Druck und Papier, Publizistik und Kunst) and *Gewerkschaft Öffentliche Dienste Transport und Verkehr* (ÖTV), the union of public sector and transport workers. Another important and significant aspect is the organisational framework in which the five unions merged.

> *When the union began to deal with self-employed workers, IG-Media was one of the five organisations that set up Ver.di; in IG-Media there were media workers and workers from the cultural scene. When we started 15 years ago with Ver.di, around 23,000 creative workers were already in IG media and now there are also other freelancers. There are also workers in healthcare, and some in the IT sector but we are still at the beginning with them. Now there are about 30,000 freelancers in the union. The main goal is to foster transparency in their labour market and support positive mobility within the labour market. In all these years, we have tried to create good opportunities to support the collective demands of these workers, also giving them individual support. Since the beginning, we have been trying to lobby, analyse the scenarios and share our*

*thoughts with the decision makers. In doing so, we never forget the strategic role of social welfare.*
**(P58: coordinator 1, Ver.di Selbstständige, trade union; August 2015)**

Again, a substantial difference should be noted between the Italian and German contexts. In Germany, the existence of an umbrella organisation (DGB - *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*) seems to function as a facilitator of dialogue between unions and thus plays a positive role in the positioning process of its members. Despite its several structural weaknesses (Waddington, Kahmann, & Hoffmann, 2005, pp. 37–39), DGB plays an appreciable role in reducing competition between trade unions or, at least, it works as a place where the sharing process of strategic projects takes place in a formal framework, generating positive effects on coordination between the unions.

*All the discussions on the self-employed in the German TU started in the 1980s in relation to the transport sector, although even earlier for journalists. Now in Ver.di, they also organise writers and journalists, who are independent workers, really. And this already started in the older IG-Medien; when IG-Medien merged with Ver.di they took this approach. This was to tell writers and journalist that they should not work for too low fees. At the beginning nobody knew how much to ask for one-line writing. If you start a job you do not really know what you can ask for, so they started to tell them. Indeed, this was in the tradition of the TU approach: not to have competition between workers but to try to have common pricing. During that period, we noticed that editors hired more and more freelancers, so the TUs had to work with that situation, trying to coordinate their actions. Nowadays it is a little bit similar with internet workers. All these issues have been shared in DGB.* ***(P56: Chairman of the DGB Bezirk Berlin-Brandenburg)***

A first macroscopic difference between Italy and Germany can be noted in this regard: the three major Italian unions (two of which were considered directly in this research) develop uncoordinated projects to address the issue of new self-employment with projects which, although different in structure and strategies, have more or less overlapping targets.
In contrast, the German unions, notably Ver.di and IG-Metall, seem to develop complementary representation projects. The difference between the Italian and German union environments seems to lie in a better "division of labour" in the latter; this division of labour is consistent with the specific skills developed by the unions over the years in certain productive sectors and it leads to greater coordination between the trade unions within the umbrella organisation of the DGB. Recent technological developments have opened new frontiers in online work and work mediated by digital platforms. In this field, evolution is truly rapid and the strong lack of knowledge in terms of work dynamics and in relation to workers' identities and needs is greatly accentuated. In this case, the burden of exploring the field and supporting a first experimental project was taken on by the IG-Metall union, although the debate between trade unions greatly involved Ver.di, too (Kulemann & Müller, 2015). Other important institutions connected with German trade unions, such as the Hans Böckler Stiftung (Leimeister, Durward, & Zogaj, 2016; Schmidt, 2017) and ETUI, the European Trade

Union Institute (Degryse, 2016; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2016), are also supporting the analysis of the recent trends:

> *There is an important internal debate on crowd-workers among German unions and institutions. Moreover, even before this three-year project [Fair Crowd Work], our head Christiane Brenner made it clear to the colleagues in IG-Metall what crowd work is and what it is not, what is good and what is bad, what an opportunity for workers is, and about their working conditions. That was a useful opportunity for raising awareness among trade unionists about what crowd work is.* **(P71: member of Fair Crowd Work project, IG-Metall, trade union; November 2016)**

Although since the beginning of the 2000s, the unions, especially Ver.di, started to structure an offer of representation for self-employed workers, based on its most structured areas of expertise (the information and communication sector, and artistic sector), this was, understandably, not sufficient. The changes taking place in the production system and organisation involved all sectors. It was not conceivable that one organisation could deal with all the professional contexts with a growing number of self-employed. Moreover, the revitalisation attempts of the German trade unions had to face a strong liberalisation process (Bispinck, Dribbusch, & Schulten, 2010; Hassel, 1999, 2014) including the deterioration of wages and working conditions, especially in the service sector (Bosch & Weinkopf, 2008), with a significant expansion of low-wage work. The Hartz reforms I-IV (2003 and 2005) supported the use of agency work and deregulation of non-standard work, fostering the diffusion of mini-jobs and other non-standard contracts which led to significant segmentation of the workforce and a decline of associational membership. The erosion of the three-pillar model (workplace co-determination, coordinated bargaining, and skills training) occurred mainly in the areas where it was introduced for social reasons (social inclusiveness and workplace democracy) and not due to a strategic choice connected to possible competitive advantages (Marsden, 2015). The “beneficial constraints” of the German industrial relations model were partially circumvented through investments in Eastern Europe characterised by cheaper labour and a less-regulated economic context (Meardi, Strohmer, & Traxler, 2013). In other words, the distinctive traits which in the past had characterised German capitalism as a “coordinated market economy” (Hall & Soskice, 2001) gradually turned it into a neo-liberal one. After reunification, the former West Germany became the laboratory for the structural changes in the labour market (Brinkmann & Nachtwey, 2013), welfare state and labour protection (Bruff, 2010) which were later applied to the whole of Germany. Precariousness and the segmentation of labour workforce became more and more widespread (fixed term contracts, temporary agency work, mini jobs, and Ich-AG – Existenzgründungszuschuss). All these trends fostered the structuring process of

a dualistic economic model based on innovative production and highly qualified employment (with fewer guarantees compared with the past) and on precarious employment and low wages.
The emergence of the new German organisations must, therefore, be considered in this framework; the prevailing trait is the pursuit of change, both for unions and new organisations. This is the case, for example, of Verband der Freien Lektorinnen und Lektoren (VFLL), an association of editor and translators:

> *The association was founded in 2000 by freelancer editors, of whom I was one. The number of freelancers started to grow at that time, and work was becoming more and more difficult to find. People often do not know what an editor does. We were used to working as employees in the publishing houses, but the outsourcing process started in Germany, too. Now it seems to be partially returning to the previous situation when an important part of the work was done in-house. When we founded VFLL, it was the start of the change towards outsourcing, which lasted for over 10 years. At the start, we needed to understand how we could build a network of freelancers to face a structural change.* **(P59: co-founder of VFLL, quasi union; August 2015)**

In Germany, as well as in Italy, the arrival of new organisations is characterised by a rather protracted phase of protest against the work carried out by the trade unions or, in some cases, by failed dialogue attempts. This is exactly the case of VFLL and Ver.di.

> *When outsourcing started in the 1990s, this change was not perceived, or it was not properly considered by the unions. Let's consider Ver.di: in the union there are literary translators, journalists, all except us; probably they do not need us. Probably within each organisation there are internal balances, priorities, and other aspects that affect choices and the inclusion or exclusion of other players. I also believe that there are individual factors such as personal incompatibilities that determine inclusion in or exclusion from a group.* **(P59: co-founder of VFLL, quasi union; August 2015)**

Although the dialogue with Ver.di was an open opportunity since VFLL was set up, the internal dynamics of the union fostered by the historical association of literary translators (VdÜ - *Verband deutschsprachiger Übersetzer literarischer und wissenschaftlicher Werke*), together with a complicated dialogue with VFLL, led to the Ver.di network moving away from the new association:

> *The question is that we have a democratic structure within our departments and we also have specific groups focused on certain sectors. In our union, we have an association of writers. VFLL claimed the right to remain in the literary field but they are a group of editors and other professionals, different to writers. They didn't want to be classified in the same area as translators. At the same time, the association of literary translators, VdÜ, affiliated with Ver.di, said they didn't want technical translators working with companies. That's why, even though we had started a dialogue and also a good collaboration, in the end they decided to join the Bundesverband der Freie Berufe, which is dominated by professionals such as doctors, and they have a rather conservative approach. You can ask them what happened.* **(P58: coordinator 2, Verdi Selbstständige, trade union; August 2015)**

In Germany as in Italy, new organisations are set up in order to face the evolving needs of the professional scene. Professional experience and sensitivity to emerging issues therefore play an important role in the emergence of new associations. Individual motivation and commitment are the engines of new initiatives in large trade unions and new organisations. In the quotation below, it is quite clear that the Berlin creative scene in the early 2000s was a booming field in which freelancers played a central and almost mythological role. A new demiurge that explores new territories, a heroic figure - the digital bohemian - able to determine his or her professional life in a radically new environment, in relation to the surrounding technological infrastructures and the intrinsic working methods of intangible production. Supermarkt is a Berlin coworking space for artists and digital activists and a node of the so-called platform cooperativism movement. As we will see in the following chapters, Supermarkt is an excellent example of an organisation which grew after the technological-creative shift that affected the great metropolises (European and not) at the beginning of the century.

> *Supermarkt is something that has grown slowly. It did not appear from one day to the next through a more or less organic development. I myself have been a freelancer my entire professional life, as has my partner, with whom I founded Supermarkt in 2012. We both work in digital media and it was there that we met. We have always worked in that intersection between technological communication and digital creativity and have both been involved from the beginning in new models of work and work organisation. There was no rigid structure we had to adapt to and these new models influenced from the start the sectors we have been working in. What is interesting is that 10-15 years ago, being a freelancer meant being part of an elite. I remember a well-known book by Sascha Lobo and Holf Friebe "We call it work: the digital bohemian or intelligent life beyond the permanent position"[30]. It is an excellent mirror of the then dominant mentality.* **(P108: co-founder of Supermarkt, January 2016)**

The rapid transformations which happened in just a few years to freelancers of the creative scene saw the image of the Bohemian freelancer give way to the much less romantic figure of the freelancer trapped in the machine of immaterial production. Nevertheless, these changes also led to important reactions, such as the creation of Supermarkt which became an important node in the national and international scene of digital activism and platform cooperativism.

> *Books like those by Florida or Sacha Lobo contain an effort of imagination, too. Maybe they were also useful in a certain phase, during a period of economic growth. However, if we consider the economic and financial crisis which followed, it is immediately clear that being a freelancer was no longer a free choice. It was no longer possible to determine our working conditions. At that time, many freelancers struggled to find work, especially those who arrived in Berlin from other European countries, and it was quite impossible to get an employment contract, so becoming a freelancer*

[30] Friebe, Holm; Lobo, Sascha: Wir nennen es Arbeit: die digitale Bohème oder intelligentes Leben jenseits der Festanstellung. München: Heyne, 2006

*remained the only way to enter the labour market .* **(P108: co-founder of Supermarkt, January 2016)**

During the post-Fordist period, the transition of big cities from places producing tangible goods to those producing intangible goods was in many cases fuelled by the imaginary of the creative city (Evans, 2009; Florida, 2002, 2005), swarming with underground, rebel and politically engaged cultures. Berlin is certainly no exception (Colomb, 2012; Heebels & Van Aalst, 2010; Jakob, 2010; Novy & Colomb, 2012): the myth of the rebel, creative city had its roots mainly in the political and cultural history of West Berlin during the Cold War. For a long time after the fall of the Wall, Berlin was a favourite destination of European and extra-European artists who found cheap housing solutions, an environment where culture was not conceived of as pure commodity, and a welfare system suited to the needs of a young population oriented towards cultural and social experimentation. This image still has a kernel of truth, but over the years it was affected by the very strong speculative interests of the real-estate market which radically changed the aspect and vocation of the city, causing significant processes of gentrification (Bernt & Holm, 2009; Giersig, 2008; Levine, 2004) and making the urban territory there less and less affordable for artists and, in general, the young. This is the social context where the freelancers of the digital creative scene experimented, as well as the artists whose needs strongly changed over the years. Although the city maintains its attractiveness, the new social and urban conditions require new survival strategies; the setting up of new organisations can, therefore, be interpreted as a reaction to the new conditions and, at the same time, the concrete attempt to give new answers. This could be the case of Supermarkt - but also of Smart Germany, the initiative promoted by the Belgian headquarters, as happened in Italy, too:

*In 2012, SMart Belgium asked people working in the cultural and creative sector here in Germany if they were interested in founding an association connected to them. The people consulted were freelancers who worked in the theatrical field and in the visual arts sector. In Smart Germany there are people working here in Berlin and others in Bremen. We set up an association with the idea of helping artists and creative people (here in Germany we make a distinction between artists and creatives) with administrative issues and to improve their working conditions* **(P57: Board & Organisational Development manager, SMart.de; August 2015)**

Cooperation experiments and no-profit initiatives seem to play an important role in counteracting the individualisation processes among the self-employed. In this sense, the Berlin context, its history, and the concentration of energies and ideas across the city, positively affected the aggregative experiments aimed at the business development of weak social groups such as migrant women and, more generally, women. During exploration of the organisations mapped, significant

experiences promoted by women for women emerged. If we consider the three cases found, the temporal stratification of the experiences is quite evident: the association *I.S.I. e.V. Initiative Selbständiger Immigrantinnen* was set up in 1990, a year after the fall of the Wall, and it is still fostering the creations of self-entrepreneurship among migrant women:

> *I started doing research at the Technical University of Berlin in a UNESCO research group in 1988. We were a group of highly professional female researchers working on female immigration. […] The idea was to do some sort of update of the new trends in France and England in order to concretely support migrant women. […]. In that period, it was clear that there was an increase of migrant workers. […] In the 1980s in Berlin, we had a large percentage of immigrant women who worked in manufacturing, but in 1988 we were going through a period of crisis partly due to the transition toward automation. The automation process had begun before, but at that time it was leading to unemployment. At that time, the mothers of our two assistants lost their jobs. I knew their mothers, they were really good and capable, so we started to share ideas in order to help them develop their competences. We created I.S.I. At the beginning, we had mostly immigrant women from Iran, highly educated, then came self-employed women from Turkey, too.* **(P110: co-founder of ISI, association for migrant self-employed women)**

In this case, too, the setting up of the association sprang from a strong intertwining of professional and personal experiences. It is interesting to note how, in the case just considered and in a period of intense changes that affected the social and productive system, the way of self-employment is explored as a concrete adaptive response to a labour market oriented to expelling the weakest part of the workforce. A similar idea of gender solidarity, together with the need to think about strategies for collective action, can be found in the words of one of the founders of the WeiberWirtschaft cooperative. The setting up of this cooperative is intertwined with the history of the city: in this case, the significant urban renewal process that affected Berlin after the fall of the Wall was an excellent opportunity to foster female entrepreneurship:

> *The idea of the cooperative comes from afar. We started thinking about it in 1985 at the Freie Universitat, during a course on funding for companies created by women. At that time, one third of the new companies was created by women but many had great difficulties in finding funding. There was funding for entrepreneurial initiatives but most of them were oriented to creating businesses outside the urban space, in spaces without services and were not suitable for reconciling work and life needs. The government of Berlin was not interested in specifically supporting women's business projects, so we decided to set up a women's cooperative in the west of Berlin in a large public-owned building. A few years later, after the fall of the Wall, we managed to buy the building. That area, after the fall of the Wall, was formally part of East Berlin because it was right on the border and thanks to this situation we managed to invest a lot of money in its complete renovation. We created a financing centre for women who wanted to work as self-employed. The idea has remained more or less the same, that is, to offer small spaces for self-employed women and small women's businesses, paying attention to the specific needs relating to the balance of working and private life.* **(P112: co-founder of WeiberWirtschaft, cooperative; August 2016)**

The last two cases here presented (I.S.I. and WeiberWirtschaft) are of major importance for several reasons. First, they are examples of organisations set up to support female and migrant self-

entrepreneurship in a historical period, the late 1980s, when the public institutions were not equipped to accurately recognise the emerging needs of the female workforce. Second, they are an inclusive response that aims to reconcile the strong trends of a fast-changing labour market, focusing on the needs of the individuals and not simply on the interests of the market. In this regard, their approach is similar to that of SMart described above. Third, they are significant examples of organisations that, over time, were structured well enough to succeed in overcoming the pure logic of volunteering, which in some cases greatly limits organisational strategies. This happened thanks to progressive and constructive interaction between the organisations and the different institutional levels, including the ability to intercept public funding (as with I.S.I.). Moreover, in the case of WeiberWirtschaft, the autonomy comes from a cooperative project which could grasp the opportunities emerging from the process of urban renewal and consequent econversion of urban spaces. This experience is even more interesting in light of the successive developments, which in 2006 led to the setting up, after a few years of difficult dialogue with different institutional levels, of Grunderinnenzentrale, the non-profit association linked to the cooperative:

> *Our organisation can be considered affiliated with Weiberwirtschaft, working together but two distinct entities. The cooperative works without receiving funding, while we are an association, the result of a consistent organic development process by the cooperative. The cooperative has rented spaces to the self-employed and entrepreneur women for a long time. This led to a demand for more information, support and guidance with regard to their complex and evolving working environment. Over the years, the requests for support and guidance increased but we were aware that a structured answer needed additional funds and further spaces. Grunderinnenzentrale was set up for three main reasons: careers guidance, information and networking.* **(P113: managing director of Grunderinnenzentrale; no-profit association; August 2016)**

### 4.3.3 Emerging strategic action fields: similarities and differences between Italy and Germany

The mapping of the organisations and subsequent selection made it possible to confirm that at the end of the 1990s the transformation of work oriented towards a service economy reached a critical threshold in Italy and Germany. The changes in the productive structure of the two countries created significant professional opportunities which made Milan and Berlin highly attractive for a growing number of new workers. The adjective "new" applied to workers should be interpreted in terms of new generations of workers and new professionals. Milan and Berlin have common traits in relation to specific professional areas: they both attract creative workers, communication and marketing professionals, startuppers, and architects involved in urban regeneration and development. At the same time, each has its distinctive traits: Berlin has the centres of institutional decision-making and is thus a strategic place for a wide range of lobbyists, with the high concentration of institutions also generating the need for specialised services.
In addition, it has for decades played a central role in the music and artistic underground scene, maintaining and nurturing the myth of the creative, rebel city; whereas Milan plays a leading role in the areas of finance, fashion, healthcare, design, publishing and communication.

Differences in economic and productive vocation generate some structural differences in the presence and distribution of the organisations considered in this study. At the same time, the mix of economic profiles and the orientation towards a service economy supported by a strong concentration of start-ups, coworking and territorial policies fostering the economic vocation of the cities make the comparison useful on a metropolitan and a national scale, with regard to the emerging field of I-Pros and self-employed representation.

Some comparative evaluations can be developed with regard to the variety of organisations oriented towards self-employed workers and independent professionals. In both contexts there is a **similar stratification of traditional organisations** (trade unions, professional associations, and associations) **and new ones** (quasi-unions, sector-oriented or professional associations, informal groups, and cooperatives). The similarity stems from the fact that the two cities are strategic places where the organisations have to be present with regard to the economic dynamics and the political debate on self-employment. Moreover, the concentration of I-Pros and self-employment generates a critical mass for the experimentation of new networks and the renewal of existing ones through the active involvement of self-employed workers.

To understand now how the existing organisations place themselves in relation to the other members in the field, it is necessary to return to the concept of incumbents and challengers (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Gamson, 1975) considered in the theoretical chapter.

The balance of forces in a field must always be conceived of as a continuous and dynamic process in which cooperative and competitive actions coexist, as a set of forces and relationships between the different actors that are part of it.

Looking back at the organisations involved in self-employed representation, we can certainly say that in the past twenty years the panorama in both Italy and Germany has been enriched with new players. The increase is not only quantitative but also coincides with the growing importance and visibility that self-employment has acquired in the production system, from the typical condition of some professions (basically, the liberal ones) to an increasingly widespread condition in various productive sectors for high- and low-skilled workers. Self-employment is becoming less and less a choice, and more and more a necessity for entering or remaining in the labour market, changing from a privileged condition to one which, in some cases, means subsistence minimums.

The focus on new organisations and the organisational change of the existing ones allows us to evaluate whether the representations of the self-employed can be considered an emerging action field in line with Fligstein and McAdam's perspective (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, p. 165). The authors' relevant questions are:

- *Who were the key actors who vied for control of the emerging field?*
- *What alternative conceptions of the strategic action field did these key actors represent?*
- *What resources - material, political, ideological - did each of the main combatants bring to the founding struggle?*
- *Who prevailed in this struggle and why?*
- *What role, if any, did external actors - especially state actors - play in the outcome of the founding episode?*
- *What were the principal terms of the settlement eventuated at the close of the episode?*
- *What, if any, internal governance units were established at this time to help routinise and safeguard the settlement?*

I attempt to immediately give some short and general answers to each question, but also consider them in the detailed comparative analysis below.

The field is defined by the set of organisations, their interactions and position in the field, the set of practices and discourses recognised by the members of the field, and a common idea of what is at stake[31]. But why can we consider the representation of self-employment an emerging field? The field is new because of the structural conditions affecting the economic processes, productive system and the role of the self-employed in these contexts. On one hand, this generates a renewal of existing organisations; on the other, the emergence of new organisations. In this context, it is certainly possible, with a certain degree of approximation, to tell the incumbents from the challengers, although there are more opacities than in fields with more stable positions, practices and roles. In other words, in the emerging fields, clearly distinguishing between challengers and incumbents is more complicated, due to the uncertainties determined by the unstable relationships between those in the field, the absence of already tested and consolidated models of action, and the weak links with the decision-makers.

We can certainly distinguish organisations equipped with adequate financial and human resources to guarantee their continuity of action from those that, on the contrary, rely on volunteering. However, this is not enough to clearly distinguish between challengers and incumbents. The growing communication space generated by the pervasiveness of the web and digital social networks creates spaces of visibility that can often be more easily exploited by new organisations with light, horizontal structures. The analysis is even more complicated because of the extreme fragmentation that characterises self-employment. The self-employed are in all economic sectors and play an important role in the tertiary sector, and self-employment concerns both low- and high-skilled professionals. These elements lead to extreme fragmentation of the offer of representation. In both the Italian and German contexts, the areas of overlap between organisations are rather limited, despite the significant differences which can be found between the two. The increasing number of the organisations involved in the emerging field studied can be explained as a reaction to a growing diversification of self-employed professionals. It is stressed that

[31] «One way to know whether a field had emerged was by the degree to which four elements of structure existed: a common understanding of what is at stake in the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), a set of players with known positions in the field, a common understanding of the rules in the field, and a way for actors to interpret the actions of others and frame their own as the 'game' is being played» (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012).

the aggregative capacity of the organisations considered, whether incumbents or challengers, with the exclusion of some organisations focused on specific professions, is still rather limited and attempts to produce effective representation offers are, therefore, still very unstable.

It is now worth considering some significant differences emerging in relation to how new organisations are set up and how existing ones decided to choose an organisational change that included self-employed representation. The comparative approach will have two focuses: the role played by the organisations in the strategic action field at national level, and the approach of similar organisations in both countries (e.g., trade unions, quasi-union, and coalitions).

The transition of the German trade unions, and their structured approach to self-employment, took place in a more comprehensive reorganisation that gave rise to a large trade union oriented to the services sector (Ver.di). This new union was officially founded in 2001 after a strong, complex bargaining process between the five old unions. The change was a clear opportunity to include in the structure of the new trade union a specific department (Ver.di Selbständige) for fostering a collective identity for and collective action by the German self-employed (high- and low-skilled)[32]. The timing of the organisational change must be taken into account for many reasons: a) it was strictly functional in addressing the externalisation processes characterising some specific productive sectors (communication, publishing, artistic and creative); b) it created a category earlier than the Italian trade unions did for a specific type of self-employed worker, the own-account worker, who in a few years would become one of the main targets of the emerging strategic action field considered here; and c) it responded to an on-going trend among migrants towards self-employment and, more generally, in the services and trade sectors (Conen, Schippers, & Schulze Buschoff, 2016, pp. 36–37) also powered by labour market reforms (Hartz reforms 2003-2005[33]). In addition, along with several institutions and organisations, Ver.di was deeply involved in the great debate on digitalisation trends in industries and services (Mandl et al., 2015, p. 132). The digitalisation process was also a central issue for IG-Metall, the other main German trade union,

[32] The slogan on the homepage of Ver.di Selbständige is “The self-employed cannot go far as lone fighters” (*Selbstständige kommen als Einzelkämpferinnen und -kämpfer nicht weit*)

[33] In 2003, within the framework of the Hartz reforms, a business start-up grant, the "Ich-AG" (*Existenzgründungszuschuss*), was introduced in order to foster "new self-employment" among unemployed people. After 30 June 2006, the Ich-AG was abolished in favour of a new start-up fund (*Gründungszuschuss*) paid by the German Federal Agency for Work (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*); Since 28 December 2011, the start-up grant for new applications is a discretionary measure and no longer a compulsory service.

which in 2016 implemented a specific experimental project - Fair Crowd Work - for crowd-workers whose work is mediated by digital platforms **(P71, project manager, IG-Metall, trade union)**.

Conversely, the adaptation paths of Italian trade unions show different timing and less structured investments in self-employment representation. The increasing flexibilisation of the workforce, supported by the various reforms implemented since the end of the 1990s, led the union response to be oriented mainly towards non-standard work (temporary workers and agency workers) through NIDIL-CGIL, ALAI-CISL, and UIL-TEMP. At the same time, the specific target of new self-employment (own-account workers) was not reached until more recently: the Board of Professions - CGIL in 2009, Networkers-UIL-TuCS in 2012[34], and vIVAce!-CISL in 2016. Due to the slow adaptation process, other organisations were set up: in 1998, CoLAP, the first umbrella organisation of independent professionals and in 2004, ACTA, a quasi-union of autonomous workers in the advanced tertiary sector. Over the years, both organisations gained significant nationwide visibility . Despite the signs of growing unrest among the new self-employed workers, the Italian unions took several years to start experimental projects for them. In addition, it is worth mentioning that in none of the three cases involving the Italian trade unions did the organisational change oriented towards new self-employment involve the creation of a dedicated department. Indeed, the choices made were oriented towards lighter options with fewer impacts on the overall structure of the unions. The analysis of the structures will be better detailed in the next section. Here it is worth mentioning, however, that lighter options mean reduced resource investments, fewer reorganisational needs in relation to the union structure, and fewer impacts and risks in relation to the re-balancing of internal power.

According to the evidences collected, a first significant difference between German and Italian trade unions concerns the timing of organisational change in relation to self-employment representation, with the German ones reacting earlier (2000) than the Italian ones (2009). Moreover, the two main relevant cases in German trade unions, Ver.di Selbständige and Fair Crowd Work (IG-Metall), developed a complementary offer of representation. The first was a structured department within Ver.di dedicated to high- and low skilled self-employment which could also rely on a company connected to Ver.di, Mediafon GmbH, for consultation services addressing the self-employed; the second was an experimental project for

[34] Originally oriented toward ICT workers, it has recently included also crowd-workers

crowd-workers. In both cases, the unions invested economic and human resources exclusively for self-employment and the emerging phenomenon of crowd-work.

The Italian unions opted for different choices. The Board of Professions - CGIL is a space for dialogue where union opens up to self-employed associations. It is composed of a permanent national board and regional boards created on a voluntary basis by the regional departments. In the recent past, the Board proved to be a strategic tool for a coordinated lobbying. This was the case of the recent law on self-employment (*Jobs Act del Lavoro Autonomo*, Law 81/2017) when the organisations which participated in the Board of Professions were able to agree on common lobbying positions which favoured approval of the law.

The Board of Professions was a significant innovative attempt within the union practices; the trade union opened a dialogue with the numerous new organisations set up in recent years. At the same time, it had weaknesses: 1) opening up to organisations with very different points of view made dialogue more complicated; 2) this opening up could arouse internal mistrust as it could be seen as a threat to union cohesion; 3) it could be seen externally as an attempt at hegemony; 4) voluntary, unstructured inclusion could favour utilitarian participation and behaviour by members. These and other aspects will be taken up and deepened in the following chapters.

Another union, the CISL, also recently supported a new project for the self-employed, the online community[35] vIVAce! (2016), with the aim of gouping together the self-employed from the liberal and non-regulated professions. Finally, the tourism and services sector of the UIL union (UIL-TuCS) recently extended an online consultation service previously aimed at workers in the IT sector - Networkers (set up in 2012) to other workers, mainly the self-employed, but in particular crowd-workers. Like that of vIVAce! -CISL, this experience is quite recent and, therefore, exploring the opportunities and threats of the new field. Both projects (vIVAce! and Networkers) are certainly an important attempt to extend the offer of representation to the self-employed, but their effectiveness has yet to be tested.

We can recognise some common traits in the three Italian unions' attempts. They constitute a reaction to the organisations set up in previous years. The consciousness that an emerging field was being constructed supported the need for organisational change. Furthermore, they are based on light structures, with limited resources but at the same time with weak ties to, and thus also limited dependence on, the existing union structures, with relative freedom from the organisational

[35] Legally speaking, it is an association.

procedures of traditional trade union structure and practice. At the same time, weak ties with regard to union practices also means limited influence over the internal union debate. Likewise, the experiences of Ver.di Selbständige and IG-Metall, despite their being only a small part of the projects carried out by the two unions, can count on stronger internal recognition that influences the internal debate:

> *There is a difference between Ver.di and the people who work with the self-employed in Ver.di. Probably there is a gap and also a different awareness, but what is important is that in Ver.di there are people dedicated to the self-employed. I believe it is inportant to recognise this difference, it plays a role also in the internal debate.* **(P58: CEO of Mediafon, Ver.di Selbständige; August 2015)**

Ver.di Selbständige can play the role of incumbent in the emerging field of self-employed representation thanks to its experience gained since the turn of the century, its specific knowledge of the needs of the self-employed and its ability to offer professional services through the company Mediafon. Instead, in the Italian context, the boundary between incumbents and challengers is more nuanced.

After exploring the organisational changes of the Italian and German trade unions, we now move on to consider a selection of new cooperatives. The national branches of Smart Belgium were set up in both countries and at similar times. SMart Belgium was set up in 1998 to offer artists administrative support, but quickly evolved, becoming more complex and able to foster professional identity and empowerment processes among self-employed workers. Over the years, SMart was able to extend its offer to many self-employed workers in the creative and advanced tertiary sectors including, in the case of Smart Belgium, food delivery riders. The new eadquarters set up in Berlin (2013) and Milan (2014) adopted the form of a cooperative; but despite being recently set up and basing their organisational model on that of the Belgian headquarters, the German and Italian national cooperatives have different reference targets. The German one is oriented primarily towards the artistic-musical scene, which plays an important role in Berlin's cultural environment. In contrast, the Italian one, after a first phase in which it was oriented towards performing artists, opened up to freelancers of the advanced tertiary sector, thanks to a strategic agreement with ACTA, one of the most important Italian quasi-unions. The different strategies of the German and Italian main offices will be considered in detail in the following chapters. Here it is worth noting that the setting up of the two national headquarters took place within the framework of a European-wide expansion project. The start-up phase of the new offices was supported by the SMart Belgium Foundation with economic and

human resources, but was based on strong interaction with existing local groups involved in the artistic scene. In addition, in 2015 the evolution of the SMart European network led to a wide public discussion involving all the main stakeholders. At the end of this two-year process, called “SMart in progress” **(P69; P15)**, the European network previously composed of associations and companies, chose to shift towards a common approach with a cooperative structure.
The empowerment processes pass mainly through inclusive and democratic structures; the relatively recent case of SMart was preceded in Berlin by two organisations for self-employed migrant women: Initiative Selbständiger Immigrantinnen (I.S.I.) and WeiberWirtschaft. Set up in the late 1980s/early 1990s, both were ahead of their time on an issue that became topical in the following years: women’s inclusion in the labour market through self-employment. No similar cases were identified in Milan, perhaps because there was some missing data in the mapping phase, but most likely because of differences in: a) the migratory profiles of the two territories and the timing in setting up organisations dedicated to including migrant women in employment; and b) their models of political and civil activism: in Germany, more oriented towards practices of job inclusion; in Italy, towards political claims and social inclusion; and c) social awareness with respect to gender issues in the processes of job inclusion. To conclude the analysis of the emergence of new organisational structures involved in self-employment representation, umbrella organisations, quasi-unions, movements and coalitions will be briefly considered.

The umbrella organisations play a significant role in both countries. However, it is necessary, to understand their position in the emerging field of self-employment representation. The mapping identified the umbrella organisations of the liberal professions and those of the new professions. The former can rely on long experience and strong institutional connections built up over decades of activity, and lobby in favour of professions formally recognised by institutions and protected by professional associations. Despite this, the environment of the liberal professions is undergoing strong changes and the self-employed, widely present in these professional contexts, are experiencing different and harder conditions than in the past. The umbrella organisations of liberal professions face structural changes with a corporatist approach: their analyses and proposals remain strongly focused on professional sectors but rarely go further to deal with the new self-employment in a broader perspective. Thus we can state, as a preliminary point, that in both countries the umbrella organisations of the liberal professions play an important but corporatist role in the emerging field of self-employment representation. In a similar way, the most

recent umbrella organisations focusing on new self-employment or self-employment without professional associations play an important role in the emerging field of self-employment representation, strengthening the dual system of professions through lobbying and, at the same time, reinforcing the public debate on professionals and their social conditions.

In both countries, while fostering a corporatist approach to self-employment representation, the umbrella organisations of non-regulated professions have distinctive traits: they are challengers with regard to the liberal professions because they aspire to obtain similar institutional recognition, but incumbents compared to the emerging organisations (especially quasi- unions) because they can count on a more structured organisational basis and, despite their corporatist approach, are possible allies in temporary coalitions focused on single issues (e.g., law proposals or awareness campaigns). At this stage of the analysis, it is worth emphasising that the selection process showed some significant asymmetries between the German and Italian contexts. First, the existence of umbrella organisations among German trade unions can foster stable dialogue between the members and also positively affect the offer of representation for self-employed workers. The evidences gathered would require further in-depth study, but we can hypothesise that the stronger dialogue between German trade unions leads to a clearer division of labour and a more coordinated offer of representation: while Ver.di focuses on self-employed workers without employees, IG-Metall is developing a specific project for crowd-workers.

Conversely, the Italian unions seem to develop less complementary offers of representation which, in any case, cannot be shared and discussed in a stable context such as an umbrella organisation[36].

In the crowded landscape of self-employment representation, quasi-unions are playing an important role because they greatly help in defining the new boundaries of the emerging field. First, they can explore the new communication opportunities offered by the digital environment. Through their websites and digital social networks, they exert strong criticism against traditional organisations, and through their practices, based on networking, they foster the collective identity of the self-employed and the inclusion of new groups of workers in the arena of social dialogue. The quasi-unions are usually set up “to fill the gaps in the system of representation” (Heckscher & Carré, 2006) and the quasi-unions considered here are consistent with the quoted traits.

[36]The absence of a stable coordination level has some important effects on informal meetings and public events, which become opportunities for networking and sharing coordinated plans.

Nevertheless, “filling the gaps” can have different meanings for different quasi-unions, and for Italy and Germany. In this section, we limit our observations to the timing of the quasi-unions’ setting up. In Italy, ACTA, the original and main quasi-union for freelancers of the tertiary sector was one of the leading promoters of the public debate on new self-employment. This allowed ACTA, at least in the early stages of the emergence of the field, to gain a dominant role. As noted before, the emerging field is characterised by a high degree of instability, so the roles of incumbents and challengers are less defined than in more stable fields. For this reason, the starting dominant position of ACTA changed in a few years. Now the emergent field of self-employed representation is much more crowded: through a long, continuous complicated internal (quite invisible) debate, the unions are structuring their own offer; in the meantime, other quasi-unions have emerged in other local territories and in specific professional contexts where the existing organisations were ineffective or less present. In a different way, the German strategic action field takes shape through different dynamics. The strong presence of the new trade union Ver.di, together with the greater effectiveness of traditional organisations, influences the setting up and positioning of quasi-unions and new professional associations. The quasi-unions and the new professional associations are free to fill the vacuum of representation in specific productive sectors, but are obliged to interact from the beginning with the trade unions and the traditional professional organisations with a strong know-how in the same emerging field. To conclude this section, some considerations will also be made on the movements and the mapped coalitions, even though their fluidity, which is sometimes close to instability, makes precise analysis more difficult. It is certainly necessary to distinguish protest movements set up with regard to specific episodes of contention from those with a more stable nature, because the latter were set up from the start with a medium-long term project. With regard to the protest movements, it is possible to cite the protest promoted by the German freelancers in 2012 when the Federal Government of Berlin tried to introduce a compulsory minimum pension scheme contribution also for freelancers (**P345_NEWS_DE; P108**). The proposal was withdrawn after over 80,000 freelancers signed a petition against it. However, among the the more stable movements, it is worth mentioning the composite grouping of organisations that support platform co-operativism (of which both SMart DE and SMart IT are part). This involves various European organisations and also has links with organisations in the United States. However, the instability of certain experiences of protest movements also hides the extreme vitality of its components. The information gathered (**P108**) allows us to say that some of the promoters of the protest against the compulsory retirement scheme for freelancers in Berlin were

then promoters of the European Freelance Movement which, in turn, generated the European initiative of the "Freelance week" (see footnote 43) which has become a fixed annual appointment for many European freelancers.

Instead, in the Italian context, a significant cross-sector social coalition (Coalizione 27 Febbraio) was set up in 2015 in order to take public positions on the law proposal on self-employment (*Jobs Act del Lavoro Autonomo*) approved in 2017 (Law 81/2017).

## 4.4 Shapes, structures, rules, resources

A variety of shape and structures emerged from the organisations found and classified in the mapping phase. The information collected is a significant basis of knowledge, successively implemented and tested during the interviews with the key actors of the organisations selected for the following step of the analysis. At first glance, it is possible to identify two different evolutive paths that are totally consistent with an adaptive strategy to a changing environment. On one hand, the traditional organisations try to find a gradual, soft way to foster the creation of new departments or new experimental projects which can structure a suitable offer of representation for the self-employed. In some cases, it means adapting the existing structures; in others, grafting a new element onto the existing structure. This is not a simple or mechanical change, but one which involves a lively and sometimes delicate discussion that affects the internal balance between existing departments and roles, and sometimes includes a minimal re-distribution of resources. In all these cases, the existing organisational shape must be preserved yet, at the same time, renewed. Trade unions are forced to reaffirm their previous choices by finding a way to consistently include a new target in their strategies. At the same time, professional associations face a similar problem, despite many of them not being previously focused mainly or exclusively on employees, as is the case of the trade unions[37]. For all these organisations with a long history, it is a matter of developing adaptive strategies to renew themselves while maintaining consistency. In the same way, they need to develop and present to the public debate new discourses on self-employed workers which are compatible with others' needs for representation (e.g., employees, in the case

[37] There are at least some examples of trade unions with relevant experience in traditional self-employment (FELSA-CISL in Italy) or in specific sectors where externalisation processes were ahead of the trend towards solo self-employment (Verd.di in Germany in relation to the information, communication and publishing sectors). Despite that, the re-framing process aimed at the structural inclusion of solo self-employed involved strong and structural internal debate.

of trade unions; or pure entrepreneurs, in the case of some professional organisations). The challenge is greater for the existing organisations than for the new ones. Existing organisations must reframe their strategies taking into account the complexities connected with their organisational identity (strongly rooted in the history of the organisation), and these new strategies must be compatible with the previous ones, as well as with the access rules and existing resources. In contrast, the new organisations were set up precisely in order to act in the new field of self-employed representation and can thus focus their energy on a direct and aggressive strategy oriented towards specific self-employed groups. As will be explained later, this gives them a competitive advantage with respect to the large, traditional organisations, whose vertical bureaucratic structure means the processes of timing reorganisation and of communication are slower, due to the complexity of their decision-making process.

On the other hand, we see a renewal of practices through the intense use of the digital environment promoted by grass-root groups and new associations (some of which can be classified as quasi-unions) with light, flexible structures. Flexibility of roles and organisation is functional to reacting properly and quickly in the complex (online and off-line) communication environment and to a fluid (or unstable) organisation based mainly on voluntary work. The new digital technologies probably fostered the emergence of the new organisations by offering new opportunities to speak publicly about the new conditions of the self-employed. At the same time, the organisational logic of the digital environment probably inspired and influenced the structure of the new organisations. The network prevails over hierarchies, and the horizontal circulation of information and exchangeability of roles prevail over the strict division of roles and information asymmetry. In the following paragraphs, the operative structures, access rules and resources of the organisations studied will be considered in order to evaluate, where possible, their evolution, potentialities and weaknesses. The wide range of organisations considered means some summarising will be necessary. For these reasons, following the approach adopted in the previous chapter and in the following ones, some unions, quasi-unions, cooperatives and organisations set up from below will be considered, using the most relevant evidence collected. The case studies selected for in-depth study (via in-depth interviews, document analysis, and ethnography) will be considered first, after which a general, although less detailed, overview of all the organisations selected will be made, based on the documental analyses and semi-structured interviews.

### 4.4.1 Italy: light, flexible structures, weak ties and limited resources. Potentialities and limits.

The Italian trade union approach to self-employment (understood here as professional self-employment) was essentially a reaction to two different external factors. On one hand, to the emergence of new organisations, such as ACTA, focused on the professional self-employed and, more generally, those, such as CoLAP, focused on the variety of new professions carried out as self-employed or entrepreneurs; on the other, to the aggressive corporate action of professional bodies, such as the Italian Bar Association (Imola, 2011). The reactions took place in different periods and in different ways. The first crucial response among trade unions was the Board of Professions - CGIL, officially set up in 2010. In the trade union context, it is one of the most significant experiments oriented towards professionals. A new structure in the CGIL, it can be seen as a bridge towards the extremely complex environment of professions, including first- and second-level organisations, individual professionals and experts, and thus a way of overcoming the historical limit of the union of being focused mainly on employees. The Board of Professions nominally includes all professionals, not only the self-employed, but also employees of companies and public administrations. It can be considered an innovative attempt - although one which was probably not completely accepted within the CGIL, at least at the beginning, not even from an organisational standpoint. It overcomes the classic bureaucratic organisational vision in favour of an open system and is a permanent board open to professionals and professional organisations. Participation is free and not conditional on union membership. Moreover, the (light) structure of a national coordinator and some regional coordinators aims at building a stable network and stable dialogue with professionals and professional associations (Borghi & Cavalca, 2015).

The innovative experiment of the Board of Professions was possible thanks to the strong involvement of a small group of trade unionists who raised a new issue on the union agenda in the proper manner. The beginning was complicated, also because of internal hostility **(P14: founder of the Board of Professions, CGIL)**. The light, flexible structure of the Board of Profession can thus be interpreted in two ways. First, as highly functional to the union's exploratory purposes. Participants have no obligations in terms of continuous participation, coalition constraints or other similar limitations. Consensus within the Board must be reached through dialogue, whereas the union is in

charge of coordinating meetings. The national Board is permanent and its coordinator is permanently invited to the union's National Steering Committee, while the regional Boards are activated on a voluntary basis by union members at a regional level. This means that regional Boards are activated only if necessary and if a member of the union is interested in the activities of the Board of Professions. Second, the light, flexible structure also means that neither the national coordinator nor the regional ones are dedicated exclusively to this activity - they spend part of their working time for the Board of Professions, but are also involved in other duties unconnected with self-employed representation. The current national coordinator, for example, is also the reference person for fiscal policies and public finances at a national level. He inherited the difficult burden of the previous phase managed by the founder of the Board:

> *Let's say that the Board of Professions had a setback when Davide Imola - the founder - died in December 2014. I replaced him only a year later, so during that year, doing also other things, I tried to reactivate the Board but had some problems. Nevertheless, now the associations that are part of the Board, thanks also to our work, have strengthened their networks and are supporting the so-called Legislative Decree Del Conte on self-employment*[38]*.* **(P63: Current coordinator of the Board of Professions, CGIL; ; June 2016)**

The weaknesses of the light structure are well known and widely debated within the union. Lightness also means lacking specific weight in the internal debate where union federations are used to measuring their force through the membership at national and regional level during the steering committees. In this case, lightness also means limited human and economic resources:

> *The Board of Professions is not a category, it is only a place where the CGIL meets the associations. I am only invited to the national steering committee, I am not an official member, so have no resources. Obviously, I am reimbursed for travel and maintenance costs, I have no territorial structures except where the regional union decides independently to activate the regional Board of Professions. [...] There has been a big debate within the union on the idea of unifying all the units focused on professionals and self-employed* (NIDIL, Consulta delle Professioni and Agenquadri*).[…] When this unification takes place, there will also be dedicated units throughout Italy. In this way we will have more opportunities to have an impact at a national level and on workers.* **(P63: Current coordinator of the Board of Professions, CGIL; June 2016)**

Although the lightness of the new structures could be interpreted as a limited investment or as a gradual and cautious opening towards new groups, structural factors, too, can explain some general trends oriented to a slow organisational change. Weak ties in the context of large organisations such as trade unions are functional to an organisational culture driven by a solidaristic concept of efficiency, rather than an entrepreneurial one, and this means the internal dynamics are governed

[38] He refers to the first draft of the law on self-employment and smart working (Act. 81/2017)

by gradual readjustments, rather than rapid organisational changes like those expected, for example, in business- oriented organisations.

> *Let's start from the organisational structure: the CGIL, like all the large trade unions, is based on weak ties. It is not organised militarily or even organised like a large enterprise with a very strong chain of command. There is no automatic or mechanical response to the decision of a leader. There are no rapid reactions but rather a continuous internal dialectic. We are involved in the union because we chose to be (it is not just a job). Obviously, there are also hierarchies and subordination dynamics but these are mixed with specific relational and human conditions. There are positive and negative aspects; in phases of change like this there are parts of the organisation which go at different speeds and in different directions. I would not make a big deal out of it, I think this is simply one of the characteristics of such organisations.* **(P118: President of Agenquadri-CGIL; June 2017)**

In addition, the organisational assets and processes need to be evaluated in relation to the broad, structural changes in society, and actions and reactions have to be interpreted as an effort to adapt to the changing environment. According to the interviewee quoted below, the shift towards bureaucratisation is the conservative reaction of the unions, and especially of the CGIL, to the structural crisis of intermediate bodies:

> *The crisis of representation experienced by unions and political parties at the end of the twentieth century produced different reactions. Many of the old mass parties were transformed by individualisation processes which led to the shrinking of the containers. That happened especially to the former Christian Democrat party, which even before the crises had, to a certain extent, this inclination. Whereas the Communist party moved towards an organisational model focused on the leader, a model that was also consistent with its history of attention to collectivist demands and the sacredness of leaders. Despite that, in the past the leaders had different bonds with members and voters. The unions choose a different way; a way of resistance that tends to protect the organisation through bureaucratisation.* **(P118: President of Agenquadri-CGIL; June 2017)**

The light approach to the new self-employment is similar to that in another important union studied, the association vIVAce! promoted by the CISL (the second Italian trade union in terms of membership). VIVAce! is oriented towards non-regulated self-employed professionals and strongly connected with the online environment (web designers, editors, journalists, services for consumers etc.). Members of the online community are not automatically enrolled in the union. vIVAce! can be considered a softer way to draw near to the union. Members of vIVAce! have access to all the services (tax and administrative services, legal advice etc.) but are not involved in the political decision-making process of the union. As noted above, a light structure can be extremely effective for exploring a new context or group. The entire project is led by the coordinator, the only official union member, supported by two external resources - one freelancer focusing on communications and community management and another dealing with marketing activities **(P64)**. Limited investments and limited structural organisational changes allow gradual experimentation

and innovation. As in the case of the Board of Professions, the lack of a full membership means there is a structural weakness in the bargaining processes in the union that can be partially overcome by strong support from the National Steering Committee for the project. From a different angle, as witnessed by the excerpt below, the light structure can be strategic in avoiding the long, delicate and cumbersome dynamics of a structural organisational change.

