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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Pandemic Crisis, Italian Municipalities, and Community Resilience

Rossana Sampugnaro

University of Catania

Patrizia Santoro

University of Catania

ABSTRACT: The pandemic caused by Covid-19 has tested the resilience of public institutions, already burdened by a deep and complex crisis (political, economic, managerial). This crisis has revealed a discrepancy between the needs expressed by the community and the solutions adopted to satisfy them. This has been accompanied by a progressive worsening of decision-making efficiency and weak implementation capacity in a context of increasing environmental uncertainty. It is in local institutions, in particular, that the greatest problems are revealed, because of many endemic negative factors: political fragmentation, reduced economic resources, new forms of poverty. Against the background of this scenario, our study aims to analyze the reaction of local institutions to the pandemic crisis by looking at both welfare and communication services. The objective is to identify key features in understanding the resilience of municipalities. In other words, their ability to react and adapt to change, which is essential not only to deal with emergencies, such as the pandemic, but also to make the institution itself sustainable. Our interest is focused on a specific dimension of the resilience of the municipalities, related to collaboration with the third sector. The pandemic has shown that the continuous activism of non-profit organizations has allowed for the continuation of many so-called "ordinary" services, as well as the launch of several initiatives aimed at alleviating other social problems. The research has, first of all, an exploratory character that befits a new and still ongoing phenomenon. The basic questions concern the production of local welfare policies by municipalities. The data show different levels of "interventism" and different modes of communication. On this latter point, we observe the presence of significant attention-seeking among Mayors as community builders able, on the one hand, to reinforce the spirit of solidarity and, on the other, to uphold respect for the rules. On the services side, three main models of response to the pandemic emerge, two of which refer to the public-private relationship in local welfare policies. Findings suggest that these different reactions will have consequences in the immediate future for the management of the pandemic crisis (still ongoing).

Specifically, the tendency is to employ a management of services based on partnership-model, which means that public-private collaboration is a pillar of local welfare. This seems to entail a greater legitimacy for individuals or associations to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies.

KEYWORDS: COVID, crisis communication, governance, resilience, social participation, sustainability, third sector.

CORRESPONDING AUTHORS:

Rossana Sampugnarò, rossana.sampugnarò@unict.it <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7518-7776>;

Patrizia Santoro, santoropatrizia1@gmail.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8278-3701>

1. The pandemic and the resilience of organizations

The pandemic caused by Covid-19 has tested the resilience of public institutions, already burdened by a deep and complex crisis (political, economic, managerial). This crisis has revealed a discrepancy between the needs expressed by the community and the solutions adopted to satisfy them. These processes have been accompanied by a progressive worsening of decision-making efficiency and weak implementation capacity (de Nardis 2013). To this, we can add a much wider environmental uncertainty than in the past. Especially noticeable are the difficulties of public institutions in managing the processes of change and dealing with adverse circumstances and new problems, which restrict them to the hard task of managing the current ones. The ongoing debate initiated by trade union representatives, entrepreneurs and experts converges on the need to lead public administrations towards resilient organizational models. Similarly, many mayors and regional presidents are asking the government and the EU for immediate measures for the economic and social recovery of the community based on the resilience of public institutions. The new "mantra" to be pursued in policy decisions and, more generally, in institutional action has changed: public discourse is shifting from the observation of a negative condition of vulnerability, dictated by the repercussions of the pandemic on the social and economic conditions of the community, to a necessary positive reaction linked to the development of new opportunities.

The diffusion of Covid 19 has highlighted various and diversified problems that, in Italy, have their roots in the past: to name just a few, the complexity of legislative measures that require equally complex implementation decrees, bureaucratic elephantiasis and cuts in spending on health services. There is thus a deep and complex crisis of public institutions that is accompanied by a widespread feeling of mistrust and an equally widespread loss of social credibility. The reasons for the institutions' functional weakness are well known: the public are unable to keep up with demands coming from a rapidly changing, increasingly uneven and articulate society. The consequence is that policies are adopted which often turn out to be insufficient or inadequate (Dalton 2004). All of this can be understood within a framework of low community tolerance for crisis, so that some (apparently irrelevant) "incidents" may provoke public outrage (Boin and Lodge 2018), contributing to the growing detachment of citizens from politics and institutions (Mèny nad Surel 2001).

In this context, the literature on emergency management finds heightened relevance, especially that which, following the current of Hood (1991), aims at response strategies to overcome crises and disasters rather than that which deals with prevention strategies (Weick and Sutcliffe 2011). Financial crises, terrorist attacks, and extreme weather events such as hurricanes and floods have recently demonstrated the grave limitations of risk prevention tools, both in the case of "known unknowns" and, even more so, in the case of "unknown unknowns" (Clarke 1999). In the past, it was considered useful to prepare for unknown threats through the identification of generic capabilities that can be applied to a large number of potential events. This strategy

does not guarantee that existing risk tools can be applied to all possible events. Instead, more effective capabilities and skills would seem to be those of flexibility, adaptability, and creativity.

The focus of attention has shifted from efficiency and equity to the notion of resilience. The latter concept (in the context of complex organizations) has been developed in the study of complex adaptive systems. It indicates the capacity for adaptation and change in dealing with unforeseen or unpredictable events, thanks to "learning circuits" - i.e. internal processes of self-organization - that enable the creation of opportunities for development (Argyris and Schön 1996). In this sense, the term resilience expresses the integration of two alternative approaches to change management of complex adaptive systems: adaptability and transformability. On the one hand, adaptability represents the capacity to learn, by pooling experience and knowledge, and to regulate action as external agents and internal processes change along the current stability trajectory (Folke et al. 2010). On the other, however, transformability is the ability for a system to become different from itself by creating a new system when ecological, economic, or social structures make the existing one unsustainable (Walker and Salt 2012). We can consider resilience as a holistic construct, based on awareness of environmental instability and the ability to prepare ad hoc solutions. The aim is to enhance the ability to extemporaneously create new solutions and, at the same time, incorporate unforeseen phenomena occurring in the external environment (Weick and Sutcliffe 2001). The focus is on the development of new capabilities and the ability to continue to use existing ones by creating new opportunities, in order to go beyond the returns of initial performance.

