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Title: Social Worker Unionism: Obstacles and Opportunities in the Interaction between Trade Unions and Self-Organised Groups of Educational Experts in Italy

Abstract

In recent times, several self-organised networks of workers have arisen in the Italian labour movements. These groups share some characteristics with new social movements, but they are anchored in labour-related issues and often compete with trade unions for the representation of a particular group of workers. The relationship between self-organised groups and trade unions largely depends on the identity of the latter, embedded in its history and influencing its strategy. Having a logic of action and a network of alliance more close to the social movements, self-organised groups of workers might more easily switch a particular contention from a labour to a social and political issues. This can endow workers with new resources of power, enabling the exchange between social consent and working conditions improvement. The political exchange in fact has been considered mainly in the tripartite agreement at the institutional level, but it is possible to resort to it in specific labour struggles in the private sector as well, under certain conditions. The dynamics related to the self-organised groups of workers can represent an effective empirical field for an in-depth study of the interaction among these different subjects, the obstacles and the opportunities of their alliance.

This paper is based on a case study on the mobilisations in the socio-educational sector in Bologna between 2011 and 2016 and in particular on the events tied to the professional figure of the educational expert (educatori). The privatisation of social services in Italy is a topic comprising of effectively social claims, the increasing importance of the subcontracted work in the public services and its impact on the labour standards. The aim of the research is to contribute to the debate on the crisis of representation, trying to integrate Industrial Relations and Social Movements discipline in order to open new horizons for labour movement revitalisation and social change.
Introduction

Recently the crisis of representation and the increasing skepticism toward trade unions has contributed to the arising of groups of workers organizing beyond the traditional channels. These groups share some characteristics with new social movements, but they are anchored on labour-related issues and often compete with trade unions for the representation of a particular group of workers. The relationship between self-organised groups and trade unions largely depends on the identity of the latter, embedded in its history and influencing its strategy (Fredge and Kelly, 2003). The Italian trade unions traditionally rely on institutional power, given by the role of the social pacts in their contemporary history, by means of which they put in place a strategy of political exchange (Pizzorno 1977, Regini 2000). In the last two decades, Italian trade unions have experienced a dramatic decrease in terms of institutional power, losing their attractiveness as counterpart in the negotiation of the labour and social reforms. Even if the conditions for the political exchange have been lacking, the institutional path dependence still influence their strategy. This is the reason why Italian trade unions have difficulties or are not interested in interacting and collaborating with social movements and self-organised groups of workers (Fredge & Kelly, 2004). Yet, the history of Italian trade unionism has also been characterised by a deep relationship with social movements, especially during the cycle of protests of ‘70s.

The political exchange strategy has been considered mainly at the institutional level for analysing the dynamics of the tripartite concertation. Recently, it has been argued that the political exchange can represent an effective strategy also in the labour market and in particular in the public sector, whenever the conflict becomes large enough to involve public opinion (Perez, 2012). In this case, the reputation of the counterpart and the guarantee of social peace can represent an incentive to negotiate better labour conditions. The argument this paper will put forward is that the alliance between social movements and trade unions can result effectively in creating the conditions for a political exchange. On the one hand, social movements are oriented to direct action and can have an important mobilising capacity. On the other hand, trade unions are the only subject entitled to negotiate long-term labour rights with the employer. Social movements and trade unions are here conceived as actors composing the enlarged labour movement in which different subjects with different identities interact. This perspective would overcome the fracture between the “old” social movements and “new” social movements heading toward replacing trade unions. The main research questions are how trade unions and social movements interact in a scenario of institutional path dependence as the Italian example, and what the obstacles and the incentives are to an alliance between them. The radical trade unions are assumed to be closer to the social movements because of the similar logic of action and repertoire of contention
largely concurring in shaping their identity. The self-organised groups of workers can constitute a good field of investigation for their intrinsic peculiarity, being subject which go beyond the dichotomy of “old” and “new” social movements.

Starting from this theoretical framework, this paper analyse the mobilisations in the public socio-educational sector in Bologna between 2011 and 2016 and focuses in particular on the events tied to the professional figure of the educational expert (educatore). This sector presents several peculiar aspects, resuming the dynamics of privatisation of the welfare in the country, the impact of outsourcing on labour conditions and the chance to switch easily from a labour issue to a social one. The budget limitations imposed by the austerity policies have led local authorities to outsource the management of welfare services to social cooperatives, which compete in the public sector on the base of a balance between quality and cost of the services provided. The educational experts work in the field of disability and social marginalisation and represent one of the most difficult position to represent among the social workers because of its high degree of precarity. Social cooperation is an important sector in the province of Bologna, containing 8,000 workers employed in the outsourced public services. There, two episodes of budget cutting resulted in the emergence of two different movements of self-organised groups of educational experts. This research has been conducted through the participant observation of meetings and mobilisations conducted by trade unions and self-organised workers from November 2015 to May 2016, 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with the activists of self-organised groups and trade unionists.

This paper will develop according to the following structure: in the first section, it will discuss the main literature on the sub-contracted work and the trade unions strategies drawn by both industrial relations and social movements literature; in the second section the perceptions of the educational experts on their working conditions will be described, based on the interviews collected; the third section will trace back the contention regarding the socio-educational sector from 2011 to 2016 (starting from the emergence of the first self-organised group of educational experts) focusing in particular on the logic of action and repertoire of contention of the different actors involved; in the fourth section, there will be an analysis of the mutual perception of the actors involved with the aim to detect the main variables influencing the interaction among them. Lastly, in the conclusion there will be an overview of the factors that affect the interaction between trade unions and self-organised groups of workers.
The traditional way of representing labour has been challenged by several processes of socio-economic nature. The larger access of women and migrants to the labour market and the flexibility of the latter resulted in the demise of the “average worker” (the male bread-winner employed in industry on an open-ended base) and the emergence of new categories of workers. The fragmentation of the labor process, the subcontracting of work in industry, as well as in services and in the public sector, further challenged the system of representation based on the clear identification of the counterpart in employment relations. The declining influence of trade unions and the difficulties they face in the new scenario bolstered the emergence of new subjects with a variety of aims, including to fill a representational gap or to take over the supposed unsatisfactory trade union action.