> *I am quite sure that within the union we have reached a widespread awareness that the approach to self-employment must be extremely different from the approach of the unionists who deal with employees. I then proposed developing a very light, web-based structure without hierarchies in order to avoid the usual dynamics that happen when the union reorganises.* ***(P64: Coordinator of vIVAce!, CISL; June 2016)***

In some cases, the approach to self-employment is a way to explore the dynamics and conditions which are gradually experienced also by employees, as in the case of smart-working. At least in the case of vIVAce!, the dominant idea is that the three-year experimental phase could be an appropriate period to test the project and establish strong connections with other union units strongly focused on the transformation of work driven by the digital revolution:

> *The interest in investing in this project shows that the union wants to be open to workers who were not previously considered. This project will be evaluated within three years. There are also strong connections with other working contexts such as 'smart working' for employees. The internal debate is really strong, you can feel the urgency of a structured and common reflection on all these issues.* **(P64: Coordinator of vIVAce!, CISL; June 2016)**

Another interesting case is the fast-evolving environment of the new cooperatives dealing with the self-employed - mainly, but not exclusively, artists and technical staff (e.g., sound and light technicians). Some emerging cases were not previously considered in the mapping phase, for example, Doc. Servizi, a national cooperative with over 7,000 members which operates in the field of the performing and non-performing arts, including technical staff. The case study selected instead, Smart.it, is important for different reasons, general and specific, which relate to its evolving structure. As already noted, Smart has a European dimension because it is based in nine countries, including Belgium, where it has its headquarters, and Germany, the other country considered in this study. Its steady but rapid growth is worth special attention because of the flexibility of the structures and resources generated by the network and especially by the headquarters. While the common basis of the European network is the non-profit purpose, the legal form changes from country to country according to national legislation. In 2015, there were about as many different legal forms as the number of countries where Smart was present:

> *The legal forms are different between the various European structures, but the common denominator is that they are all non-profit legal structures, so most are cooperatives, but in Belgium it is a group of ASBL that are non-profit organisations.* **(P15bis: president of SMart IT; November 2015)**

The variety of legal forms was necessary at the beginning to address the different legal constraints at national levels. After the start-up phase, there was a harmonisation process. Despite that, the variety of national legal frameworks determined different constraints and opportunities for cooperatives, and each national headquarter had to deal with its own framework.

Now SMart IT has two national headquarters: one in Milan, the first in Italy; the other, recently opened (2017), in Rome. As stated in subsection 4.3.1., the start-up phase was strongly supported by the SMart Belgian Foundation connected to network of cooperatives. In Italy, SMart was set up from the beginning as a social cooperative (*società cooperativa impresa sociale* - **P287: social report SMart 2015**) thanks to the joint funding from the SMart Foundation and within the framework of a special project supported by Cariplo Foundation, a philanthropic Italian foundation dedicated to social innovation, art and culture. The legal form is consistent with the general purposes of the European network, as well as a strategic choice to actively engage members in the development of the cooperative through democratic and participative processes:

> *In our case, the Italian one I mean, being a social cooperative means the possibility of underlining a little more the non-profit aspects as well as the active participation of members. The active involvement and motivation of members is not only an ethical value but also a guarantee of success for the cooperative. Motivated members certainly contribute more to the development of the cooperative and, at the same time, exercise control because they own a part, even if little, of the cooperative. In this way, opportunistic behaviours can be avoided or at least limited.* **(P15bis: President of SMart IT; November 2015)**

The structure conceived of as a professional, collaborative and participative environment can evolve by remaining close to the shared values. At the same time, this evolution is co-determined by members actively contributing to the decision process, sharing problems, ideas and needs which can be discussed, evaluated and included in the cooperative's plans. Thus the flexibility of the structure is conceived of in terms of adaptability to members' needs and of services provided, as well as in relation to the management group. In the start-up phase, the core of the operative management was concentrated around a few strategic figures: a) the managing director, in charge of strategies and development, but also of public relations, jointly with the communication manager; b) the president, the planner of the start-up phase; c) the communication and partnership manager; and d) an administrative employee managing the members' administrative arrangements (one of Smart's original core services). After four years, the operative structure is still light and

flexible, despite the two national headquarters in Milan and Rome (the latter at the beginning of the start-up phase) with a managing director, who also became president of the cooperative; a communication and partnership manager; three administrative staff; and three employees dedicated to implementing active relations with members. Four years after the start, the cooperative counts over 1,300 members, slowly increasing despite the complicated conditions which characterise the Italian labour market and the legal framework concerning contracts, welfare and the tax system.

The light, flexible structure of SMart IT based on a non-profit orientation seems particularly favourable to implementing virtuous relationships based on win-win strategies; and its non-profit approach aims at guaranteeing a plurality of operators in the same sector. Workers can rely on protection from possible distortions generated by the market (e.g. delayed or missed payments), and receive support from the cooperative to deal with their bureaucratic, administrative and tax obligations which, while unavoidable, sidetrack them from their professional activities. In addition, the cooperative context can address workers' networking and professional improvement needs in that their active participation in the life of the cooperative can foster training and lobbying activities suited to their real needs. Finally, thanks to its bundling capacity, Smart (and, more generally, the cooperatives of professionals) can become an authoritative interlocutor for clients interested in a variety of professional competences, and this authoritativeness also has weight with national and local institutions.

While Smart IT positions itself in an intermediate point favouring the interaction of different professional players, it also recognises and intercepts the multiple professional conditions that workers can meet in their career. The fluidity of the professional conditions experienced by knowledge workers in general, and particularly in the artistic-creative sector, is one of the main emerging issues in the debate on the new self-employment. This fluidity has significant repercussions on tax obligations, access to social security and their inclusion in the welfare system. Again, Smart appears to be the most favourable interlocutor for many professionals whose careers are in continuous evolution:

> *Starting from what my colleague said about the participation process in a non-profit context, we can easily understand that 'sharing' and 'redistributing' have different consequences: through the active inclusion of members in the corporate governance we can better understand their needs. Moreover, through the daily work with a variety of specific situations, you discover that very often there is no distinction between members, the self-employed, entrepreneurs and clients. For example, several members, at some stage, use SMart as a kind of incubator, then become self-employed (registered for VAT), then open a graphics office and need graphic designers or a video*

> *maker for a specific project. In this case, they go to SMart to find the professionals they need. Potentially, SMart could include members, clients, self-employed, partnerships and companies working on the same professional issues.* **(P15: communication and partnership manager, SMart.It; November 2015)**

Having proper economic and human resources is one of the key elements in the start-up phase of any organisation, but remains strategic in the following phases, too. In the case of Smart, the combination of funding from the Cariplo Foundation and economic support from the Belgian SMart foundation played a crucial role at the beginning, while the latter still supports Smart.it (in 2015, with around €200,000).

The €50 membership fee entitles the member to take part in the activities promoted by the cooperative, vote during the general assemblies and access the cooperative's services. Each member can decide which professional projects the cooperative will administrate, in return paying the cooperative 8.5% of the invoiced cost of the work (excluding VAT). This is the cooperative's other important funding resource.

Another important aspect concerns the strategic support provided by the current communication manager, who previously worked in Smart Belgium. This important link favoured the sharing of the approach promoted by Smart Belgium, ensuring the start-up phase would be consistent with the development plan fostered by Smart Belgium in other European countries **(P15: President of SMart IT)**. Also, after the three years of the start-up phase in Milan, the manager moved to Rome to foster the growth of the new headquarters. In the case of Smart IT, the development strategies were supported during the start-up phase by a combination of the light, flexible structure of full-time dedicated professionals and proper funding . This is more and more significant in relation to the Italian context, which is characterised by poor labour markets such as the artistic scene, and the complexities of the Italian legal framework.

Most of the organisations representing the self-employed are in the metropolitan areas where the self-employed, institutions and clients are concentrated, and where it is easier to build networks and alliances and explore the emerging business environment of coworking and start-ups. This is why most of the traditional and structured organisations and the more horizontal and new bottom-up organisations were set up in Milan and Rome.

It is interesting to note that in the case of structured organisations, and even more so in the horizontal organisations with weak hierarchies, the presence of several headquarters means a strong tendency towards decentralisation and autonomy in the decision-making process. This is not only consistent with the flexible approach of the working groups but also a necessity, due to both

the characteristics of local urban environments where the economic, institutional, and social frameworks are entwined and to the social capital of the active members. This last point is crucial for quasi-unions such as ACTA, whose existence is totally based on members' voluntary work:

> *Lombardy is the most represented region in ACTA, Milan in particular; we also have a group in Emilia Romagna, they are very smart, they do a lot of work. What we don't have, basically, is the South, we have only a group in Cagliari, Sardinia. Our presence always depends on our members' willingness to dedicate their time, knowledge and energy to the organisation. Our presence starts from the bottom, if there are no active members, there is no organisation. The same in Rome, one of our most strategic areas.* **(P74: president of ACTA – feb. 2017)**

In this case, a light structure also means no physical structures with their maintenance costs. Public meetings are organised in coworking spaces, foundations and other available spaces provided by public institutions in a way which brings with it a new concept of space (temporary and targeted to limited goals) a precise idea of the relationship between the representing organisation and the represented self-employed (attempting to be where the self-employed are) and a necessary economic model oriented towards cost reduction. In the case of ACTA, the governing body, managed by the president, includes members of different local groups and is structured by the national laws regarding associations. Beyond the formal structure, the organisational model based on voluntary work requires flexible models based on small (often informal) groups in charge of specific and limited tasks (e.g., online communication, special funded projects, helpdesks, and training sessions). The economic resources come mainly from annual membership fees (€50, or €30 for young members), voluntary donations or specific projects funded by public institutions. This is a key critical issue because, in some cases, the combination of voluntary work of members and limited income from membership fees limits the capacity for action. It is rather interesting and contradictory, in this case, that the American Freelancers Union, founded by Sarah Horovitz in 1995, was one of ACTA's reference models from the beginning. Indeed, there is much in common between the two quasi-unions, from the style of communication to the idea of supporting the creation of a social identity of freelancers. What is different is the "business model": in the case of the Freelancers Union, membership is free because union activities are supported by income from favourable insurance schemes which members join through the union.

The attractiveness of the Freelancers Union lies primarily in the direct economic advantage for its members (a strong pull factor), in a context where the welfare system is based almost exclusively on the private sector. In contrast, in the case of ACTA, membership fees are the main source of

income, since the Italian quasi-union cannot rely on strong leverage based on the economic advantages deriving from advantageous private health and pension insurance. Health insurance agreements (also promoted by ACTA) or the need for a supplementary pension (perceived but not strongly sought after by the self-employed), which could be promoted at advantageous conditions, are not so attractive for members because of the universal welfare system and cannot be an effective pull factor for the organisation. The combination of the membership fee and the absence of the leverage of economic advantages or other limited club benefits thus plays a part in limiting the number of members, despite the high reputation of the organisation and the high number of its followers on social networks.

Flexible, light operative structures are, obviously, to be found in many other bottom-up organisations, whether sector oriented (e.g., GPL, the association of young psychologists; MGA, the association of young lawyers; IVA sei Partita, the association of young architects and engineers; or Re.Re.Pre, a network of precarious editors); cross-sector (GASP, an informal group of precarious self-employed knowledge workers; or *San Precario*, a movement of precarious workers in the service sector); or a coalition, as with *Coalizione 27 Febbraio*, the only one in this study. Flexible, light structures can, in these cases, again be considered part of a consistent strategy for new organisations still under construction and based mainly on members' voluntary work. At the same time, it could be considered a pragmatic choice based mainly on a specific cultural orientation forged by the complex communication environment (on- and off-line) that plays an important role in the emergence of claims and protests. Moreover, lightness and flexibility often mean a trend towards a more participatory and horizontal environment where members have sufficient room to propose (and propose themselves for) new activities. Therefore, lightness and flexibility can, in some cases, be considered a positive constraint that fosters experimentation, the sharing of responsibilities, and democratic debate.

Turning now to the other organisations, it is worth considering the main Italian umbrella organisations: CoLAP, Confassociazioni, Confprofessioni and CNA Professioni. Although they have many things in common, each has specific aspects of its operational structure that are determined by its history, professional areas of reference, and the logics closely connected with its positioning. First, it is interesting to note that these four organisations have quite different origins but similar formal structures, partially determined by the legal framework for associations. In this case, the gap between the formal and operative structures is narrower than with other types of organisation because governing several organisations gathered under the same umbrella requires reliance on a

more formalised structure. According to the information gathered, Confprofessioni brings together twenty organisations operating mainly (but not exclusively, an aspect that is quite interesting in the analysis of representation strategies) in the field of the liberal professions; whereas CoLAP, Confassociazioni and CNA Professioni are mainly focused on professions without professional bodies and gather a significant number of organisations of different sizes: CoLAP, over two hundred; Confassociazioni, over a hundred; and CNA Professioni[39], thirty-three.

The operative structure involved in the daily activities of the organisation is composed of members from the most important affiliated organisations. From the interviews (**P70; P73; P66; P79**), a strong connection emerges between the importance of the affiliated organisations (in terms of membership and resources invested in the umbrella organisation), the experience of their top managers and their role in the operative structure of the umbrella organisation. In other words, we can say that two complementary criteria coexist in the hierarchical structure of the umbrella organisations: the legitimate power of the organisations based on the resources invested, and the recognised role played by the individuals, according to their strategic skills and competences. If we focus our attention on the top roles (president and vice-presidents) of the four organisations, at least three significant common traits can be detected: a limited turnover, a high concentration of official posts in bodies and associations in the same field as the umbrella organisation (or in adjacent sectors), and the important role played by the individuals at the top of the organisation in the structuring process of the field of self-employed representation. In the latter case, the presidents of the three umbrella organisations focused on non-regulated professions (CoLAP, Confassociazioni, CNA Professioni) played a pivotal role in the approval of the law on non-regulated professions (Law 4/2013).

The new digital environment has supported the visibility of new organisations which are more open to exploring the opportunities of digital social networks and blogs. In addition, through the digital environment, isolated self-employed professionals can be reached in order to combat trends to domestication (Bologna & Fumagalli, 1997). Despite that, proactive participation by isolated self-employed beyond single-issue online campaigns is quite limited and discontinuous, which is why

[39] Counting the associations in the umbrella organisations turns out to be rather complicated because:
1) the information available on the websites is not necessarily up-to-date;
2) the different registration criteria (annual fee, one-off quota plus yearly fee, symbolic one-euro registration fee) make the evaluations of representativeness less precise than is necessary;
3) the lack of precise rules on the formal evaluation of representativeness means declarations about it or the membership are less verifiable.

developing strategies and services which can only be partially developed through the web requires local headquarters and employees:

> *ConfProfessioni has regional headquarters all over Italy. Everything depends on the economic resources and fortunately, we can count on solid sources of funding. We have a very large headquarters in Rome (we have been a recognised social partner since 2001), we have bilateral agencies* [enti bilaterali] *and twenty regional headquarters. I am also a member of another organisation called Altapartecipazione. This is a network of organisations and is more fluid, extremely dynamic and innovative but without a solid economic and organisational structure as is the case of Confprofessioni.* **(P72: president of ConfProfessioni Lazio)**

If we focus our attention on the emerging field of self-employment representation, we can recognise a strong variety in terms of organisational structures and economic models. There are the classic, well-established organisations with regional structures covering the whole country (e.g., trade unions and professional organisations) and there are new organisations which are extremely fluid, flexible, and ready to exploit new opportunities arising from the digital revolution but with smaller physical structures and economic resources. In addition, some specific events played a strategic role in the (re)structuring process of some important self-employed organisations as well as on the emerging field as a whole.

The approval of the law on professions without a professional body (Law 4/2013), a milestone (despite being more symbolic than effective) has been strongly supported since the turn of the century by CoLAP, where the current president of Confassociazioni was heavily involved until 2013, before founding Confassociazioni. The current president of CNA Professioni, too, played a important role lobbying for approval of the law. This is important in understanding the structuring process of the field because the setting up of Confassociazioni and CNA Professioni was connected temporarily and strategically to the newly approved law. The shape of the emerging field was also affected by competition between the organisations in terms of affiliation rules. As noted before, Confassociazioni was set up by a former CoLAP member who was one of the main lobbyists for Law. 4/2013. A number of previous member organisations of CoLAP moved to Confassociazioni, which grew in the following years also thanks to an aggressive affiliation campaign. This was based on a combination of a process which levelled associative positions and low membership costs - indeed, new members can decide their membership fee, starting from a minimum of €1 to a maximum that reflects their real interest in the organisation's activities:

> *Many organisations become members of Confassociazioni above all because we have low costs. The membership fee is variable, starting from one euro. So, we have very low access costs and treat all members the same way, those who pay €1 and associations that pay five thousand. It's a political choice and I would not have grown this way in just three years if I done otherwise.*

> *And, as in all networks, in Facebook as in LinkedIn, you can use Confassociazioni as you wish; if you invest more, a proper return can be generated; we are an extraordinary multiplicator of opportunities.* **(P70: president of Confassociazioni; February 2016)**

In so doing, Confassociazioni created low entry barriers favouring a proactive approach to the economic contribution in an organisational environment oriented towards the business community, and with this critical mass, the organisation could also develop structural lobbying. In addition, even in an umbrella organisation, some trends towards reducing hierarchies can be found in the formal and practical aspects: vice-presidents and other top-level staff are formally delegated for specific thematic areas and can act autonomously, with the obligation of keeping the president informed of their activities. Here again, the change can be seen as a measure to foster a proactive approach, but at the same time the delegation process can be functional to addressing the multiple productive contexts where the tertiary sector self-employed are involved:

> *They were all vice presidents and now they are all delegated presidents. In this manner, even in the external representation, I am just one of the knights of the round table. In so doing I can better select a ruling class that is more holistic and less vertical. In addition to the increased independence fostering a proactive approach, I can concentrate my efforts on the business community composed of several associations which also need to be represented. I think that this is the model that really works.* **(P70: president of Confassociazioni; February 2016)**

In contrast, CoLAP, CNA Professioni and Confprofessioni (the umbrella organisation of the liberal professions) have more classic operational structures and affiliation rules, as well as organisations focused on one sector or one professional profile (e.g., UGCdL, the association of labour consultants; or ANASF, the largest Italian association of financial planners). Despite that, the perceived priorities are flexibility of roles and the need to act simultaneously on multiple contexts (institutions, old and new members, the online and off-line communication environments, at local, national and European levels). Moreover, the evolution of the professions and working environments are pushing for a rapid process of adaptation by the organisations representing professionals involved in different contexts, also because of new laws on self-employment (Law 81/2017) and non-regulated professions (Law 4/2013):

> *[We have] to abandon established and outdated models to explore new opportunities, new references closer to the new needs of the present; we ask politicians and institutions, but also trade unions, to give up archaic models and imagine new forms of protection, new competitive models, to face the emerging new markets and new labour markets. […]The associations have a duty to re-define themselves (in the new roles acquired and in favour of the professions). We must find the strength to define strict and indisputable rules, if we really believe in the principles of law 4/2013, which we pursued for about 15 years.* **(P269: president of CoLAP)**

Analysis of the organisational and operational structures, access rules, and resources shows an evident polarisation between traditional and new organisations. The former, e.g., trade unions and professional organisations, including some of their umbrella organisations, can rely on physical structures all over the country and on staff paid to carry out specific activities aimed at self-employed workers, in some cases full-time, in others alongside other activities for the same organisation. The latter have limited resources and physical structures but are more oriented to the digital environment. The prevailing economic model among traditional organisations is based on a mix of resources coming from membership fees (from individuals or collective organisations), services (in many cases not dedicated exclusively to self-employed workers), training activities and, to a lesser extent, funded projects. In some cases, in particular for the unions, the approach to the representation of self-employment took place through projects that can be defined experimental. This has direct and significant repercussions, at the same time positive and negative, on the structures and resources available. As far as organisational and operational structures are concerned, it is significant to note that being an experimental project means being able to move in a more dynamic and informal way compared to the normal procedures followed by the departments and trade union federations. In relation to the organisation as a whole, the experimental projects are thus at the perimeter of the organisation, although within it. This implies a large degree of freedom with respect to all the procedural and formal (bureaucratic) obligations of a structured traditional organisation. We can therefore interpret the experimental state as a way of trying out innovative paths, taking all the necessary precautions in a relatively new field for trade unions to avoid overhasty choices or those not based on solid experience. At the same time, being experimental means having limited weight (even though fully legitimate) in the interaction with the union federations (fully integrated into the organisational machine) and in asking for additional economic and human resources to reinforce the experiment. Limited economic independence also means limited room to foster organisational innovation through ad hoc training for staff, to implement new services or adapt old ones.

Considering now in detail the adaptation process of organisations to the new environment of self-employment, the empirical evidences show they are more dynamic compared to trade unions. The first, and trivial, reason is that self-employment in its varied forms has always been a natural target for professional organisations, which have closely followed its evolution. A second is that they are a direct expression of the productive contexts' urgent needs due to the rapid changes of the productive system and labour markets. Both reasons may explain their greater vitality in fostering

the setting up of new organisations (I refer here to the umbrella organisations considered in this study: CoLAP, and Confassociazioni) or in setting up new structures (rather than opting for less structured experimental projects) within the existing organisations (CNA Professions within CNA; the National Confederation of Crafts and Small Businesses). Finally, it is worth noting that the Italian context is characterised by convergence trends with regard to the targets of the organisational structures. Thus Confprofessioni, the main umbrella organisation of liberal professions has also recently been opening up to professional organisations without a professional body, grouped in what they define "the fifth area" (intellectual professions, artists, cultural operators, and archaeologists). In the same way, the umbrella organisations of non-regulated professionals are opening up to some organisations of liberal professionals (e.g., CoLAP includes two associations of psychologists: Mo.PI, the Movement of Independent Psychologists and SPOPSAM, Operators in Sports Psychology). Likewise, the Board of Professions - CGIL also includes organisations that appeal to the liberal professions and those without professional bodies.

With regard to bottom-up organisations, both those that can be defined quasi-union and those more oriented to specific professional sectors with a corporatist approach opt for light, horizontal organisational structures whose formal hierarchy determined by legal requirements does not reflect the daily practices where roles and tasks are flexibly distributed among active members. These trends are the result of choices and sensitivities that can be traced back to a network-oriented organisational culture rather than to hierarchies, and are consistent with the practical needs of an organisational model based mainly or exclusively on volunteering, where people need to reconcile their activities in the associations with their professional activities and private life.

In these contexts, the absence of stable economic resources tends to limit the innovative potential aimed at testing new ways of participation based on the new digital technologies. Digital social networks and digital platforms are not only a new channel of comparison between organisations and their targets, but a new and still little-explored environment where individuals experience soft access to associations: not members, but followers (Twitter) or friends (Facebook). The nature of the relationships between associations and users is certainly still in an experimental phase, but the success of some online campaigns promoted by quasi-unions like ACTA, Iva sei Partita, and San Precariat, the effects of these campaigns on traditional communication channels, and the consequent activation of the political and institutional sphere, show that there is still a great deal of potential to be explored. At the same time, digital attitudes are not automatically transformed into

structured and constant activism outside the digital environment, despite the fact that a significant amount of the human resources in the new organisations is oriented to developing online communication. It is difficult to transform a reputation acquired in the digital context into a structured and constant resource in the real world where a continuous and competent presence is equally necessary.

### 4.4.2 Germany: professionalisation and new frontiers of self-employed representation

In Italy, the union path towards self-employment, which came late and in an adaptive form with respect to the emerging field, is via a plurality of focuses: on non-standard work (NIDIL-CGIL; FELSA-CISL), high professionalism (AGENQUADRI-CGIL) and knowledge workers (SLC-CGIL[40]), and partly via direct experience with traditional self-employed workers, tobacconists, petrol pump attendants, and travelling shows (FELSA-CISL). In contrast, the much earlier experience of the German trade union Ver.di comes from the experience of the trade union IG-Medien (focused on workers in the media and art sectors), one of the unions which then merged into Ver.di in 2001. From the start, Ver.di fostered an internal debate on the structural changes of self-employment, starting from the media and communication sectors, education, culture and ICT, in line with the sectoral expertise developed by some of the founding organisations. A specific unit, Ver.di Selbstständige, was set up as an attempt to respond to a fast-changing labour market.

When it was set up[41], Ver.di Selbstständige could count on a large group of self-employed members who were previously members of IG-Medien. Its approach to self-employment also benefited from some organisations (e.g., VdÜ, *Verband deutschsprachiger Übersetzer literarischer und wissenschaftlicher Werke*) which were annexed to the trade unions after merging into Ver.di. Even these apparently distant events influenced the recent debate on the representation of self-employed workers and, more precisely, the discussion between Ver.di Selbstständige and one

[40] Especially through STRADE, an association of publishing translators which signed a structural agreement with the union in 2012, and was in 2016 structurally included in SLC-CGIL.

[41] Ver.di is the abbreviation of Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft, "United Services Union". It was set up in 2001 when the German Salaried Employees' Union (DAG, Deutsche Angestellten Gewerkschaft) merged with four other unions of the German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB, Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund): the German postal union (DPG, Deutsche Postgewerkschaft); the Union of trade, banks and insurance companies (HBV, Gewerkschaft Handel, Banken und Versicherungen); IG Medien (printing and paper, journalism and art); and the Union of public services, transport and traffic (OTV, Gewerkschaft Öffentliche Dienste, Transport und Verkehr).

of the new organisations (VFLL, *Verband der Freien Lektorinnen und Lektoren*), as described in the previous chapter.

> *When we started in 2000, before the official foundation of the new Trade Union in 2001, about 23,000 workers in the creative sector were already in IG-Medien and now they are in Ver.di. There are also other freelancers in the education sector, some in health, very few freelancers in IT, but we are beginning to deal with them, too, and now there are 30,000 freelancers in the union.* **(P58: coordinator 1 Ver.di Selbstständige; 2015; August 2015)**

Ver.di is part of DGB, the largest German Confederation of Trade Unions, and through DGB, Ver.di is linked to cross-national union organisations such as the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation), ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) and TUAC (Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD) (Borghi, 2018). Although the increase of a structured network of organisations is perceived as a strategic issue, the structuring process appears strongly influenced by long-term dynamics whose origins need to be traced back in history. That is to say, despite being strategic and constantly under construction, the dialogue between the trade unions and new organisations produced only limited opportunities for the structural inclusion of sectoral organisations:

> ***When I interviewed the chair of DGB Berlin-Brandenburg, she told me that if someone (including, and especially, the unions) wanted to explain to freelancers the best solution for their organisation, the attempt would probably fail because, according to her, the only way to approach freelancers is through the existing freelancers' organisations. How did Ver.di include some of these organisations in the union?***
>
> *On one hand, the result of this network is the result of a historical process because, for example, the association of literary translators has long been part of the union. It was not the fantastic work of Ver.di that led us to their integration but rather something that happened in Germany long ago, when writers and translators in Germany decided to stay on the side of the workers[42]. Therefore, it was partly an event that had something political, historical. In practice, we have only a few organisations that are integrated into the union.* **(P58: coordinator 1 Ver.di Selbstständige; 2015; August 2015)**

As in the case of the Italian trade unions, the operational structure relies on a very limited number of human resources who are politically active in favour of the self-employed. In the case of Ver.di Selbstständige, the staff in charge even decreased, from three full-time resources (including one in administration) and one part-time, to two full-time coordinators. However, this reduction was accompanied by the progressive structuring of a professional consulting service provided through

[42]Together with the Verband deutscher Schriftsteller (VS), VdÜ joined the Translators Association in 1974 as a "Federal Translators" union of the union IG Druck und Papier, which expanded in 1989 by merging with the union Kunst to IG Media and was incorporated in 2001 in the service trade union Ver.di. **(P339: History of VdÜ)**

an external company, Mediafon, structurally connected to it and funded by the union. Mediafon can count on a number of contracted freelancers (from 15 to 18). Consultations are free for union members while non-members are charged a fee. Mediafon was originally set up in IG-Media when the number of self-employed members increased to 15%, as a result of the restructuring process of the media sector. This was a way to provide professional services to a fast-changing working group with different traits to the classic employee. When Ver.di was set up, Mediafon suffered a setback because the complicated aggregation process absorbed all its organisational energies **(P111)**. After that period, Mediafon was reactivated as a project within Ver.di Selbstständige and in 2004 became a limited liability company (GmbH):

> ***Has Ver.di Selbstständige changed since the beginning, when you started dealing with the self-employed? Have investments increased? How has the organisation been evolving?*** *[a smile before answering] The resources have decreased. If we look at them, we have to say that. We started with two full-time staff, plus a part-timer and a full-time secretary. So, two and a half people doing political-union work and one dealing with administrative duties. Now there are two of us involved in political-union work. Günter is the manager of Mediafon, the company that provides services to freelancers; there are 15 freelancers, each an expert in a specific working sector. People call or write about their problems and the experts answer by phone or email. So it is true that the number of people involved in union work have decreased, but it is also true that there is a structure with a group of 15, sometimes 18, experts who support the Mediafon's activity. Freelancers working in Mediafon are paid and most are union members.* **(P58: coordinator 1 Ver.di Selbstständige; 2015; August 2015)**

Mediafon also publishes a book, Der Ratgeber Selbstständige[43] with an online extension accessible only by owners. This book contains information on laws, contractual clauses, and tax and insurance regulations, and is constantly updated according to user requests. In addition, there are regional groups which autonomously organise meetings, networking, thematic groups and other activities according to need. The framework outlined above allows some preliminary comments. Structural inclusion in the union of the self-employed started before Ver.di was set up, following the structural changes in the media sector with the significant increase there of the self-employed in the 1990s (Nies & Pedersini, 2003). When Ver.di was set up, the self-employed were structurally included in the targets of the union thanks to a dedicated unit, Ver.di Selbstständige, with its own resources and a dedicated project, Mediafon, which became a limited liability company in 2004 and aimed at providing consultation for the self-employed. Three significant aspects can be noted: a) the timeline of the innovation process is earlier in comparison with Italian unions and the changes in the union follow the re-structuring process of the labour markets more closely; b) the structural investment

[43] https://selbststaendige.verdi.de/beratung/ratgeber

in a dedicated unit allows constant exploration of the emerging field and, once again, we can note a significant difference between the soft exploration of the Italian trade unions and the more structural choice of Ver.di; and c) the investment in a dedicated professional service for freelancers, Mediafon, instead of a weaker inclusion of the self-employed in the target of the union service structure (as happened in the CGIL and CISL). As mentioned before, timing, investments and dedicated services greatly influence the structuring process of the emerging field of self-employed representation at a national level, as well as the positioning of the trade unions in the emerging field.

Another interesting and complementary German case is 'Fair Crowd Work', promoted by the trade union IG-Metall. Complementarity seems less a casual result than that of a structural division of the areas of influence among German trade unions. It is probably also favoured by the existence of a common formalised context: DGB, the German trade union confederation, where structured debate, points of views, and approaches can be shared and compared:

> *I met a lady from IG-Metall ten days ago in a regional union conference of theirs, the one for Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony. At the conference, she explained the approach of IG-Metall. We talked during the lunch break and she confirmed that IG-Metall and Ver.di have the same approach. The workers are isolated individuals and so now the two unions organise individuals, offering useful tools to give better information on the labour markets, reinforce the network of workers, and better understand what happens in the industries. It is the first step, the first very good step towards transparency and workers' networking.* **(P56: Chairman of the DGB Bezirk Berlin-Brandenburg)**

Fair Crowd Work is a pilot project for crowd-workers, a specific target in the variegated environment of new self-employment. The pilot project was positively included in the union plans. According to the district manager of IG-Metall Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony, Fair Crowd Work is the result of a complex bargaining process within the union focusing on a proper balance of the resources dedicated to pilot projects and the internal models determined by a number of sensitive items: 1) the traditional productive contexts where the union is more involved; 2) the sectoral and thematic groups set up according to the strategic productive sector of the area; and 3) the priorities determined at national level. On one hand, the union is open to new projects which can explore the new frontiers of production and labour organisation; on the other, each union needs to consider the internal balance of interest groups and its democratic structure:

> *As far as I am concerned, it is important to correctly consider the complexity of our structure, which is less rigid than it appears. We are a mix of an elected board and 155 groups with strong grass-roots, which means they have a high level of autonomy. Their resources come directly from membership fees. The board is elected by the delegates of the members. There is the president,*

> *who is a strong influence on the regional area. So, all this to say that there is a big gap between the union people who talk about issues such as crowd work and the daily reality of the 155 regional groups. At the same time, there is also an open attitude to emerging issues. […] New initiatives have to be discussed and supported with good arguments because in the union everyone wants to have resources, and this is one aspect. The other is that the union has a very open view that also relies heavily on scientific knowledge, so we are aware of the changes taking place and the challenges ahead.* **(P68: Chairman of IG-Metall , District of Berlin-Brandenburg)**

Resources are certainly one of the most sensitive issues since the entire union structure is financed by membership fees. These cover salaries and management costs (over 50% of the income - **P68**) and must also finance the projects of the 155 groups, whose weight in the union is proportional to the number of their members. So it is evident that obtaining resources for experimental projects requires delicate work based on diplomacy and precise evaluation in order to respect the complex internal balances.

> *Normally, what we do is financed by membership fees. We invest a lot of money in basic structures, where the elected council members are present, so they are well aware of the number of members and the resources they are entitled to as a result. They are strong, capable, and determined, and obviously want to know what is being done with this money. So we must have solid arguments when we explain that part of it goes on projects which are not directly connected with their own working context. There is obviously a principle of solidarity, but it always needs to be justified.* **(P68: Chairman of IG-Metall, District of Berlin-Brandenburg)**

Despite the internal dynamics described above which influenced its start, Fair Crowd Work is the first structured attempt among European trade unions to face the fast-evolving labour market mediated by digital platforms. The light structure of the three-year experimental project was designed to explore a topic that was totally new in the European context of 2015 when the project started. A structural knowledge gap had to be filled, which is why one of the two full-time resources in the project focused on research activities, while the other was specifically hired to recruit crowd-workers interested in playing an active role in the union. The latter is Six Silberman, a well-known American activist who, with Lilly Irani, co-designed Turkopticon (2008), a website and browser extension aimed at supporting workers of Amazon Mechanical Turk in order to review requesters, criteria and speed of payment, fairness of evaluation, and communication (Silberman & Irani, 2016):

> *I came to IG-Metall just last year. Despite my German surname, I was born in the States. Our project is like a little project; now it is not working with other departments, we are a small unit. There is an important internal debate on crowd-workers and there was even before this project, which is a three-year project. […] I was hired as part of this project and this is my full-time activity. My boss is also the supervisor of the division and other departments, such as Migration and Youth, Gender equality, and white-collar workers. A second colleague in the crowdsourcing project is more focused on the research part of it, whereas I am more focused on the organising and am responsible*

*for the recruiting of crowd-workers.* **(P71: Member of Fair Crowd Work project, IG-Metall; November 2016)**

The case of Fair Crowd Work has several interesting aspects. First, it follows the long, structured debate on the digital economy fostered by the German trade unions, especially through the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung (Leimeister et al., 2016). This debate was also fostered at a European level by ETUC[44], the European Trade Union Confederation, and ETUI, the European Trade Union Institute (Degryse, 2016; Fabo & Drahokoupil, 2016; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2016). In December 2016, a network of European Unions[45] including IG-Metall signed the Frankfurt Paper on Platform-Based Work[46], a proposal for platform operators, clients, policy makers, workers, and workers' organisations, after a structured international workshop on the platform economy. Second, it is based on an agile structure which aims at producing basic knowledge on crowd-workers, as well as fostering digital platform transparency through a public evaluation system where crowd-workers evaluate digital platforms, therefore with the same purpose as Turkopticon (Laplante & Silberman, 2016; Silberman & Irani, 2016). Third, although the project is still in a start-up phase, it is supported by the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) and the legal information is available for both German and Austrian crowd-workers. This joint action by two national unions in two different states, although in its early stages, could be the right way to address the specific context of online labour platforms, naturally oriented towards a transnational horizon.

Turning to the other German organisations selected, four interesting cases have emerged. One is the German branch of SMart, the network of cooperatives for artists and freelancers spread all over Europe. The second is WeiberWirtschaft; the third its spin-off, Gründerinnenzentrale; and the fourth, I.S.I. e.V. Initiative Selbständiger Immigrantinnen. These are four examples of organisations supporting a sustainable approach to self-employment with a special emphasis on gender and social issues.

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[44] ETUC resolution on digitalisation: "towards fair digital work", adopted by the Executive Committee, 8-9 June 2016. Available at: https://www.etuc.org/documents/etuc-resolution-digitalisation-towards-fair-digital-work#.WsJJlohubIU ETUC Resolution on tackling new digital challenges to the world of labour, in particular crowdwork, adopted at the Executive Committee Meeting, 25-26 October 2017. Available at: https://www.etuc.org/documents/tackling-new-digital-challenges-world-labour-particular-crowdwork#.WsJJ94hubIU

[45] Austrian Chamber of Labour (Arbeiterkammer), Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB), Danish Union of Commercial and Clerical Workers (HK), German Metalworkers' Union (IG Metall), International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 117, Service Employees International Union, Unionen. **(P16)**.

[46] Available at: http://faircrowd.work/unions-for-crowdworkers/frankfurt-declaration/

SMart DE was set up recently, but can already count on a staff of seven in two headquarters, Berlin and Bremen. The start-up model is the same as its Italian counterpart: the economic resources comes from a mix of funded projects and strong financial support from the SMArt Belgian Foundation which covers rental costs **(P57)**. In the German case, the new cooperative can count on funding for the Touring Artists[47] project, a dedicated consulting service regarding international mobility for artists, creative workers, those engaged in the cultural sector in Germany and those who want to work in Germany. The approach is thus oriented towards a pragmatic and highly functional service for Smart's core target and, at the same time, is a good opportunity to engage the cooperative's new staff:

> *We are very happy that here in Smart we can work on this project financed by the Culture Ministry because it allows us to offer our members consultancy: it is a practical way to help them and, at the same time, a useful way to understand their needs. With this service, we can give artists free support on administrative arrangements, which is most useful because they need information but cannot afford a consultant. In addition, the call centre for consulting services has the advantage of being rather informal and therefore more accessible. All the information on which we base our advice is available on the website of the project, called Touring Artists. With this service, there is time to talk in detail about the artists' individual projects, as well as about their real needs.* **(P57: Board & Organisational Development manager, SMart.de; August 2015)**

Another important source of funding comes from the membership fee[48], which entitles each member to participate in the cooperative's decision-making process. In the start-up phase, membership is obviously quite limited and, as a result, also the resources from this source, which is why funded projects are strategic. Similar access rules can be found in the WeiberWirtschaft cooperative. This aims at supporting women's self-employment through a series of services (consulting, microcredit, network building, and, above all, renting offices and spaces, see Fig. 2), oriented to creating a sustainable professional environment for self-employed women. To become a member, each woman must purchase at least one cooperative share (€103), plus a one-off fee of €30; the services and specific facilities for renting are restricted to members.

[47] https://www.touring-artists.info/home/

[48] Access is through the purchase of a one-time cooperative share of €50 and 7% of each project's net revenue run via SMart. Members can decide which projects will be personally managed and which via SMart.

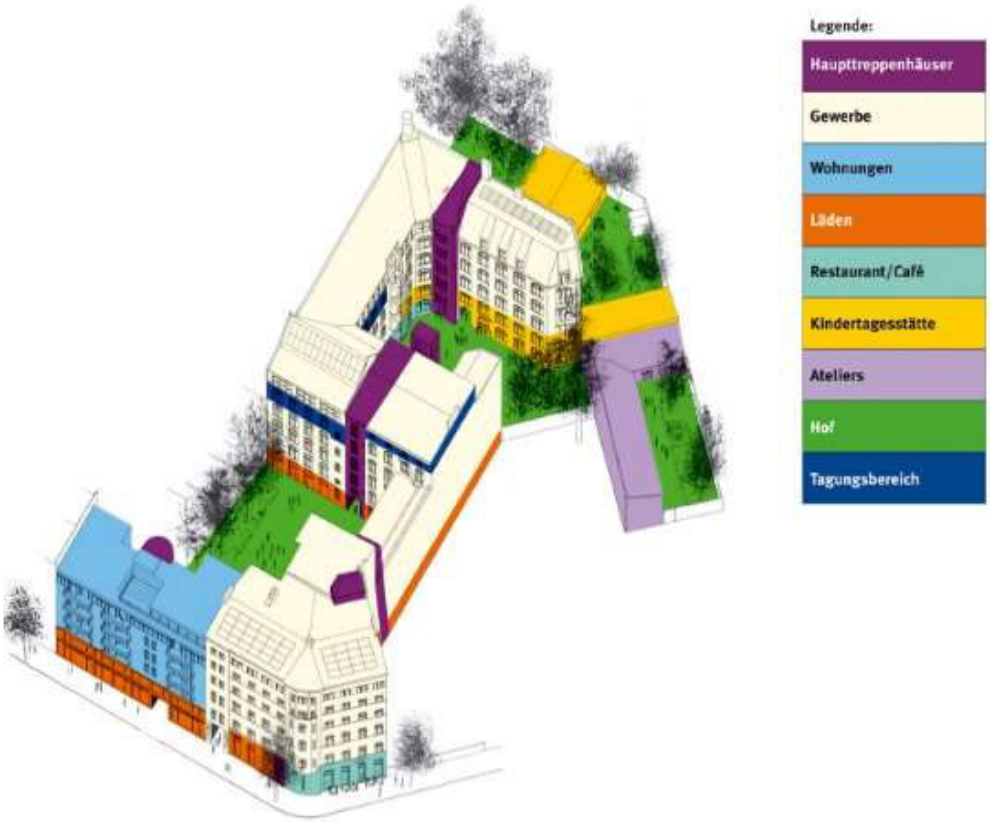



*Figure 4 - Map of WeiberWirtschaft headquarters, Anklamer Straße 38, Berlin*

In the case of WeiberWirtschaft, too, we can note that the structuring process meant setting up another ad-hoc organisation, Gründerinnenzentrale in 2006, functional to providing professional services and to implementing specific services, also through public funding. This is similar to the cases of Ver.di Selbstständige-Mediafon and of BDÜ and its limited liability company analysed below. As well as the cooperative's three full- and six part-time staff, Gründerinnenzentrale employs other collaborators:

> *The compensation of employees and part-time employees comes from renting out our spaces; then there are people focused on lobbying and, obviously, a board managing the cooperative and all its activities. We also try to foster other smaller projects that aim to support female entrepreneurship. Then we have Grunderinzentrale, a satellite organisation which organises thematic workshops, advises women who want to become entrepreneurs or self-employed, and provides microcredit. Grunderinzentrale is a spin-off of our cooperative and receives funding from the State of Berlin. We are also working in a national network that is a sort of agency for entrepreneurship in order to make our experience stronger, at the same time share our skills.* **(P112: Co-founder and manager of WeiberWirtschaft; August 2016)**

The other two relevant organisations considered here in relation to their structure and resources are the recently set-up grass-roots organisations, Supermarkt and VGSD - Verband der Gründer und Selbständigen e.V.

Supermarkt was set up by a small group of activists based in Berlin, whereas VGSD was founded by a group of professionals whose organisational model is the Freelancers Union in the USA. The two organisations share some traits in relation to their structure, which is strongly based on voluntary work by members and activists. At the same time, they have partly different goals, business models, and access rules. Supermarkt could rely on rental fees of their coworking space until 2015, when they moved to smaller premises which are suitable for organising meetings and conferences but lack coworking stations. Thus the main source of funding is now from specific projects supported by public funding or from the network of organisations and activists involved in specific projects **(P341)**. In any case, Supermarkt is an atypical example of coworking/meeting space because it was conceived of from the beginning as a platform for digital activists and artists, and projects on collaborative economies, rather than for business purposes. The original idea was that coworking space could play an important role in the aggregation process of freelancers, fostering the creation of new organisations or, at least, informal groups on digital activism. However, analysis of the documents and information collected on the other three coworking spaces considered in this study, shows that both small (Tanterenate and Welance) and large coworking spaces (Betahaus) tend to be neutral spaces where professional activism is not foreseen. In these contexts, the information concerning the organisations which represent freelancers can pass through, but these spaces can rarely give up their neutrality because doing so could damage their core business (renting out coworking stations) and their relationship with large and medium enterprises (especially the former) focused on coworking spaces as the enterprises' favourite reservoir of a highly specialised on-demand workforce **(P342).** The market of coworking spaces has rapidly evolved, especially in large urban contexts such as Berlin, with a multi-faceted offer ranging from micro coworking spaces with two-four workstations to larger ones occupying entire buildings and hosting thousands of freelancers all over Europe (e.g., Betahaus) or the world (e.g., WeWork) on the basis of a franchise agreement with local owners. In some cases, small coworking spaces can combine a strong focus on the market and the individual activism of some of the members, as is the case of the co-founder of Welance **(P9),** who was also involved in implementing the European Freelance Movement website[49], supported by EFIP[50], the European network of freelancers' organisations.

[49] The web page of the European Freelance movement on the website of the European Freelance week: http://freelancersweek.org/about/european-freelancers-movement/
[50] EFIP website: http://www.efip.org/

Now we move on to analysis of the professional organisation, BDÜ, the Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators. It is an interesting case because of its strong structure and the mix of non-profit and profit activities, the former managed by the association, the latter developed by a private company connected to the association. Founded in 1955, BDÜ is the largest federal association of interpreters and translators in Germany. It has around 7,500 members, corresponding to 80% of the professional translators and interpreters registered in German professional associations. Governance is ensured by:

- the Federal Executive Committee, composed of a president and nine vice-presidents;
- the Federal Head Office (BGS, Bundesgeschäftsstelle), the pivotal point of the BDÜ organisation, in Berlin. This coordinates the work of the Federal Executive Committee, communication between members, the Federal Executive Committee, special advisers and association committees, and also manages special projects;
- special advisers, each responsible for a specific thematic area: in-house interpreters and translators for business and industry, training, healthcare interpreting, information technology, language data processing and CAT[51] tools, literary translation, professional development, patent translation, sign language interpreting, taxes and social matters, or community interpreting;
- full members: 12 regionally-based chapters and one national interpreting association;
- associated members: enterprises dealing with the professions represented by the association and public institutions, such as the German Federal Ministry of Finance, the German Federal Office of Languages, and the University of Hamburg.