In public administrations, the concept of resilience is mainly used to indicate an organizational-management model whose aim is to strengthen the responsiveness of organizations during unexpected critical events, by facilitating their flexibility (Wilson and Jarzabkowski 2004). In political science and sociological studies, it is possible to distinguish two main currents, each focusing on a specific conceptual dimension of organizational resilience. The first - referred to as "recovery resilience" - emphasizes an organization's ability to effectively and efficiently recover from a shock (Aldrich 2012) through coordinated and cooperative efforts; the second - referred to as "adaptive resilience" - emphasizes an organization's ability to learn from past lessons, implement changes, and increase its chances of withstanding future crises. In both cases, the unforeseen events that create shocks or crises are best governed by increasing the level of diversity of response in different organizational, cultural and institutional settings (Duit et al. 2010). The most appropriate tools are those designed to increase the available stock of information, knowledge, and regulations, such as organizational learning, stakeholder participation, and multilevel governance.

As far as resilience is concerned, flexibility involves not only the availability and accessibility of resources, but above all an organizational structure that tends to be "organic" (Burns and Stalker 1961), characterized by decentralized and cooperative decision-making units. It is well recognized, in fact, that a high degree of centralization, specialization and formalization - typically expressed by the Weberian model of bureaucracy - hinders the activation of new procedures. The latter are necessary for processes of exogenous adaptation, as well as the development of new modes of cooperation. It is equally well known that crises push institutions to their limits because they often make standard procedures inapplicable and "force" people to work outside their routines, using solutions constructed on the spot. It is not surprising, then, that public administration scholars have become interested in resilience, looking primarily at the coordination structures used by governments in times of crisis (Kettl 2003) or the coordination processes in networks (Moynihan 2009).

The role of leadership during an emergency is more controversial. There are, for example, no analyses of why leaders succeed in one crisis and then fail in another (Boin et al. 2013), or what strategies (where they are present) or behaviors influence the effectiveness and legitimacy of crisis management. It is also true that very little is known about the factors that trigger a subject's reaction to a crisis: the combination of threat, urgency, and uncertainty is rarely used and only in laboratory settings. Thus, it is very difficult to be able to understand what leader requirements are necessary to achieve effective performance during a crisis and, consequently,

how resilience can be achieved (Comfort, Boin and Demchak 2010). Even with these limitations, leadership studies direct future research toward decision-making and networking production processes, with the combined analysis of analytical skills and communication skills (Lodge and Wegrich 2014). The focus shifts from organizational resilience to public policy resilience.

In this respect, the most recent research on the management of the pandemic crisis has shifted its focus. The attention of scholars has mainly been directed to the analysis and impact (still in progress) of the policies of national governments. In particular, some policies are arousing interest: above all the organization and management of health care and, in general, of public health, the social and economic implications of "distancing" as the main strategy to contain the virus. What is common to these studies is the reflection on the opportunity offered by the pandemic to build paths of renewal, or at least to facilitate transformative interventions in various policy areas: from income protection measures to interventions in the field of employment policy, transport or security policies, for example. Collaborative governance represents an essential element in the process.

Such research underlines the importance of the "robustness" of a governance model in which public and private actors work together to arrive at policy decisions. This has proven to be strategic in finding new solutions to the different issues related to COVID-19. In the context of the pandemic, which was characterized by a lack of evidence-based knowledge about the virus and high uncertainty about the effectiveness of measures to combat it, the collaborative approach was crucial: it allowed governments to acquire useful information (in some cases indispensable), to provide tools and methods to test, track, and treat COVID-19 in a timely manner, to flexibly mobilize relevant resources, to improve knowledge sharing and coordination, to stimulate innovation, and to build joint solutions and their subsequent adaptations (Ramus, Vaccaro, and Brusoni 2017). In short, collaborative governance strengthens the responsiveness of public institutions to the pandemic crisis.

The collaborative approach is itself one of the main components of organizational resilience, as it multiplies the options for responding to the crisis using available resources (Bardach 1998). An organization that is interested in engaging in resilience will need to develop or strengthen the interconnections that affect not only staff members, but also the different organizations with which it comes into contact, with an emphasis on their ability to collaborate (Keong and Mei 2010). In particular, resilience requires collaboration between public actors, private actors and civil society, traditionally with different resources and competencies that are even more crucial in solving problems in crisis conditions (Busch and Givens 2012). These resources can determine more flexible emergency management. Collaboration should be viewed in terms of cooperation, which implies working toward shared goals through mutually agreed upon arrangements in terms of division of labor, allocation of resources, and sharing risks and benefits (Buse and Walt 2000). This cooperation (public-private partnership - PPP) implies the willingness of partners to commit themselves on behalf of the partnership, leaving aside their own interests, establishing agreements (formal or informal) made ad hoc during the emergency.

In the case of public institutions, cooperation must also be communicated to the local community. It is necessary to inform it about the collaborative paths taken during the crisis with other organizations (public or private), in order to establish services and performance levels more quickly. This makes it possible to manage the crisis from a point of view not only of administrative action but also of the relationship with citizens which, as is well known, is functional to the construction of the public institutions' identities (Kirschner 2011). Their image conditions the meaning of actions and social expectations. In this sense, institutional communication itself becomes a strategic measure, designed to keep the community united around values of solidarity and altruism and to support a social interpretation of the current crisis, mitigating - or at least containing - possible expressions of collective panic.

At the local level, the main storyteller of the crisis is the mayor, the interpreter of so-called “proximity policies” but, above all, the political subject in charge of reinforcing the values of solidarity of the local community through the “definition of social networks more marked by gratuitousness and altruism” (Campi 2020: 14). As with the national government, the pandemic led to a reinforcement of executives who had to respond promptly to emerging needs. As is always the case in crises, “enormous expectations are created around leaders, they represent the main reference point of those affected” (Ventura 2020: 49) and it is precisely in the crisis that a great deal of expectation is directed toward them (Boin et. al, 2017): the demand for information that allows citizens to define the situation, predictions on the evolution of the crisis, the ability to become a relational hub that can connect and coordinate the actors in the field and their projects, and the ability to implement appropriate and effective measures.