The spreading of subcontracted work is a phenomenon making the post-industrial labour model even more complex. According to Wills (2009), the fragmentation of the labour process resulting from outsourcing can make more difficult the process of awareness and empowerment of the workforce because of the spatial and emotional distance from the employer. The workers are more vulnerable because they can easily be displaced or replaced if they are not compliant. At the same time, the increase of labour costs could create a decrease of competitiveness in the marketplace and consequently the risk of job losses. In the public sector, the outsourcing of public services has been the means for complying with the “new public management” doctrine, arguing the profitability of a business-oriented strategy in the public services in order to foster efficacy and effectiveness. In the practice, the main aim of the local authorities outsourcing public services is managing the budget (Savas, 2000). Generally, outsourcing has represented a way to avoid the application of the public collective agreement which is more favorable to the workers in terms of protections and benefits, and to obtain more job flexibility while reducing the workforce (Mori, 2015). Cunningham and James (2014) study the phenomenon of public service outsourcing in the health sector in the UK though a longitudinal perspective (from 2002 to 2009), noticing a dramatic worsening of labour conditions affecting subcontracted workers after the financial crisis and a convergence towards more “business-like” price-oriented model, with more competition and less guarantee of the quality of the service compared to the past. In comparative research on the labour implication of public outsourced services in Italy, UK and Denmark, Mori (2015) argues this implication depends on the national institutions of employment relations. Dimensions such as the application of the social clause and collective agreement, redundancies, and wage rate appear to differ largely in the three countries, while
the workload increase seemed to be the only common trend. Cunningham and James (2014) consider a contrasting perspective of Greer et al (2011), according to whom the employment implications of public service outsourcing depend on the nature of the funding regimes involved rather than the national employment system. In this view, the authors argue, a strategy that goes beyond the workplace can be more effective in influencing fundings arrangements.

In the aforementioned study of Wills (2009), the author considers the subcontracted employment as a relevant field in which experimenting strategies of alliance between trade unions and the local community, go beyond the workplace (Tattersall, 2010). The concept of “going beyond the workplace” is one of the foundations of the social movement unionism approach. Even if the social movement component of trade unionism is a longstanding concept (Crozier, 1963), social movement unionism was first theorised through the studies of the alliance between trade unions and social movements in the process of democratisation in South Africa (Webster and Lambert, 1988). Social movement unionism has been lately extended to Western democracies and associated in particular with the organizing strategies spreading at the end of the 1980s in the US, consisting of strong campaigns of unionisation with the involvement of the community. Some authors suggest that the switch of this concept from the global South to global the North made it vague (Robinson, 2000), resulting in strategies mainly oriented towards the membership increase (Sullivan, 2010) in which social movements have a purely instrumental role in fulfilling trade union goals. While some author conceives the social movement unionism as an alternative model to the so-called “business unionism”, a different vision stresses the movement dimension embedded in all the forms of trade unionism, and the need of reassert such underlying feature (Von Holdt, 2002; Fairbrother, 2008). The “trade unions as social movement” perspective (Fairbrother, 2008) would allow one to overcome the dualism present in a part of social movement literature considering trade unionism as the “old” social movement bound to be replaced by “new” identity-based movements, making possible in turn to consider labour movements as entities composed by subjects -as trade unions, social movements and other actors- with a different logic of action and repertoire of contention. The concept of repertoire of contention has been elaborated by Tilly (1978) referring to the concrete actions defining a style of mobilising coming from a certain process of the learning and spreading of knowledge. The logic of action could be considered as the reason leading the action: the objective of the claim. In the Olsonian logic of collective action the answer was given by a rational reasoning of convenience. The same criteria of rationality was applied in the field of the representation of the economic interest, where “free riding” groups can emerge with the aim of representing particularistic interest, competing and challenging the encompassing trade
unions representative of general interests (Olson, 1969). Other authors integrate the concept of collective identity in the framework of the collective action, especially with regards to social movements (Poletta and Jasper, 2001). The arising of self-organised groups of workers is a phenomenon integrating a discourse tied to the representation of labour and the dynamics typical of the social movements.

The way trade unions interact with self-organised groups of workers and whether they ally or not among themselves largely depend on the composition of the enlarged labour movement in a given context. A wide literature is developed around the concept of trade union identity driving its actions. One of the most important contributions on the topic is the Hyman’s model of trade union action considering the identity as the independent variable of the trade union strategy, which can result in a different combination according to the orientation toward the market, class and society (Hyman, 2001). In their social model for trade union action, Fredge and Kelly modify and integrate this model by considering the institutional framework as the independent variable and the trade union identity as the intervening variable framing the trade union strategy (Fredge and Kelly, 2003). The logic of action can be considered as an important indicator of the identity of an organisation. Analysing the effort of revitalisation undertaken by the major Italian trade union (Cgil) in the last few years, Ambra (2013) attributes the strategic orientation of the union to the different logic of action, referring in particular to the theory of Zan (1992) and Pizzorno (1978). Openly inspired by the “trade unions dilemma” of Regini (1980) Zan detected several dilemma that the association representing economic interest have to face, resulting in as many dichotomous logics of action. It appears particularly relevant the first dilemma regarding a tension between a logic of influence vs a logic of membership. On the one hand, Zan argues that, according to the logic of membership, strengthening of the internal democracy in the decisional process will bring the member closer to the association. On the other hands, paradoxically, the more an organisation is structured around articulated mechanisms allowing the direct participation of its member, the more difficult it will be to synthesise the rank-and-file demand in order to result in influence. A more vertical leadership and a system of delegation sacrifice to some extent the internal democracy and the logic of membership. However, it can respond better to the logic of external influence. An association will choose its own equilibrium point between these two logics according to its goal.