On an international level, BDÜ is affiliated to FIT[52], the most important international umbrella organisation of translators' associations, and to other important international associations[53].

On a national level, BDÜ is connected to many industry associations, as well as to BVMW[54], the German Association for SMEs. The case of BDÜ is a paradigmatic example of a highly-structured professional organisation able to define an appropriate development plan to address the relevant

[51] Computer Assisted Translation
[52] Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs / International Federation of Translators: http://www.fit-ift.org/
[53] European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association (EULITA); Conférence internationale permanente d'Instituts universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes (CIUTI); European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli); International Council for the Development of Community Interpreting (Critical Link International); European Network for Public Service Interpreting and Translation (ENPSIT).
[54] Bundesverband mittelständische Wirtschaft: https://www.bvmw.de/home.html

changes in the reference market. The shift to the digital environment strengthened internal cohesion and cooperation among member associations:

> *In 1998, we started on the web providing services for clients interested in finding professionals in our associations. That was the turning point for our customers and for us. Clients could search for professionals throughout the federal republic, not just in some areas. In addition, digital tools facilitated cooperation between members. It reinforced the feeling of belonging to a group. Before that, however, some of the associations, especially the Bavarian one, felt they were something apart.* **(P60: vice president - BDÜ)**

In this case again, it is worth briefly analysing the human and economic resources deployed, because corresponding to this relatively light structure in economic terms (only a few people are paid), is a wide, well-defined structure able to offer professional services, plan effective lobbying, and maintain strong connections at national and international levels. The strategic role of the eight vice-presidents on mini-job contracts ensures significant support to the activities of the association, with limited costs:

> *We have three salaried staff: a secretary, our CEO, and a colleague who works for the CEO. All the others with official positions in the association, such as myself (I am one of the vice presidents) or the president himself, receive a fee which corresponds in fact to a mini-job. It is very little in addition to the reimbursement of our expenses. We moved here to Berlin around 12 years ago. When we were in Bonn, the president played a more important role, carrying out many strategic tasks, but our activities were fewer than now. […].* **(P60: vice president - BDÜ)**

Beyond the relatively limited costs of personnel, other costs must be added, especially maintenance and lobbying. The activities of the organisation are partly made possible by the structured support of a limited liability company in charge of all the profit-making activities such as conferences, seminars, or publishing activities:

> *For the past six years we have had a lobbyist, he costs a lot, but is worth it. We need to interact with Parliament and through the lobbyist we get to the right people, all transparently, of course. The lobbyist costs us around €60,000 a year. […]. We are an association, so cannot make profits. For this reason, in 2003 we founded a company (GmbH) that organises and produces everything we need: seminars, conferences, and books. On our website, we sell technical books for translators and interpreters, books on legal translation and legal codes from other countries.* **(P60: vice president – BDÜ; August 2015)**

To conclude the overview on the structures and resources of the selected organisations, we now consider one of the umbrella organisations selected for the study, Initiative Urheberrecht (IU). Like other umbrella organisations, it has an extremely light operative structure composed of the president (the only full-time employee) and the spokesperson, who freelances for the organisation on a nearly full-time base. IU is supported by volunteers and some paid employees from the member associations, and represents around 140,000 professional authors and performing artists working

under the copyright law in Germany. It is totally devoted to lobbying in the common general interests of its members, by ensuring the application of copyright law at national and European levels. The 35 member associations include small organisations of artists, large, influential organisations focused on the media and communication sector, as well as trade unions (e.g., Ver.di and DGB, the German Trade Union Confederation) and affiliated organisations (DJU - Deutsche Journalistinnen- und Journalisten-Union and VdÜ - Verband deutschsprachiger Übersetzer literarischer und wissenschaftlicher Werke, affiliated to Ver.di). Each IU member is in charge of lobbying in its specific reference sector, while IU concentrates on the shared general interests of members in reinforcing copyright law.

Analysis of the operative structures, resources and rules of access to the German organisations studied allow some preliminary considerations, first of all, in relation to trade unions. In the cases of Ver.di and IG-Metall we can recognise a trend towards specialisation through different paths. Ver.di Selbstständige-Mediafon shows a significant and stabilised balance between a small group of full-time unionists employed on the political side, while the de-centralised and well-structured company Mediafon is based mainly on freelance work (from 15 to 18 freelancers) offering distance consulting services (phone, mail, or website). The freelancers in Mediafon are professional experts on specific sectors and usually also union members. They are paid €12.50 per hour when working for Mediafon, plus €12.50 for each consultation provided. Through the online work, they can optimise their professional activities while ensuring good coverage in terms of time and professional areas. From the beginning, Ver.di Selbstständige tried to combine the servicing model[55] (Heery et al., 2000), political action and the organising model (Vandaele & Leschke, 2010) through regional groups, and thematic groups autonomously managed by freelance members. Each unit is organised around its members' professional competences, with clear task allocation. The model experimented since the setting up of the trade union in 2001 is now stable and a reference point in the emerging field of self-employed representation. In the wide debate on the structural changes of trade unions, some scholars emphasise the trends towards managerialisation (Thomas, 2013) in terms of the rhetoric and practices aimed at improving quantitative performances (efficiency and accountability). The use of a private company for consulting services based on freelance work could be interpreted in the same framework. Another possible interpretation could count on the basic

[55] Conceived as the structuring process ofcollective and individual services to members provided by the organisation through its officers or external companies or collaborators.

fact that the trade union is conscious of the limits of its internal resources and of the increasing complexity to be faced in terms of labour markets, professional conditions, specific needs of workers, and working trajectories. The awareness of its limited ability to deal with all these elements by itself led the union to open up to the wide range of competences of freelancers working through a flexible private company. The result is a structure rebuilt around different but strongly coordinated units, where the core of the political competences is managed by unionists, while the services can be professionalised through the dominant models of the private sector but with fair rules established by the union. In a different way, IG-Metall opted for an experimental project in order to deal with the frontier of the digital labour platforms. In doing so, instead of converting its internal resources to a new area requiring strong technical competences, IG-Metall decided to bring into the project one of the pioneers of the organising practices among platform workers: Six Silberman. Again, we can interpret this choice as a trend towards managerialisation or as an attempt to internalise new competences in order to deal with a fast-evolving working environment. Both approaches, that of Ver.di based on a stable unit supported by a private consultation company controlled by the union and that of Fair Crowd Work-IG-Metall, have in common the attempt to professionalise specific branches of the union in order to address the new scenarios of the labour market. Therefore, at least in relation to the two specific contexts of solo self-employment and crowd work, a difference between managerialisation and professionalisation must be recognised. For Thomas, managerialisation is «the general trust in the quantification and 'rationalisation' of organisational activities and processes, with the aim of reducing costs, but also of improving quantitative performance, 'efficiency' and 'accountability'» (Thomas, 2013). Professionalisation is here conceived of as the attempt to flexibly include new professional competences in the union structure, in order to face new labour markets and targets. The latter could be interpreted as one of the attempts aiming at supporting union revitalisation (Carola M. Frege & Kelly, 2004).

The German case, especially the Berlin area, presents significant examples of cooperatives involved in fair and sustainable self-employment, as well as of organisations supporting migrant self-employment from a gender perspective. The cases considered, WeiberWirtschaft and SMart.de, have similar access rules based on membership fees which allow active participation in the internal democratic debate (e.g., on development plans, management decision, and co-determination of priorities and goals). The two cooperatives can count on a small group of paid workers in charge of the start-up phase (SMart) and of managing the promoted activities (WeiberWirtschaft). In a similar way, the no-profit association I.S.I., as well as

Grunderinnenzentrale, the spin-off of WeiberWirtschaft, can rely on a few paid staff plus members working on a voluntary basis. We can recognise different business models: on one hand, the well-established cooperative model of WeiberWirtschaft based (from the beginning) on members' fees and income from renting out spaces managed by the cooperative, with the non-profit branch (Grunderinnenzentrale) allowing access to public funding. On the other hand, Smart DE can be considered a spurious flexible model gathering around its project pre-existing groups of artists involved in a project funded by the Ministry of Culture, in order to lay the groundwork for the strategic staff, while the substantial overheads are covered by the Belgian Foundation. After some years, with the increase in membership, Smart DE is progressively implementing the services (administrative services, advance payment of fees, mutual fund in the event of non-payment) offered to its members. In contrast, the two non-profit organisations, Grunderinnenzentrale and I.S.I., are totally based on funded (often public) projects. This group of organisations, cooperatives and non-profit associations, emerge as an important example of relatively recent organisations fostering a sustainable, fair (also from a gender perspective) and social way to self-employment. This issue will be discussed in the following chapters.

Turning now to the two umbrella organisations, DGB, the German Trade Union Confederation, and Initiative Urheberrechts, two important aspects can be underlined regarding their structures and composition. DGB is a formalised common context where members can share and discuss their positions, goals and strategies. Its managers hold strategic liaison positions between the trade unions: their presence in union congresses can facilitate the dialogue and coordinated strategies of the unions. The existing models of the German unions, where each focuses on specific sectors and targets with little overlap and thus limited competition, has its roots in the German industrial relations system which is based on the pragmatic and central role of co-determination. In addition, the ability of DGB to balance the interests of socialist workers and Christian workers has prevented the unions from splitting along doctrinal lines, as happened in other countries, including Italy (Antonioli, 2012, p. 196). In contrast, Initiative Urheberrechts is one of the most notable examples of a coordinated aggregation of different organisations focused on a professional niche market with high added value. In this case, too, there emerges a clear intention to professionalise and specialise the lobbying activity. The main aim is to make lobbying more effective by focusing on the collaborative strategies behind the aggregation process. These strategies consist of a clear division of lobbying work between the individual organisations

specialised in particular sectors, with the umbrella organisation focusing on a more general level of lobbying that could interest all the members.

From the overall analysis of the structures and resources of German organisations devoted to the self-employed, we can say that light, highly professionalised organisational structures are the choice of both large organisations with a greater number of targets (employees, the self-employed, the high- or low-skilled) and reference sectors (e.g., tertiary sector or industrial sector) and small or medium-sized organisations focusing on a smaller number of targets or professions. In some cases, these structures are supported by externally controlled organisations, no-profit or limited liability companies for specific professional services (consultation, publications, seminars, conferences, etc.). Furthermore, at least three different business models can be noted. The first is based mainly on membership fees (DGB; VdÜ, Initiative Urheberrecht, VGSD, IG-Metall, VFLL). The second is based on membership fees and income from specific professional services (Ver.di Selbständige, Smart DE, BDÜ, WeiberWirtschaft). The third combines a small revenue from membership fees or users' donations with external funding (public or from private foundations) and the voluntary work of members (I.S.I., Gründerinnenzentrale, Supermarkt, and Smart DE [especially in the start-up phase]). The evidences collected show significant trends towards specialisation and professionalisation of the organisations studied, in a general framework characterised by limited competition due to an implicit (but in some cases explicit) division of the targets to be represented.

### 4.4.3 A comparative perspective on structures, resources, and access rules

A preliminary partial assessment of the structures, resources and access rules of similar organisations in Italy and Germany can also be made with a comparative transnational perspective. The aim is to highlight some significant common models and some important differences. This can help to understand whether and when similarities result from similar paths and when they can hide different meanings or reasons. In the same way, differences can be explained by the path dependence approach, the organisational culture, or by more contingent elements connected to power relations within the organisations or to external constraints (including the strategies of competitors).

The first transversal and widespread trait among the organisations considered, whether large, structured organisations or small, new ones, is the tendency to opt for light, flexible structures. Certainly, such structures are functional to exploring a changing context with still little-known or understood characteristics. There are many reasons to be cautious, especially in the explorative phase, in reorienting organisational structures towards new self-employment. Some of these deal with the increasing fragmentation of career paths, the multiplicity of contractual forms an individual has in their career, the greater mobility of new workers and their spreading to many professional contexts in the tertiary sector and to many places, from companies to domestic spaces. Light, flexible structures can also be interpreted as an adaptive change to the new social context, where changes occur more rapidly and are sometimes harder to understand.
A comparison between Italian and German trade unions means combining the common orientation towards such structures with other elements regarding their history and specific approach to self-employment, as well as the timing of their approach to self-employment.
The Italian unions (the CGIL and CISL) opt for different approaches, but the extent of their target is similar. The CGIL addresses regulated and non-regulated professionals (employees and the self-employed) through the Board of Professions, whereas the CISL focuses, through vIVAce!, on non-regulated professions where the self-employed make great use of the web.
Both approaches are pursued through specific projects which do not affect the union structure:

a) the Board of Professions is an "open space" where the union discusses and sometimes finds agreements with other organisations;

b) vIVAce! is an association connected to the union aimed at implementing an online freelance community; it can also rely on the union's promoted services (tax consultation, legal advice, etc.).

In both cases, the resources devoted to the project are rather limited and participants are not automatically involved in the union[56]. The two approaches can be interpreted as a soft way to explore a new target after new organisations emerged giving voice to the new self-employment. According to the evidences gathered, the soft approach is a solution aimed at avoiding excessive risks in re-defining the internal balance of the unions.

In contrast, Ver.di Selbständige faces the rapidly changing environment of self-employment through a structured unit in the union with its own resources and dedicated services (through the controlled

[56] Members of vIVAce! are members of the association, so they can access the services promoted by the union but cannot vote during its decision-making processes.

private company Mediafon). This double approach has, from the start, been based on professional services and strong political activity, and is functional to acquiring new members through a pragmatic strategy. On one hand, Mediafon, the company for professional consulting services with its concrete support for the self-employed (members and non-members); on the other, the political activity of the union based on strong dialogue with the institutions and organisation of the self-employed at a local level. This is a more structured choice compared to the soft approach of the Italian unions. Significant differences can also be found in relation to the other German union selected for the study: Fair Crowd Work (IG-Metall). The project for crowdworkers was developed in a complex, strongly structured and finely balanced union environment. The decision-making process means that extra resources for experimental projects need strong justification in terms of strategy and goals. This is a similar situation to that found in the Italian unions, where internal debate is dominated by the union federations with more members and thus more resources. Again, the most important difference concerns the focus: while the Italian unions (the CGIL and CISL) opt for light projects with a wide target (called generic or specific, depending on the point of view), IG-Metall chooses a specific target: crowd-workers, a possible strategic target in the near future, given the rapid evolution of digital platforms.

Another important difference between Italy and Germany is the competition between unions. The Italian context shows that the unions have different approaches (the CGIL → networking with self-employed associations; the CISL → fostering an online community), different previous experiences with the self-employed (more structured in the CISL) and different visions of professions and self-employment while vying for a wide and partially similar target (the CGIL → professionals; the CISL → freelancers). This implies potential competition. In Germany, the approaches and targets of Ver.di Selbstständige (solo self-employed, high-skilled and technical) and IG-Metall (crowd workers) can be considered more complementary, suggesting an implicit (or possibly partially discussed) division of targets.

Turning to the other organisations selected in the two countries, and especially those in Milan and Berlin, it is worth noting that in Italy no relevant examples focusing on self-employed women were found, while in Berlin, WeiberWirtschaft, Grunderinnenzentrale and I.S.I. are three important, although different, examples. Attention to the question of gender and, more in general, to a sustainable approach to self-employment, is a significant trait of the organisational environment in Berlin.

Since the end of the 1980s, support to self-employed women (including migrants) was seen as a strategic field by the intellectuals and activists who created I.S.I. and WeiberWirtschaft, whose evolution over the years shows a significant capacity to deal with the changing labour market of a dynamic city like Berlin. I.S.I. was able to build and maintain a strong connection with key public institutions and donors, while WeiberWirtschaft has been developing a profitable rental activity aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs since the 1990s. In addition, the activities of the cooperative are supported by Grunderinnenzentrale, a non-profit organisation focused on consultation and microcredit for women entrepreneurs. Another cooperative, Smart, has been studied in both Italy and Germany. The recent setting up of both cooperatives (SMart IT and SMart DE) permits some preliminary observations. The start-up phase and mix of mobilised resources is quite similar, as well as the structuring process of the core staff. In both Italy and Germany, part of the staff comes from the artistic sector, the principal and closest one to SMart (Sociéte Mutuelle pour Artistes). Their start-up phase was quite similar in Italy and Germany. It was based on: 1) a mix of funding from the European headquarters (the Belgian Foundation of SMart) and funded projects; 2) a small, flexible staff to structure the strategic and basic models (administrative support to artists, the cooperative's business plan, networking activity with other important organisations, and implementation of the communication strategy); 3) significant monitoring by the European headquarter: in the case of Italy, the Belgian SMart Foundation supported the start-up phase with funding and a full-time communication manager from the foundation. Despite differences between SMart.it and SMart.de regarding the social and economic context of reference, they both follow the same start-up model, goals and approach to self-employment. The organisational models adopted by ACTA in Italy and VGSD in Germany are also quite similar. The activities of these two quasi-unions are based mainly on voluntary work by members and activists, and strongly oriented to the digital environment (websites and social networks) for information, promotion and online-activism (e.g., single issue campaigns, petitions, and supporting professional identity). They are both part of the European network of freelancers' organisations (EFIP, European Forum of Independent Professionals) and have a similar funding model based on annual membership fees (in VGSD, the amount is decided voluntarily; in ACTA, €50 reduced to €30 for the under-30s) which entitle the member to benefits such as training at special low prices, regional meetings, and consultations. Moreover, free soft access to the organisation is possible by registering on the mailing list. If we consider the emphasis and visibility dedicated to the so-called "community members" (VGSD) or followers (ACTA), we need to recognise that they are part of their

innovative approach to the target. Furthermore, this new approach plays a significant role at a rhetorical level: the followers and community are strategic players in building the organisation's reputation (online and off-line), which is closely related to representativeness. This aspect is a significant shift from the classic models of representation (by trade unions and employers' associations) based on membership and thus focused on a precise (and countable) form of representativeness. The emphasis on followers or community members stresses the boundaries of a tested praxis in favour of an idea of soft membership, rooted mainly in the digital social networks, and thus more fluid and more difficult to evaluate.

To conclude the analysis on operative structures, resources and access rules, it is worth underlining that some traits of the Italian and German quasi-unions are also shared by other organisations. The strong involvement of activists with their voluntary work, along with a business model based mainly on membership fees, funded projects or crowdfunding, is also a common model among grass roots groups and small associations focused on a single sector or profession, or among those with larger or cross-sector targets. In contrast, large professional organisations have a fine-tuned business model based on a mix of income from membership fees, professionalised services and, in some cases, business activities. With regard to the umbrella professional organisations, one important difference was found between Italy and Germany. The Italian ones were set up recently on the basis of partial but significant competition. Professionals and the self-employed are seen as a wide target whose aggregation can be structured around a cross-sectoral proposal. The competition between similar umbrella organisations is based mainly on the idea of a critical mass: the bigger the organisation, the bigger its influence. In contrast, the German context presents a significant example of a sectoral umbrella organisation, Initiative Urheberrecht, focused on authors working on the basis of copyright law. Here again, we can note a significant difference, similar to what happened in relation to the German and Italian unions: specific target groups instead of wide and heterogeneous targets, specialised professional representation (within a specific target) instead of a wide but generic professional representation.

## 4.5 Representation strategies

In this chapter, the representation strategies of the organisations selected will be explored. The mix of the data analysed (official documents, in-depth interviews, and fieldnotes) allows us to address the issue on two fronts. The first aims to reconstruct the trajectories, purposes, actions and,

ultimately, the strategies, conceived of as a process of rationalisation of all these elements. In this case, the organisations are observed from outside, from an etic point of view (Harris, 1976). The elements and their combinations are interpreted with the ideal aim of reconstructing the puzzle that will be finished when the last piece falls in the right place. This is challenging because it means obtaining all the necessary elements for the analysis and then being able to correctly put them together. The completed puzzle would restore a perfect image of the organisation studied, its representation strategies, or even the entire emerging field. That would be the dream we all have: a perfect and completely coherent image of the object of study. This ideal and unattainable reference point is also evoked in the interpretative effort of the symbolic realism approach (Richard H Brown, 1978; Richard Harvey Brown, 1987). Nonetheless, a balanced interpretation could cross a number of different narratives, from the most objectifying to the most relativist. In this case, the middle point could risk being ineffective and the extremes unrealistic. In this chapter, I attempt to combine only some pieces of a multi-dimensional puzzle, without forgetting some important aspects:

- the research design includes the attempt to identify and analyse the most important dimensions for understanding the players involved and the overall evolution of the emerging field. Nevertheless, the awareness that the study of complex organisations would require the involvement of a research team and longer timing (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992) brings us to consider this study an explorative attempt which may be useful for further investigations;
- the dynamic nature of social phenomena requires abandoning the implicit static perspective in the reconstruction of the puzzle, in order to systematically include the change in the analysis;
- the interpretative effort requires a positioning of the researcher that requires giving up seeing some things in order to see others, which is precisely what happens when we look at a landscape (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Barbara Czarniawska, 2000) or what happens in quantum mechanics, according to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (Heisenberg, 1958).

The second aims to see the representation strategies through the eyes of the organisations and their members. It may sound naive to search for a direct and simple way to their viewpoint, because if access to reality takes place through interpretation, interpretation of how others interpret reality requires a double passage. A double passage definitely implies greater risks in terms of increased interpretative misunderstandings and double omissions - in the narration of reality as well as in the narration of the narration of reality. Despite this, even if access is partial and not exhaustive of the perspective of the protagonists - and thus an emic perspective, it allows us to reach the complexity

of reality that is equally necessary and complementary to the etic perspective. In this way it is possible to understand the choices, contradictions, difficulties, and developments which from the outside could too easily be interpreted as errors, inabilities or limits, but on the inside can take on different meanings and a consistency invisible to the outside. Let us return here, once again, to Bourdieu's analytical perspective (1990).

Before analysis of the representation strategies, some preliminary premises are necessary. The variety of organisations requires a number of different approaches to representation. Moreover, the emerging field of self-employed representation is characterised by a mix of rapidly evolving practices in search of stability. Traditional and new organisations are both experiencing new communication environments in the digital context (social networks and digital platforms) and in urban spaces (coworking, and dedicated events promoted by local authorities or European networks[57]). This is a good opportunity for them to test new ways to reach their targets, structuring unprecedented flows of information and communication which can guarantee strong visibility, if properly used. Thus the first step towards an offer of representation, contact with the targets, can count on powerful and pervasive tools unknown only a decade before the turn of the century. Having a presence in the new social environments (digital and physical) could be considered an option but is more a necessity driven by multiple factors. The first is to foster visibility through constant and structured promotion in a de-politicised social environment mainly oriented towards consumption. Constant promotion means being able to share ideas and proposals which foster the community-building process and the identification process of the self-employed in the organisation. In this way, the reputation of the organisation is reinforced. The pervasive communication environment is the fertile ground where all other actions can grow. At the same time, it is not automatic leverage towards the pro-active and constant participation of the self-employed in the organisation's everyday activities. The decline of trade unions is traditionally measured with the decline of membership, mainly employees. In the case of the

[57] There are several events promoted by organisations and public institutions, including:

a) Manifattura Milano Camp, an event of the Municipality of Milan dedicated to the new 4.0 manufacturing and digital craftsmanship. The program came about through an open call. http://www.manifattura.milano.it/
b) Music Pool Berlin, the meeting for music creators in Berlin. The consultation offer from music scene professionals provides music makers with information, further education and network contacts, with the aim of successfully establishing them in the music industry. Music Pool Berlin is a cooperation project of all2gethernow and the Clubcommission. https://musicpoolberlin.net/de/ueber-uns
c) The European Freelancers Week, a bottom-up initiative bringing freelancers together in coworking spaces and events, encouraging peer-learning and skills-sharing. It is a European event promoted mainly by the organisations in EFIP, European Forum of Independent Professionals. http://freelancersweek.org/

organisations representing the self-employed (including some trade unions), we can note some contradictory trends: increasing visibility of the organisations representing the self-employed, an increasing number of organisations playing in the same emerging field, growing interest of the political and institutional levels, and a limited capacity of the organisations to count on a solid and widespread membership. Some reasons for this contradictory situation are listed here and discussed in the following chapters: 1) the isolation of the self-employed (and therefore the difficulty in reaching them): this is fostered by the structural conditions of their professions (multi-sited, multi-client, distance working, or de-structured physical working spaces including cafés and domestic spaces) and by a widespread tendency towards an individualistic idea of work shaped around a direct relationship between the self-employed and their clients, with no intermediaries in the bargaining process; 2) the prevalence of utilitarian approaches towards the offer of representation, with representation mainly seen as a commodity ready for consumption where necessary, rather than as a general, stable framework of the individual and collective condition of workers; 3) the lack of institutional constraints supporting the aggregation process of the self-employed; and 4) the general (including institutional) rhetoric on individual moral involvement based on employability and flexibility, which shifts the reasons for success or failure to individuals rather than to a set of factors (including individual abilities) belonging to both the individuals and, in large part, to the economic-productive context and institutional regulatory system.

In the following paragraphs, on the basis of the data collected, different ideas of representation and strategy will be explored. The order of analysis will follow the outline of the previous chapters: first the Italian context, then the German, with the comparative analysis third. Due to the density of the data collected, it will first concentrate on the six case studies, three from each country. The comparative analysis will then also consider the data collected in relation to the other organisations selected for the overall study.

The last necessary premises concern the two concepts at the centre of this chapter: representation and strategy. From the data collected, a plurality of meanings emerges that deserves consideration, before circumscribing one or more relevant definitions. Considering the plurality of meanings allows us to best adopt the point of view of the protagonists and appreciate the role of subjectivities in the field. These partly shape the field supporting their vision and specific perspective, including specific ideas on representation and strategy. Each concept contains not only a specific and subjective meaning, but also a broader idea of the referential conceptual world and original ideas aimed at

shaping the surrounding environment; thus, subjective meanings go beyond the description and help to give shape and substance to the action.

During the interviews carried out, the need to investigate the representation strategies sometimes pushed towards the explanation of what strategy is or should be. If the initial choice was, in fact, not to define strategy in order to understand how the term was interpreted by the interlocutors, in other cases, it was necessary to clarify what I meant by the term. The attempt to clarify the concept included the two extreme and antithetical interpretations of the term: a) strategy as an attempt to plan the actions necessary to reach a final goal according to a proper analysis of the surrounding environment, and b) strategy as an ex-post interpretation of the choices and activities carried out and an attempt to rationalise the results obtained. In the latter case, the strategy justifies the existing position of the organisation. In the case of the trade unions, on the other hand, another useful reference to share at the beginning of the interview is Frege and Kelly's model of union strategic choice (C. M. Frege & Kelly, 2003).

### 4.5.1 Italy: a focus on three case studies: CGIL, ACTA and SMart

Looking inside a complex organisation necessarily means understanding how its key members interpret their role, position and agency within and without the organisation. It also means recognising that every point of view investigated is partial and subjective but at the same time capable of interacting with different existing perspectives in the organisation. It is unrealistic to expect individual interlocutors to be spokespersons of the official line of an organisation and not to create further discrepancies. It is more realistic and useful to recognise within the existing plurality of perspectives, the tensions and complementarities which orient, shape and at the same time interpret the organisation and its goals. The plurality of visions and perspectives is extremely significant in organisations such as those selected for this study. Participation combines personal interests and militancy, whereas performativity is not oriented towards the conquest of a market as in the case of business organisations, but is the result of complex internal discussions aimed at interpreting social needs in order to translate them into an offer of representation. In this regard, an organisation is a democratic arena where subjectivities can cooperate but also openly disagree, because the existence of different viewpoints is part of organisational life and they cannot be interpreted as dysfunctional elements. Being part of an organisation therefore cannot be

considered only a job (if paid) or a utilitarian affiliation, but always means strong involvement that often includes the moral and political spheres.

#### *4.5.1.1 CGIL: multiple approaches, weak coordination*

The first organisation considered is the trade union CGIL, and in particular the three structures of the union most involved in the internal debate on self-employment at national and local levels (Board of Professions and AGENQUADRI; and NIDIL Milan, respectively). The main attempt is to take the different perspectives on self-employment in the union and evaluate their approaches and analytical frameworks. In particular, in the following paragraphs I will focus on the various ideas which emerged during the interviews, highlighting their potentialities and, at the same time, their limits in terms of internal coordination which emerge clearly from the interviewees' own statements. The exploration of different structures and projects at national and local levels reveals, first of all, an apparent discrepancy between the interviewees in terms of strategy and vision. This discrepancy can be partially explained by the specific point of view of each interviewee, strongly rooted in daily practices and specific targets (precarious work, instead of highly-skilled professionals or organisations of the self-employed, in the case of the coordinator of the Board of Professions). Another possible focus may be the gap between a general national framework and local strategies which need to be effective in local social, economic and political conditions. If we look at trade unions as perfectly functioning machines, we risk misunderstanding their operating logics. They are, instead, a complex body in search of continuous (imperfect) coordination through explorative attempts promoted by small groups of trade unionists in search of the right way to introduce innovative practices.

NIDIL is a national union structure originally set up in 1998 to face the labour market reforms which expanded the non-standard forms of employment, especially the so-called *lavoro parasubordinato* (formally self-employed but with some characteristics of dependent work) and temporary agency contracts. The original aim was to limit abuse of these new forms of atypical contracts and thus combat the processes of precarisation. In recent years, some NIDIL members have been trying to face the rapidly changing labour market by representing new emerging groups of workers such as freelancers and independent professionals at risk of marginalisation. The attempts (e.g., the Board of Professions and some local experiments aimed at creating coworking spaces managed directly by the union), are to be considered a significant effort to innovate union practices despite their limited coordination:

> *NIDIL as a whole is trying to find a way to talk to all the people without a permanent contract, those registered for VAT, those with temporary collaborations* [parasubordinati]*, those working outside the frame of national collective agreements. They are an extremely heterogeneous group: those with secondary education, graduates, and others with master's degrees. Some work in universities, others would like to become freelancers, but they fail. The point is not to represent the high-skilled or medium-low skilled, it is time to find the way to talk to all these people, they must be able to rely on us and we must be a strong cultural reference point.* **(P61: trade unionist of NIDIL-CGIL Milan, Jan. 2016)**

The quotations below show exactly the mix of initiative, competences and the attempt to build a progressive approach to self-employment. At the same time, NIDIL's perspective shows some apparent contradictions if compared with the attempts of the Board of Professions, another innovative initiative aimed at structuring permanent dialogue with the existing organisations representing the self-employed. On one hand, the strategy of NIDIL Milan is focused on a two-fold goal: 1) to structure a direct connection with self-employed workers; and 2) selective inclusion (or at least strong networking) with the organisations longer compatible with the union. On the other hand, the Board of Professions aims at structuring a stable and heterogeneous network of organisations without a selective approach in terms of compatibility or affinity. At first glance, the two approaches appear to be in contrast. The perspective of the trade unionist supporting the idea of a strong, direct connection with the self-employed is presented below. There are interesting details of the underlying dynamics which characterise the origin of an innovative project and, at the same time, the attempt to find a line which is consistent with the founding values of the union.

> *To me, strategy means that you have to study before doing things. Until now, the idea in the CGIL was that self-employed workers had to be represented, but there was no common or shared idea: they had the right idea without a strategy. We had no experts on this, and low involvement by the new generations of the self-employed. Moreover, whoever was entitled to develop some proposal was not in a position to do something concrete. Another missing point was the "how" and we worked hard on that. It is not a matter of circumstances if the initiative to understand "how" we could represent the self-employed came from NIDIL. Our general reference principles are the same as at the beginning (1906) and they still work, but they are not enough. We started to reflect on "how" after our working time. We discussed what our organisation was doing compared to the rest of the world, especially considering organisations which were extremely different from trade unions. We also interviewed experts and researchers; that was the starting point of our strategy.* **(P61: trade unionist of NIDIL-CGIL Milan, Jan. 2016)**

This quotation underlines at least two significant aspects. The first is that the internal approach to self-employment starts from informal and unstructured contexts within the existing structures. The second relates to the slow innovation process aimed at filling the gap of knowledge in relation to a new target. In this phase, voluntary individual initiative outside working hours is the strategic starting point.

> *We are thinking about some basic tools for organising the self-employed and will experiment with a coworking space[58]. Obviously, we discuss with all the organisations, but at the moment there are no significant ones in Italy which can act as a trade union in favour of the self-employed. That is why we decided to talk directly to self-employed workers. This does not mean bypassing the existing organisations, but we are a mass organisation, we need to speak with the base. Therefore, the first objective was to reflect on a proper language for the dialogue with the self-employed. This is the first message we shared within the union, then we will talk to similar organisations to ours. Our strategy includes a sort of gradual path for self-employed participation, in line with the ladder of participation proposed by Roger Hart* (2013) *in relation to children's education[59]. That model is brilliant and easily applied to what each organisation does with its targets. We started from that and are working on the five levels of positive participation, from information to capacity building. In the latter case, if the worker becomes the driving force of the union, that means that your job is positively concluded.* **(P61: trade unionist of NIDIL-CGIL Milan, Jan. 2016)**

Some parts of the excerpt above need to be contextualised better. Self-employment includes a wide variety of different professions and conditions. There are numerous organisations representing the self-employed, each focused on specific targets (e.g., sector- or profession- oriented, the liberal professions, retail sector, tertiary sector, solo self-employed, and entrepreneurs). The interviewee was referring specifically to freelancers of the tertiary sector, mainly involved in the so-called creative economy or, more in general, belonging to the broad and varied group of knowledge workers. This detail can help to underline again that, from the point of view of a large union such as the CGIL, the most visible organisations representing the new self-employment of workers in the creative sector and knowledge economy have limited representativeness.

In other words, their bargaining power is limited because of their limited membership. This is a classic view of the relationship between membership, representativeness, and bargaining power. Consistent with this viewpoint, the attempts by the union to reach the new target are focused on the idea of reproducing the original vocation of the trade union as a mass organisation. Again, on one hand, the effort is oriented to maintaining and reinforcing the original vocation of the trade union as representative of the entire work force (standard and non-standard). On the other, the attempt goes through specific targeted actions aimed at challenging the existing infrastructures for freelancers, notably coworking spaces, promoting similar initiatives aimed at empowering freelancers, and fostering the reconstruction of

[58] WORX Milano (http://www.worxmilano.it) was opened in early 2016 by the tax and administrative consulting structure of the union. Criticism of and doubts about the coworking model for-profit emerged at the beginning. See for example Ciccarelli R. "Freelance di Milano unitevi. Nel coworking a pagamento della Cgil (13.11.2015, Il Manifesto). https://ilmanifesto.it/freelance-di-milano-unitevi-nel-coworking-a-pagamento-della-cgil/ **(P343)**

[59] Hart, R. A. (2013). *Children's participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*. Routledge

a shared working culture based on common values, shared competences, and professional consulting services:

> *Our coworking space cannot be a labour pool for companies as most coworking spaces aspire to be. We do not want to become the intermediary between freelancers and companies. […] We want to foster a different coworking model where cultural and professional competences can be shared by respecting the real value of work that must be fully recognised by workers and by clients. Our main goal is to empower freelancers in the bargaining process with companies; at the same time we also support them with tax and other consulting services.* **(P61: trade unionist of NIDIL-CGIL Milan, Jan. 2016)**

From the union's point of view, preserving an inclusive and general framework that includes the entire range of workers (employees and self-employed workers) does not simply mean maintaining and nurturing the identity of its origins. The general and inclusive framework is a functional approach to keep their bargaining capacity intact and effective. The criticism expressed by the interviewed CGIL members towards the new organisations of self-employed workers is that they support a corporate approach to representation. This would encourage negative trends towards corporative bargaining based on particularism and personal contacts with institutional representatives, rather than support a bargaining process which can assist the self-employed without discriminating against or forgetting other workers. On the contrary, it is quite clear that the structural changes in the labour market, production system and organisation of labour have increased the gap between workers and trade unions or other intermediate bodies. In some cases, the space has been filled by emergent bodies (quasi-unions but also other new organisations) whose aims are quite heterogeneous. For certain, they include corporatist approaches but the emergence of new organisations, the reaction of the unions, and the difficult dialogue between traditional and new organisations are fostered by reciprocal prejudices and, mainly, by diametrically opposed starting points. There is a need for the strong renewal of well-established organisations, the trade unions, whose traditional target is salaried employment including its flexible, non-standard, atypical variations. But there is also the urgent need for representation of the new self-employment shaped by the rapidly evolving digital eco-system, which is extremely exposed to global market fluctuations and, at the same time, often trapped in the low wages decided by the local labour markets. Both types of organisations are trying to develop a proper offer of representation but the gap, or better the vacuum, between all the organisations and the increasing mass of self-employed workers (e.g.: professionals, the bogus self-employed, and platform workers) has yet to be filled.

Turning now to the Board of Professions, it is worth reconstructing the strategy of the founder and the subsequent developments made by the current coordinator because these developments appear to be in contradiction with the strategy. In the first case, it prefigures a direct and ideally mass relationship with autonomous workers through an activity of organising and servicing. In the case of the Board of Professions, however, the representation strategy is based on coordination with the existing organisations, thus becoming a top-down lobbying strategy.

> *Our representation strategy is very simple. The CGIL is available to build a stable network with all professional associations. We aim to facilitate the relationships between professional associations, with a strong focus on specific professional activity, and sectoral organisations which can deal with collective bargaining. These organisations can play an important role for a number of issues, such as negotiating fair compensation, expanding contractual welfare, and defining and managing social protection (maternity leave, injuries, etc). We have already established some positive agreements with these associations. At the same time, we are trying as much as possible to build common ground on cross-sectoral issues in coordination with the second-level organisations of professionals such as CoLAP, Confassociazioni, and Confprofessioni.* **(P14: founder of the Board of Professions, July 2014)**

The Board of Professions was from the start conceived of as an open space, without excessive access rules, where participation is voluntary with no obligation to continue. It was, for many reasons, an unprecedented space where the trade union opened to first- and second-level associations (umbrella associations) whose field of action until a few years before was seen as complementary and largely unrelated to the main interests of the CGIL. Through the Board of Professions, the CGIL built a bridge, albeit fragile and partly still unstable, to the world of professions largely populated by self-employed workers. For its founder, self-employment was a strategic yet complex target, due to its traditional individualistic and particularistic approach to work. Thus the aim of the Board of Professions was to find a consistent way to represent professionals and self-employed professionals and foster innovation, while at the same time avoiding downward competition on fees and workers' rights:

> *Today, there is a more widespread awareness among professionals that collective action is the strongest way to improve individual conditions. Despite that, if you consider the hundreds of professional associations, you can easily understand the difficulties in overcoming the borders of professional identities and the tendency towards individualism and competition for common purposes. We must bet, as a union, on this cultural leap. The lack of regulation and support for such a large part of our intellectual work will necessarily lead to losing energy for innovation and growth in the country. If we do not support this cultural leap, we will be less and less competitive in terms of quality and innovation of products and so we will continue to chase the emerging countries on short-lived issues such as the own goal of reducing salaries and rights. To win this bet, the CGIL must play all over the field. Above all, we must deal with the issue of contractual regulation, without which no representation is exercised; without that, the founding principle of the trade union disappears. Our purpose is the unity of all workers in order to achieve better working and living conditions for all.* **(P14: founder of the Board of Professions, July 2014)**

The aim of the Board of Professions is to reinforce the connections between trade unions and professional associations, but also with grassroots organisations representing precarious self-employed professionals. The aim is also the systematic inclusion of their demands in the negotiation process with the employers' associations, as the trade unions tried to do during negotiations with the employers' association of the publishing sector in 2012. This is a precise but contradictory example which emerged during the interview. During the most recent restructuring process of the publishing sector[60], which involved journalists, proof-readers, editors and other key positions, the trade unions were strongly contested because they were unable to effectively contrast the strong trends towards subcontracting. That situation obliged a significant number of professionals to become self-employed in order to keep their jobs. A similar and stronger trend happened in relation to professionals with the so-called semi-subordinate contracts (*contratti di collaborazione, contratti a progetto*)[61]. These professionals were formally similar to the truly self-employed, but practically employees; they were used to working within the structure of the publishing companies, and, indeed, their contracts were automatically renewed year by year or even every three months, by tacit agreement. The situation changed in 2012, when the most important publishing companies started outsourcing most of the key people, and shifting from coordinated collaborations to external consultations, using threats disguised as suggestions.
As part of the strategy to push them towards self-employment, collaborators were forbidden to use the company computers and offices. This is clearly evident in the interview of an activist of Re.Re.Pre., a grass-roots group of proof-readers and editors:

> *Some days ago, we organised a protest against the cultural commissioner of Milan because he declared that publishing is one of the flagships of the city. We pointed out our working conditions. Now we are trying to organise a public meeting where we will discuss how the publishing market works and what role proof-readers and editors have. This is the most significant political initiative at a time of radical change in the Milanese publishing sector. So far we have worked mainly with project contracts. These lasted from three months to a year, depending on the sector, education, fiction or non-fiction. Currently the publishing houses are starting to ask us insistently to work with service contracts, which means our having to register for VAT. This is burdensome because not everyone is in a position to do this and have tax benefits. The shift to VAT is presented as just a suggestion, but in practical terms it is compulsory. That would start a war between the editors and*

[60] The publishing sector was an early user, starting in the 1980s, of the outsourcing processes later adopted by many other sectors. In this case, the restructuring process of the publishing companies was justified by the need to bring the contracts in line with the labour reform (Legge Fornero: Law 92/2012).

[61] "The project contract is only a contract of convenience. I know people who have been working on a project for twelve years, even in positions of responsibility, in practice they are employees." **(P336: member of Re.Re.Pre, December 2012)**

*lead to price undercutting, where only the employers win. What did the trade unions do? They invited us to accept the "suggestion".* **(P336: member of Re.Re.Pre, December 2012)**

The grass-roots group of precarious editors (Re.Re.Pre, *Rete dei Redattori Precari*) was a significant example of a self-organised movement created by precarious workers who were not considered by the unions (Zambelli, 2012). When the group was set up in 2008, the conflict with trade unions was quite serious because of the unions' inability to positively influence the restructuring process of the publishing sector in favour of the workers. In 2013, strong criticism of the unions emerged during a public meeting on precarious workers of the publishing sector, promoted by Stefano Boeri, Cultural Councillor of Milan (22 January 2013). Despite the aim of the meeting, the Councillor and trade unions were strongly contested by precarious workers, most of them involved in Re.Re.Pre. The councillor was contested because some weeks before, during the presentation of the annual book fair, Bookcity, he had presented the publishing industry as the "flagship of Milan" without mentioning the workers' conditions; the unions were contested because some weeks before they had suggested to many temporary workers that they should convert their project contracts into service contracts and register for VAT, as the publishing companies were asking **(P344, public meeting Bookcity, Jan. 2013; Field notes)**. This specific episode is interesting for several reasons. Two extremely different bodies, trade unions and self-organised groups of precarious workers were engaged in a public discussion promoted by the local institution. Certainly, conflict prevailed over dialogue, but through these episodes, spaces of dialogue were later opened. Unable to influence the substantial restructuring processes of the publishing sector which had started years before (Semenza, 2000), the unions were exposed to criticism from self-organised groups, and while these groups did challenge the trade unions, they slowly tried to see if there was any room for the unions to reposition. In this case, then, the dispute was part of a two-fold strategy: to gain visibility and to stimulate the reaction of the most institutionalised bodies with an important role in workers' representation. Visibility and criticism are two of the main tools of the emerging organisations which lack the power or resources to do what the trade unions should do: bargain from a strong position.

Although some productive sectors, such as publishing, are strategically important in the area's economy, they offer few opportunities for mobility because there are not many large companies, and so there is a niche labour market. This has significant repercussions for the workers; they cannot protest too much because they risk losing new job opportunities. This dynamic is clearly evident in the excerpt below. In similar cases, the absence of a strong trade union leaves the workers with

limited and highly risky chances of exerting their agency. It is equally evident that militancy, including the risk of excessive visibility, has its limits:

> *We are not a union and therefore representation capacity has some weaknesses because we cannot give any guarantee to the people we would like to represent. Another important point is that when someone appears in the media talking about our problems, they do not feel safe. We do it at our own risk because showing our face means being recognised. In this case, the publishing house does not even bother to fire you - it is even easier, they just do not renew your contract. Many contracts expire in this period, between December and January, so if the contract expires and they do not renew it, you can do nothing. So, I can understand it if someone with a project contract or registered for VAT does not come to us because we cannot guarantee anything. […] No-one can afford to be a full-time activist for long; the resources should be found for the people heavily involved in these activities.* **(P336: member of Re.Re.Pre, December 2012)**

The weaknesses of Re.Re.Pre. are widely recognised among its activists, so the hypothesis is that criticism of the trade unions is not part of a structural competition with them. To give voice to and make precarious workers visible means redefining the framework of the public debate and bringing out what was hidden. The strategy is thus two-fold: to impose a public discussion forcing the institutions and other important bodies to take a position; and to stimulate new, more innovative reactions within the unions, considering that in the medium term, the only way to build effective representation strategies is to strengthen and enlarge the network of interested parties.

> *There have been attempts by the CGIL to build a dialogue, but the point is that they have a somewhat distorted ideas on what precariousness is - they still think only workers are precarious. The unions believe that after the first working experiences, the young worker is fully integrated into the productive system. Now they are becoming aware of the harsh reality - the "young precarious" are aged from 25 to 52. They have never really thought about that. In individual cases, the CGIL has proved to be helpful in opening a dispute, but for project contracts and registered VAT workers, the possibility of organising and the room for representing them is very limited. In Bologna, a girl in our network (ReRePre) joined the CGIL and they are trying to plan activities together.* **(P336: member of Re.Re.Pre, December 2012)**

Criticism of the unions and attempts to build bridges should be seen as two sides of the same strategy. Indeed, the attempts at collaboration between the CGIL and the group of precarious editors based in Bologna led to a lengthy report on precarious workers in the publishing sector (Dieci & Fontani, 2012; Dieci, Fontani, & Rinaldini, 2013).