2. Local institutions in the crisis: the research process

Local institutions have been in the front line of emergency management even though they are going through an endemic crisis, exacerbated by a reduced transfer of economic resources. The processes of political fragmentation and the emergence of new parties determine quarrelsome and variable council majorities, capable of conditioning the political agenda on the basis of which administrative action moves. In addition, there is a progressively lower transfer of resources from the State in a context characterized by a growth in social inequality and new poverty. On the one hand, therefore, an increase in requests for services, on the other, the problem of guaranteeing existing ones without increasing local taxes. The ability to manage is linked to a multiplicity of factors that are not always controllable and that become even more difficult to handle in conditions of crisis. Against this backdrop, our study aims to analyse the reaction of local institutions to the pandemic crisis by looking at both welfare and communication services. The objective is to identify keys that will help us to understand the resilience of municipalities. In other words, their ability to react and adapt to change, that is essential not only to deal with emergencies such as the pandemic, but also to make the institution sustainable.

Our interest is directed at a specific dimension of the resilience of the municipalities, that which relates to collaboration with the third sector. At the basis of a resilient operational structure, there are competencies and organizational resources that find vital lymph in collaborative relationships with other actors (Tillement, Cholez, and Reverdy 2009). Through these relationships, it is possible to take a series of actions - the sharing of needs’ analyses, the definition of objectives, the elaboration of the planning of interventions, the identification of indispensable resources - that are essential to facilitate the satisfaction of social needs in a short time.

The research has, first of all, an exploratory character that befits a new and still ongoing phenomenon. The basic research questions concern the production of local welfare policies by municipalities: how many and which welfare services have been adopted? Have these policies adopted governance logic? In what way has the crisis and its management been communicated? The research examined nineteen Italian regional capitals¹, analysing their reaction to the pandemic crisis during the period of maximum emergency: from February 20 to May 31, 2020. Specifically, we consider what types of services and activities were carried out as a result of the pandemic and the restrictive measures, taking into account both those services provided by public

¹ Ancona (AN); L’Aquila (AQ); Bari (BA); Bologna (BO); CAG (Cagliari); Campobasso (CB); Catanzaro (CZ); Firenze (FI); Genova (GE); Milano (MI); Napoli (NA); Palermo (PA); Perugia (PG); Potenza (PZ); Roma (RM); Trento (TN); Torino (TO); Trieste (TS); Venezia (VE).

administrations and those organized in collaboration with other public and private organizations, as well as those provided independently by third sector organizations.

The research involved two different stages of investigation: in the first stage, the aim was to identify all the different types of services and activities provided by the municipalities, considering both the area of intervention (social, environmental, security, etc.) and the method of provision (autonomously or in collaboration with other administrations or with non-profit organisations). This entailed analysing official documents (resolutions, ordinances, etc.), posts and press releases², which also revealed other activities promoted by third entities and all instances of collaboration that had not been formalised in official documents; in the second phase, meanwhile, the analysis focused on so-called "supplementary" services, i.e. those carried out by municipalities in addition to those required by central and regional government.

The hypothesis is that the production of services is linked to the presence and nature of pre-existing collaborative relationships with the third sector. The aim is to evaluate the reactivity or time of response to the crisis and to consider the types of services offered to the population. This research strategy led to the consideration of indicators of collaborative behaviour, attributable primarily to the municipalities. Two dimensions were investigated: one concerning the external environmental context of the organisation, namely its engagement in social innovation; and one regarding the internal organisational context, expressed by policy lines oriented towards the outsourcing of services or forms of public-private collaboration.

3. Municipalities and pandemic response

The first phase of the health emergency was critical for the provision of services and assistance. The crisis highlights problems that were already present: the complexity of legislative measures that require equally complex implementation decrees, bureaucratic elephantiasis, the cut in spending on health services, to name just a few. However, it is true that, in the case of healthcare services, the "system" has succeeded since the first days of the pandemic in supplying treatment and assistance, at least of an essential kind. Services have been provided with different modalities and procedures from Region to Region, and in some cases even in contrast with central government directives. Socio-assistance services, however, show a different picture. On the one hand, the need for personal protective equipment and the urgency of adopting social distancing measures have caused the suspension of many services, in the immediate period of the spread of COVID-19. This interruption had serious repercussions on vulnerable people who need to be assisted, especially if they are poorly protected by income support provisions. On the other, already under "normal" conditions the delivery of social assistance services tends to be slowed down by a system centred on monetary transfer. According to Magatti (2013:13), this gives rise to "an irresponsible federalism": the system decentralizes spending responsibilities without sufficiently clear criteria for accountability in spending.

This does not mean, however, that welfare "operators" (third sector and volunteers) have remained inert or that local administrations have been paralyzed in dealing with the emergency. On the local welfare side, the event of the pandemic has shown, on the one hand, that the continuous activism of non-profit organizations has allowed the continuation of many so-called "ordinary" services, as well as the launch of several initiatives aimed at alleviating further social problems. These include the distribution of food and medicine in the territory, psychological support for those who have lost their relatives without being able to give them a last

² As far as reference to communication is concerned, the observation focuses on the institutional communication activities carried out by specialized structures (Press Office, Spokesperson, URP) and published on the site of the Municipality (press release, news, ...).

goodbye, telephone support for the compilation of applications for access to shopping vouchers, etc. Although times and modalities differed, the Municipalities have put in place services and/or welfare services different from those indicated by the national government: first in Decree Law n.6 of 23 February (for the Municipalities of the Lombardy and Veneto Regions), then in subsequent decrees³. In addition to these government-induced interventions, there are also autonomous initiatives deriving from spontaneous and endogenous dynamics: those of a supportive nature, such as fundraising for families with economic fragility; those of a cultural nature, such as online access to some resources of municipal libraries (e-books, magazines, newspapers) or lending books at home or even the activation of cultural events in streaming; those of an informative nature on the dissemination of Covid in the municipality, on regional and national ordinances, on commercial activities who carry out home deliveries, etc.