In his research on the Italian wave of contention in the 1970s, Pizzorno (1978) argues the occurrence of two different logics of action put in place respectively by trade unions and social movement in the two year period of mobilization 1968-70. The logic undertaken by the “new collective identities” is the willing of being recognised. This leads to
high levels of conflict in which the protests have new, not negotiable contents. Indeed, the scope of the conflict is represented by the conflict itself in order to strengthen the internal cohesion and, consequently, the collective identity. The logic of “association” of trade unions is based on consolidated relationship allowing for the delegation. The participation is expressed by means of the act of registration, which give rise to standard procedure. At that time, Italian trade unions were able to ensure the support of their own base and interact with social movements by calibrating their strategies and alternating the two logics of actions, promoting and restricting the participation, centralising and decentralising their action according to the perceived convenience. According to Regini (1980), the new balance of opportunities and resource availability was the main reason for orienting Italian trade unions decision to switch their strategy at the end of 1970s toward wage moderation and conflict containment, instead of institutional participation. In a more recent contribution, Regini (2000) applies the concept of “political exchange” to these practices experienced by several European countries in the phase of transition between the culmination of the Keynesian welfare states and its crises. The political exchange is a further important theoretical contribution coming from the analysis of Pizzorno on the Italian labour movement of 1970s (Pizzorno, 1977). The author detects three types of exchanges taking place at different levels and to different modalities in the labor market. The first one takes place in an “atomistic market”, where the labor relationships between the employer and the employee is merely individual and the employee does not have a strong bargaining power. The second is a scenario of “collective negotiation market”, where labour is organised and the bargaining power increases, due to the possibility of inflicting a damage on the employer by means of the interruption of production. The last type of exchange takes place in the so-called “political market”, where the counterpart is a political administration and the object of the exchange is represented by the threat to create social unrest undermining the political consensus. The political exchange practice represents a clear orientation toward a logic of organisation and influence. The resulting increasing distance with the rank-and-files can boost the emergence of new subjects aimed to directly take over the trade union action following a logic of movement. According to Culpepper and Reagan (2014) the political exchange is no longer an attractive option for the government who used to resort to it. Compared to the past, trade unions now lack the power given by the “stick” of the strike threat, which has become less and less effective, nor the “carrot” of the concertation of economic reforms because traditional trade unions are less representative of the categories affected by such reforms.

The concept of political exchange has been recently used as well in the labour market. In a case study on the labour conflict in the shipyard of the Spanish province of
Cadiz, Perez (2012) argues that the political exchange can be apply also in the field of the labor market and not just in the frame of the concertation and tripartite agreement. It could be particularly effective resorting to this strategy in specific labour struggles in the private sector as well as when economic pressure and strike threat are not effective and the scope of the conflict is large enough to create a change of public impact. In this research Perez considered the role of radical unions in increasing the level of conflict creating a case of high public impact, allowing the formation of a strategy of political exchange which was revealed to be effective in the containment of the negative measures affecting the workers involved.

While traditional trade unions are largely path dependent, radical trade unions often develop their action and identity by opposing the strategy of containment of the traditional trade unions, having a logic of action closer to the social movement. According to Fredge and Kelly (2004), traditional Italian trade unions don’t resort to strategies of coalition building with other subject because they still rely on an institutional power.

In Italy, the phenomenon of the arising of self-organised groups has been studied especially in reference to professional, knowledge and precarious groups of workers. (Ciarini, Di Nunzio and Pratelli, 2013). The professional workers have been largely affected by the Italian labour market reform of 2002, deeply modifying the traditional assets of autonomous work and the access to the welfare arrangements. In this case, the lack of trade union representation is due to their essential aim in representing employees. Other self-organised subjects are distinct for being extremely critical towards traditional trade unions and more oriented towards a radical militant action. It is the case, for instance, with San Precario, a network of self-organised precarious workers resulting from the development of the Chainworkers collective, which is one of the founders of the European platform of precarious workers EuroMayDay (Murgia and Selmi, 2011; Colleoni, Marino and Galletto, 2014). San Precario was lately involved in a specific large labour issue with a large-scale lay-off resulting from the outsourcing of the communication company Omnia, in which it took over the trade union role by promoting legal action and protests. According to Ciarini et al (2013), these groups don’t arise necessarily in order to fill a representational gap or to answer to the lack of protections. Thus, it is possible to operate a rough distinction among these self-organised groups according to their scope, namely whether they are specifically addressed to represent a category of workers or supporting larger political instances. Moreover, the authors argue that these groups don’t refuse necessarily the system of delegating representation, but rather they search for larger democratic systems for legitimising representation by enlarging the participation of their members and activists for a more inclusive decision making process. It can be worthwhile testing whether the aim of self-organised groups of workers is effectively in line with what these authors argue. Moreover, it
The privatisation of social services in Italy is a topic comprising of effectively social claims, the increasing importance of the cooperative associations in the processes of outsourcing and its impact on the labour standards.