Returning to the point of view of the trade union, its efforts to deal with the rapid changes in the working environment must be recognised. We have already mentioned the enormous difficulties trade unions are experiencing regarding their representativeness. During a historical phase where the tendency towards disintermediation seems to prevail, they are trying to limit the damage. At the same time, the strategies are not only defensive: even with limited resources and a significant lack of knowledge, the unions (above all, the CGIL) are exploring and trying to build bridges to the

new contexts of work and, as in the case above, with new players who can interpret the new needs of workers. The explorations and innovation processes happen thanks to reduced coordination from the top. Different units within the union, according to their skills and sensitivity have room for planning representation strategies for new groups of workers. The results may appear to be poor, slow and apparently inconsistent, yet what looks negative from the outside looks like an opportunity on the inside. A certain degree of freedom in constructing proposals and experimenting new initiatives is strategic to fostering innovation in large organisations like trade unions. Experimenting new strategies is part of the democratic process in the union and, even though in some cases it produces an inconsistent public image which attracts criticism, is still part of the internal debate:

> *The daily work in the union is based on democratic negotiation, which requires time and energy, but this aspect must respect the need to take decisions (on time). One could also ask whether the democratic rules should support the internal dialogue or reflect the position of the congress majority. There is great debate on this subject, too.* **(P118: President of Agenquadri-CGIL, June 2017)**

Agenquadri is an association affiliated to the CGIL and it represents highly-skilled professional workers, both employees and self-employed. From the start, it has had a very advanced vision of the transformations taking place in the organisation of work. Issues such as flexibility, performances, autonomy and goal-oriented approaches are a common ground among its represented workers. This is why the association was involved from the start in the internal discussion on the self-employed promoted by Davide Imola, the founder of the Board of Professions. The highly-skilled professions' privileged point of view on the fast-changing world fosters an awarenesss and a self-critical perspective on the union's attempts to represent the self-employed. The approach of the the CGIL towards the increasing flexibility of workers, the rapidly evolving organisation of labour and the need to overcome the defensive strategies of the union, are well summed up in the quotation below. Bureaucratisation emerges as a defensive strategy, while there is also an attempt to reconstruct strong and effective ties between workers and the different hierarchical levels of the union.

> *The process of bureaucratisation allows the organisation to remain cohesive but obviously makes the processes of change more difficult. This undermines the supply chain that starts from the workers who are in the workplace and reaches the union management. At our annual conference we discussed the need to reconstruct a strong relationship with workers and trade unionists. We need to link the movement - the level at which the workers organise themselves - and the institutional levels of the organisation. I say this with the classic sociological terms, but that is*

> *precisely the point, as Susanna Camusso[62] says: if we shut ourselves in the fort we will fail. This applies to traditional work, as well as to the Foodora and Deliveroo riders, and obviously it applies to professionals. This is the challenge.* **(P118: President of Agenquadri-CGIL, June 2017)**

Since the beginning, Agenquadri has greatly contributed to the growth of the Board of Professions, now a stable element in the union approach to self-employment. Nevertheless, its activity is at times contested by some organisations. Strong criticism emerged, for example, when the law (4/2013) on non-regulated professions was approved in the last months of Monti's technocratic government. Approval of the law was supported by a transversal coalition because it represented symbolic recognition of the new self-employment trends, but the law was considered unsatisfactory by many organisations. Some of these, openly against the law, contested the role played by the CGIL, which rejected most of the criticisms in this case. In contrast, the recent law on self-employment (Law 81/2017) was the result, widely recognised, of a solid coalition that was largely supported by the Board of Professions.

> *Sometimes we are accused of having supported approval of the law 4/2013, but we had no specific interests in that case. If there is a crime, there must usually be a motive, too, and we had no motive. Within the Board of Professions, lobbying was carried out with regard to important issues for self-employed workers (for example, during the discussion on contribution rates or, more recently on the 'Jobs Act' on self-employment). Much of what is written in the Jobs Act is directly connected to the demands made by the associations which are part of the Board of Professions. We tried to understand what the common points were. In this case, there was a consistent discussion on the Board before the law was approved and everyone can see the results.* **(P118: President of Agenquadri-CGIL, June 2017)**

So far we have considered three different CGIL perspectives towards self-employed representation. The first was NIDIL, with its local attempts to approach self-employed workers through a combination of services and dedicated infrastructures (coworking). The second was the Board of Professions, the main attempt to open a dialogue between the CGIL and the numerous professional organisations for the self-employed. The third was Agenquadri, the affiliated association which greatly contributed to setting up the Board of Professions through its focus on highly-skilled professionals. Yet there is also a fourth perspective expressed by the current coordinator of the Board of Professions, focusing on the progressive inclusion in the union of existing professional associations such as Agenquadri or STRADE[63], one of the four main translators' associations:

> *I think that a trade union must seriously consider self-employed workers even though it is clear from the quantitative data of ISTAT[64] that the vast majority of workers are employees. The model that*

[62] Current national secretary of the CGIL (2018)
[63] Official website of STRADE: http://www.traduttoristrade.it/
[64] Italian National Institute of Statistics and the main producer of official statistics

> *works best, at least at the beginning, is the affiliation of some professional associations to the corresponding categories in the CGIL. Why do I say this? The research presented here says that a substantial number of professional organisations opt for a corporatist approach to representation. I am not very surprised by this. I want to make it clear that corporatism is legitimate, but it is not part of the trade union tradition. On the contrary, the union would like to include the relationship between freelancers and enterprises in an inclusive bargaining that also considers employees. We are not in favour of competition between the self-employed and employees.* **(P144: current coordinator of the Board of professions; Urbana Conference - Milan, May 2017; field notes)**

This declaration condenses in a few lines the renewed perspective of the Board of Professions. It remains what it originally was, a place for discussion with the professional organisations of the self-employed, but at the same time it focuses on specific parts of self-employed professionals: those with a structured and stable relationship with medium and large companies and those in specific professional contexts (e.g., lawyers). The representation of autonomous, atomised workers with multiple clients and short term atypical contracts remains an unsolved problem. From this point of view, several evaluations may be made. We can interpret this choice as complementary to the strategy adopted by NIDIL, which fosters the opening of coworking spaces. This choice could be theoretically consistent but is not supported by sufficient evidence.
The experimental coworking space supported by NIDIL Milan and managed (at a local level) by the private enterprise for tax consultation connected to the union is at an early stage and there is no consistent information about coordination between the top-down approach of the Board of Professions and the bottom-up approach of NIDIL based on coworking and fiscal services.
A second possible interpretation considers reduced coordination as a possible way to explore a rapidly evolving context where the organisation cannot rely on proven strategies of action. The mix of apparently conflicting approaches based on adaptive strategies aims to test different solutions before making more structural investments focused only on specific targets (e.g., atomised freelancers or the self-employed with stable collaborations with large and medium enterprises).
The multiple approaches of the CGIL to self-employment are evidence of its great vitality although, at the same time, it is clear that weak or absent coordination can generate inefficiencies or give the impression of inconsistency. Nevertheless, it is worth recalling that over the years the CGIL has, including through weak coordinated actions, developed a structured knowledge of self-employment and close dialogue with the organisations focused on the self-employed. This determines a positive repositioning in the emerging field of self-employed representation that partially reframes the competition with the other organisations.

#### *4.5.1.2 SMart: reciprocity and active participation. The keys for professional empowerment*

SMart's case study represents a one-off for many reasons. What is most interesting is the combination of the general strategy model of the European headquarters in Belgium and the strategic evaluations developed independently by the national offices. The result is a strategy based on common values in the European network and adapted to local geographical contexts. The combination of the knowledge and skills of local groups interacts with a strong structure supporting the start-up phase of the new headquarters, including the funding and human resources to implement the activities.

The strategy of representation is based on a pragmatic approach. The cooperative offers its members an administrative service (costing 8,5% of turnover, net of VAT) which means that they can spend less time on administrative and bureaucratic matters and more on their professional activity. This service is the gateway to the cooperative environment, which offers networking and training opportunities and includes members in decision-making. Taking advantage of these opportunities and actively taking part in the decision-making process is free for members but strongly encouraged. Offering a highly functional service helps to increase the number of members, while the overall proposal of the cooperative is fostered by active voluntary participation. The two aspects combined make the overall proposal sustainable, as the fees that members pay for the administrative service guarantee resources for the cooperative's other activities. The latter include up-front payment to members for work done for clients, with Smart recovering the credit directly from the client, and a mutual fund for members in the case of an insolvent client.

> *When I was working in Smart, at the beginning I was running 350 activities, 350 projects. There were members that I had never seen because they just sent me their documents, but others with whom I created a shared professional relationship, we organised activities that we supported together. Thanks to that they grew together with us. The members vote and have a strong decision-making power in the choices made by the cooperative.* **(P15: Communication manager, SMart IT, November 2015).**

> *Some join because they are interested in the project, others because of the administrative service. In neither case do we judge their choice because everyone has their specific needs. What is important is that we do not just offer administrative support because we all like to do something more, and we think that developing projects with our members makes much more sense. If we had been interested only in providing an administrative service, we would have pursued this goal body and soul and in the best way possible, but without thinking about anything else. Passive participation causes no problems to our structure, but we foster active participation because that makes the difference.* **(P15bis: President of SMart IT, November 2015).**

Smart's representation proposal emerges as an indirect result of a strategy focused on supporting the professional growth of its members as well as growth of its membership. In this regard, the strategic representation model is quite different from trade unions and professional organisations. With the latter, the offer of services is one of the elements of a more multifaceted proposal where the self-employed can be passive members or activists. The overall offer of SMart defines an inclusive professional environment organically built to support and empower its members. So it is not a formal issue, but the difference is between the sum of services and activities, including representation (trade unions and professional organisations), and the proposal of a coordinated set of services and activities aimed at professionally empowering the self-employed through reciprocal exchange between members and cooperative. In the case of Smart, effective representation is the result of an aggregation process focused on creating a professional environment which reaches a critical mass.

> *In SMart, representation comes after the fact that we can be useful for someone. Formal representation is immediately there in the cooperative - each member votes so each has decision-making power, but real representation outside comes when you feel that I, as the cooperative, respond to your needs. When you feel that I do, and can perhaps respond even better, you will use this potential to do something about your needs. To me, representation has a series of very practical aspects. It means telling members to use us and to suggest good changes to work better. We do not ask for this in a utilitarian sense, because otherwise I would simply say 'use our cooperative' and that's it, whereas we ask them to tell us how to change. We do this by listening and we do it because we want to be shaped by our members. Utilitarianism, on the other hand, implies a passivity that is exactly the opposite of what we hope our members will do. It is essential that they participate. This way, we work better, because it is a two-way relationship.* **(P15: Communication manager, SMart IT, November 2015).**

In other cases, for example, in trade unions or even the quasi-unions, representation is one of the main and immediate activities, but in some cases it can become more important than an effective aggregation process or a community of practices. The unions and quasi-unions can have a limited self-employed membership because they base their representation on other elements: the unions, on strong involvement with institutions; the quasi-unions, on the reputation and authority they earn with their advocacy.

> *The model proposed by Smart focuses on an idea of representation that comes indirectly from the creation of a professional environment supporting projects, networking with those involved, protecting them and encouraging their attempts. So reaching a critical mass means we can consolidate the associative model and transform the cooperative into a representative body. This break-even point means we can influence the conditions set by the markets and negotiate more advantageous conditions for our members. It also means we can play an important role in the dialogue with institutions and in lobbying.* **(P15bis: President of SMart IT, November 2015).**

The effort to construct a cohesive professional community that tends towards self-sufficiency in resources and professional competences means the community can become a credible and authoritative interlocutor with the market and, in some favourable cases, influence it, interact with institutions from an independent position, and take the opportunities offered without being too dependent on them.

> *The difficulty of acting in different professional sectors must be acknowledged. In Italy, it is even greater because social capital plays a significant complementary role to the market logics. Often you can open doors if you know someone, a situation I experienced even outside Smart. The idea I support is that independence is powerful. Being able to somehow disregard a certain type of external environment is a big advantage. It means that you play by different rules and since you play with different rules you have the upper hand. This makes you less predictable because you don't have to be servile. Independence is an important weapon in our armoury.* **P15: Communication manager, SMart IT, November 2015).**

The representation strategy therefore includes direct action towards the market and public institutions. With the market, in order to improve its members' contractual conditions, the cooperative tends to generate forms of bargaining on the basis of their critical mass and on the quality of its offer. With the public institutions, lobbying is exercised in a constructive form when the institutions are interested in experimenting innovative formulas in the sectors where Smart acts (above all, the cultural sector). However, when institutions accept clientilism or are not transparent enough, the cooperative can concentrate on community building without depending on lobbying for public support (or funding). SMart aims to exercise a proactive force oriented towards redefining the rules with regard to the market and public institutions. In the market, it protects its artists and, in particular, its creative freelancers working on professional projects without an immediate economic return. With public institutions, it uses persuasion to reinforce the virtuous logic of improving cultural policies (paying attention to pluralism) beyond the profit-oriented logic promoted by the cultural industry.

> *It is no coincidence that people who work in the cultural and entertainment sector are left alone. The founders of Smart wanted to fight against the idea that artists are recognised according to how much money they make. There are workers, there is a sector - culture - that con not rely only on economic logics. Art and culture must be defended no matter how much money comes from commercial success, so creative artists with different commercial results must have access to measures of social protection and must be in a position to continue to exercise their activity. This position is our position, an alternative to purely market-based logics.* **(P15: Communication manager, SMart IT, November 2015)**

SMart IT was set up relatively recently (2013), so it is natural that its representation strategies are not yet consolidated. However, it is worth considering its early attempts to open up the

cooperatives to freelancers outside the artistic and creative scene which is the starting target of each new SMart headquarters, all over Europe.

> *The alliance we are building with ACTA has specific reasons. We started from the artists in a broad sense, then included the creative worker scene in the broadest sense. Why? Because in these sectors, a number of workers is in search of protection. Over time, we have recognised that this sort of fragility is common for a number of the self-employed across the sectors. We realised that the supporting tools developed in SMart on the bases of our ideals are also useful for other self-employed workers. So why should we recreate boundaries between professional sectors or between workers? This is why we choose to open up the cooperative to other freelancers.* **(P15bis: President of SMart IT, November 2015)**

During the interviews with the president and the SMart communication manager, the opportunity to critically analyse the concept of strategy emerged. Usually, when respondents are aware that they are playing a public role and publicly representing their organisation, they prefer to reconstruct a past with no contradictions, and omit the most important difficulties in their organisation. In these cases, a totally rationalised and linear reconstruction of the facts emerges, but it appears quite artificial. The history of the organisation becomes a performance: the aim is to enhance the image of the organisation by manipulating past events and building an official history. On a different scale, it seems rather similar to the reinvention of traditions studied by Hobsbawm (Ranger & Hobsbawm, 1987). Similar dynamics emerged during seminars and public conferences where the representatives of the organisations explained their role in the national debate on self-employment. In contrast, during the interviews, the dialogue was sometimes based on a more realistic analysis which included the uncertainty and difficulties of the complex environment in which the organisation operates.

> *At university I was following a course on strategy and management. A series of contradictions emerged, and they come to my mind now talking about strategy. We had to study cases of failed companies; we knew that the strategy was wrong because they failed. The real truth is this: when you have existed for a short time, despite your international experience, it is quite normal for you to need to develop strong specific expertise in your geographical area in order to define a proper strategy. As yet, our history is not meaningful or rich enough for us to do this. We need to reinforce our network, and know our members and their professional sectors better. That is what we need to define an a priori strategy. We are more focused on opportunities than on a priori decisions. The priority is the road with least obstacles. The strategy at this time can only be strongly based on analysing the context, listening to what happens, and taking opportunities. This means being very adaptive and reactive. One thing has changed since the beginning: we now consider this mix of needs more seriously, we talk to everyone, after that we try to understand which proposals are the most interesting and those are the ones we support.* **(P15bis: President of SMart IT, November 2015)**

The idea of representation comes at the end: it is the end result of practices shared and recognised by the community of reference, not the a priori investiture of whoever takes on the burden of

representing a community, or claims the right to do so. The difference may seem subtle, but it is important to recognise it, because it is part of two contrasting perspectives. In the case of SMart, representation is a natural consequence of its activities and recognised as positive. Forcing the interpretation a little, we could say that delegation for representation takes place ex-post, when the results have already been achieved and not before, as in the classic representation models (Pitkin, 1967).

> *I would like to say a little more on what I mean when I think of representation. To me, "to represent" means being able to say "I represent". It is not me representing someone else but someone else who feels represented by me. This is a concept that makes sense in practice: it is not me who takes on the role of representing a multitude, representation comes later. I can try to summarise, I can try to understand what the common bases of a group are, I can imagine tension and evolution, what their practical needs are, choosing a way to give them an answer. If I do this work in the most honest way, I do not even ask myself who I represent, because it is the action of Smart as a whole that does the work. When it happens, I feel part of an organisation with common and fundamental values.* **(P15bis: President of SMart IT, November 2015)**

#### *4.5.1.3 ACTA: reinventing conflict through advocacy and coalition building*

ACTA can be properly considered a quasi-union according to Heckscher & Carré's definition (2006). Since 2004, when it was set up, it has been striving to bring out the new needs of tertiary sector independent workers by filling the vacuum left by trade unions and professional organisations. At the turn of the century, the unions were focused on defending employee labour and the non-standard labour which had become increasingly flexible due to the reforms implemented in those years[65]; the professional organisations were mainly focused on defending the older generations of independent professionals with consolidated careers. In both cases, defending insiders. For ACTA, advocacy was the main strategy from the start. Through advocacy, it aimed to increase freelancers' visibility and reputation, and renew the public debate mostly focused on the precarisation process generated by the recent labour reforms:

> *Until now we have tried to acquire authority and therefore the capacity for representation. As long as we, as self-employed professionals, are not included in the social dialogue, none of the new laws will take our needs into consideration. The first step was to start a dialogue with the Labour Commission; we were able to obtain a change in the labour reform law[66]. Looking ahead, our efforts aim at extending our coalition to the other associations, because we cannot go anywhere if we are so fragmented.* **(P325: President of ACTA; November 2012)**

[65] The so called 'Pacchetto Treu' (Law 196/1997) and the 'Legge Biagi' (Law 30/2003)
[66] 'Legge Fornero' (Law 92/2012)

ACTA is characterised by a combination of rather different professional and political perspectives, but it is undeniable that a great contribution to the analysis of the political and social context came from one of its most prestigious founding partners, Sergio Bologna. Historian and labour movement scholar, he was a port logistics consultant for several years during his professional career and his analysis is a reference point for ACTA activists. Analysis and strategies are closely combined as well as strategies and new practices. Reinventing the conflict by finding new forms of coalition becomes an urgent priority. Reconstructing a fragmented society (Mingione, 1991) within a common and inclusive framework where individuals identify as a collective entity emerges as the top priority. According to these assumptions, in the medium-long term, representation strategies are oriented towards coalitions where individuals have sufficient reasons to claim their rights through new and partly reinvented forms of action. Reinvention is the common challenge involving interpretation and action:

> *The decline of the traditional working class led to the end of the culture of conflict in the working context. This is why reinventing conflict is a crucial theme. Having experimented with new forms of protest was fundamental: tweet bombs, flash mobs, using social networks and open-air spaces. To get results, you need to raise your voice and take an antagonistic stance. [...] Post-Fordism in Italy was fostered from below, by those who did not want to be salaried employees and were fine with being precarious. Today, precariousness has changed its meaning, has become a conviction. We need to focus on the fragmentation of the middle class and the breakdown of the workforce. Finding inequality is not difficult, understanding what goes on in people's minds to push them towards a coalition is much more difficult, but also much more useful.* **(P20: interview with Sergio Bologna, Il Manifesto, April 2017)**

ACTA has always tried to foster a strong renewal of the public debate on self-employment as well as stimulate the public institutions to renew their policies in view of the rapidly-changing labour market. Over time, the daily work focusing on information and communication through their website and digital social media allowed ACTA to acquire sufficient authority to take part in the dialogue with political decision-makers. Paradoxically, this winning strategy also has a weak side if we consider the specific context of this organisation: the fact that the activists' work is voluntary. Over the years, their specialised skills and knowledge (e.g., in communication, data analysis, or the history of movements) contributed to the organisation's positioning yet, despite being continuous, their activities lacked stability because such activists are, above all, professionals dedicated mainly full-time to their activities. The difference between the means of action of structured organisations (trade unions) and quasi-unions such as ACTA lies mainly in the voluntary work behind the core activities. The other weak aspect of ACTA's strategy is the fact that advocacy cannot automatically increase the membership and thus also the economic resources.

As their leaders publicly declared on many occasions, when successful, their advocacy benefits all self-employed workers without distinguishing between members and free-riders. Proof of this was the very limited number of members of a national organisation (around 1,500 per year) and the large number of followers it had on social media during the ad hoc social media campaigns to bring about or block institutional measures.

> *We are mainly focused on advocacy, we have invested very little in services. Now we are trying to invest more. We are coming to services because people pay if they have a service. This applies to all representative organisations. Nobody joins the CGIL because of a general idea of being represented, most do so for the services (tax services, legal advice, etc.) Whoever joins ACTA pays an annual fee, and they do that mainly because they support our advocacy.* **(P74: President of Acta; February 2017)**

As the quotation below explains, there is a strong link between the mobilisation around the time of important legislative change, the visibility that it can reach through the traditional media and the opportunities for dialogue with politicians. In this case, before the law on self-employment was approved, there was broad debate in the newspapers and on TV. This was the result of strong activism by organisations such as ACTA, but also by CoLAP, Confassociazioni and the trade unions (especially the Board of Professions-CGIL) which supported the debate, above all on social media. This widespread activism, partly based on common positions, was why some newspapers fostered public debate on the bill on self-employment, which was approved in May 2017.

> *It is not easy to get to the press and the media in general. We wrote to the Prime Minister when he supported a really unfavourable labour reform for young workers. We explained our position even on TV in political debates. When politicians realised that there was support behind our protest and ours was not an ideological position, they realised that even politically we were an important part of society. So they started a dialogue. We were consulted before the bill on self-employment was set down in detail (Law 81/2017). We asked for changes to be made and we defended them. When the first version of the bill came out, a series of criticisms immediately began - "it doesn't solve everything, it isn't useful" - even from members of our own coalition[67]. I went to a coalition meeting and said: "I lay claim to this bill because it is our result. We want to bring it home". We started writing that it did not solve everything, but was important for us. If we had not supported it, they [politicians] would have sunk it. We supported the bill in the media, we supported it with all the other associations we were in contact with.* **(P74: President of Acta; February 2017)**

The issue of coordination with other organisations emerges strongly. The approval of the law on self-employment is the best example of the efforts made towards a common front by the existing organisations. All the leaders of the organisations involved in the public debate and consulted by the government agreed that the new law was the result of a common and coordinated

[67] The reference is to Coalizione 27 Febbraio, made up of various groups of professionals, precarious workers and students.

will, although during the semi-structured interviews each leader underlined the important role played by their own organisation.

### 4.5.2 Germany. Reframing representation through organisational innovation

#### *4.5.2.1 Ver.di: lobbying supported by servicing as a strategic tool*

The strategy towards self-employment representation promoted by the German unions could count on a significant base of unionised workers in the publishing and communication sector. The artistic and creative sector, too, had seen considerable growth in self-employment before other professional contexts. The existence of a critical mass of members allowed representation of self-employed workers to be structurally included in the new union, Ver.di, which was oriented to covering the entire service sector. As seen also in Italy, innovation within the union takes place because of the initiative of individual trade unionists whose recognised position and authority generates spaces for change. This case is extremely significant because the creation of a new union made space for a new unit, Ver.di Selbständige, which was totally dedicated to representing self-employed workers. In retrospect, this choice was fundamental to implementing a structured representation offer counting on a medium-long term project. Likewise, the creation of an ad hoc structure meant the possibility of acquiring precise knowledge of the needs of self-employed workers and of dedicating human and economic resources to representing them.

> *During discussion on the founding of Ver.di, Veronica and me convinced IG Media to focus on the growing number of freelancers and this was then considered when the new union was structured. It was, of course, a slow process. […] I would like to say that when I hear someone in the union complaining because someone says stupid things about freelancers in the coordination meetings […] I can say that it is easier for me to recognise these mistakes because we have promoted concrete and effective change within the union […] we work with freelancers every day; it was not a decision from above.* (**P58bis: Head of Mediafon - Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015; August 2015)**

The representation strategy is based on progressive increase in the membership, which is seen as the strong basis for lobbying. This increase includes the attempt, difficult and slow, to acquire new members in new working areas where the union is not present or only marginally so. During the interviews with representatives of Ver.di and other organisations, the difficulty in developing a range of representation across sectors and professional figures emerged repeatedly. This difficulty is due to a number of factors: lack of knowledge of the specific professional contexts they wish to represent, difficulty in actively involving the self-employed workers from those sectors, the need to

find a balance between segmented needs and a common minimum framework, and the need for substantial investment in terms of energy and time in building alliances and coalitions with other organisations dealing with self-employed workers. In the case of Ver.di Selbständige, the pragmatic attempt was based on a two-fold strategy: 1) progressive acquisition of specific knowledge of different working sectors; and 2) membership growth diversified by the working sectors (e.g., health care and information technology) with significant numbers of self-employed workers.

> *Ver.di has represented the self-employed since it was set up. IG Media, one of the five organisations that joined Ver.di, was focused on media workers and workers in cultural industries. IG-media had about 23,000 self-employed members then, and now in Verdi there are also freelancers from the educational sector. Some freelancers work in healthcare, very few in IT, but now we are starting with them too. Now we have about 30,000 of them in the union. […] Our main goals for the coming years are to increase our knowledge, membership and network in order to show our strength in supporting freelancers even better than now.* (**P58: Head of Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

From the beginning, the aim was to foster transparency in the labour market to stimulate self-employed mobility. At the same time, the representation strategy also included dedicated services for individuals (legal, tax and administrative advice). All these activities were seen as functional to aggregating the self-employed, in order to lobby with the support of a substantial membership. All this took place in line with an inclusive approach which managed to integrate representation of the self-employed into the general framework of workers' representation promoted by the union. Ver.di Selbständige had always promoted inclusion of the self-employed into the public welfare system **(P58)**, a strategic but contested issue because the costs of inclusion were too high for a significant number of the self-employed on low incomes[68]:

> *For example, we say that there must be a common social security system for everyone living in this country. Some organisations say they have enough money to opt for a private social security system according to what the market offers. If this is a difference between us and them, we cannot have a dialogue with them. From my point of view, we should not even help them because their direction is different to what we think is the right one. If they want to join the union, they must undersand that there must be common interests. I am not sure that this is what many people working here think, but this is my opinion. Elsewhere, freelancer organisations, let's take the example of the Freelancers Union in the United States, are more or less selling private insurance. This is the basis of their "activities" but it is not a reference model for a union. Plus, what*

[68] Since 2009, health insurance has been compulsory for all those living in Germany, whereas pension contributions are compulsory only for some self-employed workers (those with only one client or with no employees, teachers, nurses and tradesmen). Artists and journalists are included in the health and pension special schemes of KSK Künstlersozialkasse. The liberal professions have specific conditions: the fees of independent architects, doctors and lawyers, for example, are laid down by the state; while their professional bodies manage dedicated pension funds and specific care services for members.

> *I think is that if a trade union decides from above to enter a new field, it will probably not work; you need a concrete basis of knowledge and workers to do it.* (**P58bis: Head of Mediafon - Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

Acute awareness of the context in which the trade union is acting emerged during the interviews. At the same time, significant evaluations also emerge regarding the union's innovation dynamics. These have medium-long times and change takes place through progressive adaptation where only some units (or one, in some cases) bear the burden of the internal change by developing their everyday activities. Full integration of new targets and new activities inside the "cage" of the trade union is thus a result, not the premise. Hence the partly provocative considerations on the union's lack of strategy:

> *I do not believe Ver.di has a strategy for self-employed workers. The trade union focuses on certain sectors, talks with other organisations and tries to reflect on what is happening. Its efforts are oriented to ensuring that all workers are treated in a dignified manner. It is important to say that there is a difference between Ver.di as a whole and the people who work with the self-employed in Ver.di. That is to say, there is a gap and probably also a different sensitivity. But what is important is that there are people in Ver.di dedicated to the self-employed. I believe it is important to recognise this difference, even in our internal debate.* (**P58bis: Head of Mediafon - Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

The realistic view of the internal dynamics of the trade union makes it possible to consider complex organisations under a different light. The official narratives of the organisations tend to describe them as machines or organisms whose functioning is totally, or predominantly, rational and harmonious. These narratives are functional to building the public identity of the organisations. In-depth exploration of the internal activities and dynamics, however, reveals a grey area between one unit and another, as well as between one unit and the organisation as a whole. A certain degree of disconnection between different parts of the same organisation is not necessarily to be considered negative. This disconnection, which emerges in different forms in different organisations, means the organisation can experiment and act strategically in order to adapt to the changes taking place in the surrounding environment. In that light, consistency and strategies appear to be the ex-post product of the rationalisation process rather than the product of a fully-shared decision of the organisation as a whole from the start.

There is a similar situation in DGB, the umbrella organisation composed of eight unions, including Ver.di. Here the strongest organisations, those rooted in the production system, dominate the decision-making processes, even though the strong orientation towards industrial production is accompanied by rapid expansion of the tertiary sector. The role played by Ver.di Selbständige in DGB is difficult because of internal inter-union competition,

but extremely important. As the interview excerpt below shows, the definition of common agreements on the decision-making process means significant pressure on DGB's members, and even when decisions are made, their implementation needs monitoring and stimulating. Thus an overall picture emerges in which a unit of the trade union (Ver.di Selbständige in Ver.di) and a member of the second-level organisation (Ver.di in DGB) play a fundamental and often not very visible role in supporting innovation processes. The effective assimilation of new issues and their implementation is therefore the result of a struggle against passiveness determined by the dominant interests in the organisation.

> *They claim not to have a position, but indeed within the structure of DGB there is a structure called the 'Parliament of Labour'. Every four years, there is a sort of general assembly. Last year they made some interesting decisions about freelancers. What happened was relatively simple. We lobbied in DGB, even though we met only a few people interested in this subject. Anyway, in the end the 'Parliament of Labour' took an official position on freelancers. So, our effort now is to make visible and share this decision within DGB. Although this umbrella organisation is dominated by old-fashioned unions, something can be done in that context, too, and I think it is a duty. The Parliament of Labour is not only a formal context; it is an effective context where decisions are taken, and the umbrella union must implement them concretely.* (**P58bis: Head of Mediafon - Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

Action and representation strategies therefore need to be active on several fronts, internal and external. In the union, Ver.di Selbständige fosters constant dialogue with the other units, starting from DJU, the unit dedicated to journalists, as well as with other units less focused on the self-employed, and its actions affect the trade union as a whole. In turn, the union acts consistently within the umbrella organisation, supporting the reasons for and proposals of structural investment in actions dedicated to the self-employed. In both cases, the organisations incorporate some innovations thanks to the action of a minority (Ver.di Selbständige in Ver.di; Ver.di in DGB) which focuses on the heart of the issue. We can recognise similar traits also at the micro level of the different groups of self-employed members of Ver.di Selbständige throughout Germany: a high degree of autonomy in the aggregation process and in action balanced by light coordination activity at a national level. This can encourage the spontaneous growth of active local units within the union. What is interesting to note is the relationship between a highly varied and fragmented service sector and a union structure, Ver.di, which within its hierarchical structure acts through highly autonomous local and national units. In other words, we can recognise a extremely flexible approach within a hierarchical structure:

> *What is important is that in Ver.di each sector has its autonomy; so it is not like having a large union with a rigid vertical structure. We have freelancers in the different federal states of Germany*

> *and we meet three times a year. They have their own structure, their groups. Ver.di as a whole decided that freelancers are an important group of workers to represent. Our union tells the freelancers "come with us and change us". The freelancers say they do not want to join a union where 98% of the members are employees, but the good news is that compared to the other unions, that portion of freelancers in the union constitutes a critical mass; it can guarantee that our voice is heard in the union and other unions.* (**P58bis: Head of Mediafon - Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

Like in other cases in Italy and Germany, the structure of the unit dedicated to the self-employed is extremely light. The political and unionist work is carried out by the two people interviewed, while a private company connected to Ver.di, Mediafon, provides services to freelancers. However, it is important to correctly place the role of Mediafon in the union's overall strategy. Mediafon is managed as a concrete support tool, not an end in itself. Investment in services must be considered a functional element for the overall strategy, whereas the active involvement includes sharing the values consistent with the union's general approach to work. In this regard, the need for a collective welfare system to which everyone contributes (including all the self-employed) remains a non-negotiable value, despite being opposed by a significant part of the freelancers. The decision not to negotiate some basic aspects has the advantage of making the position of the union clear and, at the same, of setting up an entry barrier to organisations with corporative approaches to self-employed representation.

> *We are completely against services as a tool to make money or to increase membership. We try to say to our members that we help them in their work with services, but our discourse has a wider, political framework. We do not simply want to sustain the market by solving the problems of the self-employed. For example, we say that everyone, also the self-employed should have to pay retirement contributions to the public fund, because this is one of the big issues that generally concerns all workers, and the self-employed in particular. When they come to ask us things like "how can I improve my self-employed condition" we answer that they must know that because they know or should know their own business context. As we said before, we do not want to sustain the market, we want to have a political impact; otherwise we could provide paid services as a pure business. There are some issues, such as pensions, that cannot be addressed by sector or category; these need to be tackled structurally and we must be clear on that.* **(P58bis: Head of Mediafon - Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

This choice is completely different to that of the CGIL in Italy, which instead of investing in a unit dedicated to self-employment opted for weakly-coordinated multiple approaches: a permanent open forum (the Board of Professions) with all the organisations focusing on self-employment combined with some local experiments focusing on dedicated consulting services and coworking spaces.

One last interesting aspect concerns the concrete attempt to build forms of coordination with other unions focused on the new frontiers of self-employment. In particular, the work

developed by IG-Metall seems to be seen as complementary to the activities promoted by Ver.di Selbständige. From the statements gathered, the idea of non-competition appears to prevail among the trade unions. In this case, the German situation also seems quite different to the Italian one, where overlaps in the targets and sectors covered by the unions can be found.

> *IG-Metall recently changed its statute, opening up to self-employed members. Now they are developing a new project focused on crowd-workers and thinking about the organisation of self-employed engineers. In principle, if an agreement were found to coordinate the organisation of different types of self-employed, I would not be against it, even if it meant leaving to them the most qualified part of the self-employed. The first thing I think about is the benefits that certain choices have on workers and whether these choices have a benefit for me, too. There is no point competing for more members if coordination between unions can have more effective results.* **(P58bis: Head of Mediafon - Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

#### *4.5.2.2 Smart.de: adapting the European format to national and local environment*

The opening of a new Smart headquarters in Germany followed the strategic European expansion plan of the Belgian head office, and the Berlin office closely followed the model experimented since 1998 in Belgium and other countries such as France, with artists and creative workers as an initial target, and advice and administrative support as a solid starting point. The possibility of relying on structured economic and know-how support from the Belgian headquarters allowed time and energy to be invested in a systematic study of the legal frameworks regulating the labour markets of the artistic and creative professions. As happened in the Italian case, careful planning favoured the correct positioning of the organisation in the context of the German creative scene. The risks were connected with the uncertainties of the rapidly-evolving environment of the labour market intermediaries (LMI). Indeed, Smart adapted the classic idea of labour intermediation because it is not conceived of as an end in itself and thus a pure client-oriented business, but as a tool for empowering freelance workers. Analysis of the legal framework is part of the essential starting phase in order to move into new geographical areas. This helps avoid the risk of being associated with the role played by digital platforms, which are based on aggregation logics oriented to generating benefits exclusively for consumers, rather than for workers.

> *Being part of a European network composed of many other similar organisations allows us to better understand how the international scene evolves; at the same time the support of the European network allows us to be autonomous and adapt the organisation to the local context. In this respect, Smart Germany was created to connect with the artistic, musical and creative scene, this is what we know best here. The first logical step was to adapt our project to the legal structure regulating these sectors and their labour markets. Now we can act in these contexts without any ambiguities that could make us appear intermediaries like Helpling, the large digital platform of the household cleaning sector. Helpling was developed on a very different business model which*

> *we do not want to reproduce. We do not want to play the role of employers; we want to make freelancers stronger by giving them opportunities to optimise their financial condition as well as more opportunities to access social benefits. We do this because we want people to be able to take advantage of being a freelancer, but at the same time to have the basic protection of the social security system.* **(P67: Member of Board & General Manager of Smart DE, October 2016)**

However, specific arrangements in relation to the welfare system as well as the specific dynamics of the reference labour market had to be considered from the start. In the early times, the setting up of Smart also led to some criticism because it was perceived as a threat to the special Social Insurance Scheme for artists and journalists, the KSK - *Künstlersozialkasse*[69]. Indeed, Smart allows its members to decide when to work as self-employed and when as employees of the cooperative. In other words, each member is free to manage each project directly as self-employed or to assign it to the cooperative, which then formally becomes the employer. This latter option, however, means that working as employees, the artists cannot pay their contributions to the pension fund reserved for artists and journalists. What happens in practice is that many artists perform professional activities that fall outside the range of activities foreseen by the Künstlersozialkasse. The complex assessment involves the tax office and the evaluation committee of the Künstlersozialkasse, which make their evaluations independently and with different criteria. In some cases, the results of the evaluations differ and the artist is excluded from the special Social Insurance Fund (KSK). What clearly emerges from the interviews with the managers of SMart is that they want to offer effective support to all the artists excluded from that fund:

> *Smart does not aim to undermine the social insurance fund for artists (KSK). We are in favour of its existence, but it is not an opportunity available for all. We see every day that in the artistic sector the urgent need is to provide freelancers with more opportunities to work, and working through SMart is an additional opportunity. That is why SMart Germany is now being built. On the other hand, the goal is to professionalise the freelancers. When art school students complete their studies, they frequently lack the sufficient know-how to become freelancers. Today there are no more networks of galleries like those that could once guarantee and support the artists, neither are there are all those music labels that could once be a point of reference for the musicians. Above all, we want to develop an instrument that helps artists in administrative and bureaucratic management. After that, SMart aspires to become a fertile environment aimed at empowering artists through networking and training.* **(P57: Member of Board & Development Manager of Smart DE, August 2015)**

[69] The State supports artists and publicists who work as self-employed because the social group is usually much less secure than other self-employed workers. This is a social, cultural and political issue: artists and publicists are recognized as important for society. They are insured through statutory pensions, with health and long-term care insurance through the Artist's Social Insurance Fund (KSK - Künstlersozialkasse) and receive from the insurance company the share for their contributions to the insurance fund. KSK ensures that independent artists and publicists enjoy similar protection in statutory social security as employees.

> *The basis of our proposal is an administrative management service. First of all, we evaluate whether there are contractual arrangements for access to the Social Fund for artists, but sometimes there are not. That means they work as simple freelancers but without access to this fund; sometimes their working condition is suitable for working through our cooperative. Sometimes we also evaluate the possibility that being freelance gives them advantages; in these cases, we do not suggest working with us. We do not want to convince freelancers that it is always better to work with us; we always suggest the best solution for them.* **P67: Member of Board & General Manager of Smart DE, October 2016)**

The rapid changes in the artistic and creative scene require dynamism and flexibility from the representative organisations there, too. It is thus a strategic necessity to follow the flows of freelancers in order to understand their needs and plans. Technological infrastructures have opened new channels for visibility, self-promotion, and networking, yet there is an indispensable physical and spatial dimension where networks and projects take shape, are socialised and performed. The off-line dimension is one of the cornerstones in tackling the complex environment of the artistic and creative scene. Awareness of this complexity requires multifaceted reactions including shadowing the main targets, and daily contact with the stream of freelancers becomes strategic to understanding their needs and their trajectories in the urban cultural economies.

> *In the near future, our strategies include moving to a new headquarters in a large cultural centre. The change is scheduled for 2018 and will allow us to be more connected to the music scene, where the workers are mostly freelancers. Right now, we are hosted in a building called Lettre Etage, which is more related to the literary context, the meaning is more or less "house of literature". Our goal is to go to where there are more people, where a flow of people moves, we need to be where they meet. The basic idea is that we have to look for the freelancers, not the other way round. It is certainly a marketing choice that has a highly strategic basis. The reasons for changing our headquarters are to better understand freelancers' needs and to be in close contact with other organisations on the cultural and musical scene. In the same way, our project is to make ever stronger contacts with the coworking spaces and similarly to strengthen our relationship with the wide network of platform cooperativism. There is a meta-level where there are fruitful discussions about all those future projects but at the same time we need to be physically present in the places where things happen.* (**P67: Member of Board & General Manager of Smart DE, October 2016)**

The approach of SMart Germany, as well as that of the other cooperatives of the European network, is based on practical and effective solutions for artists and creative workers. SMart aspires to carry out structured lobbying of political decision-makers, although this is currently a distant goal because of its recent setting up and thus limited membership:

> *Our numbers do not yet allow us to have a strong political influence, at least in Germany. We still need to grow a lot if we want to lobby. Everything is evolving quite fast and we still have to understand how a part of the economy is being reorganised. What we are trying to offer are small but practical solutions that are not just advisory services. We do that to learn what is happening, to test the waters. After that, the core of our activity is services that add value to the our members' professional work. Certainly, we are not interested in creating a space simply oriented to matching*

*supply and demand, we are interested in giving people the tools to work better and in better conditions.* **(P33: Member of Board & General Manager of Smart DE, March 2016)**

The idea that emerged several times during the interviews is based on a progressive development of the organisation. Thus the first step is to stabilise the activities addressed to the workers of the artistic and creative sector, increasing the membership significantly. As in other nodes of Smart's European network, this first step has to become the solid basis of a model to be applied to other professional contexts. **(P33)** As in the Italian case, representation should spring from the practical daily activities carried out by the cooperative. So when the work done is recognised as congruous and effective, it is a result rather than a premise. This is a different perspective from those of trade unions or professional organisations. It is certainly difficult to assess a priori how the ability to exercise representation that starts from these assumptions can produce different or complementary results in comparison to other representation strategies. What is worth stressing here is that the starting point of the representation offer originates from the activities developed to empower members. The organisation then builds a representation base on common values based on the idea of cooperation among the workers. At the same time, the common representation framework is rooted in practices that aim to improve professionalism among members. The cooperative model is proposed as a concrete alternative to the forms of employment intermediation oriented towards pure business which adopt a neutral position between workers and clients when they are not totally on the clients' side.

#### *4.5.2.3 Supermarkt: cooperativism as a new productive paradigm*

The case of Supermarkt is extremely interesting because it represents an experience deeply rooted in the Berlin area. It comes from an aggregation of digital activists from the underground urban artistic and creative scene. The significant element is the mix between activism and professionalism, where the demands of activists often precede and shape the profession, which is closely tied up with the social identity of the activists. In this context, the sensemaking arises and shapes the strategic choices of Supermarkt. The group is strongly focused on technological transformation and its effects on work and individuals. The aggregation process started in a rather homogeneous group of activists and professionals but now includes the wide and heterogeneous world of freelancers inside and outside the digital environment.

Like most grass-roots groups, Supermarkt has to face the contradictions concerning the aggregation process and its peculiar dynamics. Over time, the open and inclusive nature of the group allowed

different associations to be aggregated, despite the original idea being to foster digital activism through direct management of a coworking space for the digital professions. Then Supermarkt changed its location and set aside the idea of coworking. Now it aggregates different groups focused on platform cooperativism. As noted previously, the participants, including activists and professionals, belong to different associations, NGOs, informal groups, or cooperatives (included SMart). The contradictions emerge in the attempt to find a common framework between the different subjects involved in the project, and thus a transversal base that can constitute a starting point for a collective demand. At the same time, the extremely rich variety of experiences of activism pushes towards a social coalition where those involved reflect on their fragmentation and specificities:

> *Moving on to the issue of representation, if we look at what happened here in Berlin, we must be aware that many of the freelance activists come from the digital scene, and by using digital tools they are aggregating and organising the movement. But it is true that there are many freelancers who are not necessarily on social media and so it is much more difficult to aggregate them by developing an effective proposal for collective representation. It is more difficult to understand what their needs are. So we must consider the obstacles that characterise every sector where freelancers are involved because this probably affects how contact and involvement can happen.*
> **(P108: co-founder of Supermarkt, January 2016)**

In this case, the need for new aggregation strategies emerges unequivocally. Aggregation takes place primarily through sharing practices, and the digital environment can be a fundamental support in the aggregation process. It would be naive, however, to think that the use of social media in daily and professional life is standard and affects most people equally. Awareness of the existence of important fractures in this respect leads to further reflections on a multiplicity of strategies to reach and actively involve freelancers in a process of collective representation.

Since 2010, when Supermarkt was set up, the founders have followed the process of collective aggregation of freelancers. In the case of Berlin, this process was stimulated by specific conflictual events between workers and public institutions. In the early 2000s, the freelance culture in Berlin was shaped by an imaginary based more or less on bohemian underground counter culture, and a good standard of living could be enjoyed even on a relatively low income. It was also a period of experimentation and relative freedom for unconventional workers such as young freelancers. After ten years of urban speculation which led to higher costs of living, together with the rapid evolution of the service economy (especially the creative and artistic scene), the condition of the freelancers had changed profoundly. The structural changes, which also involved the welfare system, included attempts to redesign measures and targets. A specific episode concerned the inclusion of

freelancers in the compulsory pension schemes. This was the episode that triggered the spark of conflict and the collective aggression of the Berlin freelancers:

> *It was also becoming clear that all those social infrastructures that surround the worker, such as health insurance taxes and, of course, the pensions that are not yet provided for freelancers, had to be addressed by us, too. This was necessary especially here in Berlin because we inherited a very heavy and rigid traditional bureaucracy. A bureaucracy that originated long before and had long been fossilised in a society that was changing. With the growth of economic and social problems, the inability of the political class to think up acceptable inclusion measures also increased. I understand the need to include freelancers in the social protection system as well as the need to contribute to its implementation. Still, they tried to make freelancers pay contributions to the social protection system, but their proposal was totally unaffordable for them. If I remember correctly, 20% of the freelancer's income had to be paid into the retirement contribution scheme. In the end, a great petition was made by many freelancers and we also contributed. In the end, the politicians had to give in because they saw that many people were against it. There was really strong pressure from below; it was in exactly that period that digital activism expanded its action. Before that we were only individuals, afterwards, we started to think as a social group.* **(P108: co-founder of Supermarkt, January 2016)**

During the last few years, the movement of freelancers in Berlin has become active (also thanks to some disruptive attempts to reform the welfare system) and has grown through digitally-based and traditional forms of aggregation. What is interesting to note in the message of the protagonists is the need to overcome a state of instability that characterises many (if not all) movements, and to obtain a more stable condition for the group of activists. Clear recognition emerges of the structural weakness of a collective group based on its activists' voluntary work.
The energy and time required to sustain the network of organisations and individuals are extremely important as they affect people's lives from a professional and private point of view. During the growth phase, enthusiasm makes it possible to endure and overcome all the obstacles relating to the organisation and to balance activism with professional and private life, while in the degrowth phases, discouragement becomes similarly important in people's lives. The need to find an answer to the risks of burnout led the group at Supermarkt to reflect on the need to shift towards a formal structure which could develop a critical point of view of the evolution of urban economies and platform capitalism. At the same time, the group of activists felt the need to foster professional opportunities for its members to guarantee medium-long term sustainability.
In line with the issues addressed within the group and promoted throughout the local and national territory, they recently discussed setting up a cooperative to bring together and enhance professional skills without uncritically sustaining the exploitative market dynamics which the group strongly contests. The decision to set up a cooperative is the result of lengthy internal debate, and

confirms the already existing desire to be critical of and alternative to the market-based logics of individualism and exploitation:

> *Now we are discussing setting up a cooperative. The discussion is intense and lively because some of us, including me, believe that the decisions of the cooperative must be separate from and independent of the economic arrangements. This is essential to guarantee our independence. We want to avoid the risk of taking decisions only on the basis of economic convenience. It is important to talk about it now because it is the cornerstone of the cooperative. At the same time, I think it is important to find the best model to guarantee economic sustainability. I have never seen a movement set up on a voluntary basis that lasted long. No more than a year or a year and a half; this is a bit 'what I can say after ten years inside the Berliner scene'. This is totally understandable and natural, there is a moment of growth then a slow decline, and when you realise that you are in the middle of the decline, sure, you feel frustrated. You devote your energy to keeping the network constantly growing and after some time you realise that you cannot go any further or improve any more. Anyone who has been involved in movements, at some point, also needs to think of themselves. This happens even to the best activists known in Berlin; some have spent time and energy defending freelancers but of course they did it for free and for a long time. […]I say this because we had the same experience here in Supermarkt* **(P108: co-founder of Supermarkt, January 2016)**

This attempt to set up a cooperative can be interpreted as a reaction to the uncertain environment experienced by the activists. Indeed, a structural weakness is recognised in the context of initiatives that have achieved great visibility over time at a European level, too. From the interview, it emerges that a common framework which can bring together and reinforce the many professional identities and different needs of the variegated world of freelancers is still lacking. The absence of a common framework determines an inability to become stable and recognised interlocutors by political decision-makers. The same weaknesses make a structured dialogue complicated or even impossible with other organisations representing freelancers and, more generally, self-employed workers. Thus the institutionalisation of the group that set up a cooperative aims to be an answer to these structural weaknesses.