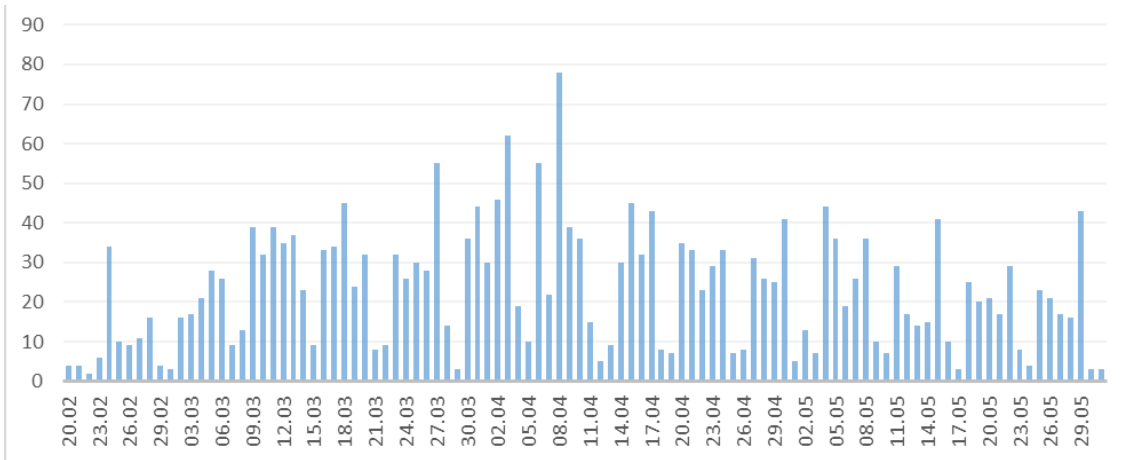
In conjunction with institutional communication, these autonomous initiatives are useful in grasping the organizational resilience of municipalities. Unlike the services and benefits induced by the central government, autonomous initiatives express the willingness of local authorities to react to the crisis by using their own resources and implementing their own strategies. Considering the social and economic context generated by the crisis, the Municipality has tried to find solutions that imply not only the capacity for flexibility and adaptation, but also paths of change that affect the amortization of the crisis' impact on the community. In short, the Local Authority has not suffered the changes induced by the crisis passively, but it has reacted to it by trying to seize new opportunities.

The complex of activities carried out by the municipalities can be reconstructed, with good levels of accuracy, through the official measures taken by the Mayor, the Council and the City Council (from February 20th to May 31th)⁴ and through a study of the institutional communication carried out by the administrations. With regard to the documents published by the OPR and the Press Office, there was a gradual increase in the number of postings from February 20th to April 8th (excluding Saturdays and Sundays) and a slow decrease in the following weeks (Figure 1). Reading them allows us to understand what has happened at the local level and what the reaction to the crisis has been.

³ Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers 1 March 2020; 8 March 2020; 9 March 2020, 11 March and 22 March and subsequent decrees of extension; Decree Law n.19 of 25 March.

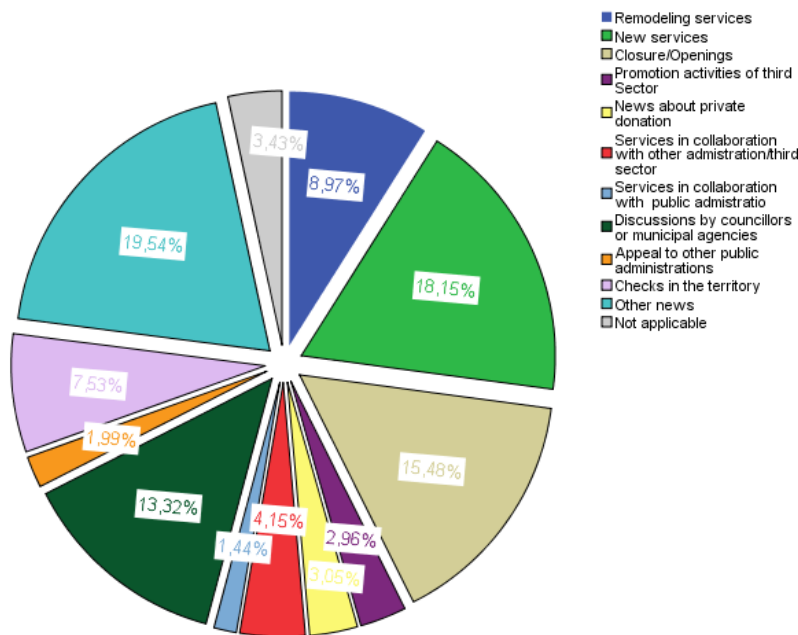
⁴ According to the “Amministrazione Trasparente” (Legislative Decree No 33 of 14 March 2011), all public Administrations must publish administrative acts and resolutions on official websites “with the aim of fostering widespread control by citizens over the work of institutions and the use of public resources”. This provision facilitates the collection of data (from June 20th to July 30th), although in two cases (Perugia and Genoa) it was necessary to ask for the entire documents to be sent because only the titles were present on the websites. In fact, reading only the title can be misleading and it is necessary to examine the whole text to identify type of act, date of publication of the act, type of service, area of intervention.

Figure 1 - Institutional communication activities - number of posts published from February 20 to May 31 (2020)



During the survey period, we detect 2384 posts. The consistency for each of the nineteen regional capitals involved is different because it depends on the articulation and consistency of the communication structures. On the whole, communication is aimed at reporting changes in the provision of services [Figure 2]. The posts announce closures/openings (15.48%) or the remodelling of existing services (8.97%) or the introduction of new ones (18.15%). This monitoring also showed services in collaboration with other administrations or with the third sector, whose news constitutes 1.44% and 4.15% of the posts, respectively. In addition, the website of the municipality becomes a space in which to report on activities promoted independently by the third sector (2.96%).

Figure 2 - Distribution of posts by type of service or activity



Specifically, looking at the areas of intervention represented by the posts [Table1], it is evident that posts regarding the emergency are more than 70%. The pandemic crisis has relegated ordinary administrative activity to second place and amplified the communication activity expressly dedicated to Covid, in most cases leading to the construction of parts of the website specifically dedicated to the emergency.