The Italian North region of Emilia Romagna represents a paradigmatic case in the country for its role in the social cooperation with the outsourcing of the local public services. Traditionally embedded in a left-win political culture, the welfare expenditure of the region used to be one of the higher ones of the country (Fargion, 1997). The social cooperation represented a model of local development boosted by such political culture and the region is the headquarters of some of the most important Italian cooperatives and cooperative associations. All around the country, outsourcing of the public services represented the common answer of the local government to the public budget limitation imposed by the national government. In the province of Bologna, almost all public services are outsourced to social cooperatives and the sector of the social cooperation contains 8,000 workers, mainly employed in care services, kindergarten and socio-educational services. The socio-educational sector comprises a series of services like extra-scholastic services and services addressed to minors and adults affected by disabilities or in a condition of social marginality. This category of worker is generally called “educational experts” (educatori). Compared to other groups of social workers, the representation of the educational experts differ widely. While care workers and especially the kindergarden workers are strongly unionised, the educational experts are more difficult to mobilise. This can be attributed to several reasons. First of all, the educational experts are difficult to define from a legal standpoint, due to legislative gaps on the matter. In the national landscape there is a wide variety of professional figures in charge of various tasks working also as educational experts, often representing a specificity of the territory in which they are employed. Even if the definition of this figure can be traced back to 1984, up until now no specific degree was required in order to access the profession. One other important aspect marking the difficulties of the educational experts in terms of representation is the higher degree of precarity. In the province of Bologna most of the contracts provide hourly-based payment, but the working time can be reduced for reasons unrelated to the workers willing, affecting their continuity of salary (as in, for instance, weather conditions imply the closure of the school). The job tenure is strictly
related to the awarding of a public call for tender. The social clause in the sectoral collective agreement of the social cooperation states that the workers have to be relocated by the cooperative in which they work in case of change of the trustee of the services. Nevertheless, sometimes the job continuity is difficult to guarantee. The cooperative cannot employ their workers in other services if there are no other job available. It implies a further vulnerability of the workers, which clearly emerge from evidence collected. On this respect, a key informant argues as follows:

We are all precarious workers. I mean, even if I am hired under an open-ended contract, the cooperative for which I work is always concerned to the dynamic of the public call for tender. So, if the cooperative lose the management of the service, it’s a problem to relocate me because there is no longer the job, or just few positions are available. If I have always behaved in a certain way, reflecting the mission of the cooperative, maybe I will be among those whom will be relocated. Otherwise, if I expose myself against the cooperative, if I have a polemic attitude, in the selection of the people to relocate… (most likely I won’t be chosen)

The precarity and the vulnerability of the workers is also given by particular statuses of the people employed in a cooperative. Most of them are actually member associated with the cooperative and for this kind of professional status, a pejorative normative is apply. Lastly, the difficulty in mobilising the socio-educational workers comes from the relationship with the people they work with and with their families, which boost a servile disposition and even difficulties in perceive themselves as workers. The lack of a precise and uniform definition of this professional figure is often considered as an obstacle for the awareness of the educational experts. This is effectively summarized by a key informants statement:

Often driven by the kindness towards the users, the educational expert accepts tasks and responsibilities that go beyond his role resulting in the exploitation and underestimation of this professional figure (…). If they were aware of their professionality, of their role, of their tasks, this would happen much less

It is possible to distinguish three main professional situations in the fragmented scenario of the educational expert. In the first one, the educational expert is entitled to work with persons with serious disabilities or drugs addiction in the local public health sector. He has a specific title (educatore professionale) gained through a university education in the faculty of medicine, or by means of a path of equivalence established by a law dated 1999 regulating the access to the title for people with a certain number of years of experience up to that
moment. In the second one, the educational expert has another title gained through a specific degree in the faculty of education (educatore socio-cultural) allowing him to work just in the socio-educational services dealing with social marginality, excluding those in the local sanitary unit or regarding serious disability (while the educatore professionale can work in both). Such division is extremely blurring and the normative is subject to various interpretations in the different regions. As a consequence, in the last scenario the educational expert doesn’t have any of the previous title, but he is still employed in one of the socio-educational services mentioned. The normative void in this regard has created an heterogeneous situation both at national and local level, resulting in the increasing vulnerability of the educational experts because of the lack of precise rules. According to many of the informants, currently the normative on the professional title is being applied in a more strict way in order to cut workplaces, by restricting the labour market of those without specific titles.

In this scenario, two different self-organised groups arose in the province of Bologna, following two different episodes of budget cutting in the socio-educational services. Educatori uniti contro i tagli (Educational expert united against the cut - Educir-) born in 2011 protesting for the budget cut in the district of Casalecchio del Reno, and Rete degli educatori e delle educatrici di Bologna (Network of educational experts of Bologna -Rete educatori-) born in January 2015 after a cooperative won a competitive tender for the management of the extra scholastic socio-educational services of Bologna with a decrease of the 11% below the base bid.