> *What I can say is that the political level must be approached through specific issues rather than a general list of freelancers' needs. The point is that we have not yet developed a solid enough network to generate a kind of common roof, a common framework where we can feel at home. This is a must when you aspire to build a structural dialogue with the political level. The most significant experience in this sense remains the European Freelancers' Movement, which was supported from the beginning by some activists who work here in Berlin. But the movement has limited goals oriented mainly to supporting freelancers' visibility and awareness. […]*
> *I think that it is better to pay someone who will do this job for a longer time than a volunteer. I am quite sure that this person can do a better job because they are completely dedicated to these activities without needing to think of something else, surviving for example. If you are an activist and you have to run your business at the same time, at some point you have to come to terms with your idealism.* **(P108: co-founder of Supermarkt, January 2016)**

Part of the interview was dedicated to understanding the dynamics behind the representation strategies promoted by Supermarkt. In this case, as happened with the trade union Ver.di, there emerges a clear problematisation of what a strategy is, as well as the idea that it cannot concretely be conceived of as something planned a priori. The challenge is to accept the complexity of reality and its contradictory tendencies. In other words, it means clearly facing the difficulties in interpreting trends, needs and opportunities. The strategy then becomes the result of multiple attempts and explorations going in different directions. Sometimes these give positive results and the following step is to build something good on them. This perspective often comes up in the interviews when the self-celebrating narratives are bypassed and the problematic position before the complexity of reality is recognised and shared.

> *I think it is very difficult to establish in advance an overall strategy of representation for freelancers. It is certainly easier to move freely when fundamental decisions for a group have not yet been made; I believe that this condition is common to many groups. As Deborah, one of the people involved in setting up the cooperative, says, we need to distinguish the direction we take to address the contingent needs from the definition of a representation strategy. In some cases, however, making certain choices is essential to building a strategy in the future, even if still uncertain. Now we do not have a manifesto or something similar to allow us to define ourselves and be clear and definitive on every important issue. We are still in a preliminary phase. I think that strategy is the result of attempts. I believe that no one can define a strategy isolating themselves from the rest of the world; so I think the strategy is always the result of a series of attempts, of explorations which redefine your previous plan.* **(P108: co-founder of Supermarkt, January 2016)**

Here, too, we need to return to the considerations developed by Pierre Bourdieu. With lucid self-reflective capacity, he emphasises the distance between scientific practice, and thus the attempt to analyse a phenomenon, and the practical sense of those who experience it. Scientific practice abolishes time because it always comes after the facts. This makes it possible to override the effects of time to totalise meanings and the meaning of a given phenomenon. The time of scientific practice is therefore counterposed to the time of those involved in the game, which to paraphrase Bourdieu, does not know what it sees, but what it envisions; in other words, it fits to what players see in advance. Everyone (members of organisations, too) plays a complex game of forecasts and expectations whose results are never certain (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 127) but governed by a significant portion of uncertainty determined by the unpredictability of the reactions generated by the interactions. The evaluations of the players are therefore always a gamble on the probability that something will happen according to a continuous effort of forecasting within dynamic social contexts.

From these considerations, the necessary distinction arises between the idea of strategy as an a posteriori concept (closer to the etic perspective of scientific analytical practice) to a less defined idea of strategy, more dynamic and in construction, but closer to the subjects studied. The latter idea better reflects the horizon of subjects who take a position in the social arena and in more detail, in this case the perspective of the players in the emerging strategic action field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012) of self-employed representation.

### 4.5.3 A comparative perspective on representation strategies

In this section, the representation strategies of the six case studies will be discussed to detect similarities and differences, and strengths and weaknesses in both countries. The analysis aims to define emerging reference models of self-employment representation. In this regard, it is necessary to establish some premises. The previous paragraphs focus on six case studies considered relevant for the analysis. However, the entire set of organisations selected for this study presents an even greater variety of strategies. This variety is determined by multiple factors such as the fragmentation of workers in multiple production contexts, different practices of work organisation, different organisational cultures, and the positioning of the organisations in the emerging strategic field of representation. The attempt, then, to define models of representation strategies considers the six organisations selected for the case studies to which in-depth study was dedicated also with the ethnographic activity, and the set of other organisations considered in the entire study.

Before starting the analysis, it is useful to establish some premises that arise from the data collected during the fieldwork. It is interesting to note that the context in which the collected data are produced partly determines their shape and substance. Indeed, on several occasions during the fieldwork it was possible to follow the representatives of the organisations in public contexts such as conferences and seminars. These representatives were also interviewed two or three times. From the comparison of the two contexts, what emerges is that, especially in the public contexts, the storytelling on strategies is built around the need to perform. In these cases, rhetorical and argumentative strategies mean that certainties are privileged over doubts, the narratives that show farsightedness rather than explain the changes in strategy due to the unstable environment. An interview can also be considered a setting useful to give a performance. This is because representation strategies are a central and very sensitive topic for

the organisation. They are the source of the credibility and solidity of an organisation, so special emphasis is reserved for sensitive topics. Nevertheless, in the best of cases, an interview also makes it possible to go beyond the persuasive necessities inherent in every narrative, above all in the narratives aimed at strengthening the public identity of the organisation. In these cases, the performative needs of the discourse leave room for reflections that bring out different and more nuanced conceptions of what can be defined as "strategy". When this happens, space is created to deconstruct an excessively linear, solid and progressive idea of the concept. The concept of strategy takes different forms according to the point of view adopted:

1) when performative necessity prevails, the strategy is something totally planned from the beginning. It can be totally codified and narrated as a clear, linear, pre-established path that to be realised requires not adjustments but the commitment of the organisation as a whole. We call this **dogmatic strategy**;
2) on the other hand, again in the framework of a performance, the strategy is constructed retrospectively by reinterpreting the events which occurred, the choices made by the organisation, and the results obtained. That is, the strategy explains past facts to rationally justify the present position of the organisation. In this case, we have **strategy as justification**. Numerous implications emerge during the narration. Similarly to the processes of reinvention of tradition (Ranger & Hobsbawm, 1987), the environment and the reference world of the organisation are recomposed by the demiurge narrator. The narrative thus contains the subjective interpretation of events and the intention to manipulate those facts to give a rational and acceptable semblance to what happened. Both aspects, manipulation and subjective interpretation, help build and reinforce the image and identity of the organisation. One could argue that any subjective interpretation is manipulation, to some degree. I believe, however, that manipulation of the events implies a different degree of intentionality in favouring precise assessments by the interlocutors and, more generally, by the relative public. This is particularly true in public events with limited possibility of dialogue and discussion. I refer to all those rigidly structured situations, where the protagonists are on stage and the public can only listen (except in the final minutes of the meeting, when questions may be invited), the timing of the speech is extremely limited (similar to a talk show) and there are no structured exchanges between speakers. A similar situation occurs even when the stage is a newspaper or television program. Analysis of the news collected shows that in most cases the article simply aims at describing the

organisation because it is focused on an emerging public debate. In some cases, the articles clearly show their celebrative intent. However, in very rare cases it is possible to identify critical analyses of the organisations as well as a structured investigation of the relationships between organisations. In most cases, however, the descriptive dimension of a single organisation prevails. There are at least two main reasons for this trend. First, the potentially interesting information is the basic material necessary for readers or viewers to understand who the new players of self-employed organisations are or what the relevant changes in the traditional ones are. It is therefore legitimate to think that basic, descriptive information is necessary for the public to become familiar with the organisations. However, a second explanation is possible, and can be complementary to the first. It specifically concerns the functioning of the information machine. The journalists who write about self-employed organisations tend to be the same ones, resulting in their having a direct relationship, and this relationship implies mutual trust. The possibility of interviewing members of the organisations is part of an exchange where organisations gain visibility and the journalists receive enough information to write their article. This agreement is implicit and evident on both sides;

3) a third situation occurs when the performative necessity included in the narration of the representation strategy is bypassed or leaves room for a self-reflexive discourse. In these cases, the intent is no longer to recount the choices of the organisation as if they were part of a totally defined plan. The narration includes the daily activities, as well as the spaces of uncertainty and afterthoughts of the organisation. The strategy becomes the result of an exploration in different directions and is created in an impromptu attempt to influence events according to the organisation's values and goals. In these cases, the adaptive character of the strategies emerges, as well as recognition of a dimension of uncertainty. We can call this **progressive and adaptive strategy**.

A second basic premise concerns the organisations studied. Their size and the geographical area covered vary greatly. Some of them limit their action to large urban centres, others have structures nationwide. The dimension and structure significantly influence the decision-making processes, including definition of the representation strategies. Significant differences emerge when comparing organisations with very different dimensions and structures. There are new organisations with horizontal and decentralised structures where the decision-making process is

faster than in traditional organisations such as the trade unions. The unions also have to combine multiple focuses which include employees and self-employed, and their internal power balance makes the self-employed a weaker target in comparison with employees.

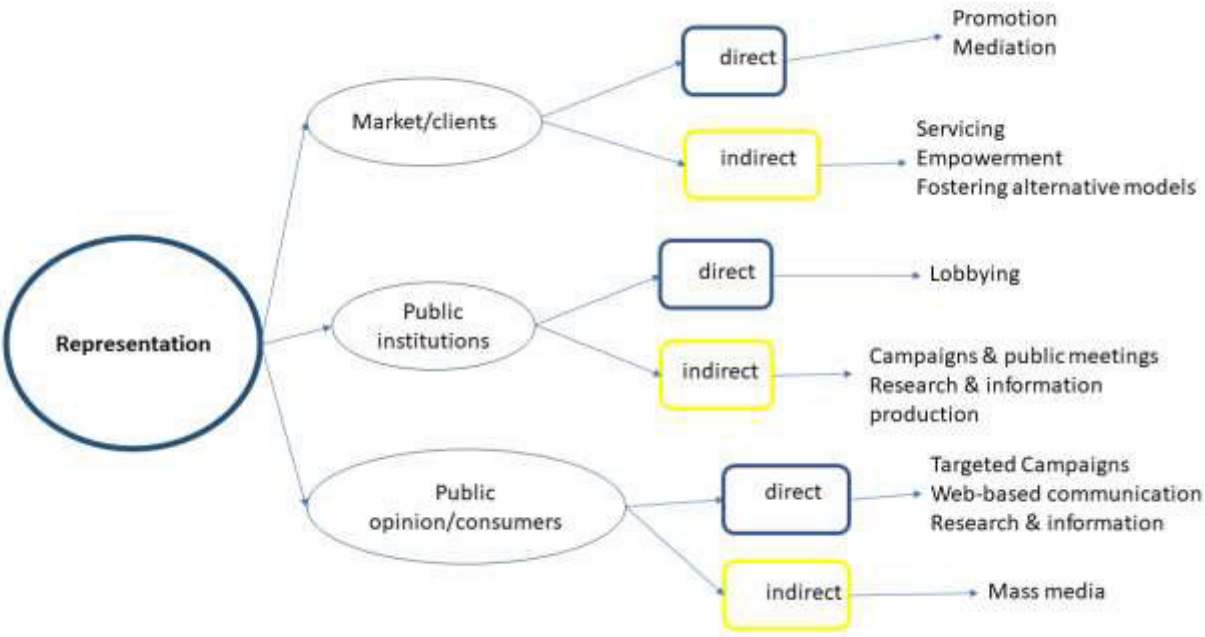
A recent study on organisations focused on self-employment[70] classifies the strategies as follows: 1) the servicing model; 2) the lobbying model; 3) the integrated strategy; 4) the collective bargaining model; and 5) the coalition-building model (Mori & Semenza, 2018).

Models are never acquired in an exclusive and rigid form and are often combined with the attempt to experiment with integrated forms of representation.

Over the years, different organisations have tested and combined different models to find a stable one. According to our analysis, the final aim in common of all the organisations studied is to exert influence, i.e. lobbying, on public institutions, although at the same time several organisations also have other strategic focuses: the markets and consumers. What is different is the way (or ways) adopted by the organisations to reach their final goals according to their main focuses. Representation activity towards the market, public institutions and public opinion can be reached through a repertoire of direct and indirect actions (see figure below). The representation strategies can be towards the market when the aim is to get better conditions (or opportunities) for the self-employed, and towards public institutions when the aim is to change the rules (e,g., of the market, labour market, or social security system). Representation of self-employment has a third strategic target: public opinion, and, in some cases, public opinion conceived of as consumers.

[70] I-WIRE. Independent Workers and Industrial Relations in Europe (Funded by the European Commission – DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion). Website: http://www.i-wire.eu/

*Figure 5 - Representation focuses and repertoires of action*




As noted before, the paths leading to representation are different and often combined. Over time, each organisation continuously defines and redefines its strategies based on how the context evolves and in relation to what competing organisations do. What is remarkable relates to the combination of the different approaches: organising, community building, coalition building, and lobbying. The strategies often imply other strategic activities behind a suitable representation offer such as servicing. Before proceeding with analysis of the strategies adopted by the organisations, some details concerning all the approaches considered in this study must be given.

During the 1990s, as part of the discussion on the revitalisation of trade unions, the topic of **organising** emerged significantly in the USA and then spread to Europe (Fitzgerald & Hardy, 2010; C. M. Frege & Kelly, 2003; Martens & Mitter, 1994). The basic idea concerns the need for trade unions to support their membership growth by fostering active participation by workers. The intent is thus to invest in those practices aimed at actively involving the workers in representation processes which support the creation of collective identities.

The peculiarity of the new self-employed concerns the lack, in many cases, of previous experiences of representation on which to base the new strategies. Obviously, this lack is not absolute. In the previous decades, professional organisations were focused on traditional self-employment, including some productive sectors emerging in the post-industrial phase such as the consulting and communication sector. However, what is different

concerns above all those to be represented: they belong to new generations, largely deprived of political experience, and not familiar with the trade unions or professional associations.

The new labour conditions are rapidly repositioning self-employment in the hierarchies of the production system, generating new protection needs. In addition, if we focus on the advanced tertiary sector, it is worth considering that the new professions often grew without direct connections with the existing professional associations or trade unions. Organising activities thus becomes a primary need for all the organisations involved in the representation of self-employment. Nevertheless, this need is interpreted in different ways and in some cases, it coexists with other organisational priorities.

**Community building** is here considered mainly in relation to the professional context. What distinguishes community building and organising is the existence of digital or physical infrastructures and networks of relationships focused on professional development conceived within a collective framework. In this case, therefore, the professional community is not the sum of the professional individualities but the result of an intentional action promoted by a group or an association aiming to empower the self-employed group with regard to the market. Professional community building practices therefore aim to strengthen the identity of a group by connecting members and fostering professional exchanges and development.

**Coalition building**, instead, concerns the activities of an organisation aimed at structuring stable connections with other organisations to achieve common goals.

The existence of a coalition therefore means that its members act as if they were a single group and recognise themselves as legitimate members. An existing coalition also performs common actions which give their public a recognised public identity.

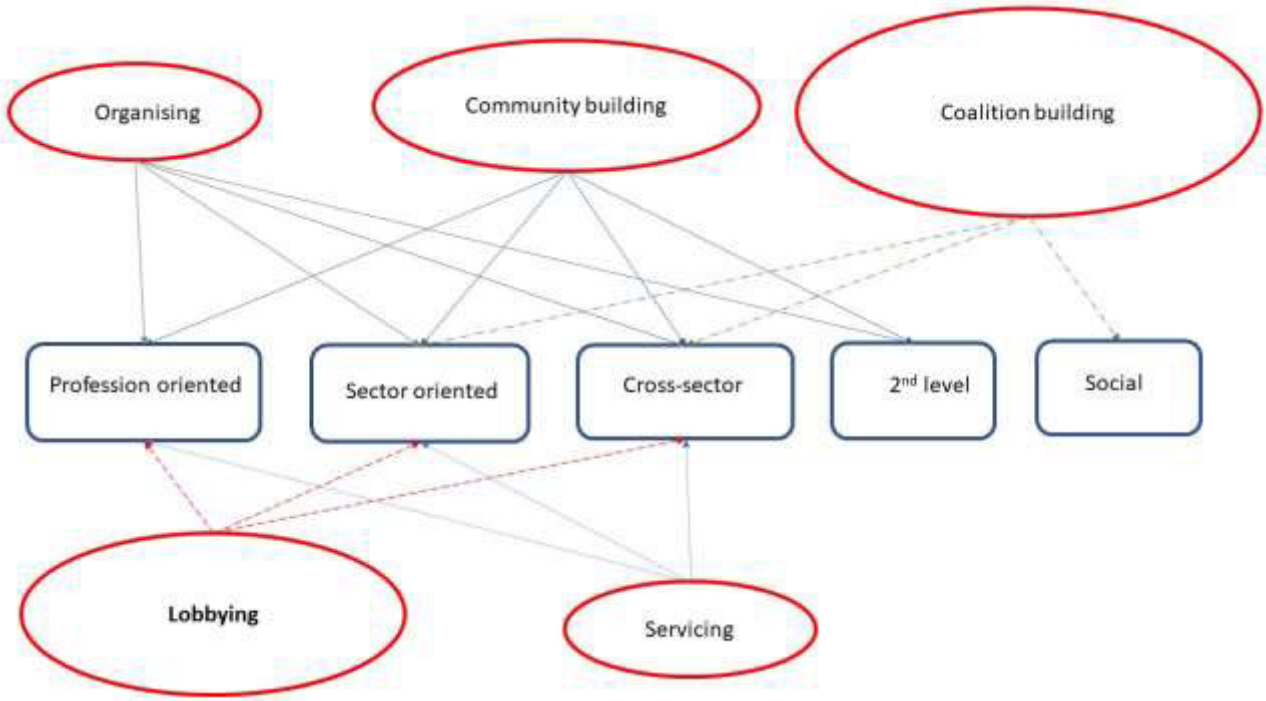
The difference between a coalition and a second-level (umbrella) organisation is considered in this context. A coalition is focused on the common interests of different organisations, but this does not mean it has to formalise common intentions; while the network and common aims of an umbrella organisation are formally defined by a statute and membership fee. The coalition can be focused on limited issues, whereas the second-level organisation (umbrella organisation) usually has long-term goals.

**Lobbying** is here interpreted in its strict sense as the activity aimed at influencing legislators and, more in general, public institutions and consultative bodies at local, national or European level involved in self-employment regulation and protection.

The **servicing** approach, widely spread among the organisations studied, is a way to provide concrete support to self-employed workers, at the same time allowing the conditions and needs of the target population to be understood. It is also a rather effective way to establish a first contact based on a concrete need. In these contexts, providing services means investing resources and competences in high performance legal advice, administrative and tax consultations, professional services for professional development (including training) and activity aimed at obtaining club benefits (discounts on professional devices, training courses etc.). This approach is functional to finding new members as well as maintaining the existing ones. It is driven by the utilitarian interest of the self-employed and can thus be seen either as a pure for-profit activity or as a strategic tool for the inclusion of active members in the organisation.

All the approaches considered can be developed with different purposes (corporatist or inclusive) and different focuses: on professions, sectors, cross-sector, or organisations, with a specific interest in their common issues; or the broader social environment, with a focus on social changes through professional activism. Below is a figure of the combination of approaches and focuses found during the research.

*Figure 6 - Representation approaches and focuses*



The figures on representation focuses (Fig. 5) and representation approaches (Fig.6) have been built on the basis of the in-depth study of the several organisations selected. The combination of focuses and approaches is primarily the combination of two point of views from which to look at organisations' choices. The representation focus infact sheds light on the main reference point of the organisation (market/clients, public institutions, public opinion/consumers) the approach instead is the way (organising, community building, coalition building, lobbying, servicing) they opt for addressing their offer of representation to specific targets (within specific professions, sectors or a group of organisations in the case of second level organisations, or the society as a whole).

#### *4.5.3.1 The six selected case-studies*

We can now compare the case studies in the light of the diagram above by considering similar organisations: the Italian trade union CGIL and the German trade union, SMart Italy and Smart Germany, and ACTA and Supermarkt. In the table 6 based on the evidences collected, the red cells indicate the prevailing approach adopted by the organisations, while the grey cells indicate with two intensity degrees other existing approaches which emerged.

Comparison of the two trade unions, the CGIL[71] and Ver.di[72], reveals a different combination of approaches based on different investment strategies. The combination of approaches and investments significantly affects the structures involved in representing self-employed workers. However, the most evident difference between the CGIL and Ver.di is the relationship with other organisations operating in the same field.

Through the Board of Professions, the CGIL is investing in a second-level organising activity, whereas Verd.di is focused mainly on a selective inclusion, closing itself off from organisations with different views and values to its own. As noted previously, the Board of Professions, with limited human resources and without economic autonomy, manages to develop a space for coordination and exchange with the old and new professional organisations of the self-employed (top-down approach). It is evident that the aim is to foster a dialogue without overfiltering the conflicting positions of the organisations, an approach with positive aspects but many weaknesses. In this way, the CGIL legitimises itself in the field of self-employed representation and generates opportunities

[71] The fieldwork focused on three organisational structures (the Board of Professions, NIDIL Milan, and Agenquadri), all of which played an important role from the beginning. However the comparative analysis in the table shows only the Board of Professions.

[72] The unit analysed is Ver.di Selbstständige, which is dedicated to the solo self-employed.

for temporary convergence on specific topics, opportunities which in some cases lead to coordinated lobbying, as in the recent case of the law on self-employment (Law 81/2017). The weaknesses concern the limited possibility of building a more stable and politically oriented coalition, since the founding values and ideas of the organisations involved often contrast. In most cases, the CGIL exercises an official mediating role, although this can limit its decisional autonomy because if it expresses too rigid a position on specific issues it could compromise the functioning of the Board of Professions.

In contrast, the trade union Ver.di has from the beginning invested its resources in a specific unit dedicated to representing solo self-employment. This was consistent with its presence in the media sector, where self-employment had been growing significantly since 1990. Lobbying and servicing provided by an external company connected to the union have been the two pillars of their representation strategies. Finally, both trade unions are oriented towards cross-sector lobbying. Even in this case, however, the qualitative data points to substantial differences between the two. The nature of the Board of Professions does not place too many limits on the participating organisations in terms of type or viewpoint, including organisations representing the liberal professions (regulated professions) or those representing at the same time the solo self-employed and the self-employed with employees.

This means that the debate and sometimes the coalitions that are created include the demands promoted by these organisations. In contrast, Ver.di chose to focus on the solo self-employed and ruled out in principle representation of either the self-employed with employees or the regulated professions, a choice with significant repercussions on its positions on lobbying and coalition building. However, further considerations are necessary regarding the different choices made by the CGIL in relation to the Board of Professions and to other activities planned in favour of the self-employed. With regard to self-employment, the analysis of three different units in the CGIL shows a wealth of reflection and approaches as well as great difficulty reconciling existing viewpoints. Indeed, significant proof of this is the existence of a local strategy promoted by NIDIL Milano which seems quite contradictory to the approach of the Board of Professions. As noted earlier, this may actually be considered a diversified strategy that aims to address the issue of self-employment through alternative and complementary approaches. In other words, weak coordination may also be interpreted as a functional strategy to explore all possible ways to develop a representative offer. However, combined with a reduced investment of resources, this choice limits the possibility of developing more decisively a structured, recognisable representation path.

In contrast, the experience of Ver.di Selbständige demonstrates a greater linearity of choices regarding the development of the representation offer. These choices strongly characterise the trade union in the emerging field of self-employment representation whilst at the same time guaranteeing more opportunities for the union to express its positions without needing to mediate too much with other organisations.

The second comparative analysis focuses on the SMart case study, which is particularly interesting because it is part of a project on a European scale. The reference model of the original experience of Smart in Belgium is promoted in other countries after adaptation to their legal system. This is the most complex phase since the different systems offer opportunities but also limit possible action. Both in Italy and Germany, the initial working group benefited from funded projects and could thus find an appropriate operational framework. After the setting-up phase, both SMart IT and SMart DE opted for a cooperative form to better develop their proposals and integrate new members into the group. This choice reaffirmed the common direction decided in the European Smart assembly attended by all the existing national headquarters (**P299**). The two national headquarters in Italy and Germany were recently created, with their different territorial contexts leading to slightly different representation strategies.

Both base their strength on a servicing approach combined with strong investment in community building through the active inclusion of members in the cooperative. However, it is interesting to note that in the Italian case, the initial focus on the cultural and creative sector expanded quite rapidly thanks to a strategic alliance with ACTA.

The aim was to expand the offer of representation to the many self-employed in the advanced tertiary sector who had direct experience of limited work opportunities and reduced earnings during the economic crisis.

In contrast, Smart DE maintained its focus on the artistic and creative sector. It is worth stressing that this choice was also determined by the role played by this sector in the urban economy of Berlin: the artistic and music scene has for decades been one of the main pillars of the city's imaginary. Indeed, Berlin has been the destination of artists and creative workers from all over Europe since the 1970s, thanks to the low cost of living and wide range of opportunities for urban counter-cultures. This type of imaginary, and its economy, continue to exist although the city is changing, as are the music scene and, more generally, the cultural market. Thus SMart Germany focuses on exploring the network of the self-employed and organisations working in this sector to strengthen its position through targeted growth of membership and networking.

*Table 6 - Representation strategies of the case studies selected*

| | | Board of Professions CGIL - IT | Ver.di Selb. - DE | SMart IT | SMart DE | ACTA - IT | Supermarkt – DE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Organising** | Profession oriented | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | |
| | 2nd level | | | | | | |
| **Community building** | Profession oriented | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | |
| | 2nd level | | | | | | |
| **Coalition building** | Profession oriented | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | |
| | Social oriented | | | | | | |
| **Lobbying** | Profession oriented | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | |
| **Servicing** | | | | | | | |

The different choices of SMart Italy and Smart Germany can be explained by the different dynamics governing the markets of culture and creativity. As the interviews with Smart Italy show, the Italian context is strongly influenced by the system of personal relationships in private and public commitments. It is certainly difficult to measure how much personal relationships and social capital influence the dynamics of the creative and cultural market and how much depends on economic and cultural interests. These differences between Italy and Germany can, however, be inferred from the data collected. The Italian cultural and creative market, more based on personal relationships, hinders the development plans of organisations such as Smart. The choice, as the interviews show, is therefore to diversify the fields of intervention by taking all the opportunities available, whether in networking or those offered by the local and national markets, without setting too many boundaries between professions. On the other hand, the interviews conducted with Smart Germany

show that the focus on the cultural and creative sector is functional to exploring and developing all the potential in terms of networking and promotion towards the self-employed workers involved in the sector. This is a strategy which aims to consolidate and professionalise Smart Germany's presence in the cultural and creative framework as a way to cover a niche sector which plays a central role in the city's economic development.

The third focus on case studies concerns the strategies developed by Acta and Supermarkt, which follow quite different paths, although it is possible to identify partial convergence if we consider the attempts to foster new forms of production and coalition building.

The case of Supermarket is extremely interesting because it combines particular attention to the context of digital cultures with a propensity to develop very broad networks of groups which can support the development of platform cooperativism. The promoted events involved a multitude of groups which were active in the digital and in the social movement contexts. This happened because the platform cooperativism project needs above all a solid social base that goes beyond minorities of activists committed to proposing an alternative model to the capitalist production system. For this reason, the proposal was extended to NGOs and associations that deal, for example, with migrants and refugees, as well as other organisations like Smart which focus strongly on the cultural sector. All the actors involved have in common the idea of fostering the cooperative system (and its digital version) as a valid alternative to the neo-liberal logics of production. In this sense, a wide, open social coalition is part of a medium-long term strategy to reconstruct social ties between professionals, professions and all of society by fostering a way out from the logics of exploitation governing the markets. Similarly, Acta is oriented to building strong ties between workers in different sectors as well as participating in the coalition called "27 Febbraio". This coalition includes professional organisations and different activists in social movements (e.g., student organisations) who combat exploitation and precarisation trends at work, unpaid work, and the dismantling of the welfare system. In both cases, the coalition attempts must be considered in relation to their internal potentialities and weaknesses. While the heterogeneity of the participants makes it possible to build discourses and reasoning which can face the multiple problematic situations experienced by workers and the general public, this heterogeneity requires a coordination effort that cannot always be made. The extreme fragility of the coalitions is determined in both cases by the participation of volunteers who are usually totally focused on their own associative activities and most of whom also have to manage a professional career. This concentration is first of all a necessity, due to personal and organisational survival. Participation in

coalitions thus becomes an additional activity that can only in rare cases be conceived of as constant constructive activity for organisations to structurally invest in. We therefore face the paradox of potentials and positive tensions that, however, fail to become projects with a linear and progressive development. Let us consider again the existing contradictions that concern a large part of the associations. They are based mainly on the voluntary work of their members. In many cases, the lack of professionals dedicated to coalition building, as well as limited resources and time, reduce the effectiveness of the coalitions. As will be seen later, the operative and representation models developed by others, for example by organisations focused on specific professions or strongly codified productive sectors, are often based on approaches that include business activities such as servicing and training which can generate useful resources for their political activity in the field of professional representation.

#### *4.5.3.2 Trade unions*

We can now consider the comparison between the selected trade unions. This looks at the main union units dealing with self-employment, those with a significant role in structuring an offer of representation. Although the diagram cannot be considered exhaustive, it identifies the most important areas of activity of the unions.

*Table 7 - Representation strategies of trade unions (IT and DE)*

| | | CGIL – Board of Professions | CGIL-Agenquadri | CGIL – NIDIL | CISL- FELSA | CISL-VIVACE | UIL-TuCS – Networkers | DGB BEZIRK BERLIN-BRANDENBURG | Ver.di – Selbstständige | Verdi-DJU | IG-Metall/Fair Crowd Work |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Organising** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2nd level | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Community building** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2nd level | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Coalition building** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Social oriented | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Lobbying** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Servicing** | | | | | | | | | | | |

At a first glance, we can see that the representation approach in both countries focuses mainly on organising and lobbying. The strategy tends to include the servicing approach: in some cases (CGIL NIDIL, FELSA,Ver.di Selbstständige), this is dedicated to the self-employed; in others, (CGIL NIDIL, Felsa CISL, vIVAce!, UIL-TuCS) standard services are adapted to the self-employed. Community building at a local level was found in two cases, NIDIL Milan and Ver.di Selbstständige. The first, NIDIL, fosters the creation of a cross-sector professional community

promoting a coworking-space where workers can network, share strategies, and receive useful information on their rights and duties. The second, Ver.di Selbstständige focuses mainly on supporting the growth of local groups of the solo self-employed, which plan periodical meetings to discuss the issues and problems of specific sectors or labour markets. Strong autonomy of the local groups is part of the strategy of Ver.di (P58; P111). A different case of community building is that of CISL VIVACE. This is a recent attempt by the Christian Democrat union to develop a cross-sector on-line community of freelancers, but due to its recent setting up, its effectiveness cannot be fully assessed. Another case of community-building approach, the only one focused on organisations, concerns the Board of Professions, which aspires to become a stable place for dialogue between all the organisations focused on the self-employed. The potentialities and contradictions of this case were analysed previously. It is worth underlining here that the Board of Professions contributed substantially to the stabilisation of the emerging strategic action field of self-employment representation. It brings together a plurality of organisations, from those focused on a single profession to second-level ones representing various regulated and non-regulated professions, so it is a large stage where organisations can dialogue and, in some cases, build common strategies.

The fragmentation of self-employment is significant in several productive sectors; it also reflects the fragmentation of the offer made by the unions. In some cases, i.e., CISL and UIL in Italy and IG-Metall in Germany, the unions are focused on specific targets: freelancers (CISL vIVAce!), traditional self-employed workers (CISL-FELSA)[73], or crowd workers (IG-Metall- Fair Crowd Work). With regard to lobbying, the cross-sector and sectorial approaches prevail, and it is oriented to specific professions by only two unions: CISL FELSA in Italy and Ver.di DJU (the journalists' union) in Germany.

#### *4.5.3.3 Second-level organisations*

Like the trade unions, the second-level organisations base their approach to representation on organising and lobbying, with two (CNA Professioni and BDÜ) using servicing as an additional tool to increase membership. For these organisations, community building is a mechanical consequence of the organising activity. In a second-level organisation, constant discussion between

[73] Although FELSA CISL is oriented to traditional self-employment, it is the union unit that started the innovation process towards the new self-employed (professionals and freelancers).

members redefines the framework of common interests by including and adapting different point of views. The collected data allow us to make some significant considerations on the Italian and German second-level organisations. First, we can recognise similar aggregative dynamics in the organisations of the regulated professions. Thanks to a strong vertical structure and decades of experience of professional representation, they maintain a strong representation approach focused on the regulated professions. Nevertheless, we can recognise at least one significant turning point in the Italian context. Confprofessioni, the main second-level organisation for regulated professions (see the table below), recently opened up to the unregulated ones. Similarly, CoLAP, one of the main organisations that brings together over two hundred unregulated professions, also extends its offer of representation to regulated ones. These dynamics characterise the Italian case, because, unlike in Germany, competition between organisations leads to partial redefinition of their targets, increasing the overabundance in the offer of representation.

*Table 8 - Representation strategies of 2nd level organisations (IT and DE)*

| | | Confprofessioni | Colap | CRESCO | CNA Professioni | Confassociazioni | BDÜ - Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer | Initiative Urheberrecht |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Organising** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | |
| | 2nd level | | | | | | | |
| **Community building** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | |
| | 2nd level | | | | | | | |
| **Coalition building** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | |
| | Social oriented | | | | | | | |
| **Lobbying** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | |
| **Servicing** | | | | | | | | |

A second aspect that differentiates the Italian context from the German concerns the proliferation of the organisations representing self-employment. The competition between organisations such as CoLAP, Confassociazioni, and CNA Professioni hinders the structuring of a strong offer of representation, whereas in the German case, competition between second-level organisations (and therefore also its variety) is less evident. In addition, Initiative Urheberrecht, one of the two German cases examined, is an important example because it brings together all the main national organisations focused on copyright protection. It represents 36 writers' organisations from the artistic, televisual and music fields, including some structurally linked to

the trade unions, so the offer of representation can be implemented without spending energy on competing. In the same way, DGB, the second-level union organisation which brings together eight of the most important German trade unions, constitutes a common minimum framework that limits competition in favour of a coordinated diversification of the offer.

#### *4.5.3.4 Grass-roots organisations and cooperatives*

The panorama of the grass-roots organisations and cooperative environment appears quite varied. Significantly, there is a rather widespread trend, especially in the case of cooperatives, to combine the organising activity with the community-building approach and provision of dedicated services. This trend can be explained by returning to the nature of these organisations. The cooperatives and the other grass-roots organisations were both set up to give concrete and immediate answers to the self-employed who were previously not properly represented. Thus the intensive community-building activity represents the missing link in an offer of representation which in the other organisations (trade unions and second-level associations) is based mainly on the combination of organising, lobbying and servicing conceived of as discrete parts and therefore weakly coordinated. Instead, in the context of bottom-up organisations (and cooperatives), the community-building activity makes it possible to reinforce the effects of their organising and to strengthen the skills of the self-employed in a coordinated way, thereby improving their ability to face the market collectively. The widespread approach to community building has a cross-sector focus that is consistent with the aims of combating fragmentation among the self-employed and different generations of the self-employed. Even the organisations which are more focused on specific professions are involved in close dialogue with other organisations to avoid corporatist approaches to representation. Close dialogue takes place in organisations with a clear political position and those whose founding members have various political approaches - indeed, they organise seminars, debates and other events in common.
In the same way, there are signs of dialogue and exchanges which are even more structured, such as the cases of ACTA and Smart. These two organisations signed a collaboration agreement aimed at reinforcing and supporting common strategies for representing the self-employed. The agreement took place in 2017 and includes the fact that the president of ACTA joined the board of directors of SMart.
Instead, the German context examined in this study has a good number of co-operatives, which are one of the main actors focusing on a mixed representational approach including organising,

community building and servicing. This mix is seen as a coordinated way to support the professional activity of members and the lobbying capacities of cooperatives. However, it is noteworthy that in both countries the groups of organisations have limited lobbying activity compared to unions and second-level organisations. Once again, the reason lies in the very nature of these organisations, focused more on developing authoritative representation supporting the self-employed in their daily professional activities than on constant lobbying with political and decision-making apparatuses. Furthermore, it is no minor matter that many of the organisations listed below were set up very recently and have not yet sufficiently developed their network of contacts to lobby in a structured way.

*Table 9 - Representation strategies of grass-roots and cooperatives*

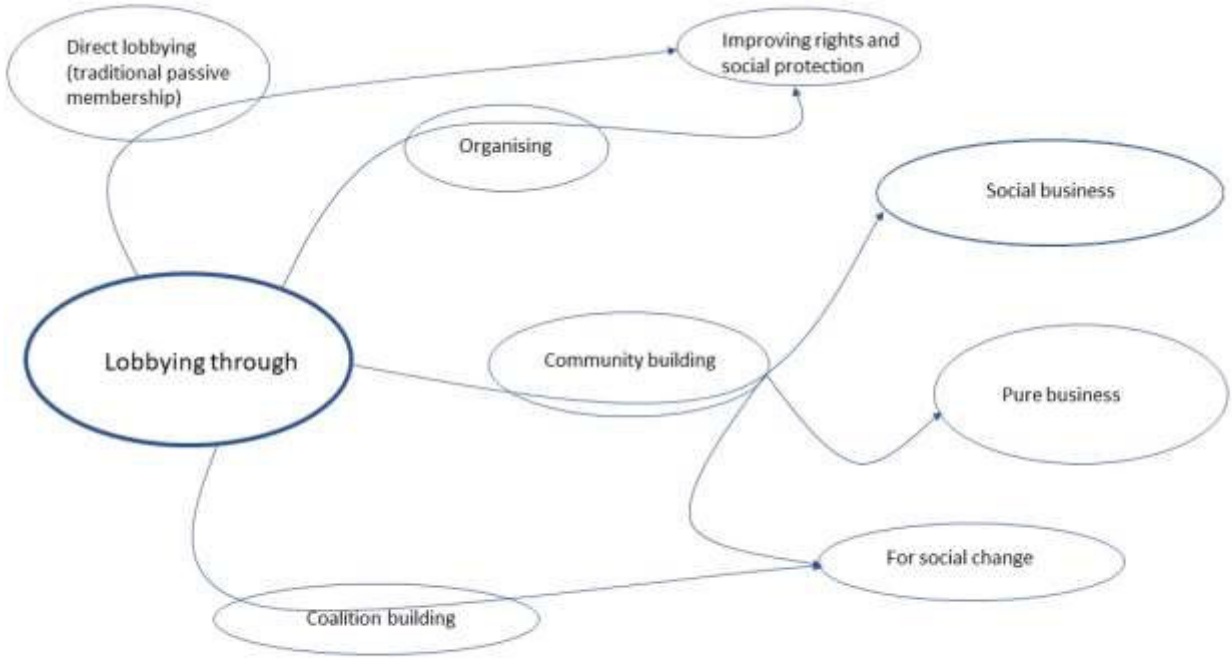
| | | San Precario | ACTA | GPL - Giovani Psicologi Lombardi | Unbreakfast | Re.Re.Pre | MGA | IVA6partita | CLAP | SMART-IT | Coalizione 27 Febbraio | GASP | WeiberWirtschaft | I.S.I. | VFLL | Gründerinnenzentral | Supermarkt | VGSD | SMART-DE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Organising** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2nd level | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Community building** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2nd level | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Coalition building** | Profession oriented | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Social oriented | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Lobbying** | profession oriented | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sector oriented | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Cross sector | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Servicing** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

### 4.5.4 Preliminary conclusions on representation strategies: hybridisation and progressive innovation

Although the increase in opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between organisations is evident in Italy and Germany, it cannot be argued that it has the same shape and intensity in both. As mentioned before, the emerging field of self-employed representation has different forms in the two national contexts. We can certainly recognise a similar trend in the structuring process of the offer of representation, but the rates of hybridisation of representation practices among existing organisations are higher in Italy than in Germany. This because of the greater inclination of German organisations to oversee specific production sectors by trying to limit competition with other organisations as much as possible.

To conclude this section dedicated to representation strategies, it is worth making an overall consideration on the different paths that determine the minimal conditions for lobbying. There is no doubt that the ultimate goal for each organisation is to influence policymakers to act in favour of their community of reference - their members, the self-employed, or, in the case of trade unions, all workers. Indeed, even the organisations which are oriented mainly to empowering their members, and therefore mainly market oriented, lobby in order to open a dialogue with the political and institutional stakeholders. How then can these different approaches to lobbying be represented? Certainly, the many paths and practices, often intertwined or combined, are the result of organisation strategies which are strongly influenced by the context of reference: competitors, structure of the productive sectors, labour markets, and institutional framework. Here we define the most important approaches found among the organisations studied.

*Figure 7 - Paths to lobbying*




The figure above highlights the variety of paths which determine legitimacy for lobbying. If we take the institutional point of view, this means the need to consider a plurality of actors, whose representation paths are based on different models and strategies which, to a certain extent, also correspond to different objectives. Analysis of the organisations considered in this study shows that lobbying conceived of as a direct activity as well as lobbying legitimised by organising practices (e.g., as in the case of trade unions) often has as its main objective the increase of rights and social protection. In contrast, lobbying legitimised by organising practices can have a greater variety of objectives. Such lobbying can aim at supporting projects for social business, pure business, or social change, and it is clear that in all three cases the role of the institutions is of strategic importance. Finally, lobbying legitimised by coalition building practices aims mainly at structurally fostering social change. So, in this case, too, the support of local institutions and, even more, of national institutions can play a decisive role in the emergence of new forms of production and work organisation, such as platform co-operativism.

## 4.6 The external environment: allies, competitors, public institutions

### 4.6.1 Allies and competitors: the emerging field of self-employed representation in Italy

The beginning of the new millennium was marked by significant upheaval in the organisations of self-employed workers in Italy. CoLAP, one of the second-level organisations still playing a central role in the national debate on self-employment, was set up with the specific aim of obtaining a law recognising the non-regulated professions. The result was achieved over a decade later with the approval of Law 4/2013, which regulated the professions without a professional body and gave professional organisations[74] the right to certify the skills of their members. In 2004, ACTA, the quasi-union representing the self-employed of the advanced tertiary sector, was set up in Milan. In the same period, the traditional organisations, in particular the professional organisations focused on the liberal and non-regulated professions and traditionally oriented towards practices of corporate representation, continued lobbying without coming into direct conflict with the new emerging organisations. However, even among these professions, a significant number of self-employed professionals belonging mainly to the new generations of workers were de facto excluded from the representation promoted by the existing organisations. As a result, associations of young professionals were set up in that period with the aim of giving visibility to the new generations of self-employed workers whose experience of working and career conditions was radically different from those of previous generations. These were the years in which the digital revolution emerged strongly, structurally redefining the organisation of work and the priority of skills in many professional sectors. In addition, in the first years of the century, public debate emerged in Italy on the growing precariousness of workers in the tertiary sector, thanks to grass-roots organisations such as San Precario, and the trade unions were redirecting their offer of representation towards non-standard workers. The labour reforms from 1997 on favoured the spreading of atypical contracts (project contracts, coordinated and continuous collaborations). Although departments and services were created in trade unions to monitor the spreading of atypical work, provide services for new non-standard workers and limit abuse of the new contractual forms, the new self-employed workers were not a real target for them. Reconstructing an overall picture, partly mentioned in the previous chapters, is useful to outline

[74] The professional organisation has to be registered in the list managed by the the Ministry of Economic development: http://www.sviluppoeconomico.gov.it/index.php/it/component/content/article?id=2027474:professioni-non-organizzate-in-ordini-o-collegi-elenco-delle-associazioni-professionali

how the field of representation of self-employed workers was then taking precise shape in Italy. It was in the early 2000s that some specific lines of fracture and some positions emerged. Fractures and positions would significantly influence the evolution of the public debate and the process of dialogue which became the basis of the alliances between organisations in the following years. On one hand, there were the trade unions which, focused on atypical workers, only formally included new self-employed workers in their representation offer. The CGIL represented self-employed workers through NIDIL, the structure set up specifically for atypical workers, which intercepted mainly the single self-employed by offering them tax services but with neither an opportunity nor the willingness to activate these workers by fostering collective representation processes. On the other hand, for several years CISL, the union linked to the political party Christian Democracy, represented some traditional self-employed workers such as newsagents, tobacconists, and petrol station attendants through its structure called FELSA. This later included new atypical workers but it still did not see the need to develop an offer of representation designed for the new generations of the self-employed (freelancers in new creative professions and the IT sector, but also self-employed workers with a professional body, such as architects, psychologists, lawyers). The vacuum of representation thus created made the new organisations attractive to the new independent professionals. **The visibility and reputation of the new organisations was structured along two lines: strong capacity to analyse the changes taking place and strong criticism of the role played by the trade unions**. At that time, the trade unions were unable to recognise (or express their position on) the major changes happening to the Italian self-employed workforce. This was a first line of fracture to influence the structuring process of the field of self-employed representation.

**The emerging field saw significant dialectic oppositions** between 1) new and traditional organisations; 2) old and new generations of self-employed professionals; and 3) expanding productive sectors such as the performing and innovative digital sectors and saturated professional sectors such as the liberal professions of architects, lawyers, psychologists, designers and, a few years later, those in the wellness and health sector. In addition, many labour markets were experiencing increasing competition which, due to the new digital technologies, was becoming more and more international.