Table 1 - Number of posts by area of intervention

		V.A	%	%
Reorganization of Municipalities	Suspension to enter the municipal offices	52	2,2	8,0
	Online contact with process managers	58	2,4	
	Safety and prevention tools for public employees/smart working	56	2,3	
	Budget changes	26	1,1	
Territory	Control over the territory	236	9,9	14,9
	Sanitization of roads	119	5,0	
Reorganization and suspension of public and private services	Suspension of municipal taxes and fees; planned deferrals and payment in instalments	94	3,9	22,1
	Permissions, bans, suspensions of public transport	71	3,0	
	Suspension of cultural activity	66	2,8	
	Closures and Inspections of commercial and productive activities	127	5,3	
	Suspension of access to cemeteries, parks, schools, libraries, churches	146	6,1	
	Reorganization of garbage collection	25	1,0	
Reorganization of services for vulnerable and poor people	Reorganization of social services for vulnerable people (older, disabled, etc.)	90	3,8	15,3
	Reorganization/strengthening aid services for poor people	118	4,9	
	Extraordinary collection of basic necessities	28	1,2	
	Fundraising	28	1,2	
	Donations and services offered by private individuals or companies (not necessarily to the Municipality)	88	3,7	
	Public assets concession contracts between Municipalities and Hospitals or care Institutions; contributions to schools; financing summer centres	12	0,5	
Information	Information on commercial activities with home delivery	27	1,1	9,6
	Information on social services provided by Third Sector	52	2,2	
	Online promotion of shows, readings, cultural initiatives, sports activities	131	5,5	
	Commemorations of the dead by covid	20	0,8	
Other Activity	Other	714	29,9	29,9
Total		2384	100,0	100

Disaggregating the posts by function, it can be observed that most of the posts are concentrated, as expected, on the reorganization of services and public and private activities (22.1%) and on the activities of control and

sanitation of the territory (14.9%). On the pages managed by the municipalities, there is also news about the services for fragile or poor people and the activities - often initiated by the municipality in collaboration with the Third Sector - of fundraising or distribution of meals.

It is worth going into the substance of the new services. Table 2 shows the use of particular technologies and a new way of working - the so-called “*lavoro agile*” - even in the cultural, educational and social services of the municipalities, traditionally based on face-to-face relations: pathways for remote communication, telephone interviews, various telematic methods have characterized the services offered to the community more than anything else. It is true that smart working opens up a number of questions concerning both the use and accessibility of technologies and the possibility of guaranteeing appropriate pathways. Nonetheless, we cannot deny its innovative impact on the organization of personal and cultural services, making it necessary to activate simplified paths, and, more generally, on the realization of services that did not exist before. It is even more significant that this innovation involves all municipalities regardless of their size and geographical location, even though there are some that are more active (Milan, Florence, Bari) and others less (L'Aquila, Campobasso, Perugia).

Specifically, innovation concerns activities organised by civic museums, picture galleries and municipal libraries: virtual tours, online reading on institutional social networks, online literary appointments, digital bookshelves, are the most recurrent initiatives. Innovative services are also organised by municipal welfare departments with regard to welfare and educational activities. In the latter cases, innovative services are less diversified and focus respectively on two specific types of activities: on the one hand, the telephone helpdesk dedicated to psychological support and/or counselling and, in some cases, to social and health care; on the other, online platforms to support pedagogical activities for children in municipal crèches and kindergartens, or for extracurricular support to primary school children and adolescents in secondary schools. It is precisely in the activity provided in the educational and welfare fields, as opposed to the cultural, that the innovative approaches shared by all the municipalities analysed are to be found (Table 2).

There are also services that, without adopting any technological process, have been implemented to provide effective and timely responses to the new needs that emerged during the pandemic crisis. This category includes: fundraising through a special current account; the collection of goods and food to be distributed to those families with economic hardship (not covered by the citizenship income); home delivery of food shopping and medicines. Last but not least, in order to respond to the emergency, municipalities have also strengthened or remodelled existing social welfare services to reach new social categories that have been hit by the crisis. The most widespread activities are those of strengthening the street units and services aimed at the homeless (increase in reception facilities; extension of time slots in night shelters; distribution of meals in day centres) (Table 2). It is interesting to underline that it is precisely in these enhanced services that we see a greater interventionism among some municipalities, associated with different social measures: services to women who are the victims of violence, to disabled people, and the distribution of tablets and PCs to students in lockdown. Bologna was the most active city in this respect, followed by Milan, Florence and Rome.

As far as new services are concerned, however, a strong homogeneity emerges: all the municipalities have implemented home delivery services for groceries and medicines and almost all of them have activated fundraising activities for people who do not benefit from instruments of economic assistance. As with other types of sudden crisis (e.g. those caused by natural factors), the health pandemic in itself requires - at least in the immediate term - a few specific activities capable of supporting the satisfaction of essential needs. We are usually inclined to think of a number of traditional factors for detecting and analysing the activities, and more generally the performance, of city administrations. In this case, the political culture of the councillors and the mayor, the spending capacity, the technical skills of the managers, the articulation of work procedures - to

name but a few - seem to have little, or at least insignificant, influence on the choice of outputs during the first phase of the COVID-19 diffusion

Table 2 - Services activated by cities in the phase of the pandemic and propensity for collaboration with Third Sector in the previous phase

	Propensity for collaboration between Third Sector and Municipalities					Servizi attivati nella fase della pandemia														N. services	Type of service
						Innovati on Services			Strengthening of social services				New Services								
	Register of associations	Solidarity shops	Time bank	Cohousing	municipal services	Online Museum	Online library	Educational	Social care on the road	Reception of the homeless	Services to women victims of	Other	Fundraising	Collection of goods or food	Telephone counter for the delivery of food	Telephone help desk for advice or	Telephone counter for new elderly people	Other			
FI	1	8	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	10
MI	0	0	7	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	9		9
BA	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9		8
TO	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	8		8
NA	1	3	5	7	1	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	9		8
CA G	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	8		7
VE	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	8		7
BO	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	7		7
R M	1	1	7	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	9		7
PA	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	7		7
CZ	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	6		6
PZ	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	5	1		6
TN	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	6		6
AN	1	5	0	0	1	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	7		5
GE	1	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	5		5
TS	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	5		5
CB	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	3		3
PG	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3		3
AQ	11	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	3		3
tot						6	8	1	17	6	6	3	1	6	18	7	15	9			