Both groups are currently still active in different forms and interact between each other and with the trade unions in different ways. Thus, the representation of the socio-educational sector in the province of Bologna is formed by a plurality of subjects pursuing different strategies and interacting in a discontinuous way. The strategies of the different actors will be analysed by focusing on two central variables- the different logics of action and repertoire of contention.-

The contentions in the socio-educational sector in the province of Bologna (2011-2016)

In the description and analysis of the mobilizations occurring in the socio-educational sector in the province of Bologna between the 2011 and 2016 it will focus on two main dimensions: the repertoire of contention, by observing the specific action undertook; and the logic of action, reported to the empirical observation by considering the objective of the mobilization, the subject to whom it is addressed and the extent of requests claimed.
The two self-organised groups arose in a concrete situation of emergency in order to face consistent budget cuts in the socio-educational services. The different lengths of their experience in terms of period of activity implied a process of evolution in terms of object and logic of action, but they appear to have been different since the beginning of their existence. In the case of Educit, two representatives of the main trade union present in the sector at provincial level - Cgil and Usb- were part of the group and were involved in the negotiations with the cooperative and the institutions against the budget cut in 2011. According to the declaration of the key informants, in this instance Cgil refused to call for a strike, so the group organised with help from Cgil and Usb a parade directed to government of the district of Casalecchio with the participation of the association of parents of the recipients of the services, attended by almost 500 people. Following the mobilization and the negotiations, the budget cutting was strongly reduced at that moment. Educit undertook a sort of “branding” of itself in terms of symbols and repertoire of contention. They created an official symbol of the group: a panda with the scissors, symbolising the educational expert as “at-extinction-risk” because of the budget-cut, successfully developing small merchandizing to promote the mobilisation. The activists of Educit stressed the importance of the transverse nature of the group. They consider the lack of a defined political ideology as an advantage in order to not be traced back to other subjects or political forces, being consequently manipulated. Generally, they appear not to be inclined toward a radical style of protest and they rather define the style of their protests as inclusive and original. A recurring story emerging from interviews to the activists is the building of a snow-panda in front of the city council of Casalecchio, in order to protest the unpaid hours of the educational experts caused by the closure of the schools due to snow. Two activists summarise effectively the general trend of the action of Educit:

You should be the least ideological you can, having the necessity to bring into this path a lot of persons whom are not really incline to this kind of actions. I would be willing to occupy the city council, but some kind of political actions scare most of the people (...). We had the necessity to be inclusive, of having as much people as we can. So we were creative, we did original things, effective but inclusive actions for attracting people... in my opinion this is also the reason why we are still alive as group after all these years.

You should do nice and ironic things, when there are not so many persons and they are not able to mobilise the mass... I’ll make you an example, I’ve interviewed a famous local showman who in a minute and half told me who is the educational expert. He told me so many deep and beautiful things... then I have transcript the interview and I have posted it on facebook. It was liked by more than 6000 persons. So that message reached 6000 persons, while a manifestation or a sit-in with a bunch of people probably wouldn’t had the
same effect. You should also make the sit-in, but in this historical moment getting hit by the police who is not open toward the movement is very dangerous, you risk to be manipulated and strengthen your enemy.

With the end of the contention, once the budget cut was declared suspended, the group started to change its efforts toward the creation of an identity of the educational expert at a local and national level. At the local level, from 2011 to the present, they undertook a project with a local radio consisting in the weekly broadcasting of a program called “Ladies and gentleman, the welfare disappeared” where they discuss issues related to the local welfare with a focus on the figure of the educational expert. The radio represented a way to give a continuity to the group and to spread their message on the defense of a good quality local welfare service and education, with a focus on their profession. With the same general aim, Educit has also collaborated with the group Rete educatori for the creation of guidelines for a public call on socio-educational services in the province of Bologna, which they have promoted at the institutional level. In the promotion of this type of action, they stress the importance of being professional and anchored on concrete claims. One of the recurring statements about this attitude collected among the key informants is summerised as the following:

*It’s important to understand the rules on which this field is based on, in order to be more incisive on specific point. Otherwise, it’s an ideological battle which can be manipulated.*

At the national level, starting in 2014 Educit developed a network called *Rete Nazionale Operatori Sociali* (National Network of Social Operator - Renos) which was formed by other self-organised groups of social workers from all around the country and especially from the North and the Center of Italy. Renos was initially formed and founded by self-organised groups of workers coming from different areas of the welfare sector sharing the problems tied to the subcontracting of the public services with a preponderant presence of workers from the socio-educational services. Beyond the general aim of defending high quality public welfare, Renos deals with issues strictly related to the working condition of the social workers, especially those working in the socio-educational sector. One of the first documents produced was a platform for the social work, representing a new ideal collective contract which should simplify the contractual heterogeneity characterizing the sector and creating a large discrimination in terms of working conditions for the same working task. The platform also makes references to the need of an official recognition of social work as an “arduous work”, making it subject to the referring normative. With the time, the educational expert became the central professional figure in the political agenda of the...
network, which developed the purpose of representing this category of workers. Another fundamental topic on which Renos is particularly active is the discussion related to the law on the definition of the criteria of access of the profession (the so-called “Iori law”). They established a direct contact with the congresswoman proposing the law and they participated in the parliamentary audit with other associations of educational experts. The most recent action of Renos is an online campaign for changing some provisions of the law regarding the transitory rules which would be to the detriment of the educational expert without the adequate professional title.

The second and younger group dated January 2015, Rete educatori, arose after a meeting called by Cgil for discussing the consequences of the change of trustee in charge of the after-school socio-educational service in the city of Bologna. There, the workers of the same cooperative met for the first time all together and started a process of mobilisation, distancing themselves immediately from the trade union. A key informant told about the discourse he made during that meeting:

*The point of view of Cgil was… “Let’s negotiate, let’s try to take back what we had before”. It sounds like what we had before was ok, but this is not true, it was still not ok. I said… let’s block the city council, let’s show our opposition. We are not gonna stand with this, they didn’t consider us, the educational experts, in managing and writing this call…(*) Cgil assumed a wait-and-see attitude, they tried to tone down the issue.*