In the following subsection, we analyse the main fracture lines between the organisations. They shape the emerging field of self-employment representation. The combination of the dialectic oppositions noted above and **contingent fractures** determined by the interaction between the

organisations as well as by their specific history, shaped the emerging strategic action field. During this process, each organisation struggled to define its position, interpreting the actions of allies and competitors but at the same time helping to build a general common framework within which the fracture lines shaped the field. In the following subsection, the subjective points of view of some relevant organisations will be considered in order to discover the most relevant contingent fracture lines in Italy.

#### *4.6.1.1 Multiple fracture lines. The conflict at the basis of the emerging field*

The emerging field of self-employed representation took shape in Italy starting from multiple fractures between the traditional and new organisations. The vacuum of representation generated by the rapid expansion of the tertiary sector was accompanied by the inability of the traditional organisations to adapt their structures to it. New organisations thus emerged, generating and bringing into the open the public debate on the new working conditions for self-employed workers, especially those of the new generations.

The distances between trade unions, professional associations, quasi-unions and cooperatives lay in their different visions of the strategic approach to the new needs of self-employed workers and, in particular, their different communication strategies. Below we analyse in detail the main elements of these gaps between the key organisations. The sense-making processes of the key actors contribute to structuring the strategy and possible network of the organisations, to enabling or impeding dialogue, and also to defining their position and identity.

A first element collected during the interviews with the new organisations and confirmed during the ethnographic activity concerns the idea that the unions are focused mainly on the bogus and dependent self-employed. In line with this supposed focus, the new organisations' aim would be to include these specific groups in the category of employees. Some years ago, or at least until 2009, this idea was deeply-rooted among new organisations and reinforced by the trade unions' total lack of debate and actions aimed at the self-employed. Although this idea is still quite widespread in the quasi-unions and in professional associations, something is changing and some visible actions have since been promoted. The trade unions tried to reduce the gap, although their actions were often interpreted as instrumental, as a way to as compensate for the loss of the traditional membership by including new groups such as the self-employed. Analysis of the key actors' evaluations will help to understand the sense-making processes of the new and old organisations, their evolution and organisational change. Indeed, as mentioned in the chapter on the urban dimension, the potential

for developing networking activities is very high in large cities because of the high number of organisations there. Nevertheless, dialogue between organisations takes place relatively slowly, one reason being that the key actors in each need time to properly understand what is happening around them. New organisations or initiatives, as in the case below of the Board of Professions promoted by the CGIL, are often met with suspicion and mistrust as it is difficult to understand the aims and directions of other organisations in the short-term and they are often perceived as a threat to the status quo of the pre-existing organisations. The case of ACTA and the Board of Profession of the CGIL is a good example. Although both were set up some years ago, there is still mutual mistrust based on their different approaches to self-employment representation and on difficulties in interpreting the other's position. ACTA recognises and to some extent appreciates the organisational change promoted in the CGIL, although it considers CGIL's rigid vertical structure unsuitable unless revitalised by self-organised groups which can react more rapidly to the changing dynamics of the labour market and labour organisation. Conversely, taking up some of the considerations made by a trade unionist who helped set up the Board of Professions **(P118)**, it is helpful to remember the long decision-making process preceding its setting up. In a large trade union, taking a long time to make changes leads to a number of undesirable effects. The internal debate is visible neither to organisations in the same field nor to the target population, the self-employed, with the unintended but very real consequence of a widespread perception that the union is not interested in representing the self-employed. Also, the gap in time between discussion in the union on innovative actions and their actual implementation has an impact on the emerging field of self-employment representation, by leaving room for new organisations. Furthermore, the transition from a totally internal discussion to a public proposal by the Board of Professions generated conflicting reactions, especially from self-organised groups, some of which interpreted the attempts by the Board of Professions and others to represent the self-employed as a colonialist approach towards a previously disregarded group of workers.

> *For a long time, the unions thought the self-employed were a field of conquest, like employees had been in the past. They thought they could apply the same representation strategies but did not realise that the self-employed think differently. They are more elusive, and reluctant to get involved with a trade union. In addition, the unions, too, played their part in continuing for a long time with certain stereotypes about self-employment. They still have not understood that most self-employed do not aspire to becoming employees.* **(P325: co-founder and President of ACTA; October 2012)**

The difficulty in interpreting the union's choices is quite evident, and this helps to reinforce doubts about its strategy, which is seen as ambiguous. With the Board of Professions, the CGIL is trying to build a permanent dialogue with the main Italian organisations representing the self-employed. This is a heterogeneous group of new and old, regulated and non-regulated professional associations holding rather different and sometimes contrasting positions. The contrasts concern general ideas, such as the role of self-employment in the production system, and specific issues, such as the recently-approved laws or the specific pension schemes for the self-employed (**P63; P75**). The inclusive approach promoted by the CGIL is seen as a sign of weakness due to the need to maintain good relationships with all the participants in the Board of Professions. To be even more explicit, the CGIL is accused of supporting corporate positions, such as those that led to the approval of Law 4/2013 on unregulated professions. For example, in the alleged trade off between the CGIL's authority to act in the field of representation of self-employed workers and its lobbying with regard to approval of Law 4/2013. This version of the facts was repeatedly rebutted by the trade unionists interviewed in this research. The interview excerpts regarding these events will be explained and commented a little further on.

> *It would be interesting to study the relationship between the GGIL and the professional associations involved in the Board of Professions. It seems to me that at the moment the union accepts what these associations are proposing because it does not want to lose contact with them, which is why the most influential organisations, such as CoLAP and Confassociazioni, can exert their power over the union. Even CNA does it. There was complicity between the CGIL and the professional organisations in relation to approval of Law 4/2013. With this law, the interests of the associations prevail over the interests of their members.* **(P4: co-founder of ACTA; July 2014)**

For a long time, and to some extent still today, new organisations such as the quasi-unions regarded the trade unions with some suspicion. The reasons are many and can be explained through analysis of the relational dimension (quasi-unions/trade unions). We can focus on the subjective perspective or adopt an external point of view at a critical distance. Nevertheless, after some years, the critical approach to trade unions was accompanied by cautious recognition of the efforts at innovation promoted by some groups of trade unionists. At the same time there was quite evident scepticism about the capacity of trade unions to foster strong organisational innovation without the self-organised groups considered the main vital source of the change.
The critical approach of the quasi-unions is explained mainly by the structural reason for which they were set up: in the past they perceived a vacuum in self-employment representation and they now perceive the same vacuum because the self-employed still have marginal protection compared to employees. The structural changes of the advanced tertiary sector are challenging the traditional

organisations' approach to self-employment and their organisational structure, which was created mainly within the framework of the industrial economy. The point of view of the quasi-unions is that the self-organised groups can rapidly and correctly recognise the emerging needs of the self-employed, whereas the reactions of trade unions are slowed down by their organisational procedures and decision-making processes. Self-organised groups are thus conceived of as the main agents of innovation even when they are co-opted into a trade union.

> *I am quite cautious in evaluating union attempts in relation to self-employment representation. I acknowledge their efforts towards internal renewal, rather than looking at these actions with suspicion. Anyway, part of their success also comes from the fact that they have incorporated self-organised groups such as translators. I think the only way to go in this vacuum is self-organisation* **(P4: co-founder of ACTA; July 2014)**

If we exclude the first phase, the early 2000s, when some of the quasi-unions were planned and set up, on the basis of the evidence gathered we can say that there is no prejudicial attitude from the quasi-unions towards the trade unions, although dialogue is still difficult. The quasi-unions' doubts about the trade unions' real capacity for strong renewal are still accompanied by doubts about the internal dynamics of the union (in this case, the CGIL), including the power relationships shaping its decision-making process.

> *I believe that they are boxed in by their close relationship with the Democratic Party [the main Italian centre-left party] and the union's decision-making process. As you know, in these organisations, apparently, there is substantial room for manoeuvre because trade unions are porous. They include anything and everything. However, in the end when you get to the point, the decisions are taken by the national board. The internal weight of the new demands is still inconsistent. New innovative groups are tolerated, sometimes even blessed, but if you consider their internal power, they are on the sidelines.* **(P4: co-founder of ACTA; July 2014)**

The sceptical attitudes towards the unions arise from critical evaluation of the internal power relationships between the small groups of innovators which are more sensitive to the new needs of non-standard workers, including the self-employed, and the dominant groups which can count on their large memberships. This scepticism is also a reaction to the behaviour of the union, which is seen as extremely conservative and of having helped reproduce fragmentation among workers. In the case of the publishing sector given below, it is clear that non-standard workers were excluded from any kind of collective representation by the trade unions which, by observing the strict legal distinction between employees and non-standard workers, focused on the former without also trying to represent the latter.

> *In ReRePre there are two somewhat different attitudes toward unions. There are those like me who think that we can fight together even though everything the union knows about intellectual*

> *precariousness comes from us. Others think that since the union has never been seen in their places of work, there is no point trying to do things with them. The basic problem of the union is their membership: the majority are pensioners and employees. And in the companies where we work, there are no unions and, as workers on project contracts, we do not even have the right to union representation.* **(P336: member of Re.Re.Pre; December 2012)**

It is now worth investigating the views that trade unions have of the role and evolution of new organisations, in particular quasi-unions and organisations with a clear political position. Despite the mutual mistrust between the unions and new organisations, the interviews reveal a willingness to find useful points in common to build common paths. In other words, there is widespread awareness that the self-organised movements and groups are an important resource in building the necessary alliances to include the growing share of workers seeking representation. This mutual mistrust also comes from the awareness that the recent legislative innovations are the result of a dialogue between the organisations which was difficult since they do not have a united front on several sensitive issues relating to self-employment. The case of Law 4/2013 in particular can be defined an episode of contention (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 2011), as the process leading to its approval caused at least three fracture lines between the existing organisations. The **first fracture** concerns professional associations and trade unions. The professional associations were accused of supporting a corporatist law that aimed to reproduce on a small scale the institutional structure of the regulated professions. The trade unions strongly denied their active role in putting pressure on parliament and the government to approve the law, distancing themselves from the utilitarian approach of some professional organisations on the Board of Professions.

> *I must say that the big professional associations were a bit more present in the Board of Professions before getting public recognition with law 4/2013. Now perhaps they need to participate less. I want to clarify that Law 4/2013 was not systematically discussed in the Board of Professions in order to organise a coordinated lobby, despite some people continuing to spread this story. Some years ago, when a first draft of the law circulated, our previous coordinator, Davide Imola, wrote a note saying that, if approved, this law would also affect trade unions. So he thought a discussion in the trade union should be opened up, but it was probably too early, and it never started.* **(P118: President of Agenquadri-CGIL; June 2017)**

The growth of the quasi-unions, similar to that in the United States (Heckscher & Carré, 2006), and the development of new professional organisations are still relatively little studied. The trade unions experienced the growth in visibility of the quasi-unions passively. This visibility allowed the quasi-unions to become stable interlocutors with the government after a few years. The leading role played by the new representative organisations made the social dialogue more complicated because more participants meant more complex consultation procedures. At the same time, the

emergence of new organisations threatened the dominant role of trade unions from a symbolic and practical point of view. The symbolic threat is closely related to the visibility of the new organisations on digital social networks, where a strong presence is not only a question of communication, it shapes social perception of facts. Communication through social media is thus part of a strategy focused on reputation and it challenges the traditional idea of membership still dominant in trade unions. The relationship between communication strategies, a trustworthy relationship with the target population, and representativeness is changing as a result of the innovation of practices. The emerging field of self-employed representation takes shape around the competition between trade unions, professional organisations, quasi-unions and grass-roots groups, while the aggressive communicational approach of the quasi-unions also directly affects the adjacent fields, above all the institutional field. From the point of view of trade unionists, the emerging quasi-unions, such as ACTA, are part of a wider game where the government prefers weak interlocutors because the bargaining process is easier with them.

> *Banally, Acta is considered a privileged interlocutor by the government because its viewpoint is corporative. The Prime Minister [Matteo Renzi] prefers these interlocutors because they are weaker than trade unions. I admire the work Acta is doing, but don't agree with their political views. They cannot act alone at a national level if they want results. […]They should aim to become the national freelance union, this could work. In that case, they would become representative beyond a corporatist framework.* **(P61: trade unionist of NIDIL-CGIL Milan, Jan. 2016)**

Looking back at the past 15 years, the evolution of the field of representation of self-employed workers is undeniable. The dialectic developed between trade unions and quasi-unions testifies to an increasingly intense and, to a certain extent, progressively constructive debate. Although the starting point was characterised by bitter conflict based on open mutual criticism, over time, spaces of confrontation and collaboration have also been created. However, as we have seen, there is still mutual distrust. The evidences gathered from the interviews and observations made during the research allow us to weigh up the evaluations expressed by the main quasi-unions and the trade unions. Trade unions are slow in developing their representation offer because of their extremely complex internal decision process. Nevertheless, if we focus our attention on the experience of the Board of Professions (the CGIL), we can consider different interpretations.
One coincides with the quasi-unions' view that the trade unions, and the CGIL in particular, are trying to colonise the field of self-employed representation. While trade unions think of the self-employed as potential new members, it is difficult to imagine that their primary objective

is to gain a dominant position in the field of their representation: they are well aware that this field is increasingly populated and that they are just some of the many players. For this reason, it is worth considering alternative interpretations. The CGIL is aware of the extreme fragmentation among self-employed workers and their organisations, and the Board of Professions should be seen as an attempt to reduce this. On the other hand, it is necessary to note some limits which emerged from the interviews with the trade unionists: they cannot escape an excessively rigid dichotomy between corporate representation and inclusive representation, whereas the innovation promoted by the quasi-unions develops on different levels and in some cases overcomes this dichotomy. The new organisations have given voice to people who were previously totally disregarded by traditional organisations. Certainly, the new ones, less structured than a union, have developed arguments and proposals focused on very restricted working contexts. This does not mean that all the proposals have a corporatist nature. They start from a specific professional context but, through an inductive approach, they build bridges with other professions, aiming for a minimum common framework. In this respect, the focus on specific professions cannot be considered corporatist, but can be interpreted as pragmatic. Conversely, the trade union approach starts from a general point of view embracing the entire workforce, employees and nonemployees, in order to face the increasing fragmentation of the workforce. Considering the two diametrically opposed approaches of the quasi-unions and trade unions, however, it is necessary to close the gap by bypassing all the dichotomies that are over-rigid and behind mutual prejudices. It must be recognised that the fragmentation of self-employment is a matter of fact and is strongly rooted in the professional contexts as well as in the perception of the self-employed. The new organisations have played a significant role in stimulating the reaction of trade unions and the interest of institutional and governmental levels in relation to the emerging needs of self-employed. The recent consultation process before approval of the law on self-employment (81/2017) testifies to the government's broad openness to the requests made by the organisations of the self-employed. At the same time, the unions have played a significant role in a general framework characterised by significant coordination between new and traditional representative organisations (although with much less coordination than in the case of the approval of Law 4/2013).

The attention-seeking behaviour of the new organisations as well as the emerging activism of the trade unions with regard to self-employment is a mirror of the complexity that characterises the environment of self-employment. At the same time, the government's attempts to expand

consultations to the new organisations testifies to the need to avoid unilateral decisions. If we consider the government's point of view, the opening up of consultations to the new organisations corresponds to the need to understand rapidly-evolving professional contexts which cannot be tackled with the contribution of the trade unions alone. This also testifies to the knowledge gap of the government, which cannot take autonomous decisions without the fundamental contribution of all the organisations consulted. Indeed, the government's interest in new organisations has been stimulated by their leading role over the years. The more complex the working contexts, the more public institutions need to include in the social dialogue the organisations with competences in and knowledge of the transversal specific needs and characteristics of the professional contexts.

**A second and significant fracture** can be found between the quasi-unions and trade unions on one hand and the professional organisations on the other. The latter start from a traditional approach to representation focused on specific professional areas, so they sometimes contrast strongly with the transversal approach promoted by the quasi-unions:

> *I think one of our mistakes was to concentrate our analyses and critical relationship with the trade unions. The real problem and biggest contradiction is within professional representation. They do not have a tradition of representation similar to the trade unions; their history is shaped by the old professionalism. The recent law on non-regulated professions [Law 4/2013] is the result of that old professional culture despite being only a bad copy of the law on regulated professions.[…] The traditional professional associations play a negative role in my opinion because they risk freezing a potential inherent in the processes of self-organisation […]* **(P4: co-founder of ACTA; July 2014)**

Again, the contention over Law 4/2013 is interpreted by quasi-unions as the result of corporative lobbying by professional associations such ad CoLAP, set up years before with precisely the aim of promoting a law on non-regulated professions. Some of the criticisms concern the fact that the law focuses mainly on consumers and even more on organisations, which acquire more power for certification of competences and training.

> *Training is the big business that these professional organisations tend to do, and in part they also obtained it with the new law on non-regulated professions. At the moment, I do not know whether they have also received any funds or whether it is planned that they will, but formally they are entitled to them. This, in a nutshell, is what this law is about.* **(P4: co-founder of ACTA; July 2014)**

Similar ideas are shared among trade unions, too. From their point of view, the dividing line between the unions and professional organisations is the dichotomy between a corporatist and an inclusive approach to representation.

> *In many professional organisations outside the Board of Professions, however, there are two main trends: the business approach and the proselytising approach promoted by the founders. In the long term, both tend to lead to a corporatist approach to representation.* **(P8: founder of the Board of Professions – CGIL; July 2014)**

Although this interpretation is rooted in the historical cultures of the organisations, there are many reasons supporting the idea that even the corporatist approach of some professional organisations is facing a change and becoming more nuanced due to the increasing dialogue between organisations (traditional and new) in the same emerging field. The corporatist approach is also rooted in the complex stratification of laws which, in different ways, regulate several professions. So we need to consider that professional organisations and the self-employed both have to face this objective issue. Skills, competences, professional contexts, and specific labour markets are the bricks of professional identity and most of the time are stronger than the general and wider category of self-employment. This influences the aggregation process of workers as well as the orientation of their organisations. Starting from these considerations, we discuss more in depth the idea that increasing dialogue between different organisations focusing on the self-employed has led to reciprocal positive effects.

On one hand, the Board of Professions was a challenge for the CGIL and its participants. The existence of a permanent board focused on self-employment had a direct influence in the GCIL on one important initiative, the 'Charter of universal labour rights - New status for all women and men at work' [75] promoted by the union in January 2016. This was a proposal for a law based on a citizens' initiative. Enough signatures were collected from all over Italy for the union to present the petition to Parliament. The charter **(P288)** aimed to address changes in the world of work, supporting the struggle against inequality, discrimination and divisions between workers, with many of its articles referring explicitly to both employees and the self-employed[76].

On the other hand, several professional organisations, including Confprofessioni, the most important organisation for the liberal professions, supported the CGIL on the law on fair

[75] *Carta dei diritti universali del lavoro - Nuovo statuto di tutte le lavoratrici e di tutti i lavoratori*: http://www.cartacgil.it/
[76] E.g., Art.1; Art. 5 on the Right to fair and proportionate remuneration; Art. 8 Right to rest; Art.17 Right to knowledge; Art. 19 Protection of workers in the event of withdrawal from and non-renewal of successive contracts.

compensation for professionals. This can be considered a result of the prolonged dialogue between the trade union and the professional organisations as well as the CGIL's continuous involvement in self-employment representation since 2009.

**A third fracture** can be found between the regulated and non-regulated professions. The regulated professions enjoy institutional recognition and decades of experience in representing professionals, which puts them in a very advantageous position to lobby and promote the professions that they represent. The structural changes that accompanied the growth of the tertiary sector created new opportunities for professionals already in the labour market and, to some extent, also for the new generations. However, the new generations of professionals in the liberal professions were faced with increasingly competitive and often cost-cutting labour markets. This had a direct and negative impact on career opportunities and the possibility of increasing incomes. For these reasons, new associations (e.g., MGA, GPL, UGCdL) were set up by young professionals inside the regulated professions. Externally, competition between the regulated and unregulated professions increased. For years, the unregulated professions claimed institutional recognition similar to that of the regulated ones obtained long before. As mentioned before, law 4/2013 can be considered recognition of what until then was missing for the unregulated professions. While similar to that of the regulated professions in that it was based on the same model, it was considerably weaker and retained the difference (and even the hierarchy, it could be said) between the two types of professions. The law was strongly supported by CoLAP and CAN, the two large umbrella organisations representing the unregulated professions. The multiplication of representative organisations can also be considered an effect of the new law. Indeed, in the same year, 2013, a group of organisations in CoLAP set up Confassociazioni, a new umbrella association, while CNA set up a new division called CNA Professioni, in order to better focus on the non-regulated professions.

It is reasonable to say that without the lobbying of these organisations, this law would have never been approved. According to the evidences collected (**P70; P316; P328**), the law can also be considered a compromise of its various promoters. The aim was to strengthen the dual system of professions (regulated and non-regulated) but at the same time, it is clear that the recognition obtained by the law tends to imitate the regulatory system of the regulated professions. In this sense, we can interpret this trend as a sign of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991). The organisations of the unregulated professions tried to respond to the structural changes affecting the tertiary sector by obtaining institutional recognition that reduced, albeit symbolically,

their distance from the liberal professions. Moreover, the declarations of some of the protagonists reinforced the idea that the dual system should be implemented towards a more balanced distribution of power, which could come about through the recognition of additional rights for the non-regulated professions, such as the right to sign bilateral agreements.

> *The coalition wins for a very simple reason: because it is based on a collaborative competition. I can also be competitive using the same business model, however, if I compete antagonistically, we make war and we waste time rather than going to get clients. The same happens when you focus on the field of representation. Then, there are some great organisations with strong roots, such as Confprofessioni. However, Confprofessioni has 19 registered associations; what keeps it together is that it has long been recognised as a social partner. For over ten years it has been able to sign bilateral agreements and that is a very important representation niche for them. I hope that the organisations of non-regulated professions like us will also obtain the same authorisation from the government in the near future.* **(P70: president of Confassociazioni; February 2016)**

**A fourth significant** fracture can be found between organisations in the same professional field. What is happening among the cooperatives is quite significant, with the emergence in recent years of examples of cooperativism focused on self-employment in Italy as well as in Europe. Upholding the founding values of the original cooperatives, the new ones seek to overcome the individualistic approach to work in favour of one of collaboration and mutual aid between workers. This attempt aims to reconcile the legitimate individual inspirations of professional growth with a collective idea of the profession based on sharing resources and networks to the collective advantage. This is the idea behind SMart, as well as other local experiences such as coworking, business networks and projects combining public and private operators. The renewed interest in cooperativism can be seen as a response to the growing challenges of the labour market, which tend to foster an individualistic approach to the profession. Although there is renewed interest in cooperativism, in some cases this form of organisation can be deliberately misused - as a misleading solution aimed at paying less taxation or disguising an activity which provides only services. There is therefore a significant problem of unfair competition, which can damage the reputation and real development of the cooperatives which see this model as a genuine tool for aggregating and representing workers.

> *We must be frank: some cooperatives are an obstacle to our activities. For example, some cooperatives that in theory could have something in common with us, are in practice focused on the offer of administrative management. In these cases, people rely on them only to have a service, nothing else. These cooperatives use the guise of cooperation to disguise a business operation.* **(P15bis: chair, SMart IT; November 2015)**

Although the organisations know each other and have had various opportunities for dialogue, the interviews reveal their difficulty in overcoming mutual mistrust but at the same time their willingness to do so. The difficulty lies deep in their histories and in their interpretations of past actions. Each action is interpreted in the light of the past, so that the interpretation is the result of a complex game of reflections that combines evidences (the position taken in the present by one organisation) and evaluations which connect the present with the interpretation of past events. As a result, the subjective perspective of each organisation is continuously moving in the social world, determined by self-positioning and the re-positioning of other organisations in an ideal map determined by the actions of the present, their interpretation and the reinterpretation of past events.

> *Certainly, in the CGIL there is a problem of distrust towards other organisations and in particular those that we cannot fully understand. But I can also say that the situation is often symmetrical because they have distrustful attitudes towards us, too. Very often we are portrayed as traitors of the workers because once in the distant past we did something bad in their opinion. In short, there are many claims and criticisms against us and I do not think that all these criticisms help to reduce the distance between us and other organisations. At the same time, everyone needs to overcome mutual distrust in order to foster common strategies* (***P63: Current coordinator of the Board of Professions, CGIL)***

The difficulty in fully understanding the positions of other organisations is a constant and widespread trait of the emerging field. One reason is that, although the dialogue between organisations is growing, it is limited to specific issues that can play a role in defining a common minimum framework. Otherwise, the general strategies of the organisations are never the subject of direct dialogue. As a result, interpretation is often based on indirect elements, opinions, secondary information, and deductions. This makes the positioning game more complex and opaque and gives rise to misunderstandings that slow down or sometimes distort the debate. Sometimes the risk lies in already having fixed ideas about the other organisations before having an open, in-depth discussion. These dynamics have several possible explanations. As previously mentioned, many of the organisations have limited human and economic resources that prevent them from fully developing the dialogue with other organisations. In addition, in many cases, the official public meetings such as conferences and conventions are dedicated mainly to self-promotion; only rarely are they conceived of as a favourable moment for constructive dialogue. As a result, networks are built mainly through informal paths, which are less visible, more fragmented and often limited to aggregating similar actors.

*Let's talk about the network of precarious workers, it is never really clear whether their goal is open-ended contracts for all. In the end, they say that precariousness is a truly devastating human and existential condition and I strongly agree with this, but you cannot build something on the pathology of precariousness. You need something else.* **(P4: co-founder of ACTA; July 2014)**

The dialogue between trade unions has intensified in recent years, too. The three main trade unions, the CGIL, CISL and UIL, are focused on autonomous projects which through different perspectives and approaches aim at representing self-employed workers. Previously, the dialogue on self-employment was rather limited. This because, first, the logics of competition prevailed over collaborative approaches, and second, the main trade unions were concentrated on reacting, albeit with a significant delay, to the emergence of the professional organisations and quasi-unions which were structuring public debate in Italy on the new self-employment. At present, according to the declarations gathered, although the competitive logic still exists, it is now seen as a possible way to build a constructive dialogue. The most complicated dividing line, therefore, is not between different unions but between unions and the other organisations.

*I do not think that the competition with the CGIL is a problem; maybe it is even positive. Besides, historically the differences between the unions have always (or often) led to struggles fought together. So, the difference for me is not a handicap but a value. The more there are of us, the better. I know that, beyond the differences, we can certainly also build a dialogue and take common actions. What worries me most is the distance from other organisations: if competition is constructive we can find common agreements, and this generates a benefit for everyone, but we need to build a structured dialogue. […] Among trade unions, dialogue is possible. In the Board of Professions, the quality of debate on self-employment is high and is slowly and positively affecting the rest of the union. Susanna Camusso [the CGIL leader] is well aware of the important issues, and the open questions are related to self-employment.* ***(P64: Coordinator of vIVAce!, CISL; June 2016)***

Analysis of the evidence gathered, including the perceptions of the protagonists, leads to the conclusion that in the medium term, over the past 7-8 years, the field of representation of the self-employed has been structured significantly by a growing number of different organisations. This has happened due to both competitive and conflict-based approaches. The fracture lines between organisations and groups of organisations are the result of a dialectical dialogue which, on the whole, strengthens the emerging field. In this context, the processes of mutual effects between organisations come about through processes of imitation that strengthen tendencies to isomorphism, and processes of differentiation that structure the domain in specific professional sectors or specialise the organisation's action in specific professional roles. Nevertheless, we can distinguish the process of imitation which encourages trends of mimetic isomorphism from the processes of mutual effects which result from an increasing trend towards experimentation.

*Within Coalizione 27 Febbraio, for example, there is an association, ARCHING, which is also part of Confprofessioni. Altapartecipazione has a similar arrangement. We affect each other and perhaps this is why things are a bit confused.* **(P66: President of Confprofessioni Lazio and coordinator of Altapartecipazione; October 2016)**

### 4.6.2 Breaking the wall between organisations: mistrust, dialogue attempts and opportunities in Germany

In Germany, the existence of highly structured professional organisations (among the liberal and the non-regulated professions) together with the prompt attention of the trade union Ver.di to recent developments in self-employment greatly influenced the structuring process of the emerging field of self-employed representation. The professional organisations, many of which are part of the umbrella organisation BFB (Bundesverband der Freien Berufe) continued to develop a corporate and protectionist activity in favour of their members, while the trade unions developed solid competences in new self-employment without employees (high- and low-skilled) in sectors such as media and communication, journalism, arts, education and, more recently, crowd workers. We can certainly say that this combination could have blocked the development of the emerging field of representation of self-employment because of the clear division of roles between a few large organisations. However, the spread of self-employment also affected sectors where the trade unions and professional associations were less present or were not focusing on the increasing spread of self-employment. One relevant case study is the IT sector, which under the impetus of the digital revolution saw significant expansion as well structural changes in the organisation of work. The presence of a large trade union such as IG-Metall in major companies such as Siemens did not automatically lead to the representation offer being opened up to the IT self-employed (inside and outside large enterprises). Indeed, the trade union statute was only recently amended (Jan. 2016; **P345**) to include self-employed workers. What is worth noting concerns the adjustment process, which in the case of IG Metall acquires contradictory characteristics but at the same time presents extremely innovative elements. What we might have expected did not happen, namely that IG-Metall would enter the arena of the representation of self-employed work by developing a proposal aimed at the self-employed in large IT companies. What is happening, in fact, as mentioned in previous chapters, is that IG-Metall is supporting the Fair Crowd Work experimental project for platform workers. This extremely innovative project targeting all of Europe allows the union to position itself in an area of representation still without cover today. If we focus on the emerging

field of self-employed representation, this choice reaffirms the centrality of the trade unions which balance, and are complementary to, the action of the professional organisations. Overall, therefore, the combined and complementary action of the two largest trade unions gives a significant contribution to structuring the field. Despite these further elements (the combined action of trade unions and the strong presence of professional organisations), there is still room for the emergence of new organisations (quasi-unions, new professional organisations, and grass-roots organisations), which also contribute to the structuring process of the field. The new organisations are giving voice to translators (VFFL), freelancers increasingly involved in the complex environment of communication and IT (VGSD), self-employed workers who are part of the platform co-operativism movement (Supermarkt), and the increasing number of self-employed in the cultural and creative scene (SMart.DE). For Germany too, then, we can clearly define an emerging field of self-employment representation with different characteristics to the Italian field because the positions of the subjects in the German field are more structured. For this reason, in the next paragraph we consider the points of view of the protagonists with respect to the roles of public institutions, possible allies, and competitors, as well as the dynamics governing the relationships between all the actors.

#### *4.6.2.1 In search of a balance between public institutions and the multipolar environment of self-employed organisations*

It is worth starting by considering some structural elements of the field of self-employed representation. Some elements, although rooted in the subjective perceptions of specific actors in specific physical contexts (national or local), have a more general value that goes beyond these contexts because they identify with a transnational trend. The points of view of the protagonists give a mosaic of reflections on the role of the institutions and the relationships between the different protagonists in self-employed representation.

Although the trade union Ver.di can rely on long experience of worker representation, what emerges is the clear perception of a structural and problematic change in the dynamics governing the social dialogue and its actors. The growing number of organisations that, with different strategies, aim to give voice to different groups of workers are reframing the rules of the field as well as the roles of the old players within it. The new organisations are perceived as competitors even though they are less structured and have few resources. The many reasons for this perception are rooted in the structural changes that affected the institutional context, the organisation of work, and the complex social environment of communication.

> *In the past, the social partners, i.e. trade unions and employers' organisations, would have been consulted with a view to reforming the social security system. That is how it worked, and how it would work with reforms affecting certain groups of workers, such as the self-employed.* **(P111: General manager of Mediafon – Ver.di; July 2016)**

What is regrettable, according to the interviewee, is the loss of linearity in the social dialogue, which in previous years was firmly defined by a clear outline of the actors: workers' unions, employers' organisations and public institutions. This loss of linearity is thought to be mainly due to the inability of institutions to properly face (in time) the changes affecting society as a whole and the world of work in particular.

> *In the current context, however, something of this process has gone; there is no longer a clear linearity in the decision-making process with stakeholders' consultation. What happens more and more is that at some point the politicians realise they have forgotten something. This is exactly the case of the self-employed, now the politicians realise they have forgotten a social group. Since they have no clear ideas on how to solve a problem that has become part of the public debate, they begin to invite organisations and groups of all kinds, even those with 100 or 500 members. They ask them for their views, how to solve the problems that affect the self-employed, etc.* **(P111: General manager of Mediafon – Ver.di; July 2016)**

However, it is worth trying to evaluate whether this loss of linearity is caused solely or mainly by institutional inability to govern the processes, or whether there are more widespread structured causes. According to some interviewees, opening up the institutional dialogue to new players would be the result of a lack of knowledge and expertise in public institutions. Thus the involvement of an increasing number of actors makes the dialogue more and more complicated, and increases the risk of hasty and partial decisions that can serve corporatist interests, but at the expense of those of the entire community of workers. Similar dynamics are certainly common to the Italian context presented in previous paragraphs. However, it is necessary to understand in detail the underlying reasons for this change. We believe that the extension of the social dialogue is not only the result of an institutional difficulty. It is also the concrete need to consider the new conditions of the production system as well as the rapidly-developing dimension of work organisation which influences the increasingly complex environment of worker representation. The speed of change in the working context is combined with an increasingly complex communication environment. This combination has a direct effect on the timing of news broadcasting, as well as on the timing (and perceived urgency) of public debate. The timing of the latter can be greatly accelerated by direct pressure from the protagonists (organisations and self-organised groups) or by reaction to an episode of contention considered harmful for the self-employed. Increasing social reactivity is not, in any case, always and mechanically related to

immediate constructive proposals. In other words, the communication environment that fosters public debate has its own autonomy, focused on the production of information. In the short term, it can also be self-referential, but in the medium-term it can exert pressure on policy makers and public institutions. For their part, the latter must necessarily consider these ongoing dynamics by showing that they are able to respond with the same urgency. In this context, large organisations like the trade unions seem to be struggling to adapt to structural change on such a scale, despite their dominant position in terms of structures and resources. That is to say, they do not understand how to deal with dynamics of representation which, in their view, are increasingly dominated by actions based on emotions (and therefore irrational), and by claims without a structured strategy going beyond the immediate present, to the detriment of constructive discussion.

> *We are seen as old-fashioned unions. We have to say, however, that we probably have some credentials to express our opinion, and the fact that we have 30,000 self-employed members also counts for something. The issue should be interesting for the political sphere, too. It seems that the attractive organisations are those making a certain type of communication that achieves a certain type of visibility, but as we said before, it is based mostly on emotional issues. Sometimes these organisations do not have a structured strategy behind them, so they lack in-depth analysis and relevant proposals.* **(P111: General manager of Mediafon – Ver.di; July 2016)**

The assessments reported here certainly have a basis, however. They show, in a similar way to that of the Italian trade unions, the difficulty in fully understanding the strategies of the emerging organisations. Indeed, there is a structural need in the trade unions to involve independent and grass-roots associations in order to understand the evolving labour markets and build commonly shared knowledge. In some cases, the organisational cultures, languages and strategies of action are radically different from the traditional way of acting of the trade unions. Moreover, growth in the tertiary sector leads to a growing fragmentation of interests. What is interesting is that it can be interpreted as a result of the inability of trade unions and professional organisations to give a proper and rapid answer to the evolving working context. At the same time, we believe that the fragmentation of interests between self-employed organisations can also be seen as the first sign of reaction to the unprecedented conditions experienced by the self-employed. The fragmentation of interests is thus evidence of the upheaval behind the emerging field of self-employed representation. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the trade unions, this fragmentation is a threat to the consistency of their attempts to structure an inclusive frame with an offer of representation based on solidarity between different workers (self-employed and employees, high-skilled and low-skilled).

> *The problem with small organisations is that they often focus only on their small professional context. So they sometimes have a very narrow view of the problems, but want to develop general answers for everyone. A lot of time this strategy does not work because they do not have an overall vision of society. Small organisations often have very different interests and reconciling them is sometimes practically impossible.* (**P58: Head of Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

Dialogue with the new organisations is considered necessary and strategic, at least in the medium term, but remains problematic. The choice of Ver.di union is, therefore, aimed at preserving the consistency of its action, selecting from time to time the organisations that may be compatible with its vision. This is diametrically opposed to the choice made by the Italian trade union CGIL with the Board of Professions, where the inclusive approach favouring the possibility of defining a common space for dialogue prevails over the need to gradually build alliances based on affinity with the emerging organisations as well as with the traditional ones.

> *The work needed to activate workers, share common goals and achieve them is very complicated. So we have to decide each time if it is possible to work with small organisations on the basis of common ideas. Sometimes it is not worth working with them because their vision is diametrically opposed to ours.* (**P58: Head of Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

The fragmentation of interests is emerging in several professional contexts, especially those, such as the journalistic sector, most influenced by technological innovation and restructuring processes. The quotation below confirms the idea that the contemporary professional contexts are extremely lively and potentially suitable for collective aggregation. Nevertheless, the difficulties in the dialogue between the new embryonic groups and trade unions are also confirmed.

> *Today, there are tens if not hundreds of small, very sectoral organisations that are built from below and have a non-bureaucratic structure. Although they are interesting it is very difficult to interact with them; they are unstable or discontinuous in their activities. For example, there are specific groups of travel journalists. They are strongly focused on professional policies, but it is quite impossible to find a way to establish a common strategy with them. […] They are a community that certainly has a different function from representation, maybe their function precedes representation. Plus, in these groups there are people who do not like being part of a trade union because they are ideologically against us.* **(P107: Coordinator of DJU – Ver.di; September 2015)**

The fragmentation of interests and instability of the organisations is relevant for new associations that experiment with fewer hierarchical structures and for traditional organisations, too. The latter, as in the case of BDÜ, the national association of translator and interpreters with over 7,500 members, had to deal with an internal dispute which led to the setting up of a new representative association. Fragmentation of interests is not only the result of evolution of the productive system, in some cases it is also the result of fragmentation of the existing organisations.

> *For example, AT Com was 'born' out of our association because of internal disputes. In 1996, there was a big discussion between the presidents of the different regional associations on the balance of power between them and the national federation. From that quarrel, three associations that were part of the BDÜ left and founded AT Com. Like other associations in our sector, it has no more than 500 members.* **(P60: vice president – BDÜ; August 2015)**

The information from the German organisations shows a network of relations and mutual recognition between the existing organisations which clearly defines the emerging field of self-employment representation. The variety of approaches and the dialectic between organisations outlines a network of relationships that the same actors consider promising with regard to potential collaborations and alliances. However, there are obstacles and misgivings which limit the possibility of fruitful dialogue. An emblematic case, for example, concerns the organisation VGSD, which represents freelancers of the advanced tertiary sector, and the trade union Ver.di- Selbstständige. In the recent past, VGSD had strongly criticised the union as well as the Minister of Labour, Andrea Nahles **(P338),** because of their attempt to reduce the number of bogus self-employed. For its part, Ver.di-Selbstständige expressed significant doubts about the European "Freelancers' Movement" campaign promoted by VGSD and its European network (EFIP). Nevertheless, there was clear recognition of the work being done by the European EFIP network (of which also the Italian association ACTA is a member) and by VGSD.

> *The European network that promoted this campaign is good. And we know the guy coordinating the campaign; he is a very good person, his analyses are pretty good. But he is working with a German organisation, VGSD, which focuses on a small part of the freelancers, mainly concentrated in the information and IT industry. They are promoting good campaigns and also opening up to freelancers with medium-low skills.. We would like to say that it is a very good thing to have a European campaign in favour of freelancers but we cannot, because in this neoliberal context it would be like endorsing this trend.* **(P58bis: Head of Mediafon - Ver.di Selbständige, August 2015)**

The excerpt above concentrates the contradictions and potentialities defining the relationships between organisations. New organisations such as VGSD see representation as a set of actions aimed at supporting the visibility and professionalism of freelancers. The trade unions, however, maintain an approach to representation oriented primarily towards protection and rights, together with a strongly political approach that frames the representation of freelancers as part of the struggle against neoliberal logics. This creates a paradoxical situation where, while acknowledging the ability of the new freelancers' organisations, the union has to keep its distance in order to maintain the consistency of its analysis and action. The contradiction between the two different ideas of representation remains unsolved: on one side, professional support of freelancers (based

on a bottom-up strategy); on the other, the typical political engagement of a traditional idea of representation (top-down strategy).

There are also organisations which by vocation and choice aspire to be aggregators and connectors, thereby minimising the conflicts but focusing on the opportunities that the sectors in which they are involved can offer. As noted before, some organisations are built mainly to meet the emerging needs of the self-employed, so they focus on services and empowerment activities for them, at the same time fostering the collective idea of work based on mutualism and cooperativism. This is the case of Smart, as well as of some coworking spaces (see section 4.7). As in the Italian case, the political dimension conceived of by these organisations is the result of daily activity focused on the process of aggregating the self-employed. Thus the idea of membership is built around the idea of a community of practices (J. S. Brown & Duguid, 2001) with which to hold a fruitful dialogue with the existing organisations.

> *When we created the association, we tried to communicate transparently that we do not want to compete with the already existing organisations. Now, and if we look at the partners we cooperate with, we can also see that there is mutual trust based on the fact that what Smart is developing is something necessary. […] At the beginning, some feared that our action was aimed at undermining the social security system for artists (KSK) but other organisations before us fought to create this social fund and we definitely do not want to weaken it.* **(P57: Board & Organisational Development manager, SMart.de; August 2015)**

In other cases, there are organisations which, by tradition and their specific professional focus, can aggregate subjects with very different perspectives and develop representation strategies which are completely oriented towards coordinated lobbying and uninfluenced by political affinities. This is the case of Initiative Urheberrecht, the second-level organisation representing authors. Its horizons go beyond national borders and it can count on thirty-six German organisations, including trade unions, to support its initiatives.

> *Here in Germany, our policy is to talk to all groups, right or left wing, because we think it is important to focus our attention on the contents which affect our job daily. […] Moreover, in Europe there are several interesting organisations, for example, a European organisation of television authors whose activity is closely linked to what we are doing, an umbrella organisation for authors, artists, journalists and even representatives of civil society from all over Europe including European trade unions.* **(P55: coordinator of Initiative Urheberrechts; July 2015)**

In its first structuring phase, the emerging field of self-employed representation in Germany and Italy was characterised by significant conflict between the traditional organisations, especially the trade unions, and the new organisations focused on the advanced tertiary sector. This conflict was based mainly on mutual criticism of how to develop a representation offer. The traditional

organisations blamed, and still partly blame, the new ones for their inability to overcome corporate or sectoral logics. Vice-versa, the new organisations underlined the failure of the trade unions to understand the needs of the new emerging productive sectors or the professional conditions experienced by the new self-employed. The prevalence of critical and conflicting attitudes is confirmed by the interviews conducted as well as by the documents collected. Over the years, however, while mutual criticism has not greatly diminished, the positions of the players in the field have become consolidated and mutual acknowledgment has emerged. In some cases, this acknowledgment precedes a possible dialogue, yet to be structured, on specific issues such as crowd work.

> *I believe that in the long-term, trade unions and new organisations will work together on specific issues. What I notice, however, is that in many cases some organisations tend to appear the only ones focused on self-employment representation; I believe that this attitude is rather dangerous. We believe that fostering division is not a good idea. At the moment, I find the hypothesis of working together very difficult, but something different happens on some borderline issues such as crowd work. In this context, for example, it can happen that new players and unions sit around the same table discussing without prejudice. At the discussion tables you can find politicians, platform workers, trade unionists and other organisations. All of them are there to discuss and to find solutions.* **(P111: General manager of Mediafon – Ver.di; July 2016)**

The issue of digital platforms as labour intermediaries has emerged in the last four years in Europe. This is part of wider public and academic debate on the digital economy, which has been discussed since the end of the 1990s (Brynjolfsson & Kahin, 2002; Tapscott, 1996), and its effects on the workforce (Beblavy, Maselli, & Veselková, 2014; Cardon & Casilli, 2015; Huws, 2007, 2009, 2014, 2016; Maselli, Lenaerts, & Beblavy, 2014; Terranova, 2000). In the mass media, this public debate has focused mainly on food delivery riders and Uber drivers, because they were the first to organise themselves and react against their exploitation by the gig economy. However, the world of platforms is actually much more complex and involves a wide range of self-employed workers, including architects, translators, designers, computer scientists, manual technical professionals and other gig workers. Digital platforms amplify a growing trend towards the use of self-employment in different sectors, and platform workers include the high- and the low-skilled. These two aspects are challenging the traditional idea of self-employment and the focus of self-employed organisations. The platforms act in a similar way in different countries, for example, Germany, with the measures promoted by the Hartz reform, some of which (Ich-AG - Existenzgründungszuschuss) were planned to combat unemployment also through incentives for self-employed activities. The combined effect of the neoliberal reforms of the labour market all over Europe and the aggressive changes promoted by the platform economy forces the organisations of

the self-employed to find common ground. The discussion on platform workers is seen as urgent, so it takes place more openly, although there are still hidden conflicts (e.g., small organisations boycotting the attempt of the trade unions to involve crowd workers **P111**).

## 4.7 Urban and territorial dimension

The research on self-employed workers and their representative organisations is closely intertwined with urban development and urban economic issues. In different forms, but with rather similar tendencies, many large European (and non-European) urban centres have made the transition from an industrial production paradigm to the tertiary economy. The growth of mass consumption, the expansion of leisure offers and development of an urban environment concentrating professional opportunities and social relations are signs of a social revolution which is not limited to the productive system and work, but extends to all of society. The cultural and leisure offer intertwines with regional economies: in the case of Milan, fashion, communication, finance, architecture, health, and IT; in that of Berlin, tourism, media, creative industries, politics, education and research. The highly-skilled solo self-employed have been at the centre of rhetorical discourse on smart, creative cities since the highly controversial writings of Richard Florida, starting with his *Cities and the Creative Class* (2002). In an article published a year later, Florida resumed his reasoning starting from the agglomeration cluster theory (Porter, 1998, 2000b, 2000a), and focusing on relevant case studies all round the world, from Silicon Valley to disk drive makers in Singapore and flat panel makers in Japan. He noted that 'companies cluster in order to draw from concentrations of talented people who power innovation and economic growth', and continued by considering Putnam's social capital theory (Putnam, 2000) according to which the growth of regional economies is the result of strong interaction between people and firms and the consequent tight-knit communities. Putnam noted a strong long-term decline in social capital in various socially organised contexts, from the church to trade unions, from sports organisations to civil groups, including voters and ties within families. In general, therefore, the tendency is towards a redefinition of the communities characterised by less close ties. The decline of strong ties, according to Putnam, can threaten the awareness of the community and its capacity to grow and prosper. Conversely, Florida affirmed that while a community's members recognise its importance, they are oriented to reducing its invasiveness. In other words, modern society is made up of individuals for whom anonymity means being able to pursue one's desires without excessive control by the community. Florida also stated

that the social structures inherited from the past are now inadequate to generate the economic growth and innovation that individuals expect and that strong ties in a community can raise barriers to newcomers. According to the theory of human capital, however, the capacity to attract creative people can make the difference in terms of economic growth (Jacobs, 1985). Florida then developed a perspective of his own, starting from the theory of human capital, to affirm that the logic of displacement of a highly educated population is not only a question of economic interests but also of the lifestyles offered by an area and that, according to his research, the creative class is more oriented towards inclusive territories where diversity is an important element.