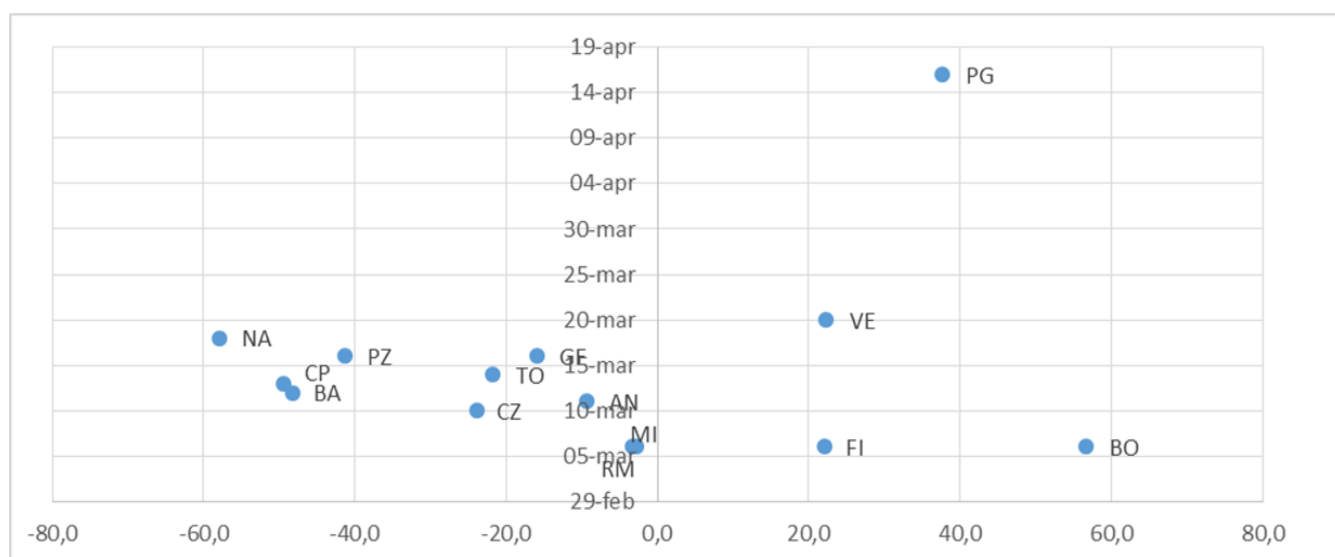
However, the timing of the municipalities' activities is different. There are municipalities that have activated the first services - generally those of home delivery of medicines and food shopping and of extraordinary

collection of basic goods - since the beginning: i.e., after less than a week from the Prime Ministerial Decree of 1 March 2020⁵. Other municipalities took action later.

In this different timeframe, factors of a technical-managerial nature traditionally linked to the functioning of the administrative machine come into play (organisation of offices, management of procedures, personnel management, level of computerisation, etc.), which find expression in the Municipalities' efficiency indicator, calculated through the ratio of spending capacity on services offered⁶.

However, if we look at this indicator and relate it to the timeframe for the implementation of the new social care services, we get the impression that other factors come into play. Among the municipalities that reacted earliest, we also find those with a very low performance index such as, for example, Campobasso, Napoli, Bari (Figure 3). In this regard, the research literature on organisational resilience suggests looking at the relationship with the external environment and in particular with those other organisations of which they make use in order to provide services.

Figure 3 - Distribution of municipalities by performance indicator and timing of activation of new service



4. The role of the third sector

The second step of our research aims at grasping whether and how much the resilience of the municipalities can be connected to previous relations with the Third Sector. In particular, we have considered two dimensions of resilience analysis: one referring to the external context of the organisation and one referring instead to its

⁵ This extends some of the measures previously adopted for the containment and management of the epidemiological emergency and introduces others to ensure uniformity throughout the country.

⁶ The indicator refers to 2016 and is taken from the *Osservatorio dei Conti Pubblici Italiani*. There are six functions that are used to construct this indicator: viability and territory, public education (including kindergartens), general administration and control functions (e.g. management of municipal staff), local police functions, services related to the social sector that are paid for by municipalities (e.g. residential care facilities for the elderly) and waste disposal. The overall efficiency indicator is calculated as a weighted average of the indicators for the six functions, with weights reflecting the share of each expenditure function in the total standard requirement.

internal context. With reference to the first, it should be remembered that the reactive capacity of municipalities, as of any organisation, is the product of a complex set of factors. These include relations with the environment in which the organisation operates and with which it has to relate in order to carry out its functions and at the same time maintain the social legitimacy that is indispensable for its survival (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967).). The social dimension we are talking about concerns the presence of networks and systems of social relations which, by promoting cooperation and collective action, are able to increase collective welfare and with it the performance of public administrations (Putnam 1993) In this respect, the variables we have used in our research reflect experiences of social innovation ⁷, specifically related to time banks, solidarity emporiums and collaborative housing ⁸. In other words, we are referring to practices of a social nature which - by recalling values of solidarity and cooperation - express levels of social activism characterised by the search for new solutions and models to respond more effectively to emerging social needs.

On the other hand, with regard to the internal dimension of the organisation, our attention is directed at the administration's previous ways of providing welfare services. That is, we take into account its objectives, resources and constraints and consider the choice of certain strategies, marking different policy practices from one institution to another. The variables used refer to the implementation of social policies outsourced or carried out in collaboration with the Third Sector. In particular, we have considered ⁹ the per capita expenditures incurred to provide social services outsourced to third subjects, and the presence or absence of specific tools (the Register of Social Associations.) to facilitate communication and collaboration with local non-profit associations.

The correspondence analysis¹⁰ applied to these categories of variables and to the services activated by the municipalities provides us with a summary of the information relating to the municipalities analysed¹¹. The technique is worthwhile even with a small number of cases (19) and is capable of providing a snapshot of the association between categorical variables (Di Franco, 2005). Cities were used as supplementary variables, while the active variables (illustratives) are those referring to social innovation, speed of response, the presence of a registry for associations and the number of services. Considering the first two dimensions identified, the value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.745 and 0.481, the eigenvalue is 2,556 and 1,703 and the inertia is 0,365 and 0,243 (cumulative variance is 60,8). These values provides an assessment of the explanatory capacity of the two dimensions by attributing more importance to the first axis.

⁷ This means practices that meet social needs in a different and more effective way than those generally proposed by public administrations.