As suggested by a activist, the educational experts broke into the city council interrupting a reunion and denouncing the large budget cut and the modality of assigning these services, asking for a more participative process in defining the public call on socio-educational services. The city council set up a technical panel on the issue, but they only met once. After the new trustee renounced to management of services due to a lack of resources, the cooperative previously in charge of such service was entrusted again. Even if a budget-cut of a different entity was still foreseen (6% from the base bid instead of the 11%), the cooperative declared its availability in absorbing personally the costs without affecting the educational experts working conditions. With the conclusion of the contention, the group decided to continue its activity and organised a series of public assemblies centered on the topic of the public call for tender of welfare services and on the role of the educational expert in society. During the assembly, and a few months later the contentions, they kept in contact with the case-workers of Bologna and allied with them against the privatization of the service announced by the municipality. They called for a strike and a parade towards the city council with 500 people with the support of the union Usb, having as an effect, the postponing of the privatisation to the 2017. Rete educatori decided then to create a different
subject together with the case workers called *Coordinamento lavoratori del sociale di Bologna* (Coordination of the Social workers of Bologna) in order to maintain separately and in parallel their group dealing specifically with the educational experts issues. In the summer of 2015, *Rete educatori* developed a strong tie with the housing movement of Bologna and organised play activities with the children living in the squatted housing. As already mentioned, they worked with *Educit* in the creation and promotion of the guidelines on the public call for socio-educational services. In 2016, *Rete educatori* disbanded and the educational experts have continued to collaborate into the Coordination of the Social Workers.

In the period considered, between 2011 and 2016, the two trade unions locally representative of the sector undertook other actions addressed to the social workers and educational experts. The Federation of Public workers affiliated with *Cgil* (*Fp*) is the main representative union on the sector at provincial level, followed by the area of Social Cooperation of Usb, which obtained the representativeness in the sector through legal action, as it was initially revoked in 2012 by the new administration. *Usb* is a rank-and-file union born in 2007 to the division from the public sector workers from the union *Cub*. *Usb* strengthen its presence locally in the sector, up to a further scission in 2016 leading to the born of a new union, *Sgb*, and the consequent lost of a part of the affiliated.

*Fp* and *Usb* were involved in the negotiations regarding the budget-cut in the district of Casalecchio, but after the conclusion of the contention the relationship with the group became less cohesive. Starting to 2015, *Fp* started a process of negotiations with the representatives of the cooperative association and consortium with a platform for an integrative agreement at the provincial level enclosing issues common to all workers of the social cooperation. The main requests of the platform were the upgrading of the contractual level for the kindergarten workers, a fixed monthly-based wage for all social workers, and an increase of the lunch voucher. Given by the refusal of the cooperative associations to consider any economic request, *Fp* called for an assembly of all the workers within the social cooperation of the province, attended by some 650 persons. The assembly delegated *Fp* to organize a 8-hours strike, which was divided in two sets of 4 hours. The first 4-hour strike was called for the 3rd of March 2016. The educational experts and the kindergarten workers turned out to be the central groups participating in the strike, with an estimated of 70% of the participation, due to their not being subject to the law on the minimum essential services, unlike, for instance the care-giver workers. In response to the persistent indisposition of the counterpart in the aftermath of the strike, *Fp* started to organize a series of flash mob outside the work hours displaying banners rallying for the provincial contract. These took place in front of the headquarter of the cooperative association. They also started a campaign on
social networks and experimented with innovative strategies of pressure by trying to undermine the reputation of the cooperative association. The key informants of Fp often underline the concept of staying in the limit of legality.

We made a sit-in in the place in which there was a celebration for the ten years of the consortium of cooperatives entrusted of most of the in-home care services here in Bologna. We didn’t want to spoil the party, but we want them to understand, in the limit of the law, of course, that the provincial contract is something important for 8,000 workers of the social cooperation and we will use all the lawful way for continue to speak up for our willing

In this moment we need alliances for convincing the employers, we are trying to encircle them and who represent them. We agreed with the delegates of avoiding situations which could put walls up…

In the period of reference, Usb undertook a strategy of claiming in the socio-educational services resorting to some radical action addressed mainly to the public institutions. Starting to 2011, Usb organised a series of protest against the hive-off of the public call for the extra-scholastic services and the summer camp for children, resulting in a sharp discontinuity of wage and working time and of the educational expert. The typical way of acting was the interruption of the city council reunions, sit-in protests in front of the public institutions, and occupation of the city council. Usb was not considering the cooperative association as counterparts against which to address their claims. For similar reasons, Usb didn’t support the platform of Fp for the provincial contract. A key informant of Usb explains this choice in the following statements:

We have never mobilised against the cooperative association and I don’t think it was necessary. We work on entrusted public services. Every year the municipality decide how many hour of educational support are needed for the minors with a certificate cognitive impairment. And every year it happens that, for instance, a boy having the right to 10 hours of educational support has suddenly the half of the hourly coverage with the new criteria. So, if before three educational experts were needed, now two are enough. In a case like this, I can’t see the point in considering the cooperative association as my counterpart.

The cooperative for which I work on the extra-scholastic services recognized the “territorial retributive element” (an efficiency-rating hourly-based), so the integrative provincial contract doesn’t have any sense, also considering that the sectoral collective agreement has been expired since four years.
Usb was particularly critical with the administration of the city and during the electoral campaign of 2016 they addressed several protests directly to the figure of the mayor, candidate for the second electoral term for the Democratic Party, contesting its welfare policy and the working conditions of the educational experts. The union supported in different way both groups of educational experts, participating in the negotiations for the budget-cut in Casalecchio in 2011 and calling the strike against the privatization of the social assistance on the behalf of Rete educatori. In 2016, an internal division resulted in the creation of a new rank-and-file union, Sgb, provoking member losses and involving also the socio-educational sector. It was not possible at the moment of the data collection analyse of the impact of such division on the strategy of Usb.