The author considers the creative class[77], those 'engaged in work whose function is to create meaningful new forms' (Florida, 2003, p. 8), the key group fostering economic growth. Florida's theories have been widely criticised and contested, and the same author recently wrote a partial rectification of his book on creative cities. Some authors underline that the definition of creative class includes a huge number of different professional groups. This choice renders inappropriate the definition of creative class as it becomes unusable, for example, for policy makers willing to use it for a city's development policies. It is not, in fact, plausible that all the sub-groups gathered in the creative class could share the same interests and opportunities offered by the urban environment (Asheim & Hansen, 2009; Markusen, 2006). However, the attempt to identify some important elements beyond economics could be seen as a starting point in understanding what has happened in certain areas of Berlin and Milan. Observing neighbourhoods like Kreuzberg in Berlin (Bergmann & Baumunk, 2016; Heebels & Van Aalst, 2010; Merkel, 2011) or the Isola neighbourhood in Milan (Cognetti, 2007; Faravelli & Clerici, 2012), we cannot fail to recognise how the presence of part of the so-called creative class (or some of its subgroups) has transformed the districts. The increasing interests of a real-estate market together with the arrival of the creative class have modified the aesthetic aspect of the urban panorama with buildings being renovated and bars and restaurants opened. The same trend has also affected the neighbourhoods: once working class, they have slowly become neighbourhoods for the wealthy.

[77] Florida gives a long list of professionals who, according to his definition, constitute the creative class: scientists and engineers, university professors, poets and novelists, artists, entertainers, actors, designers, architects, nonfiction writers, editors, cultural figures, think-tank researchers, analysts, and opinion-makers. In addition, he includes the 'creative professionals' involved in business and finance, the high-tech sector, and legal and health care professions.

### 4.7.1 Urban dimension, urban economies and the role of the public administration. Why they are relevant for self-employed professionals and their organisations

The attractive power of the urban dimension needs to be explained by considering its multidimensional character. First, it is where people, resources, energy and interests concentrate. Second, it is a complex infrastructure that allows people, resources and interests to interact. Third, it is a space of possibility, opportunity, and hope, which are structured through existing and potential social networks. Fourth, it is a dense space where the main players - public institutions, private interests, dominant social groups, and the organised public - have a significant and visible role. The strong interaction of all these players and stratified levels influences the physical side of urban development and the structure of opportunities for the population. The public image of a city and its multiple imaginaries can be considered the result of this web of interactions.

Urban areas are places of production and consumption and, at the same time, living space. Milan and Berlin exert their attractiveness by being the focal point through which ideas, projects, capital, people, and knowledge flow. The reasons for this attractiveness certainly go beyond what Florida highlighted, and are also rooted in the history of these areas. A large number of self-employed workers concentrate in large urban areas because professional and networking opportunities are also concentrated there, and despite their increasing costs of living and working, urban areas continue to attract many independent professionals. Half of all the psychologists in Lombardy (around 17,000; source Psychologists' National Professional Body; 2016) are concentrated in Milan (P333). Similarly, there are around 18,000 lawyers (Source: Lawyers' National Professional Body; 2016) and nearly 12,000 architects (3.7 per 1000 inhabitants) on lower income levels, especially the new generations (Source: CRESME 2013).

These are important figures as they show very clearly that there is an oversupply of labour in the liberal professions in Milan, as well as in the entire national territory. This has a significant impact on the negotiation process with clients, since it is clear that the large number of professionals on the market today leads to competition and thus often also to lower, almost unsustainable prices. Similar dynamics are found among professionals in non-regulated professions. The concentration of professionals in the Lombardy region, particularly in Milan, indicates a strong attractiveness of this area, which is also reflected in the growing number of start-ups launched by new generations of professionals in the artistic, creative and technological innovation sectors. Indeed, from 2013 to 2016 the number of innovative start-ups launched in the Milan area increased fivefold, two-thirds

of all those launched there. Their progressive growth can be clearly seen in the table below, which also gives the comparative incidence of innovative start-ups in the Milan area and Italy as a whole.

***Table 10 - Number of innovative start-ups (Milan, Lombardy, Italy; 2013-2016)***

| AREA | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Milan** | 180 | 395 | 700 | 993 |
| **Lombardy region** | 267 | 584 | 1012 | 1458 |
| **Italy** | 1365 | 2795 | 4786 | 6628 |
| **Incidence % Milan - Lombardy** | 67% | 68% | 69% | 64% |
| **Incidence % Milan - Italy** | 13% | 14% | 15% | 15% |

*Source: Milano Produttiva - 27th report, Chamber of Commerce of Milan*

Similar evidences at an even larger scale are found in relation to the start-up trends in Berlin, the main German metropolitan area where start-ups are concentrated. The latest Global Start-up Ecosystem Report (2015)[78] estimates the number of active start-ups at between 1,800 and 3,000. The same report ranks Berlin in 9th position of the 20 best cities in the world for start-ups. Berlin also achieved the best improvement since 2012, when the previous report was written; these good results are closely connected to the increase of venture capital investments in start-ups based there. Similarly, the report produced by the Institute for Strategy Development (IFSE 2016)[79] underlines the explosion of Berlin start-ups, based mainly on e-commerce, software-based products and services. The IFSE report shows that the number of start-ups increased by 127% since 2012 and the workforce by 97% (from 6,700 to 13,200) in comparison with the

[78] Published by the San Francisco-based Compass: https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/compassco/The_Global_Startup_Ecosystem_Report_2015_v1.2.pdf

[79] IFSE. 2016. "Booming Berlin. A Closer Look at Berlin's Startup Scene, Berlin." Berlin.

previous period. According to these aggregated results, start-ups based in Berlin are the fourth largest employer in the city, as the table above shows:

*Table 11 - List of largest employers in Berlin*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Deutsche Bahn AG | 19,466 |
| 2 | Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin | 16,800 |
| 3 | Vivantes Netzwerk für Gesundheit GmbH | 14,714 |
| 4 | Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe (BVG) | 13,776 |
| | **Berlin-based Startups** | **13,200** |
| 5 | Siemens AG | 11,818 |
| 6 | Deutsche Telekom AG | 6,833 |
| 7 | EDEKA Minden-Hannover Stiftung & Co. KG | 6,831 |
| 8 | Deutsche Post DHL Group | 6,500 |
| 9 | WISAG-Gruppe | 6,466 |
| 10 | Daimler AG | 6,203 |

*Source: IFSE 2016*

Certainly, in recent years, the start-up environment has shown significant vitality worldwide, configuring the new common global framework of the advanced productive sector in terms of languages, imaginaries, and new organisational models. These models are governed mainly by a production system oriented towards technological innovation applied to products and services. The start-up environment is propelling the economies of large cities and attracting investments from venture capitalists. The KfW/ZEW Start-up Panel[80] (Metzger and Rammer 2011) investigates the survival rate of newly-founded firms in Germany in a longitudinal design. The report shows that the survival rate for start-ups in innovative industries is slightly better than that of start-ups in traditional industries. Another study (Fritsch, Noseleit, & Schindele, 2010) reveals that small and young businesses are characterised by a lower survival rate, with a higher survival rate in start-ups with more employees and a significant share of highly-skilled employees. These results are even more significant if we consider that the start-up environment is not a homogeneous field. On one hand, it includes big players which attract a large amount of venture capital and can develop detailed business plans based on medium and long-term forecasts and on a numerous work force. On the other, there are medium and small players which, despite their innovative energy, have more

[80] The Panel is managed by the Centre for European Economic Research (ZEW), the KfW Bankengruppe and the Creditreform.

limited resources and limited time to break even. These evidences from Germany, quite similar to what is happening in other countries including Italy, are significant if we go beyond the rhetoric of the magic world of start-ups.

Growth in the service sector accompanied by rapid technological change certainly offers opportunities for the new self-employed workers involved in the urban economies where start-ups are started. However, the effectiveness of the new start-ups is not homogeneous, and they have a rather high degree of instability, so while the self-employed working in these contexts have the opportunity to apply their skills, they also risk failing. If we adopt an institutional point of view, we need to understand the consequences of bankruptcies, and the kind of protection needed by the self-employed working in these contexts.

The evidences collected show that the urban environment, with its opportunities, threats and potentialities in term of alliances and networking, is conceived of as the main strategic field for the organisations representing the self-employed. Being present in large urban areas means they have more opportunities to reach their targets and to dialogue with other organisations. Being present also facilitates interaction with the public administrations, which are increasingly investing in communication strategies promoting their city as a place for professionals, creative workers and innovators. Nevertheless, the branding strategy is more than communication because its effects influence (or dare to influence) the structuring process of specific strategic productive sectors, thereby fostering specific urban economies.

> *Speaking of the sharing economy for a municipality means being able to label heterogeneous collaboration practices with this fashion label. In doing so, the practice acquires greater value and the city gains visibility. All that positively influences what people think and say about the city, so it is usually a strategic part of the economic policy of big municipalities. Fostering imaginaries through narratives is a driving force in the strategy oriented towards economic growth. At the same time, it is a tool to frame a new idea of social cohesion if, beyond the rhetoric, a local administration can build effective proposals. Talking about the label 'sharing City', Milan was one of the first cities after Amsterdam to use it. Now it is going to develop a series of public policies, mainly urban policies because they have to do with space management, or the opening of new wifi hotspots in the city. During the last years the maker culture has been strongly fostered by the local administration. With 'making' we mean digital manufacturing, spaces conceived for working with 3D printers (e.g., Fab Lab).* **(P62: LC, urban sociologist; June 2016)**

Culture is becoming more and more a strategic tool in public discourse on the urban development, as well as in the urban economies. From the excerpt of the interview shown below, a very significant paradox emerges clearly. It concerns the intertwining of the promotion by the public administration of the image and economy of a city and the real dynamics through which the urban economy (in this case, the creative industry) takes shape and generates opportunities for those who live and

work there. This theme is relevant because the actors we are dealing with, the independent professionals and the organisations that represent them, are strongly present in the so-called creative industry. The public institutions perceive this industry as a possible opportunity for economic development which can compensate the advanced process of de-industrialisation. These are the reasons for the strong support of the creative industries, despite seeming to be largely disconnected from a proper knowledge of the core dynamics of this economy. The creative industry, one of the pulsating hearts of the city, remains in many ways misunderstood by and autonomous of public policies. The existing situation favours experimentation of new forms of flexible work, but the same dynamics foster labour markets strongly based on informality, underpaid labour and practices based on unpaid work as a way to gain access to a prestigious job in an unidentified future. It is therefore a matter of understanding not only how an urban economy grows as a whole, but also which dynamics are generated among the workers who contribute to its growth. In addition, the inability of the public administrations to build a concrete and structured dialogue with the actors that foster the creative industry significantly reduces the administration's influence in that field. Indeed, at best, it is limited to supporting the market dynamics, without exercising any regulatory power that could potentially have positive effects on the workers, mainly the self-employed, or on the organisations involved in empowering and representing the artistic and creative workers.

> *Certainly, culture and the expression of culture play a big role in the creation of the city beyond any kind of political interference. I am referring, for example, to the role played by subcultures, but if you think about how to organise and direct the culture from a political point of view, the question becomes very complex. I focused my previous studies on the creative industries in Berlin as part of a global project on creative cities. The expression of culture is often strictly intertwined with the cultural policy. It was a very important topic here in Berlin because politicians invested about a billion euros a year in the cultural development of the city. This is a rather large figure even for a metropolis. The surprising thing was that there were no direct relationships with the actors of culture in the city. There was only the idea that economic development was a theme in the foreground, therefore cultural, and the creative industry was one of the fields in which it made most sense to invest. In the end, however, I think that all this was a mistake because it seems to me that the decision makers did not understand what these sectors are concerned with. There was no need to interfere because they are growing thanks to the impulses from below. Let's consider that over 10% of the population are employed in the creative cultural industry as well as a fifth of companies.* **(P115: JM, urban sociologist, expert in cultural economy and creative industries; October 2016)**

The large urban areas concentrate self-employed professionals (regulated and non-regulated, traditional and oriented towards technological innovation, creative industries, and the arts) and organisations which try to implement an offer of representation for them. From the point of view of the organisations, being present in specific urban areas is strategic above all because it increases their opportunities for direct contact with the potential targets. At the same time,

the urban areas are where to network with public institutions and other organisations. As the interview below shows, the promotion of specific urban economies supported by the municipal administration of Milan is an example to be followed, even though it is at the beginning. The same process takes place in many European cities, with the public administration trying to build a common framework where different organisations, professionals, and enterprises can find space for dialogue and possible synergies. This is the first necessary step in supporting the development of specific urban economies. At the same time, however, the participants often perceive a wide gap between the good intentions of an administration and the evident difficulty in transforming them into concrete opportunities. Participation in specific events thus becomes a way to test the context, to evaluate the evolution of the political and administrative interests.
In other words, it is an investment in public relations for something that is not still visible, beyond the good intentions.

> *For us, it makes more sense to stay in an important urban context like Milan, above all because our potential members are concentrated here. Milan is an international cosmopolitan city by Italian standards. There are flows of people and projects here; at the same time, you can experience the fragmentation of the targets we address. Certainly, all the public administration's communication and marketing efforts can open a dialogue on the new creative professions. The public meetings on the sharing economy, the creative and artistic scene, and on technological innovation are a good opportunity to meet other organisations. Promotion of the city relies on these strategies, too, but we are not yet at the level of other European cities. Berlin promotes a lot of these events as part of a marketing strategy; Brussels is at the beginning of this self-promotion. In Milan we are not yet really ready to do that; at the moment I believe the initiatives promoted by the administration are still empty containers. They are opportunities to build networks, but still lack substance.* **(P15: Communication manager, SMart IT, November 2015)**

Given the considerations above and with the reasoning below, it is necessary to consider the tight weave between different policies. On one hand, urban policies that insist, for example, on reclaiming and regenerating metropolitan spaces; on the other, policies to promote urban economies and their effects on the protagonists of these economies. Once again, the responses in the interviews question the ability of the public administrations and the possibilities that they have when they decide to invest in supporting certain metropolitan productive sectors.
As is evident in the interview below, in the case of Milan, most effort is made with policies supporting the maker culture and its empowerment. However, the unresolved issue concerns the size of the market. Indeed, it is most significant that an administration has the political room to choose policies to develop and support some urban economies.

> *The policies promoted by the administration of Milan for the creative industries and sharing economies have an impact on the community of practices, even though it is quite difficult to*

> *measure it. These policies provide opportunities to exchange and share ideas as well as an infrastructure for business projects. Take the example of the maker culture, where the administration has invested significantly. The reasoning from the point of view of urban policies is to plant the seed of innovation in fertile soil (this is a metaphor they really like because they do not know whether something will grow or not), in order to attract external capital. This is also the reason for the new competitiveness between large urban centres: the more you can attract capital from outside, which means talents, people with very specific skills, the more the city can grow economically.* **(P62: LC, urban sociologist; June 2016)**

For the interviewees, Milan and Berlin (and other European cities) are playing the same game, trying to attract capital, knowledge and people. It is worth noting, however, that while their histories and economies differ, both are oriented towards the tertiary sector. Berlin can rely on a countercultural legacy that is still a source of ideas and creativity, although partially disembedded by the cultural consumption framework. Traces of countercultural legacy can be easily traced even in Milan, but the difference lies in the dimension of this phenomenon and in its capillary presence. After the fall of the Wall, Berlin grew rapidly, with the renewal of entire neighbourhoods leading to increased house prices and gentrification. This, then, is the context for the contradictions between new and old populations, and between the independent and mainstream cultural and creative scenes.

> *The city is under pressure because we have an incredibly high debt. In the past fifteen years, it has reached sixty billion. So the city needs to attract more businesses in order to support the tax system. The trend is quite clear: more income and more people working make the city richer. At the same time, in this city there are forces and people who think of culture as something different, as something independent from the dominant logic based on culture. In Berlin, there are also others who think differently, because independent culture is still produced here. Whereas I do not think we can define Paris as a city of artists anymore… we cannot easily find independent artists, either in Paris or London.* **(P115: JM, urban sociologist, expert in cultural economy and creative industries; October 2016)**

The new self-employed in the creative industry and arts sector are attracted by what the city can offer in terms of professional networking opportunities and lifestyles, and they contribute to the growth of the city but, at the same time, are trapped in that growth as well as in the city itself. The city's debts need to be repaid by increasing the number of businesses (including tourism) but this leads to rapid change in the city, with rising costs for residential buildings, rising costs of living and a downward spiral in terms of sustainability for numerous social groups, including migrants and the young self-employed.

The attractiveness of a city is determined by a mixture of the effective needs of the urban labour market and by the myth of its labour market. Urban economies are complex environments governed by strong dynamism, competition and continuous innovation. All these factors generate opportunities as well as a grey area where individuals daily experience professional contradictions. Berlin can exert a strong attraction, although real opportunities for professional development are

limited to a small circle of independent professionals, while for a large number of independent professionals, the reality is a combination of still advantageous housing opportunities and new forms of flexible work that can, however, also be found elsewhere in Germany or even in other countries.

> *Freelancers are one of the main populations growing in this city. This is not an overly recent fact because it has lasted for at least fifteen years. There are many people who want to live here in Berlin but at the same they time are struggling to find a job. Sometimes their only chance is to become freelancers. As freelancers, they can find work elsewhere in Germany or even in other parts of Europe, but they try to live here in Berlin.* **(P115: JM, urban sociologist, expert in cultural economy and creative industries; October 2016)**

> *I believe that today many cities aspire to define themselves as 'central' or 'creative'. I believe this theme has a lot to do with a subjective perception. If you ask someone here in Berlin if the city is a central city for the nation everyone will say 'yes, of course, we are the capital, we are creative'. I think a similar thing happens if you ask a resident of Munich. What I think of Berlin is that it attracts people because rents are cheaper than in other German cities. This is one of the reasons why many artists have been coming to Berlin for a long time, from all over Europe: Spain, Italy, and Poland, but also from Israel.* **(P112: founder of WiberWirtschaft; August 2016)**

However, due to real estate speculation, the advantageous rental conditions are decreasing significantly and this gradually leads to a slow but constant shift of some social groups, such as artists, toward other more affordable cities.

> *For some time now, the independent cultural scene has been moving elsewhere, to Leipzig for example. I think it is a big loss for Berlin and I think this part of the creative world we are talking about is the most active in keeping Berlin so lively. The increase in housing rents in Berlin is incredible, despite the attempt to enact rent control. Obviously, this leads to a great loss from the point of view of social wealth and diversity. I do not believe that there are particularly brilliant political approaches which can tackle this problem. At the same time, I believe these facts are quite recurrent with respect to the dynamics that characterise the artists.* **(P115: JM, urban sociologist, expert in cultural economy and creative industries; October 2016)**

### 4.7.2 The ambiguous role of the coworking spaces: from propeller of the market to autonomous political spaces and labour culture

Coworking spaces have been presented since they were set up[81] as places to combat the isolation of the new professionals operating mainly in the large and indistinct area of the knowledge economy. Thus coworking is, above all, an answer to the needs of the new generations of professionals. At the same time, it is functional to implementing new forms of working organisation strongly based on horizontal interactions, multidisciplinary skills, and the flexibility of project-oriented working groups. Coworking spaces appear to be a promising and significant

[81] The first coworking space was set up in 2005 by Brad Neuberg, in San Francisco.

alternative to domestication processes (Bologna & Fumagalli, 1997), the traditional offices of large or medium-sized companies, and professional firms. Primarily created to offer a collective space to the growing number of isolated freelancers, coworking has gradually become a way for companies, too, to relocate their employees for specific projects or to reduce their real estate expenditure. Over the years, coworking has diversified, with some spaces focusing on specific sectors such as digital innovation, others maintaining a transversal vocation oriented to renting spaces to freelancers and companies, and yet others incubating new businesses (Parrino, 2013). Even before the arrival of coworking, the practice of sharing spaces was widespread among different groups of professionals such as psychologists, architects and lawyers. The principle of aggregation followed very similar logics to those of coworking: cost reductions and the opportunity, at least potentially, to build common projects. After only a few years, large cities like Berlin and Milan now host dozens of coworking spaces of gradually increasing diversification. The offer is extremely varied, ranging from small spaces with two or three desks and a wi-fi connection to enormous spaces that increasingly resemble large factories.

For all these reasons, it is certainly not simple and probably not even useful to talk about coworking spaces without considering this variety. Within this rapid growth, it is possible to identify some trends as well as contrasting ideas of coworking. At the same time, it is also worth acknowledging that the potential of these spaces has not yet been fully studied or understood, and that it is not yet clear what the dense network of economic interests behind the coworking spaces produces in terms of solidarity, identity and collective activation among the growing number of freelancers involved.

The growth of self-employment in the new urban economies certainly created demand for new workspaces better meeting the needs of a project-oriented production system. Interdisciplinarity of skills and transversal knowledge are two of the structural traits behind the pervasive and sometimes intrusive concept of start-ups. Coworking spaces are one of the main contexts for setting up start-ups, so from this point of view, coworking is extremely functional to a production system that increasingly needs continuous innovation. In this sense, coworking spaces are symbolically replacing the factory, and although the logic is obviously different to that of the assembly line, they evoke the factory from a physical point of view in that they concentrate workers.

What is the role of the modern factory based on knowledge work? If we focus on the large coworking operations, which often consist of a network of spaces located in the most strategic points of European cities, they are essentially ambitious business activities. They are focused on

providing spaces and infrastructures for individual professionals and innovative projects funded by major investment funds. This is the case of Talent Garden[82], reported below. At the same time, such spaces, precisely because they host large projects of big innovative corporations, also take on a strong identity: they are not only logistic providers, but de facto intermediaries of labour.

Having a space in a top-level coworking space means, at least potentially, privileged access to professional opportunities. In this sense, the coworking space is a new type of labour market intermediary between freelancers and, for example, technological innovation projects: on one hand, freelancers interested in developing innovative start-ups and aspiring to access the coworking space; on the other, multinationals and investment funds interested in innovative start-ups and for whom these spaces are a resource to find solutions for their businesses.

> *We saw that in our country there are many interesting talents, but they are unconnected to each other. This is why everyone tends to go abroad, to London or Silicon Valley. Here what is missing is an ecosystem to support talent. In Brescia, we started from this idea and brought together fifty people in a physical place, a campus. In the past six years we have set up almost eighteen campuses in six European countries, becoming the largest European coworking network dedicated to digital innovation. We have brought together over 1,800 people, 450 companies, ranging from freelancers and start-ups to big companies or international start-ups like Uber, Deliveroo, and Tesla, which decided to put their teams in Talent Garden.* **(P136: founder of Tag – Talent Garden; online newspaper GLI STATI GENERALI, 30th July 2017)**

> *Most coworking spaces are totally market-oriented companies. It is important to understand this: unless a coworking space exists for a specific reason or due to specific conditions, it will generally be oriented to promoting its interests as a company. Of course, it will also facilitate networking opportunities for the freelancers there, but only to the extent that doing so gives them an advantage. So there is a lack of information on what choices would be better for the freelancers, given the interests of the coworking space. If we want to look at the issue from a legal point of view, what happens in a coworking space? Workstations are rented. If we go beyond the rhetoric of coworking spaces as places where networks are built, it is clear that the dominant framework in the main ones is competition, they are purely business-oriented, and I am not interested in copying that model.* **(P67: Member of Board & General Manager of Smart DE, October 2016)**

In Talent Garden, as in large coworking spaces such as Betahaus[83] or We Work in Berlin, the processes of aggregation and collaboration are predominantly and strongly business-oriented. They may espouse utilitarian interests which include, or generate, solidarity among workers but only to the extent that this is functional to the development and success of the business project. The large coworking spaces are mainly run according to neo-liberal market logics based on competition and this makes them attractive for freelancers, investors and large companies.

[82] https://talentgarden.org/
[83] https://www.betahaus.com/spaces-berlin

> *Certainly, I do not expect networks of solidarity and mutual help to be created in spaces like 'We Work' because the people there have an entrepreneurial mindset. They are surrounded by pleasant spaces designed to develop business and everyone wishes to be pleasant in the eyes of others. All this makes the environment a totally self-promotional environment.* **(P115: JM, urban sociologist, expert in cultural economy and creative industries; October 2016)**

Alongside the large totally business-oriented coworking spaces all over Europe run by the important players, there are other coworking spaces based on different logics which go beyond the utilitarian framework, where the idea that the individual is part of a community survives and the ideas of work and production are approached critically, not taken as a matter of fact.
In large business-oriented coworking spaces the idea of the pure market disembedded by society is reproduced: the workers collaborate and compete, but are pure instruments of performance of the production system. Conversely, in some small coworking spaces, productivity and performance are included in a more general framework where the community of workers tries to live by sustainable practices based on solidarity and mutual aid. The aggregation process experienced in some small coworking spaces fosters a different idea of work and society from the dominant one. Such coworking spaces based on solidarity principles are, in fact, unstable because they cannot rely on widely-tested models. Moreover, the aspects of solidarity, while representing a bottom-up response, integrate the flaws of the existing welfare system. Nevertheless, the positioning of the coworkers in a labour market dominated by a neoliberal production model is affected only marginally by solidarity practices. The challenge therefore concerns the stabilisation of the reference models and the scale of growth required to develop all these experiences in a more structured way.

> *There are many small bottom-up organisations which foster alternative forms of organisation. Some are trying to develop alternative economic models, some look at what is happening elsewhere, for example, in coworking spaces in Greece, where a new idea of social economy is the main way to tackle the crisis. In Manchester, I saw similar spaces where the focus is on solidarity between people. For example, when a colleague cannot work because she has just had a baby, they collect money for her. At the moment, the crucial question I am dealing with is how these experiences can be scaled up to bring these small initiatives together. The real problem is that many of these spaces do not have contact with each other.* **(P115: JM, urban sociologist, expert in cultural economy and creative industries; October 2016)**

Many organisations which in recent years have been trying to represent the self-employed have wondered what strategy to adopt to intercept freelancers in coworking spaces. The organisers of the Freelancers' Movement tell of a positive relationship with coworking spaces, at least as channels through which to convey their proposals. The Freelancers' Movement is promoted by EFIP (European Forum of Independent Professionals) with the aim of fostering the freelance working

identity by giving them voice. Every year, the movement promotes Freelancers' Week, with a number of events supported by the organisations belonging to the network and by some coworking spaces. Thus in some cases, specific coworking spaces can work as a strategic tool for recruiting volunteers interested in co-organising initiatives.

> *Over the past year we have asked through coworking spaces for volunteers for our campaign and twenty coworking spaces all over Europe have helped us. Of course, there has not been very much effect... in any case, some coworking spaces did a good job and in this way helped us to organise the campaign.* **(P 9: member of VGSD and activist of Freelancers' Movement; July 2015)**

The idea that coworking spaces could be a possible ally in promoting awareness campaigns and, in some cases, host specific events is quite widespread. Sometimes this happens, as in the case above, or in the case of Toolbox in Turin, where the quasi-union ACTA is used to organising Freelance day[84]. Nevertheless, coworking spaces are primarily a place of production and networking and job opportunities, so it is usually very difficult for an association or a trade union to have privileged access to these spaces. Indeed, the structural presence of a trade union or professional organisation could be counterproductive for the freelancers who work there and the businesses which use coworking spaces. That is why a generic awareness campaign for the freelancers' pride (Freelancers' Movement Campaign) might be acceptable to the owners but more specific initiatives could be seen as overly political and not in line with the business purposes of the space.

> *Maybe coworking spaces can be connected to the freelance movement and not to a single organisation. It could be better for them, maybe.* **(P 9bis: activist of Freelancers' Movement; July 2015)**

Certainly, the widespread idea among organisations is that providing the proper information to freelancers is necessary and coworking spaces are a strategic place for doing that. At the same time, a strategy to gain access to coworking spaces is needed. Again, the possibility of structuring permanent collaboration is considered a difficult option, while a light presence with which to establish direct contact with freelancers seems more realistic.

> *Here in Berlin, the theme of the creative economy is very strong, so many coworking spaces are designed for this type of economy. We know that it is not very easy to contact the freelancers involved in these contexts. For this reason, we will not talk to the managers and propose that they should work together in a structured way. We will simply ask them if we can organise information sessions where we will present our activities. This formula will probably help us to have an opportunity to talk to freelancers. It is possible to organise counselling meetings where we explain what we can do for them. But we will not organise classic consultancy meetings, we will share our*

[84] https://www.freelanceday.it/

> *experience with them. Obviously, we will try to explain the advantages of working as a freelancer and working as an employee of our cooperative. We want to make people understand what the best choice for each of them may be; we certainly do not want to create chimeras or false expectations.* **(P67: Member of Board & General Manager of Smart DE, October 2016)**

From the interviews, there emerges a significant polarisation between large business-oriented coworking networks and small local experiences of coworking spaces fostering solidarity practices with a collective idea of the freelance workforce. These experiences are aimed at developing bottom-up welfare systems and creating an alternative to the dominant system of production and labour organisation. One of the relevant cases is Supermarkt: behind its setting up there were no business purposes, or at least business was not the only purpose. This is the crucial point because it reveals, at the same time, the main distinctive traits and the greatest weakness. Being independent means not reproducing the dominant economic and market frameworks. Nevertheless, a coworking space without a strong economic orientation needs other resources. These can be the free work of activists, private or public funding. In both cases, the coworking space takes on different meanings. It is no longer a modern factory but a collective space for the development of ideas and projects which are not necessarily oriented to supporting the existing productive system, but to experimenting with different forms of aggregation and production. As mentioned above, sustainability, networking and growth are the three fundamental elements to ensure the continuity and relevance of these experimental projects.

> *Supermarkt is probably an exception; most coworking spaces aim for economic effectiveness. For example, nearby, there is an impact Hub. They are focused on social business, but the fact is that to enter this space you have to pay a fairly significant share. This means that they are a space for an elite. The dominant idea is based on start-ups, and coworking spaces are where start-ups are started. Probably Supermarkt may seem a strange space from this point of view because it is not exactly like other coworking spaces. I cannot see myself managing a coworking space as if it were a business. We organise events where we try to earn enough to manage the space but managing the coworking space certainly cannot become our job. We have to do something else. The meaning that spaces take on is not decided in advance, it depends how you decide to manage them.* **(P108: co-founder of Supermarkt, January 2016)**

The upheaval in some coworking spaces underlines the need, at least for part of the new self-employed, to reframe work, its deep meaning and the role of the self-employed in the production system. Conversely, the solidarity networks highlight the need to rethink a welfare system which was not designed for self-employed workers and which is currently attempting, with much effort and many contradictions, to include them. The network of what we can call 'social coworking' could evolve, if properly supported, and become a new recognised player in the public debate on self-employment and in the emerging field of self-employment representation.

This is the reasoning put forward by some members of the NIDIL-GCIL in Milan. The creation of a coworking space is an attempt to find direct contact with freelancers in order to organise them. It is an experimental initiative which, although local, becomes important for the area where it is proposed (Milan) and for the investment behind it. Another significant element, mentioned in the previous chapter, concerns the lack of coordination between this initiative and the others promoted by the CGIL for self-employed workers, above all the Board of Professions. Nevertheless, its ambitious purpose is to foster an alternative working culture among freelancers compared to the mainstream individualistic and neoliberal framework promoted by the large coworking spaces.

> *The idea is that coworking is, to put it bluntly, similar to a new Chamber of Labour (Camera del Lavoro), which was set up as a place of aggregation and services; the coworking space is a place of aggregation of non-standard workers and we also provide services. This is banal, but you can conceive of it as a place where companies go to intercept the new working class or you can make it a centre where you can spread a culture of labour. You can choose to start a coworking space like Tag here in Milan, where only the coolest come in and the coworking space becomes a mediator with the companies. We do not want this. Sure, we want to facilitate networking and contacts between companies and freelancers, but generally the power relationship between freelancers and companies is always disproportionate. For this reason, we are trying to find a way to support freelancers.* ***(P61: trade unionist of NIDIL-CGIL Milan, Jan. 2016)***

Different evaluations emerge from the interviews with the representatives of Ver.di Selbstständige, where a clearer assessment emerges with respect to roles and functions. In Ver.di Selbstständige, coworking spaces are seen as a useful tool and, in many cases, an effective one for dealing with the challenges of the market. Indeed, its significant role is recognised in the organisation of work as well as in creating professional opportunities for freelancers. However, a clear distinction remains between the initiatives proposed to support the professional careers of freelancers and the representation activities. This is the point of view of a trade union that has faced significant organisational change and is now one of the main players in the field of self-employed representation in Germany. The basic idea remains that the delicate work of representation should maintain a strongly political connotation. This means devoting one's time to developing sufficient knowledge in order to be authoritative in the dialogue with the institutions and by exercising the right to lobby based on knowledge and membership. In this sense, the classic idea of representation developed in the union context is reproduced, but applied to workers not traditionally considered by the unions. This point of view also means there is a need to be very cautious about acting as an intermediary and facilitator between freelancers and the market. This role could make the representation activity less authoritative and complicate the position of

the union, which would be divided between the activity and intermediation between freelancers and companies.

In the excerpt below, as well as in others previously presented, what emerges is that the union wants to keep its representation and empowerment activities separate. The latter are considered useful to support better positioning of freelancers in the market but substantially ineffective in modifying the power relationship between freelancers and the market.

> *Now, things are much more difficult than in the past: it is very difficult to ask someone who is in a coworking space to attend union meetings. Thirty years ago, if I had offered someone the choice of taking part in a union meeting or creating a coworking space, they would probably have chosen the first option. We think coworking spaces are opportunities to generate better market conditions. Being in a good coworking space is not enough, because the market dynamics could still negatively influence your working opportunities. Representing means something different than offering a coworking space.* **(P58: coordinator 2, Verdi Selbstständige, trade union)**

# 5 Conclusions

The project aimed at studying the organisations representing Italian and German self-employed workers (especially, but not exclusively, the professional solo self-employed). In particular, it focused on the representation strategies of the organisations which, in accordance with the research hypothesis, constitute an emerging strategic action field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). The existence of this field, as well as the reasons for its existence and evolution were considered from a comparative perspective throughout the analysis.

On one hand, indeed, the approach promoted by the theory of fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012) has proved indispensable to understand how, in the two national contexts investigated, the networks of relations and interactions have been structured through progressive dialogue, conflicts and cooperation, thus defining a distinct social space – a strategic action field ruled by specific languages, dynamics and knowledge - with shared puroposes. In the same way, the analysis aimed at reconstructing the origins of the field theory has been fundamental to fully understand the potential effectiveness of this theoretical approach. On the other hand, the cultural perspective elaborated by Barbara Czarniawska (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992), combined with a focus on the sense making process in the organizations (Weick, 1995), permitted to appreciate how representation strategies in organizations acquire sense and structure through progressive adjustments.

Moreover, an in-depth analysis of the metaphor as an interpretative tool, helped to underline how the complex environment of traditional and digital communication obliges organizations to strive towards the continuous production of information, both to reaffirm their identity and to struggle for positioning themselves in the emerging field.

Finally, the historical-theoretical analysis of the concept of representation has proved to be a useful orientation tool for the fieldwork in ordet to understand the different approaches to representation. During the fieldwork (2014-2017), it was possible to collect a significant amount of data, the processing of which has been only partially reported in this work. Indeed, the richness of the information collected necessitated a limited selection of data and sources to be quoted. Nevertheless, every effort has been made to maintain an overview of the field studied while preserving the possibility of carrying out detailed analysis of the organisations selected and key actors identified. Particular attention was also paid to organisations in the two metropolitan areas of Milan and Berlin, where a large number of self-employed workers and numerous innovative representative experiences are concentrated.

The research project was based on a multi-method approach allowing the data collected to be cross-referenced and their validity strengthened. The analysis was based on data collected through exploratory, structured, and in-depth interviews, and accompanied by analysis of documents collected directly from respondents as well as by exploration of digital sources (the websites and digital social networks of organisations). The data collection was integrated through an ethnographic activity carried out mainly, but not exclusively, on three Italian organisations (Board of Professions, SMart, and ACTA) and three German organisations (Ver.di Selbstandige, SMart DE, and Supermarkt). It was possible to follow the organisations during public meetings such as conferences and debates and, in limited cases, to participate in internal organisational meetings (mainly in the Italian case). Another basic choice of the research was to combine the ethical and emic approaches, with the latter necessary to understand the sense-making process of the key actors which, from our point of view, is of fundamental importance in the structuring of representation strategies.

The organisations were selected on the basis of an extensive mapping carried out using various tools: detailed analysis of previous researches on the same subject, extensive online research, and exploratory interviews with experts on the subject at national and European levels who also played a relevant role in the implementation and validation of the mapping.

**After the mapping phase, it was possible to answer positively to the first and fundamental research question relating to the existence of an emerging strategic action field of self-employment representation** (first research question). The preliminary mapping also required exploration of the multiple meanings of the term "self-employment" among institutions and professionals, which made it possible to identify and address the extreme variety of the organisations found as well as their multiple targets. From the mapping results, which included a first rough analysis of the aims and purposes of the organisations, it was possible to verify that a huge number of different players (new and traditional) act and interact (directly or indirectly) within a common border defining the field of self-employment representation. This common boundary is determined and continuously redefined by the interaction between the organisations and, above all, by a mutual recognition on which conflictual and cooperative dialogues are continuously built. These organisations, the main players in the strategic emerging action field, are trade unions, employer associations, professional bodies, associations, quasi-unions, umbrella associations, informal groups, movements and coalitions, cooperatives, and co-working spaces. The field of self-employed representation can be considered emerging and strategic for several reasons, macro and micro. The macro reasons refer to the profound changes in the organisation of production (including redefinition of the value chain) and in working arrangements. Self-employment, both high- and low-skilled, becomes a tool for experimenting flexible working relations by redistributing risk from the enterprises to workers. As a result, new self-employed workers face new working environments and conditions which generate unprecedented opportunities and risks compared to the past. Self-employment is expanding in the context of the growing tertiary sector and this expansion changes self-employment's traditional traits. The impetus to change provided by the technological revolution determines the characteristics and forms of new self-employment. The atomisation of labour favoured by the new possibilities of connection enhances the possibilities of freedom of new workers, but at the same time accentuates their isolation in an urban space that redefines itself according to its new inhabitants and workers. Micro factors such as the life led by or the daily difficulties of self-employed workers are also part of the structural changes which foster the emergence of the strategic action field of self-employment representation. The first private and then public debate on the problematic conditions of those strongly exposed to the logics of production and the market, which are oriented to innovation and continuous competition, help to define new material and symbolic social needs. The symbolic social needs refer to the existential functions of the social

(Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, p. 3) which play a relevant role in the structuring process of the emerging strategic action field.

These new and still only partially studied basic conditions of the self-employed necessitate exploration of the new forms of aggregation aimed at recomposing fragmentation and redefining collective professional identities. Indeed, the new organisations, especially in Germany, and some trade unions attempt to contribute to the definition of the emerging field. The emergence of this field is therefore dictated by a social need to define ex novo the sense and meanings of a collective group, the self-employed, whose novel features define a clear break with the past with regard to working conditions, income and career prospects, and the possibility of planning life projects.

**The focus on the setting up of new organisations and the renewal processes of existing ones allowed the reasons behind the innovation processes and those of the dynamics behind the emerging field of self-employment representation to be understood**. The upheaval became more evident in the context of the tertiary sector, and this happened in a similar way in Italy and Germany, at similar times, and with similar dynamics to the rest of Europe. In both Italy and Germany, the new organisations fill the representation gaps made by the profound changes in the productive system and the expansion of the tertiary sector. Among these organisations, we can recognise quasi-unions, new professional organisations and grass-roots groups that operate mainly, but not exclusively, in the field of non-regulated professions. For these reasons, the attention of the research focused on this context. However, there are significant differences between the two countries with regard to the shape of the emerging field as well as to the roles and positions of the organisations.

In Italy, the upheaval in the context of the autonomous professions has generated organisational responses since the early 2000s, when new organisations such as ACTA (an association of consultants of the advanced tertiary sector) and CoLAP (an umbrella organisation of non-regulated professions) were set up. At this stage, the trade unions were mainly focused on developing an offer of representation for atypical workers and showed no real interest in representing the growing numbers of solo self-employed in unregulated professions. At the same time, the self-employed in the regulated professions were experiencing increasing competition and a significant downsizing of their career and earning opportunities. In this context, traditional professional organisations maintained their positions by reproducing forms of corporate representation which, however, failed to effectively include the new generations of self-employed workers.

In Germany, in contrast, it was the trade union environment that generated an initial response to the structural changes in self-employment since the beginning of the millennium. Coinciding with the reorganisation of existing unions that joined together to create the new union Ver.di focused on the service sector, a new division dedicated to the solo self-employed - Ver.di Selbstständige - was set up. In the first phase of emergence of the new strategic field, the early reaction of the trade unions was to defend their dominant position, which was partially maintained even in the subsequent phases. The emerging strategic action field, in both Italy and Germany, took shape around the dialogue and conflicts between the growing number of organisations fostering the debate on self-employment. In Germany, too, traditional professional organisations maintained a corporatist approach without, however, giving sufficient and effective answers to the new generations of professionals.

Over the years, the emerging field of self-employment representation has continued its structuring process, fuelled by transnational factors (the digital revolution and its repercussions on the processes of labour intermediation in digital platforms), by national factors characterising the development of the tertiary sector, and by local factors (the ecosystems in which innovative start-ups develop, the historical-cultural heritage that sustains urban economies, and the active role of local public institutions in favouring new economies). New organisations are emerging in both countries and the debate on the new working and living conditions of self-employed workers is becoming more and more visible in the media after long and patient but strong communication work on digital social media, supported in particular by the new organisations. Furthermore, the public institutions are increasingly interested in regulating self-employment in order to support better inclusion of the self-employed in the social protection system. Indeed, in the first decade of the century, as the visibility of self-employed workers grew, their fragility also emerged, accentuated by the effects of the international economic and financial crisis. In Italy, there was a growing dialectical clash between the unions and the new organisations (quasi-unions and grass-roots groups). After a long and sometimes cumbersome process of internal discussion, the unions started to develop their own specific proposal of self-employed representation. Beyond the conflict that was part of the structuring process of the field, however, there were also specific spaces for the dialogue that slowly fostered a mutual legitimisation and, in some cases, created room for common initiatives. In the past twenty years, the emerging strategic action field of self-employed representation in Italy has involved organisations focused on high- and low-skilled self-employed, and on regulated and non-regulated professions. The Italian emerging field is

characterised by significant competition between the organisations as well as by an evident overlapping of the target groups selected by each organisation. The focus on the organisations that contributed most to structuring the field, namely the quasi-unions, grass-roots groups, cooperatives, trade unions and umbrella organisations of regulated and non-regulated professions, show that in most cases they address their offer of representation to a wide and sometimes indistinct target of the self-employed. For these reasons, the structuring process of the field, including the positioning of the organisations, is sometimes overabundant. Both the CGIL, through the experimentation of co-working spaces in Milan, and the CISL, with the online community project vIVAce!, aim to intercept freelancers, that is, self-employed professionals without employees. In addition, through the Board of Professions, the CGIL aims to play a coordination role facilitating the dialogue between different types of organisations.

Only recently did the third union, UIL-TuCS - Networkers position itself in the emerging field by starting to organise platform workers. The competition between the umbrella organisations of non-regulated professions is also extremely evident. There are at least three organisations of national importance: CoLAP, set up in 1998; Confassociazioni, founded in 2013 by some organisations which had left CoLAP; and CNA Professioni which was set up in 2013 by CNA (National Confederation of Crafts and Small and Medium Enterprises). All three aim to represent self-employed workers and entrepreneurs. In this sense, the boundaries of representation are highly indistinct. In addition, it is significant to note that the competition between different professional organisations also goes beyond the clear division between regulated professions and non-regulated professions. In a perfectly symmetrical manner, the largest organisation grouping together the various areas of liberal professions (Confprofessioni) opened up its offer of representation to some unregulated professions, while CoLAP counts among its members also some organisations of regulated professionals. Finally, the widespread tendency to widen the representation targets is found in the cooperative context, too, in particular in the case of the cooperative SMart IT. This was set up as a cooperative for artists and entertainment operators but after a few years it opened up to freelancers in the advanced tertiary sector through collaboration with ACTA, one of the main Italian quasi-unions. The fierce competition between organisations and the overabundance in the structuring process of the emerging field of self-employed representation were partly offset by a growing dialogue and discussion between organisations. Instead, the progressive discussion made possible coordinated lobbying during the approval of two laws regarding the self-employed: Law 4/2013

which recognised a regulatory role for organisations representing non-regulated professions and Law 81/2017 which implemented certain social protection measures for self-employed workers.

**In short, the emerging field of self-employed representation in Italy is characterised by three distinctive elements: a high degree of experimentation aimed at structuring a still insufficient representation offer, significant competition between organisations, and significant growth in the dialogue between different organisations which, in some circumscribed cases, are able to create temporary coalitions for coordinated lobbying**.

The focus on the German case reveals different traits from the Italian emerging strategic action field. Verdi's initial dominant position significantly affected the aggregation process of new organisations and thus also the structuring process of the field. In the same way, the presence of highly-structured professional organisations among regulated and non-regulated professions limited the dynamics of competition, and the dialogue between organisations focused on different professional areas. More in detail, the German unions, notably Ver.di and IG-Metall, seemed to develop complementary representation projects. The German union environment is characterised by a clearer "division of labour" and targets. This division of labour takes place according to the specific skills developed by the unions in specific productive sectors over the years, and is the result of the dialogue inside DGB, the umbrella organisation of the main trade unions. While Ver.di Selbstständige has focused on the low- and high-skilled solo self-employed since 2001, IG-Metall more recently developed an innovative project for crowd workers. In Germany as in Italy, the new organisations are set up to face the evolving needs of the new self-employed professionals in a rapidly-evolving environment. Professional experience and sensitivity to emerging issues thus play an important role in the emergence of new associations. Individual motivation and commitment are the engines of new initiatives in large trade unions and new organisations. Moreover, the cooperative approach with a gender perspective, together with no-profit initiatives, seems to play an important role in the opposition to the individualisation processes among the self-employed, at least in Berlin. Berlin's history and the concentration of its energy, ideas and political engagement positively affected the aggregative experiments aimed at supporting the business development of weak social groups such as migrant women and women in general. During the mapping, significant experiences promoted by women for women emerged: I.S.I. e.V. Initiative Selbständiger Immigrantinnen (1990), WeiberWirtschaft (1987), and Grunderinnenzentrale (2006). Moreover, the cooperative movement (especially the platform cooperativism promoted by Threbor Scholtz) is strongly supported by a large coalition promoted by Supermarkt (2010), a grass-roots organisation

of digital artists and activist based in Berlin. A further indicator of the tendency to limit competition in favour of collaborative strategies is the experience of Initiative Ureberrechts, the umbrella organisation representing authors, whose thirty-five organisations, including trade unions, focus on the self-employed working on the foundation of the copyright law. This is the most important example of an umbrella organisation connecting a variety of organisations focused on the same issue but coming from different subsectors (e.g., literary translators, actors, classical musicians, and soundtrack authors). If the Italian case is characterised by significant competition with an overlap of targets, the German one appears an emerging strategic action field based mainly on professionalisation trends with limited competition between organisations.