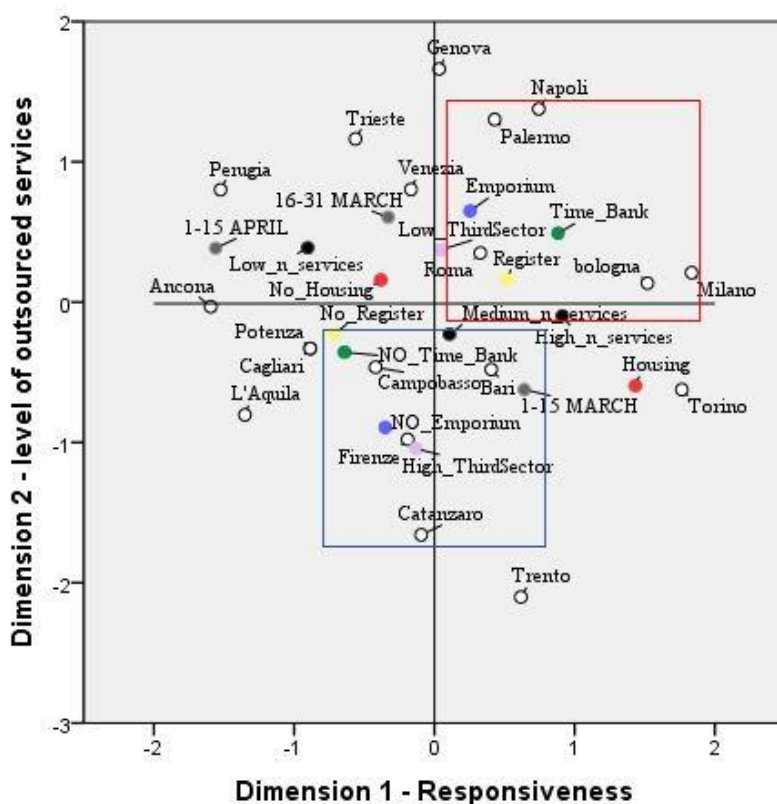
⁸ *Time Banks* are associations in which members self-organise and exchange time in order to help each other, especially regarding small daily needs; *Empori Solidali* are small supermarkets that provide basic necessities to needy families and that do not use money but cards that can be recharged upon recommendation by the social services or by engaging in voluntary activities useful to the community; finally, *Collaborative Housing* refers to housing that offers services and common spaces aimed not only at reducing costs and consumption but also at developing neighbourly relations. In our research, these social practices are from 2018 and are respectively drawn from: National Time Bank Associations (<http://mappa.italiachecambia.org/rete/banche-del-tempo>); Caritas Report on solidarity emporiums in Italy; Housing Lab Report (<http://www.housinglab.it/hlab>).

⁹ The information on the presence or absence of the Register of Social Associations is taken from the institutional website of each municipality. Expenditure on social services contracted out is extrapolated from ISTAT and refers to the final budgets for 2018. In our analysis, these expenditures have been divided into two ranges: high $\geq 20\%$ and low $\leq 20\%$.

¹⁰ The software is *IBM SPSS Statistic 20*.

¹¹ The services were grouped according to the numerical consistency of "type of services activated" in three bands: high, medium and low consistency. This criterion was preferred over the total number of services activated, because we assume it is less affected by the size class of the municipalities.

Figure 4 - Correspondence analysis



<i>Corrisonpence Analysis Legend</i>			
<i>Variables</i>	<i>Modalities</i>	<i>Discrimination Measures</i>	
		1	2
● New Social Services	High_n.services/ Medium_n_services/ Low_n_services	,481	,072
● Time (new services)	1-15 March/ 16-31 March/ 1-15 April	,496	,354
● Housing	Housing/No_Housing	,548	,095
● Presence of Emporium	Emporium/No_Emporium	,089	,580
● Presence of Association/Third Sector Register	Register/No_Register	,369	,037
● Presence of Time Bank	Time_Bank/No_Time_Bank	,566	,176
● Outsourced Social Services (before COVID)	Low_ThirdSector/High_ThirdSector	,006	,389
○ Cities (supplementary variables)	Ancona (AN); L'Aquila (AQ); Bari (BA); Bologna (BO); CAG (Cagliari); Campobasso (CB); Catanzaro (CZ); Firenze (FI); Genova (GE); Milano (MI); Napoli (NA); Palermo (PA); Perugia (PG); Potenza (PZ); Roma (RM); Trento (TN); Torino (TO); Trieste (TS); Venezia (VE).		

The correlation of the transformed variables is considerable regarding the relationship between the number of services activated and innovative social practices such as the time bank (0.471) and collaborative living (0.379) and the timeliness of activation (0.571). Considering the number of services, the values with respect

to spending on services managed by third sector (0.117) and even more so with respect to the presence of the register of associations (0.087) are low.

On the first dimension identified (Figure 4), some innovative services (Time Bank and Collaborative Living), the speed of activation of services and the number of services activated in the lockdown phase are discriminant. From right vs. left, we observe the graduation of the number of services (high, medium and low) and the graduation of timeliness (fast, medium and slow). These elements suggest an efficiency of local administration with regard to responsiveness. The second dimension is more complex to identify because the variable concerning the number of services activated remains relevant (0,354), preceded by the variable concerning Empori solidali (0,580) and the offer of outsourced services (0,389). On the positive pole of the second dimension, there is the presence of Empori solidali and a low level of outsourcing of services.

As can already be seen in part from Table 2, we can identify three groups of municipalities in relation to the number of types of services activated: in the top right-hand box we find a high number of services associated with innovative collaborative experiences (Emporium, Time Bank) and a low level of resources invested in outsourced services (third sector). At the bottom we find another group of municipalities with an intermediate number of services activated. In this case we find the presence of a high quota of outsourced services attributed to the third sector. In the area at the top left, the variables relating to a low number of services produced, late activation and the lack of pre-existing innovative services are associated.

However, Figure 4 allows us to identify two different models of reaction to the pandemic that can be traced - albeit in a prudent manner - to the two main perspectives of analysis of organisational resilience proposed in the literature. That is, on the one hand, resilience as a capacity to return to previous levels of performance without this bringing about major changes in the functioning of the organisation; on the other, as a process of strategic renewal directed towards the flexibility and adaptive capacity of the organisation through the development of collaborative networks with the external environment (Herbane 2019).