Perception and interaction among the actors

The different logics of action and repertoire of contention are assumed to be the main features shaping the perception of the actors and the consequent choice to interact and ally among themselves. The relationship between Cgil and all the other actors was for sure the most controversial. The political ties between the local administration of Bologna and Cgil was a consolidated common vision among the activists interviewed from Usb, Educit and Rete educatori. In particular, Cgil was considered as traditionally close to the Democratic Party, both at the national and especially at territorial level. This view was sharper for the rank-and-file unionist of Usb, which were considering the Democratic Party particularly close to the cooperative associations and consequently depicted Cgil as part of a block of interests in power responsible for the privatisation of the welfare and for the worsening of the labour conditions for the educational experts. Thus, the choice of Cgil of negotiate with the central cooperative without addressing strong claims to the local administration was traced back to reasons of political nature. The choice of dividing the 8-hours strike in two tranche was interpreted as a strategy of self-containment, in order not to damage the local administration nor the cooperative associations.

The visions of the trade unions were different in the two groups of educational experts. Both were sharing the concept of trade unions as a “tool” for the workers and in both groups there was a delegate of Usb, but in Educit emerged a more skeptical view towards the trade unions. On the one hand, Cgil was considered an unreliable ally especially after some episodes in which the group was excluded from the discussion of relevant issues they had contributed to bringing to the institutional level. On the other hand, the strategy of Usb was considered sometimes too radical and rigid. Nevertheless, both Rete Educatori and Educit supported the strike called by Fp on the provincial contract writing a joint document.
Educit invited the unionists of Fp to participate to their radio program in order to promote the strike. The reason of the support on the strike called by Cgil was the trasversal nature of the group, defining itself as a multiplier of the struggles.

In Fp a group of unionist and delegates with a background on educational experts was particularly active in the negotiations. They were aware of such vision of political collusion but they were refusing to be personally close to the Democratic Party and orienting their strategy according to political reason, without denying a general tradition of privileged relationship between the Cgil and the Democratic Party. A Fp delegate states:

Clearly as in all the structures there are different cores and among those there are also who is still very close to this party (the Democratic Party)(…). So, this tie has been true for a period, but I also think that no one would deny it because it was so evident that you cannot hide it. But it is also true that, after our group of delegates and trade union officers of the social cooperation started to grow, we started to talk about the fact that Cgil have to take a position on the labour condition of the workers of the cooperatives. Especially for the lawlessness emerged, Cgil cannot turn a blind eye to it.

The group of educational experts of Fp was the main promoter of the platform on the provincial contract, with the double aim of improving the working conditions of the workers of the social cooperation, trying to embrace all the different professional figures involved, and to loosen the bond with the Democratic Party. Even if most of the content proposed by both groups were appreciated and shared by the unionists of Fp, there was interest in creating a stronger connection with the self-organised groups of educational experts. The latter were considered as too small groups for being representative and lacked of any power of being influential, nor had they the need to be accountable and undertake a far-sighted strategy in order to hold together a consistent number of affiliates. According to Fp, the self-organised groups wanted to affirm their presence by creating a conflict without specific labour claims. The self-organised groups were perceived by Fp as political entity lacking a professional awareness and concrete request for improving their labour condition.

Even if Rete educatori and Educit were close in terms of contents and goals, they often defined themselves as distinct, although they collaborated in certain instance. Rete educatori defined itself as a movement and after the main contention started to deal with general issues related to local welfare. Corresponding with the end of the electoral term of the administration of Bologna, several squatted housing locations were evicted by the police. The conspicuous presence of families with children demanded the intervention of the case-workers, already active in the Coordination of the Social workers with the educational experts. This interwining of events brought the group to collaborate with the housing
movement, organizing play activities with the children in the squatted housing and supporting the protest against the eviction. They elaborated a larger set of overly general issues which presented difficulties to negotiating an end-goal, but they also collaborated with Educit in the drafting of guidelines for public calls of socio-educational services. Among the activists of Rete Educatori there were different points of view about the way to interact with Educit. For some they were considered an occasional ally, a different and more structured subject with a weaker mobilizing power; for someone else, Educit was a twin group and a fusion between the two would have be a good strategy to concentrate the respective effort on their common goals.

Educit perceived Rete educatori as too ideological and less pragmatic for its style of protest. They were lacking in transversality being consequently at-risk-manipulation. Their style of protest, like the interruption of the city council, was viewed as too radical and sectarian, far from their declared inclusive nature. Even if Educit supported the strike against the privatisation of the social assistance, no-one in the group participated to it, blaming their abstinence from the strike on disagreement on logistic. During the contention of 2011, Educit allied with the association of the families of the recipients of the services, which participated in the events. They also made contact with other association of educational experts, colliding with the Association of Italian Educationalist and Educational Expert, representing specifically the educational path and standing against the educational experts without the professional title. Whereas they established an occasional relationship based on the information exchange with the National Association of Educational Experts, active at the national level in representing the educational expert with any professional title, they aimed to overcome the dualism of the professional title reiterated in the Iori law. The main channel of alliance was the one among the different groups of educational experts around the country in order to attempt to create a professional lobby force, without renouncing to their unstructured nature.

Where there is no urgency to respond to a concrete emergence involving the educational expert, the fragmentation of the action seems to prevail and the different actors playing in the arena of the socio-educational sector stay divided pursuing different objectives and interacting just on an occasional basis.

Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to explore the dynamic of representation and mobilisation in a peculiar sector, like the socio-educational sector of Bologna, and how the different subjects composing the labour movement choose to ally or not among each other
undertaking a strategy of political exchange in the labour market. The main hypothesis advanced was that the rank-and-file “radical” union most likely will ally with social movements because of their logic of action closer to the movements, while the traditional trade unions have less incentives because of their path dependency and still relying on an institutional power. The figures 1 and 2 (p. 21) summarise the configuration of the enlarged labour movement in its evolution over time according to the logic of action of the different actors involved. Cgil was the actor with the stronger logic of organization, for its consolidated structure, following a strategy aimed to influence the cooperative associations by including all the figures of the social cooperation in the platform for the provincial contract. Usb was following a logic closer to a movement even in a frame of consolidated organisation, mixing specific professional claiming to a larger political view on social rights. Rete educatori is the actor closest to a social movement for its clear inclination to direct action, its marked fluidity in the structure, and its tendency to enlarge the strict professional claims to other spheres of local welfare. Finally, Educit was more inclined to follow a logic of membership, competing for the representation of the educational experts and trying to increase in influence at the national level by allying with other groups around the country.

In the contention on the budget-cut in Casalecchio in 2011, Educit was a newborn movement with a different logic of action. At the same time, Cgil perceived alliance with such movements as a potentially effective strategy. The need for facing a concrete situation of emergence, the clear identification of the counterpart in the municipality responsible for the cut, and presence of a self-organised group of workers formed by delegates of Usb and Cgil pressing for a joint strategy, concurred to foster an alliance among the different subjects involved. The participation of the parents of the recipients of the services allowed a further increase in the power of the coalition, given by the resources of the external solidarity. This in turn allowed for a political exchange with the local government which was losing popularity and at that moment strongly helped to reduce the budget-cut. Similarly, the strike of Rete educatori with the case workers and Usb postponed the privatization of these services. Without a concrete contention, the fragmentation of strategies increased. The evolved nature of Educit toward a logic of membership brought into competition with the trade unions for the representation of the educational expert at the institutional level. The weak institutional power given by the lack of recognition of the group was not compensated by an associational power, namely the ability of mobilising people, nor to a power given by the external solidarity which was just partially developed, given by the discontinuity in the collaboration with other subjects. The creation of a national network suggests a more pronounced orientation towards a logic of membership because of the willingness to represent a specific group of workers by means of deeply democratic methods of decision.
making, as the assemblearism. The rank-and-file union seemed effectively more willing to ally with the self-organised group of workers, but the development of joint strategies was complicated by the logic of action undertaken by Educit in open competition with trade unions for the representation of this group of workers.

Fig. 1 Actors and Logic of Action (2011)  Fig. 2 Actors and Logic of Action (2015-2016)

It cannot be argued that a closeness in the logic of action corresponds necessarily to a closeness in the repertoire of contention. The table below summarises the main features shaping the strategies of the different actors involved. On the one hand, it seems that the subjects following a logic of movement are more inclined to resort to radical actions, meaning actions with a higher degree of conflict and not necessarily fully legal. It is the case of Usb, occupying the city council, and Rete educatori, openly supporting the squatted housing. On the other hand, the style of protest of Cgil and Educit is for some extent similar given the inclusive aim and the refusal to resort to unlawful action, even if their logic of action is largely distant. The logic of action appears consequently as the most relevant element defining the fragmentation of the labour movement on the socio-educational sector in the province of Bologna.

Tab. Repertoire of Contention and Logic of Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repertoire of contention</th>
<th>Rete Educatori</th>
<th>Usb</th>
<th>Educit</th>
<th>Cgil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strike (8 hours); Public assemblies; Play activities in the squatted housing</td>
<td>Parade; Strike (8 hours); Occupation of the City Council; Sit-in direct to public institutions and against the Mayor</td>
<td>Parade; Radio broadcasting; National Network of Educational Experts; Sit-in direct to public institutions; Online petition</td>
<td>Parade; Strike (4 hours); Flash Mob; Sit-in direct to cooperative associations; Social network campaign</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Logic of Action | Movement | Movement/Organisation | Movement/Membership | Organisation/Influence |
As mentioned at the beginning, according to Ciarini et al self-organised groups of workers don’t refuse necessarily a system based on the delegation but they rather demand for larger democratic procedures of detecting a leadership. Such statement seems just partially true in the case analysed. The skepticism towards trade unions and the arising of self-organised groups of workers appear more related to a question of transparency, democracy, and inclusiveness in the decision making. It reflects a logic of membership, aimed to represent accurately the interest of the members of the group by means of a democratic decisional system, and a logic of movement refusing the delegation because of a lack of consolidated relationship of trust.

The collaboration between self-organised groups of workers and trade unions can represent an answer to the crisis of representation on the one hand and can provide a tool in labour power on the other hand. The main idea developed in this paper is that, in particular circumstances, the decline of the institutional and structural power of labour can be compensated by the resources of the external solidarity. In particular, a coalition made of trade union and social movements could be able to provoke social unrest undermining the reputation of the counterpart of the contention and triggering a strategy of political exchange. The competing concepts emerged of movements vs institutions is actually just an apparent dichotomy. In his study on the Italian cycle of contention, Sidney Tarrow (1990) underlined the peculiarity of this country, distinguished by the large duration of the contentions and the result obtained in the enhancing of labour right at the institutional level. This was the effect of the role played by social movements and trade unions, which resulted to be both fundamental actors in the labour movement. Studying the dynamics of their alliance can contribute to the debate on the crisis of representation, trying to integrate Industrial Relations and Social Movements discipline in order to open new horizons for labour movement revitalisation and social change.
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