**Analysing the representation strategies[85] meant critically reflecting on the concept of strategy with the aim of deconstructing it.** During the research, the multi-method approach was fundamental in order to best evaluate the data collected. In other words, it was necessary to combine and cross-reference the data collected for a proper evaluation by cross-referencing them with the interpretation of the context in which they were collected. In many cases, the interviewees themselves and observation of key actors at public events revealed an overly celebratory narrative regarding the representation strategies promoted, and a dogmatic idea of strategy prevailed depending on the public role the actors had to perform. In these cases, the strategy appeared totally planned from the beginning and the organisation was presented as being able to achieve its goals directly; in other words, the **strategy resembled a dogma** and the organisation was the means to achieve it. In the same context, the strategy was in other cases constructed retrospectively by reinterpreting the events, the choices made by the organisation and the results obtained. In these cases, the **strategy became a tool to rationalise the past** in order to justify the position of the organisation in the present. The strategy is conceived of differently when the need for effective communication also leaves room for self-reflection. The strategy becomes the result of an exploration, so it is built as things go along, in parallel with the always partial interpretation of events. In these cases, the **adaptive character of the strategies** emerges, as well as the existence of the uncertainties that are part of each organisational choice.

According to the evidences collected in Italy and Germany, **the representation activity of the organisations studied has three main targets: the market, public institutions, and public opinion**. The representation strategies, here conceived of as a combination of practices, can address the

[85] 2nd, 3th and 4th research questions

market when the aim is to obtain better conditions or opportunities for the self-employed; and the public institutions when the aim is to change the rules of the market, labour market, or social protection system. They address public opinion when the aim is to raise public awareness or change consumer behaviour. Each target requires its own strategy and a consistent set of human and economic resources.

**The representation practices** found among the organisations studied are varied and in many cases still to be defined. On one hand, there are organisations which interpret representation in the classic sense as structured **lobbying**; on the other, organisations (including some traditional ones such as trade unions and professional organisations) that experiment with **organising** practices, others that prefer **community building**, and yet others that invest resources and energy in **coalition building**. Conversely, other organisations, such as cooperatives, see **servicing** as an important lever to bring individuals together and build collective representation strategies, namely the empowerment of a critical mass (towards the market) on which lobbying can legitimately be based. Each of these practices can have different focuses: specific professions, specific professional sectors, cross sector, or they can address other organisations when, for example, the community building is oriented to creating second-level (umbrella)organisations. Finally, some cases of coalition building have as reference a wide range of subjects that goes beyond the self-employed to include NGOs and activists, with the latter of interest mainly to organisations interested in challenging the dominant patterns of production and work organisation.

The comparative analysis on representation strategies was first made on the six selected case studies, three for each country: two unions (CGIL-Board of Professions and Ver.di Selbstständige), two cooperatives from the same network (SMart IT and SMart DE) and two bottom-up organisations (ACTA and Supermakt). The comparative analysis highlighted some important elements.

The two trade unions, the CGIL and Ver.di, adopt a largely contrasting approach to representation. The CGIL adopts a top-down approach based on lobbying made legitimate by community building focused on organisations. That means that the trade union avoids directly organising the self-employed. In contrast, Ver.di, aims at strengthening its lobbying capacity by aggregating the self-employed, also through the strategic use of servicing.

The comparative analysis of the two cooperatives shows that although they were set up on the basis of the same business model of servicing and community building, they differ in their targeting strategy. SMart IT chooses to aim its offer of representation at a wider target that includes the

artistic-creative sector and the broader, more nuanced advanced tertiary sector where freelancers are mainly concentrated. This was primarily adaptation to the Italian context where the aggregation process is slower and therefore requires a widening of the target.
In contrast, SMart DE remains focused on the artistic and creative sector and on trying to develop great expertise there. Here, too, the choice is for a professionalisation path focused on specific target groups rather than a more general (and standard) offer to a wider group of the self-employed.

The last two cases, ACTA and Supermarkt, have interesting diversification paths in their representation strategies. ACTA focuses on organising and lobbying across the sector; Supermarkt on social coalition building. Yet it is possible to identify a partial convergence, if we consider that both are trying to foster new forms of production and coalition building. The case of Supermarket is important because it starts from the context of the digital culture in order to build broader networks of workers and organisations able to foster the spreading of platform cooperativism. Similarly, ACTA is oriented to building strong ties between workers of different sectors in the medium-long term, as well as being part of a broad social coalition combating exploitation, precarisation and the dismantling of the welfare system.

The second level of the analysis focusing on strategies considered the overall group of trade unions and revealed that the representation approach in both countries is focused mainly on organising and lobbying. In some specific cases, the effort is also oriented to integrating the servicing approach conceived of as a strategic tool to maintain a direct connection with the self-employed. However, significant differences are found between the German and Italian trade unions in terms of their representation strategies. The German trade unions showed greater reactivity in adaptating to the changes underway and introduced innovative elements into the organisation by investing resources, albeit limited. In addition, their positioning appears complementary, with Ver.di focused on the solo self-employed and IG-Metall on crowd workers. In contrast, the Italian trade unions reacted slowly to the emergent needs of the self-employed, introducing soft organisational innovations which did not affect the union structure. Despite adopting different strategies, the Italian unions compete to represent a large number of self-employed people, therefore the target is less differentiated in comparison to the German case, and the result is a overabundant and sometimes non-differentiated offer of representation. The focus on the second-level (umbrella) organisations, too, reveals that the emerging strategic action field of self-employed representation in Italy has strong competitive dynamics. This is demonstrated

by the fact that the main organisation bringing together the regulated professions (Confassociazioni) extends its representation offer to non-regulated professions as well. A similar trend happens in the second-level organisations of non-regulated professions, which extend their offer to regulated professions.

Finally, the comparative analysis of quasi-unions, grass-roots groups and cooperatives reveals above all that they develop their representation strategies by focusing mainly on servicing, organising and community building practices. This is consistent with the purposes for which they were set up: to give voice and visibility to the self-employed. Community building, in particular, is the missing link with the more structured organisations (trade unions and second-level organisations).

The second-level organisations combine organising, lobbying and servicing conceived of as discrete and thus weakly coordinated parts, without investing in a structured way in the collective empowerment of members. Thus the most relevant contribution of the grass-roots groups, quasi-unions and cooperatives is the attempt to reduce the fragmentation of the self-employed workers by fostering collective identities, peer-to-peer exchanges, mutual learning and, as a result, business opportunities. It is possible to make some generalisations on the basis of the research results. Traditional organisations, the trade unions and professional organisations, innovate their representation strategies while still focusing on the strong lobbying approach already tested with other categories of workers or, in the case of professional organisations, with previous generations of self-employed workers. New organisations, in contrast, are further exploring other channels to gain visibility and legitimacy for lobbying.

The evidence gathered during the research also makes it possible to detect some significant changes in relation to the meaning of the concept of representation. Alongside the classic concept of representation, which is mainly that of trade unions and professional organisations with a long tradition, new models of representation are emerging. These are fostered mainly by the new organisations which are strongly focused on the complex digital communication environment. They have built their visibility mainly through a communication strategy based on web sites and digital social networks. In this way, over the years, they have built a direct relationship with their audience, some of whom join the organisation. What is important to note, however, is that only a small number of them do so, and an even smaller number play an active role in the organisation. However, the audience (not only the members), is of strategic importance in both the reputation building process and in the lobbying opportunities that the reputation gained can generate.

If we focus on new organisations, with the exception of cooperatives we can undoubtedly see a **reduction in the importance of membership in favour of "followers"**, to borrow Twitter terminology. In these cases, therefore, **representativeness becomes more and more connected to visibility in the digital environment, to the reputation that an organisation can gain by developing and effectively communicating its actions and ideas, to its ability to maintain and give continuous attention, especially, but not exclusively, to its activities in the digital environment**.

The analysis of the representation strategies and the external environment conceived of as the complex mix of competitors, allies, and other relevant stakeholders, allowed further evaluations on the structuring process of the emerging field. This process takes shape according to some significant dialectic contrasts between 1) the new and the traditional organisations; 2) the old and the new generations of self-employed professionals ; and 3) the expanding productive sectors such as the performing and innovative digital sectors and saturated professional sectors, especially in Italy (e.g., the liberal professions such as architects, lawyers, and psychologists but also designers, and professionals in the wellness and health sector). In addition, many labour markets are experiencing increasing competition which, due to the new digital technologies, is becoming more and more international.

The emerging strategic action field also takes shape according to specific national conditions and to particular episodes of contention (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow, 2011) which define lines of fracture between organisations and thereby influence competitive and collaborative behaviours. **In the Italian case**, the process that led to the approval of the law 4/2013 on non-regulated professions revealed at least three fracture lines between the existing organisations, with a fourth emerging independently. The **first fracture** concerned professional associations and trade unions. The former were accused of supporting a corporatist law that aimed to reproduce on a small scale the institutional structure of regulated professions; the latter strongly denied their active role in supporting the law and explicitly expressed their criticisms in this respect. **A second and significant fracture was found between the quasi-unions and trade unions on one side and the professional organisations on the other**. The latter started from a traditional approach to representation focused on specific professional areas. Thus their approach greatly contrasted with the transversal approach promoted by the quasi-unions and, from a different perspective, by the unions. **A third fracture was between the regulated and non-regulated professions**. The regulated professions enjoyed institutional recognition and

decades of experience in representing professionals, which put them in a very advantageous position for lobbying and promoting the professions they represented. The strong investment of the non-regulated professions in lobbying for a law regulating their professional area was an attempt to compete with the regulated professions in order to gain similar recognition.

**A fourth significant fracture** was found between organisations working in the same professional field. especially between cooperatives. In recent years, some experiences of cooperativism focusing on self-employment have emerged in Italy as well as in Europe. The renewed interest in cooperativism can be seen as a response to the growing challenges of the labour market that tend to foster an individualistic approach to the professions. So while there is renewed interest in cooperativism, it can, in some cases, be adopted for instrumental purposes - as a deceitful solution to pay less tax or to disguise an activity which in fact only provides services. There is therefore a significant problem of unfair competition, which can damage the reputation and real development of the cooperative model as a genuine tool for the aggregation and representation of workers.

In the structuring process of the German emerging field, different dynamics can be found with analysis of the external environment (Chap. 4.6). This is a consequence of the emergence of new professions, profound changes in existing professions and the difficulty of structured organisations such as trade unions and large professional organisations in effectively dealing with the broad changes. However, the analysis shows that **the structuring of the field takes place on the basis of an accumulation process characterised by limited competition**. In other words, the emerging field is populated by new subjects that face each other dialectically but act on different population targets with limited overlapping. This means less energy wasted in competition and more resources for a professionalisation process aimed at supporting targeted groups of the self-employed. At the same time, the increase in the number of organisations representing self-employed workers calls for a redefinition of the framework of the social dialogue in the traditional sense. The progressive fragmentation of the social dialogue makes the decision-making process of the institutions more complicated and less linear. This is a source of mutual mistrust and misunderstanding between the existing organisations because the classic structure of the social dialogue is under threat, as are its implicit hierarchies; in Germany, too, the new organisations are building their reputations and, in this way, also lobbying opportunities.

Such misunderstandings, as well as the repositioning of all the players, are obviously also based on different visions and ideas of representation. There is the corporatist approach of professional organisations and the inclusive approaches to representation promoted by the trade unions and

some grass-roots organisations. A third position, more difficult to interpret and therefore criticised, is the pragmatic approach of the new professional organisations and quasi-unions which strongly support self-employment. The unions see them as corporatists because they seem to foster an implicit competition between the self-employed and employees; at the same time, the traditional professional organisations see them as challengers because their practices do not respect the traditional approach of professionalism.

**In its first structuring phase, the emerging field of self-employed representation (in both Germany and Italy) was characterised by a significant conflict between the traditional organisations, especially the trade unions, and the new organisations focused on the advanced tertiary sector.** This was a conflict based mainly on mutual criticism. The traditional organisations blamed (and still partly blame) the new organisations for their inability to overcome corporate or sectoral logics. The new organisations, on the other hand, point to the inability of trade unions to understand either the new needs of the emerging productive sectors or the professional conditions of the new self-employed. Over time, however, the positions of the main players in the field can be more easily interpreted by those involved, and a a mutual acknowledgement is becoming easier. This does not mean that evaluation and criticism tend to diminish significantly, but that **mutual recognition emerges**. In Italy, serious cross-organisational dialogue based on mutual recognition recently led to the most important example of coordinated lobbying by the major organisations focused on self-employed with regard to the new law on self-employment (Law 81/2017). In Germany, in contrast, the mutual recognition opens up the possibilities of a more structured dialogue, especially on specific issues. The spaces for discussion without prejudice or mutual mistrust are growing, for example, in relation to the emerging theme of crowd work.

In addition, some important examples of representation based on communities of practices (mainly cooperativism) are showing significant unexplored potentialities and are still being set up. Finally, the research analysis explored whether and how the urban environment has an influence on organisations' representation strategies. The first and perhaps most obvious piece of evidence, confirmed by numerous interviews, concerns the density of the urban environment which concentrates the self-employed and opportunities for networking and lobbying. A second concerns the need for organisations to fully interpret how the urban environment is changing in order to understand the functioning of the new places with a higher concentration of nomadic self-employed. The atomisation of workplaces also leads to a growing lack of distinction between working places, places for private life and places for leisure. Although these trends are well known,

there is still a lack of structured strategies to deal with them. In addition, the complex urban environment concentrates strategic infrastructures for the professional development of the self-employed. Indeed, in both Milan and Berlin, there are concentrations of innovation centres where start-ups and great numbers of co-working spaces are developed and innovation processes are fostered. Co-working spaces were originally set up as a collective solution to the growing numbers of self-employed working at home, whether by choice or necessity, and the aggregation process was intended to activate synergies to develop new ideas and businesses. Yet in just over a decade, the numbers of co-working spaces have multiplied and the offer has diversified. What emerges from the interviews with experts and key actors is a double and contrasting trend.

The large coworking spaces in the main European cities are essentially ambitious business activities providing spaces and infrastructures for individual professionals and innovative projects funded by major investment funds. At the same time, by hosting large projects of large innovative corporations, these spaces also develop a strong identity, not only as logistic providers, but also as de-facto labour market intermediaries. They are the basis for large innovative projects and they facilitate the selection of competences and skills required by the large companies. Conversely, in some small coworking spaces productivity and performance are part of a more general framework where a community of workers tries to exist through sustainable practices based on solidarity and mutual aid. The aggregation process experienced in some small co-working spaces fosters a different idea of work and society with respect to the dominant one. However, co-working spaces based on solidarity principles are unstable because they cannot rely on widely tested models. Solidarity is a good example of a bottom-up practice that integrates the flaws of the existing welfare system. Nevertheless, solidarity practices only marginally affect the positioning of coworkers in a labour market dominated by a neoliberal production model. Thus the challenge concerns stabilising the reference models and their scale growth by putting their existing experiences in the network. This growth is functional to reaching a critical mass which can be a solid alternative to coworking based on a neo-liberal conception of innovation and cooperation. The coworking spaces represent one of the most evident elements of the new urban economies involving self-employed. Cities like Milan and Berlin are able to attract capitals and knowledge that generate wealth, innovation and further investments in an increasingly pronounced competition between big urban areas. The competition insists both on the improvement of the productive assets of the local territory as well as of the global economies, and on the construction of an imaginary able to improve the attractiveness of the city. In this regard, we can certainly say that the social group of independent

professionals (I-Pros) is one of the important pawns both for the urban economy and its imaginary. Milan and Berlin are perceived as the place for opportunities, the place where creativity and innovation are concentrated therefore the right place where each ambitious professional has to be. At the same time the growing attention on self-employed by new and old organisations and by public institutions is evidence of the growing difficulty experienced by this group of workers mainly concentrated in the big cities. The combination of the rising costs of living, the competition that in the advanced tertiary sector also means lowering costs (also by lowering the fees), the processes of segmentation and dualisation of the labour market, call into question the sustainability of urban economies and, more in general the sustainability of life in the big urban areas more and more oriented toward (wealthy) newcomers, travellers and city users.

Milan and Berlin represent a reference model for their respective national contexts and aspire to be reference models, according to their different traits, even on the international scene. Both cities combine the development of the economic assets of the territory, the flows of the global economy, and significant investments in the cultural, creative and start-up context. Both in Milan and Berlin, the commitment of local public institutions to support these new urban economies based on start-up and cultural scene is significantly increasing; at the same time public institutions have evident limitations in understanding these new urban economies. The cultural industry and innovative start-ups grow mostly independently of public policies. The dense urban context, with its attractive power, is also the privileged place for organisations representing the self-employed and independent professionals in particular. The most effective strategies of aggregation and mobilisation combine a strong presence on digital social networks (to provide information and professional guidance) and the ability to provide opportunities for professional aggregation aimed at strengthening the position of professionals in the market. This capacity implies a strong knowledge of the territory, of the strategical hubs for independent professionals, of the opportunities that the city offers, together with a precise knowledge of the global dynamics that influence the labour markets.

To conclude, let us recall once again that this study aimed to address the issue of the representation of self-employed workers through analysis of the strategies developed by the main organisations in this field. The comparative approach on two national territories, Italy and Germany and the focus on two local territories, Milan and Berlin, made it possible to recognise the different perspectives and strategies adopted by the traditional organisations (trade unions and professional organisations) and by the new ones (quasi-unions and grass-roots groups).

This approach was also fundamental to understanding that in Italy and Germany the emerging strategic action field of self-employed representation is structured with different characteristics and by different modalities. In the Italian case, the emerging field develops around specific lines of fracture between organisations of different types, and there is a prevailing competitive dimension which stimulates an offer of representation for large targets. In the German case, the emerging field is characterised by a progressive numerical growth of organisations and projects that compete in a limited way. This means that energy and resources can be concentrated on professionalisation processes within the organisations and on developing the offer of representation for specific and more segmented targets. Some of the main results are summarised in the next page summarises some of the main relevant findings emerged. Please refer to the previous chapters for a detailed overview. The multi-method approach adopted in this research, based on document analyses, in-depth interviews, semi structured interviews, and ethnographies, made it possible to maintain an emic and an ethical perspective and thus explore the official declarations of the organisations, the subjective perspectives of the key actors and their sense-making processes. Finally, the research project was designed to combine the meso-level approach to the study of the organisations as envisaged by the theory of fields with the micro approach focusing on the internal dynamics, contradictions and subjective perspectives which keep the complex organisations alive and continuously evolving.

*Table 12 - Summary of the main relevant findings*

| | IT | DE |
|---|---|---|
| **Emerging strategic action field** | **Period:** early 2000's | |
| | **Main players:** new organisations (Associazione dei Consulenti del Terziario Avanzato – ACTA; Coordinamento Libere Associazioni Professionali – CoLAP)<br><br>**Traits:** strong critics against trade unions<br><br>**Actions:** support to independent profressional's visibility | **Main players:** trade unions (Ver.di – Selbstständige) and new organisations (e.g.: Initiative Urheberrecht; Verband der Freien Lektorinnen und Lektoren - VFLL)<br><br>**Traits:** dominant position of trade unions<br><br>**Actions:** structuring of services for solo self-employed and independent professionals. |
| **Shape, structures and resources** | Light decentralised structures<br><br>Cooperatives are emergent actors | |
| | Small units, no reorganisation of existing structures<br><br>Limited budget, no structurals investments<br><br>Mainly based on voluntary work | Small units, reorganisation fo existing structures<br><br>Limited but structural investments.<br><br>Trends toward paid staff |
| **Representation strategies and trends** | Strong experimentation (organising, community building, coalition building, servicing, lobbying)<br><br>Better inclusion in the welfare system<br><br>Self-employment empowerment<br><br>Traditional membership VS light membership (followers) as the base of representativeness | |
| | Competition on similar targets<br><br>Trends toward large cross sector coalitions on specific issues<br><br>Juridical innovation | Trends towards targets' division<br><br>Sectorial coalitions, increasing dialogue on emergent issues (e.g.: crowdwork) |
| **Urban dimension** | Strategic for all the organisations (critical mass od self-employed and representation experiments)<br><br>Strong investments on cultural sector and start-ups<br><br>Public institutions: limited understanding of new urban economies<br><br>Growth and segmentation of coworking spaces<br><br>A place of resources and threats | |
| | Specific mix of territorial assets and global economic flows. | Specific mix of territorial assets and global economic flows. |

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# Addendum

## Total employment, self-employment, Solo Self-Employment (Solo SE), I-Pros in the European Union, Italy, Germany

*Table 13 – Total employment (TE), self-employment (SE), Solo self-employment (Solo SE) and independent professionals (I-Pros) in EU (28); 2008-2016*

| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **EU 28 TE** | 218,995.5 | 215,034.2 | 212,131 | 212,070.2 | 211391.7 | 210,840.4 | 213,476 | 215,804.2 | 218,956.8 |
| **EU 28 SE** | 31,121.8 | 30,812.6 | 30,954.7 | 30,631.2 | 30650.6 | 30,391.3 | 30,635.7 | 30521.2 | 30,523.5 |
| **EU 28 SE/TE** | 14.22% | 14.33% | 14.60% | 14.45% | 14.50% | 14.42% | 14.35% | 14.15% | 13.95% |
| **EU 28 Solo SE** | 21,436.6 | 21,359.1 | 21,720.0 | 21,627.0 | 21,837.0 | 21,618.7 | 21,901.5 | 21,805.9 | 21,879.5 |
| **EU 28 Solo SE** | 9.79% | 9.93% | 10.24% | 10.20% | 10.33% | 10.25% | 10.26% | 10.10% | 9.99% |
| **I-Pros EU 28** | 7,251.9 | 7,508.4 | 7,783.5 | 8,029.3 | 8,318.2 | 8,404.8 | 8,763.4 | 8,959.1 | 9,113.2 |
| **I-Pros EU 28/TE** | 3.31% | 3.49% | 3.67% | 3.79% | 3.94% | 3.99% | 4.11% | 4.15% | 4.16% |
| **I-Pros EU 28/SE** | 23.30% | 24.37% | 25.14% | 26.21% | 27.14% | 27.66% | 28.61% | 29.35% | 29.86% |
| **I-Pros EU 28/Solo SE** | 33.83% | 35.15% | 35.84% | 37.13% | 38.09% | 38.88% | 40.01% | 41.09% | 41.65% |

*Source: our calculation on Eurostat Data (ELFS)*

*Table 14 - Total employment (TE), self-employment (SE), Solo self-employment (Solo SE) and independent professionals (I-Pros) in IT; 2008-2016*

| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **IT Total Employment** | 22,698.6 | 22,324.2 | 22,151.6 | 22,214.9 | 22,149.2 | 21,755.3 | 21,809.5 | 21,972.6 | 22,241.1 |
| **IT Self-Employment** | 5,188.2 | 5,029.1 | 5,043.3 | 5,010.7 | 4,982.5 | 4,872.2 | 4,835.6 | 4,808.6 | 4,774.3 |
| **IT Self-Employment/TE** | 22.86% | 22.53% | 22.77% | 22.56% | 22.50% | 22.40% | 22.17% | 21.88% | 21.47% |
| **IT Solo Self-Employed** | 3,682.7 | 3,586.7 | 3,625.2 | 3,597.1 | 3,588.5 | 3,447.00 | 3,484.1 | 3,450.9 | 3,419.9 |
| **IT Solo Self-Employed/SE** | 70.98% | 71.32% | 71.88% | 71.79% | 72.02% | 70.75% | 72.05% | 71.77% | 71.63% |
| **IT I-PROS** | 1,540.5 | 1,502.4 | 1,539.1 | 1,544.5 | 1,604.7 | 1,541 | 1,550.9 | 1,568 | 1,566.2 |
| **IT I-PROS/TE** | 6.8% | 6.7% | 6.9% | 7.0% | 7.2% | 7.1% | 7.1% | 7.1% | 7.0% |
| **IT I-PROS/SE** | 29.69% | 29.87% | 30.52% | 30.82% | 32.21% | 31.63% | 32.07% | 32.61% | 32.87% |
| **IT I-PROS/Solo SE** | 41.83% | 41.89% | 42.46% | 42.94% | 44.72% | 44.71% | 44.51% | 45.44% | 45.80% |

*Source: our calculation on Eurostat Data (ELFS)*

*Table 14 - Total employment (TE), self-employment (SE), Solo self-employment (Solo SE) and independent professionals (I-Pros) in DE; 2008-2016*

| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DE Total Employment** | 37,902.3 | 37,807.8 | 37,337.1 | 38,045.4 | 38,320.6 | 38,64 | 38,907.7 | 39,175.9 | 40,165.1 |
| **DE Self-Employment** | 3,892.7 | 3,952.7 | 3,914.1 | 3,999.3 | 4,003.7 | 3,891.4 | 3,825.1 | 3,773.5 | 3,733.1 |
| **DE Self-Employment/TE** | 10.27% | 10.45% | 10.48% | 10.51% | 10.45% | 10.07% | 9.83% | 9.63% | 9.29% |
| **DE Solo Self-Employed** | 2,167.8 | 2,205.3 | 2,185.5 | 2,263.4 | 2,265.4 | 2,163.6 | 2,119.7 | 2,065.9 | 2,057.7 |
| **DE Solo Self-Employed/SE** | 55.69% | 55.79% | 55.84% | 56.59% | 56.58% | 55.60% | 55.42% | 54.75% | 55.12% |
| **DE I-PROS** | 1,270.7 | 1,333.2 | 1,332.4 | 1,395.9 | 1,404 | 1,342.7 | 1,317.4 | 1,323.7 | 1,322.4 |
| **DE I-PROS/TE** | 3.35% | 3.53% | 3.57% | 3.67% | 3.66% | 3.47% | 3.39% | 3.38% | 3.29% |
| **DE I-PROS/SE** | 32.64% | 33.73% | 34.04% | 34.90% | 35.07% | 34.50% | 34.44% | 35.08% | 35.46% |
| **DE I-PROS/Solo SE** | 58.62% | 60.45% | 60.97% | 61.67% | 61.98% | 62.06% | 62.15% | 64.07% | 64.27% |

*Source: our calculation on Eurostat Data (ELFS)*

## Data classification system

Classification system of the data archived and codified with Atlas-Ti, according to the type of documents and the territory investigated (Tab.15).

*Table 16*

| TYPE OF DOCUMENT | TERRITORY | PHASE |
|---|---|---|
| Exploratory interviews | Italy, Germany, Europe | 2 |
| Semi-structured interviews | Italy | 4 |
| | Germany | |
| In-depth interviews | Italy | 5 |
| | Germany | |
| | Europe | |
| Fieldnotes | Italy | 5 |
| | Germany | |
| Official documents of the organisations | Italy | 4 and 5 |
| | Germany | |
| | Europe | |
| News | Italy | 4 and 5 |
| | Germany | |
| | Europe | |

Codification process with Atlas-Ti according to the macro-issues and related codes defined before the fieldwork and tested during its early stages.

| MACRO ISSUE | CODE |
|---|---|
| Employment and Industrial Relations | Changes |
| | Current state |
| | Origins |

| MACRO ISSUE | CODE |
|---|---|
| Labour | Changes |
| | Labour markets |
| | Relational dynamics |
| | Traits |

| MACRO ISSUE | CODE |
|---|---|
| Organisation | Activities |
| | Changes |
| | Communication |
| | Evaluation of competitors |
| | Evaluation of policymakers |
| | Evaluation of the representation supply in other countries |
| | History |
| | Ideas on what representation means |
| | Internal relations |
| | Members |
| | Members |
| | Network |
| | Representation strategies |
| | Resources |
| | Rules of access |
| | Self-evaluation |
| | Structure |
| | Urban dimension |
| | Values |

| MACRO ISSUE | CODE |
|---|---|
| Policymakers | Attitude |
| | Changes |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Role |

| MACRO ISSUE | CODE |
|---|---|
| Public institutions | Changes |
| | Measures, advice |
| | Role |

| MACRO ISSUE | CODE |
|---|---|
| Representation | Changes |
| | Concept |
| | Scenarios |
| | Urban dimension |

| MACRO ISSUE | CODE |
|---|---|
| Specific issues | Bargaining (collective or individual) |
| | Contracts |
| | Data analysis |
| | Enterprises (roles and changes) |
| | Fees |
| | Gender |
| | Health |
| | Information and communication |
| | Innovation |
| | Insurances |
| | Legal protection |
| | Market regulation |
| | Networking |
| | Pensions |
| | Productive sectors |
| | Professional support |
| | Reputation |
| | Services |
| | Social protection and welfare system |
| | Stakeholders |
| | Taxes |
| | Training and competence certification |

| MACRO ISSUE | CODE |
|---|---|
| Workers | Changes |
| | Characteristics |
| | Needs |
| | Tasks |

## Self-employment and non-standard workers: varieties of definitions

Since the beginning of the research, the analysis of the literature has allowed to detect a plurality of definitions related to non-standard workers and their working arrangements. The table below collects the main labels used by institutions and researchers focused on new self-employment and non-standard work. The list is not exhaustive but gives an idea of the existing terminological variety.

*Table 17 – Labels and definitions of non-standard workers*

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Own-account workers** | Who hold self-employment jobs and do not engage 'employees' on a continuous basis | ILO | https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/status-in-employment/current-guidelines/lang--en/index.htm |
| **Employers** | Who hold self-employment jobs (i.e. whose remuneration depends directly on the (expectation of) profits derived from the goods and services produced) and engage one or more person to work for them as 'employees', on a continuous basis | ILO | https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/status-in-employment/current-guidelines/lang--en/index.htm |
| **Contributing family workers** | Who hold self-employment jobs in an establishment operated by a related person, with a too limited degree of involvement in its operation to be considered a partner. | ILO | https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/status-in-employment/current-guidelines/lang--en/index.htm |
| **Workers not classifiable by status** | For whom insufficient relevant information is available, and/or who cannot be included in any of the preceding categories. | ILO | https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/status-in-employment/current-guidelines/lang--en/index.htm |
| **Temporary employment** | Workers are engaged for a specific period of time includes fixed-term, project- or task-based contracts, as well as seasonal or casual work, including day labour. | ILO | Non-standard employment around the world: Understanding challenges, shaping prospects International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. 2016 |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Part-time work/ On call work** | In part-time employment, the normal hours of work are fewer than those of comparable full-time workers. | ILO | Non-standard employment around the world: Understanding challenges, shaping prospects International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. 2016 |
| **Temporary agency work and other forms of employment involving multiple parties** | When workers are not directly employed by the company to which they provide their services, their employment falls under contractual arrangements involving multiple parties, for example when a worker is deployed and paid by a private employment agency, but the work is performed for the user firm. | ILO | Non-standard employment around the world: Understanding challenges, shaping prospects International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. 2016 |
| **Disguised employment relationships and dependent self-employment** | Disguised employment lends "an appearance that is different from the underlying reality, with the intention of nullifying or attenuating the protection afforded by law" | ILO | Non-standard employment around the world: Understanding challenges, shaping prospects International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. 2016 |
| **Self-employment** | The employment of employers, workers who work for themselves, members of producers' co-operatives, and unpaid family workers. | OECD | https://data.oecd.org/emp/self-employment-rate.htm |
| **Independent contractors** | • Work for themselves—are not employees<br>• Contract directly with clients<br>• Work outcome is specified by the client in the contract, but the work process is controlled by the worker<br>• Typically hired on a project basis, although the scope and length of projects may vary considerably<br>• May work for multiple clients simultaneously and for various lengths of time<br>• Independent contractors are responsible for paying their own taxes and securing benefits | PETER CAPPELLI JR KELLER University of Pennsylvania | Cappelli, P., & Keller, J. R. (2013). Classifying work in the new economy. Academy of Management Review, 38(4), 575-596. |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Agency temporary workers** | • Employed by a temporary agency<br>• Agency provides the worker to client organizations for what are usually short-term assignments<br>• Client controls the work outcome, while the agency reserves the right to direct and control workers<br>• Client's direction and control over the work process are limited to the extent necessary to conduct the client's business<br>• Work is typically performed at the client's location<br>• Workers return to the agency for reassignment after completion of their work with the client<br>• Agency is responsible for most regulatory requirements, including payroll and employment taxes, in addition to managing the screening, hiring, wage setting, and termination | PETER CAPPELLI JR KELLER University of Pennsylvania | Cappelli, P., & Keller, J. R. (2013). Classifying work in the new economy. Academy of Management Review, 38(4), 575-596. |
| **Day laborers** | • Day laborers are technically contractors hired on a one-job basis, typically lasting between one and three days, although they can be hired repeatedly by the same organization<br>• Pay and tasks are often negotiated after the worker is selected, with informal negotiation sometimes continuing at the job site depending on circumstances<br>• Absence of formal contracts<br>• Payment is often in cash, evading taxes | PETER CAPPELLI JR KELLER University of Pennsylvania | Cappelli, P., & Keller, J. R. (2013). Classifying work in the new economy. Academy of Management Review, 38(4), 575-596. |
| **Vendor-on-premises** | • An organization contracts with a vendor to perform work<br>• Individuals who perform the work are either employed by or are engaged as independent contractors by the vendor<br>• The work process is directed by the vendor<br>• A key element of such contracts is the notion of a "work product"; the vendor is contracted to provide a service, but how the service is provided is up to the vendor<br>• Vendor is responsible for most regulatory requirements, including payroll and employment taxes, in addition to managing the screening, hiring, wage setting, and termination<br>• Relevant context is where work is | PETER CAPPELLI JR KELLER University of Pennsylvania | Cappelli, P., & Keller, J. R. (2013). Classifying work in the new economy. Academy of Management Review, 38(4), 575-596. |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| | performed at client's location while engaging<br>with client's employees and management | | |
| **Stable own account workers** | **CLUSTER 1** (26%). The respondents resembling to this cluster predominantly work on one site online and are almost without an exception single workers. The large majority has more than one client and finds it relatively easy to find new clients. Respondents resembling to this cluster are fairly evenly distributed over the country-specific income quintiles, with a small over-representation on the highest earning quintile. The majority of the cluster members are not paid in terms of a monthly/weekly fee – and an important proportion (45%) would be economically insecure in the case of sickness. Most of the self-employed in this category have high discretion over their professional life: (if applicable) they would have authority to dismiss personnel and almost 90% is able to take time off at short notice for private matters. Most of the respondents in this cluster became self-employed for reasons other then the lack of alternatives. In majority they are happy to be self-employed and don't think it is hard to bear the responsibility of being one's own boss. The proportion of working five days a week or less is 50% in this cluster, 30% works six days a week and 10% every day of the week. A quarter of the respondents resembling to this cluster got any form of formal training. This cluster is over-represented in the Nordic countries, but also in some Eastern European and Southern European countries. However, in most Eastern European and Southern | Eurofound (ewcs) | De Moortel, D., & Vanroelen, C. (2017). Classifying self-employment and creating an empirical typology. No. WPEF17002. |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| | European countries this cluster is under-represented. In most service sectors this cluster is clearly over-represented, while the opposite is true for the sectors of agriculture and commerce and hospitality. There is also an over-representation of tertiary educated and directors/liberal professions in this cluster. | | |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Small traders and farmers** | **CLUSTER 2** (26%). Respondents resembling to this cluster predominantly work on one site. They work alone or with a small number of employees – more than half of them is a small employer. More than 90% of them has different clients and only a minority (30%) finds it hard to find new clients. This cluster knows a fairly equal income distribution, with a slight over-representation at the bottom and a more important over-representation at the top quintile. The majority is not paid with a fixed monthly/weekly fee – and only few members would be economically secure in case of sickness (21%), while 61% would be insecure. Members of this cluster have high discretion over their work situation: authority to dismiss is almost maximal (97%) and for 67% of the members taking time off at short notice would not be a problem. Only 25% is self-employed because of a lack of other alternatives for work. Nevertheless, this cluster has the highest proportion of respondents stating that bearing the responsibilities of being one's own is hard (40%). That however does not mean that they don't value their situation of being self-employed: only 14% doubts his/her role as decision maker. Work tends to be intense in this cluster: more than 70% works six or seven days a week. The proportion of receiving training is 20%. This cluster is over-represented in (some) Southern European and Eastern European countries, but also in some continental countries (e.g. France, Belgium) there is an over-representation. Higher proportions are seen in agriculture, but most of all in commerce (retail) and hospitality. Members of this cluster have a slightly higher probability of being lower educated. Directors (small employers) and farmers are over-represented. | Eurofound (ewcs) | De Moortel, D., & Vanroelen, C. (2017). Classifying self-employment and creating an empirical typology. No. WPEF17002. |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Small and medium size employers** | **CLUSTER 3** (23%). While still 75% works on one site only, there is a considerable proportion that works (owns?) multiple sites (25%). Almost all members have employees working for/with them: for 24% it's more than 8 employees. Almost everyone has different clients (99%), while 59% finds it easy to encounter new clients. Members earning a high income are clearly over-represented in this cluster (58%); 54% declares to get paid on a weekly/monthly scale and a majority (58%) would be secure in case of sickness. The members of this cluster have high discretion over their professional situation (both in terms of laying off employees as in taking time off). Almost no one in this cluster became self-employed out of necessity (3%), and they tend to be at easy with their role of self-employed (94% likes the responsibility of being self-employed; 79% does not find it hard to be self-employed). The majority of the respondents have a relatively balanced working week (54% working one to five days; 33% six days). 37% got training. This cluster is less present in most Eastern and Southern European countries and tends to be more present in many Nordic and Continental countries (highest proportion – 42.6% of all self-employed – in Denmark). This cluster is over-represented in some service sectors (health, finance, commerce and hospitality), as well as in the sectors of construction and industry. The cluster is less present among the lowly qualified and over-represented among tertiary educated. Finally, the cluster is more present among directors and liberal professions. | Eurofound (ewcs) | De Moortel, D., & Vanroelen, C. (2017). Classifying self-employment and creating an empirical typology. No. WPEF17002. |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Insecure self-employed** | **CLUSTER 4** (17%). Members of this cluster almost exclusively work on one site only (99%) and a majority (76%) works alone, while 24% has between one and eight employees or co-workers. More than half has only one client (55%) and almost half (48%) finds it difficult to find new clients. More than 80% of the respondents in this cluster find themselves in the lowest and the second lowest income quintiles, while they are generally not paid a fixed fee. More than half of them (54%%) would be insecure in case of sickness. Only a minority (28%) has the authority to dismiss employees. In contrast, taking time off at short notice is easy for 84% of the cluster members. 40% of these respondents became self-employed out of necessity; a third does not like the responsibilities of being his/her own boss; most do not find it hard to be self-employed, but 27% does find it hard to bear these responsibilities. Members of this cluster in general do not have a highly intense working week (35% works six days and 15% seven days). This cluster scores very poorly on receiving training (only 2% got training). The fourth cluster is over-represented in Eastern and Southern European countries and under-represented in many Nordic and Continental countries. Cluster membership is higher in agriculture and "other services" – and cluster members are more often lower educated, compared to the other clusters. There is an over-representation among farmers, freelancers and other types of self-employed. | Eurofound (ewcs) | De Moortel, D., & Vanroelen, C. (2017). Classifying self-employment and creating an empirical typology. No. WPEF17002. |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Dependent self-employed** | **CLUSTER 5** (8%). Most of these self-employed work at different sites (73%) and the vast majority has/works with employees (42% with one to eight employees; 58% with more then 8). The majority (72%) has more than one client. A significant minority (27%) finds it hard to find clients, while 42% finds it easy to find new costumers. The income distribution of this cluster is relatively equal, although with an over-representation of the lowest quintile (30%). Almost 65% of the cluster members gets paid by means of a monthly or weekly fixed fee. A majority of the cluster members (60%) would be economically insecure in case of sickness. In general, the members of this cluster have low discretion over their work situation: only 15% has the authority to dismiss other workers and for 33% of the respondents it is difficult to take some time off at short notices themselves. Moreover – while this indicator is hardly relevant for all other clusters, 24% of the respondents in this cluster witnessed a restructuring in their own business or the organization they are (mainly) working for. 34% is self-employed out of necessity (no other options for work); 50% doubts their role as boss/decision-maker and 28% finds it hard to bear the responsibility of running an own business. The majority of these respondents (63%) works only five days a week or less. Only 8% works every day of the week. Of this cluster, 17% received training. The fifth cluster is over-represented in Eastern Europe and the United Kingdom. The cluster is more present in industry, construction and transport, but also in education. Finally, there is a relative overrepresentation among the highly educated, among freelancers and subcontractors and other self-employed. | Eurofound (ewcs) | De Moortel, D., & Vanroelen, C. (2017). Classifying self-employment and creating an empirical typology. No. WPEF17002. |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Freelance workers** | They are skilled professional workers who are neither employers nor employees, supplying labour on a temporary basis under a contract for services for a fee to a range of business clients. Each of the criteria embedded in this conventional definition are examined: worker in/dependence; skill/occupation; nature of the client base; number of client relationships; and duration of client relationships. It is, of course, possible that individuals might define themselves as freelance independently of these criteria. - Freelance work is not a legal concept. Rather, the term is a customary one used by workers, end-users of labour services and other organisations in a range of work settings. Customary understandings in particular work contexts may overlap with, or diverge from, the definitions applied by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the legal system. | Kitching, J., & Smallbone, D. | Kitching, J., & Smallbone, D. (2008). DEFINING AND ESTIMATING THE SIZE OF THE UK FREELANCE WORKFORCE A Report for the Professional Contractors Group. Retrieved from www.kingston.ac.uk/sbrc |
| **Economically dependent workers** | They usually have a commercial contract (or 'service contract') rather than an employment contract; they are therefore registered as self-employed when in reality their working conditions have a lot in common with those of employees. | Eurofound (ewcs) | Oostveen, A., Biletta, I., Parent-Thirion, A., & Vermeylen, G. (2013). Self-employed or not selfemployed? Working conditions of 'economically dependent workers. Background Paper. |
| **Independent Professional (I-Pros)** | Independent workers without employees engaging in a service activity and/or intellectual service not in the farming, craft or retail sectors. | Rapelli Stéphane | Rapelli, S. (2012). European I-Pros : A Study. London, UK. |
| **Employee sharing** | It is a situation where an individual worker is jointly hired by a group of employers to meet the HR needs of various companies, resulting in permanent full-time employment for the worker. | Eurofound | Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. |
| **Job sharing** | It is where an employer hires two or more workers to jointly fill a specific job, combining two or more part-time jobs into a full-time position. | Eurofound | Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. |
| **Interim management** | It is where highly skilled experts are hired temporarily for a specific project or to solve a specific problem, thereby integrating external management capacities in the work organisation. | Eurofound | Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. |
| **Casual work** | It is where an employer is not obliged to provide work regularly to the employee but has the flexibility of calling them in on demand. | Eurofound | Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. |
| **ICT-based mobile work** | It is where workers can do their job from any place at any time, supported by modern technologies. | Eurofound | Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. |

| LABEL | DEFINITION or CLUSTERISATION | SOURCE | LINK/REFERENCE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Voucher-based work** | It is where the employment relationship is based on payment for services with a voucher purchased from an authorised organisation that covers pay and social security contributions. | Eurofound | Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. |
| **Portfolio work** | It is where a self-employed individual works for a large number of clients, doing small-scale jobs for each of them. | Eurofound | Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. |
| **Crowd employment** | It is where an online platform matches employers and workers, with larger tasks often being split up and divided among a 'virtual cloud' of workers. | Eurofound | Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. |
| **Collaborative employment** | It is where freelancers, the self-employed or micro enterprises cooperate in some way to overcome limitations of size and professional isolation. | Eurofound | Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. |

## Summary table of primary documents

*Table 18 – Type of primary document, reference territory, quantity*

| TYPE OF PRIMARY DOCUMENT | TERRITORY | N° |
|---|---|---|
| Exploratory interviews | Italy, Germany, Europe | 10 |
| Semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews | Italy | 35 |
| | Germany | 27 |
| | Europe | 5 |
| Fieldnotes | Italy | 10 |
| | Germany | 12 |
| Official documents of the organisations | Italy | 88 |
| | Germany | 63 |
| | Europe | 13 |
| News | Italy | 54 |
| | Germany | 46 |
| | Europe | 21 |
| **TOTAL PRIMARY DOCUMENTS** | | **384** |

## Outline of semi-structured interviews

**SECTION 1**

**ORGANISATION: HISTORY AND PRESENT**

1. Who founded your organisation and when?

2. Why you/or the founders created this organisation?

3. What are the main changes occurred in your organisation in the last 20 years?

4. Organisation structure and territorial diffusion (working sectors covered): where it is and who wants to represent?

5. What are the internal assets of your organisation? Can you describe them?

6. What are the main resources of your organisation?

7. What are the main goals of your organisation?

8. Who and how many are your members? Can you describe the main recurrent typologies?

9. Who and how many are your followers (not members but professionals following the activities or your organisation? Eg: throughout social networks or throughout a mailing list) Can you describe the main recurrent typologies?

10. What are the main needs expressed by members and followers? What are their requests?

11. What are the main tools used by your organisation to collect and analyse these requests?

**SECTION 2**

**MAIN VARIABLES INFLUENCING STRATEGIES**

1. What are the main social and economic changes occurred in the last decades which affected the professionals represented by your association/group/Union?

2. What are the main State and employer strategies which affected the professionals represented by your association/group/Union?

3. What is the institutional context of employment relations? Are professionals and their organisations included/considered? How?

4. In a general perspective, what are the most important features of your organisation identity?

5. What are the main activities and repetoire of contention planned by your organisation?

6. What are the main competitive associations you consider good allied for the future?

7. What are the strategic choices you think useful for the future?

Alliances, coalitions, actions (lobby, protests, campaigns...)

**SECTION 3**

**URBAN DIMENSION**

*1.* Does the urban dimension influence your representation activity?

2. Is your presence in big cities strategic?

3. What are the main useful urban contexts for building and strengthen your association network and membership?

*4.* Are you planning to improve your presence in specific urban events/places?

**NOTES**

1. Can you suggest me some interesting organisations (in term of representativeness and innovation) which represent Independent Professionals in Germany (especially but not only those based in Berlin?)
2. What are the main official documents of your organisation which can help me to understand the main choices and strategies of your organisation?
3. Can you give me a list of European and national coalitions/institutional tables/networks/campaigns in which your organisation is involved in?
4. Can you give me a list of the most interesting German associations you consider strategic for future coalitions and/or which are playing an important role in the same field of your organisation (Independent professional in general and/or in specific sectors)?