In particular, the first model - represented in the upper right red square- is characterised by a high presence of activated services associated with a certain speed in the service implementation and a high presence of local experiences in social innovation; the second - illustrated in the central blue square at the bottom- identifies instead a resilience model linked to neo-liberal welfare policies, since it associates an intermediate number of services activated by the municipalities with a high expenditure for social services outsourced to the third sector. The latter model provides the vision of reactive capacity as the result of specific skills, routines and processes. These are connected to a regulatory framework that has been encouraging the divestment of directly managed services for a long time, leading municipalities to involve profit and non-profit organisations in the activation of services. The processes of deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation thus constitute the assumptions underlying a resilience that implements management methods linked to the transfer of responsibility for service provision from a public authority to private or Third Sector entities.

In contrast to this model, the first model relies on collaborative practices present in the territory and aimed at satisfying social needs. In line with the literature on social capital, it would seem that these practices - by nurturing network mechanisms and processes of community involvement - impact on the provision of public services. They allow municipalities to be faster and more responsive: in a context where there is widespread social activism capable of multiplying energies and initiatives at the service of the community, cooperation-friendly behaviours also tend to spread within public institutions, encouraging collaborative dynamics in management practices for the provision of services (Polizzi and Vitale 2017). By supporting a model of “shared administration” in line with the principle of horizontal subsidiarity (Arena 2016), this resilience emerges as an outcome of processes of openness and inclusiveness of territorial networks in local welfare policies, creating the necessary conditions for the adoption of managerial innovations in service delivery (Della Rocca, 2019).

5. Conclusion

The study indicates effective responsiveness by the municipalities in setting up measures to contain and manage the emergency. Their activity not only fulfils the need to make supra-local (governmental and regional) prescriptions operative, but also recognises the necessity to respond to the new social needs generated by the health epidemic. A variety of interventions aim both at strengthening already existing services and at implementing entirely new services and activities. On this last front, municipalities have concentrated their efforts on ‘innovative’ services - largely provided through IT - encouraging their administrations to adopt simplified procedures and new organisational-management methods. Considering the structural difficulty of Italian public administrations in introducing new organisational methodologies and streamlined organisational models, the use of this type of service focuses attention on the activation of administrative changes, essentially of an adaptative nature, which well exemplifies a resilient organisational capacity. It seems relevant that these changes may become lasting, even after the pandemic event ends. Although we do not intend to discuss this resilience intensity here, what is interesting is that resilience found its pivot in the development of some spheres of autonomy and responsibility where direct contact with the external environment was relevant. This was most evident in those organisational areas - dedicated to the design and delivery of welfare services - that are more sensitive to gaining information about what is happening in the external environment and, at the same time, also more willing to use forms of collaboration with external actors.

The value of these relationships is well known in the administrative literature and even more relevant in the literature on organisational resilience. In times of crisis, inter-organisational collaboration becomes essential for several reasons: it provides the opportunity to share multiple skills and knowledge - often lacking within the public administration - which are indispensable for tackling new problems more quickly; it is able to bring together different actors who discuss their respective strengths and weaknesses and seek a common response to the issues to tackle. This collaboration enables administrations to concentrate on overcoming the inertia that binds them to the status quo, focusing on shared objectives and pragmatic solutions that - especially in times of crisis - require action free of rigid regulatory instruments and standardised procedures.

Our research on the regional capital municipalities shows that the structuring of the relationship is of great importance: the ability to react in the construction of new services is better in those cases where there is already experience of collaboration in innovative services. We are referring to those cases in which, also in the past, the public administration and the private social sector have been able to produce services in cooperative form. In the pandemic crisis, the activation of new services is higher in cases where there are local practices of social innovation. That is, activities that, while coming from paths of social activism, require - at least in the majority of cases - collaborative processes with public institutions. The existence of a relationship based on delegation to produce services through outsourcing would therefore not be sufficient. All this highlights the presence in the territory of a pre-existing “social capital”, consisting not only of the existence of relationships between subjects but of a shared “patrimony” of norms, expectations and practices and, above all, of trust resources that create a positive climate (Coleman 2005). What emerges, therefore, is a resilient capacity which is triggered where there is social dynamism, the bearer of collaborative logic and dynamics. Social innovation practices would function in the municipalities as an exogenous stimulus to organisational resilience. It develops and/or increases processes of inter-organisational collaboration which tend to enter into the management dynamics of the municipalities on an ongoing basis. On the other hand, we know that the more dynamic is the social context in which the organisation operates, the more it is called upon to face new situations which require processes of change (Hatch 1999).

We do not wish to attribute this to processes of automatism, perhaps referring to the widespread idea that there is a direct relationship between the level of citizen participation in policy processes and the presence of institutional innovation. What we would like to emphasise is the existence of a model of organisational

resilience which is not yet widespread in the literature, and which - referring to the literature on the psychology of organisations (Norris et al. 2008) - we could call “community resilience”. That is, an organisational resilience in which the pivotal element is the existence of a dynamic social context that is the bearer of inclusive and networked values and practices. This prefigures the impact of practices ‘from below’ (i.e. coming from local communities) on the actions of local authorities in conditions of crisis.

All this calls for further research with larger samples, representative of municipalities of different sizes, to corroborate the results of this study. These different reactions will have consequences in the immediate future for the management of the pandemic crisis (still ongoing). Specifically, the direction is that of a management of services based on a partnership-model, which means that public-private collaboration is a pillar of local welfare. Moreover, it seems to prefigure a greater legitimacy for individuals or associations to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies.

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Notes on contributors

Rossana Sampugnaro, Ph.D., Aggregate Professor of Political Sociology and Political Communication at the University of Catania. Her research interests focus on political communication, parties and Italian politics. She is coordinator of Jean Monnet Module – European Renovate Actors in European Public Sphere (EUREACT-2019-2022) and members of Scientific Committee for the doctoral course in Political Sciences (University of Catania). [Le piace fare tardi e ascoltare il silenzio della notte]

Patrizia Santoro is in the Cedoc (Centro Documentazioni e Studi sulle Organizzazioni complesse) technical support group. Her research is focused on the political and social participation, the active citizenship and the sustainability of institutions.