

Critical and Radical Social Work

Trade Unions and Self-organised Groups of Educational Workers in Italy

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Abstract:	<p>The privatisation of social services has brought about many social claims regarding the increase of labour market deregulation and employment insecurity during the last years of economic crisis. This article focuses on the experience of self-organised groups of educational workers (educatori) in Bologna (Centre-North of Italy) between 2011 and 2016 as a significant case of precarious workers' mobilisation in a local context and specific sector. Several self-organised groups of precarious workers like these ones have spread throughout Europe trying to compete with trade unions for the representation of their interests in the current crisis. The main aim of this research is to describe and to explain the interaction between self-organised groups and trade unions in the outsourced social sector. According to this, new horizons for labour movements and social change can be analysed by exploring the obstacles and the opportunities of the interaction between these two subjects.</p>
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Introduction

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3 The Italian trade unions have been able to revive their influence on the public agenda, in a moment
4 in which trade unions have been facing a long period of slowdown membership almost everywhere
5 else in Europe (Pulignano, 2007). That was mainly determinate by the switch to a political
6 exchange strategy with governmental institutions (Regini, 1981). Historically, the main Italian trade
7 union CGIL has been characterised by a more marked “logic of movement” (Pizzorno, 1978)
8 transpiring in the militant action and the rapprochement with rank-and-file movements of workers.
9 The role of CGIL during the wave of contention of the ‘70s was probably the most fitting example
10 of such orientation.
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12 The decline of the trade unions’ influence in the public sphere has exacerbated the scepticism of
13 their base, contributing to the arise of groups organised by precarious workers beyond the
14 traditional patterns of representation.
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16 The research focuses on how self-organised groups of precarious workers and trade unions interact
17 in the Italian scenario by exploring and describing which obstacles and incentives they have to ally
18 with or not, to compete with for representing a group of workers, to collaborate on for common goal
19 sharing resources, or to ignore each other on all together. Moreover, it will assess the viability of a
20 strategy of cooperation between trade unions and social movements.
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22 The self-organised groups of precarious workers constitute a privileged field of investigation on this
23 topic for their intrinsic peculiarity. In fact, these groups share some characteristics with other social
24 movements, but they mobilise for labour-related issues and often compete with trade unions
25 especially for the representation of those workers most affected by employment deregulation.
26 Following such perspective, this article analyses the mobilisations in the outsourced social sector in
27 the metropolitan area of Bologna between 2011 and 2015 and it focuses on the events tied to
28 educational workers (*educatori*)¹ in the framework of outsourced public services for social
29 cooperation.
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31 Social cooperation is a relevant sector in the province of Bologna, containing almost 8,000 workers
32 employed in the outsourced public services. This sector outlines the current welfare privatisation
33 process in Italy, entailing a worsening occupational security in the national labour market.
34 Specifically, the budget limitations imposed by austerity policies during the last financial crisis
35 boosted the outsourcing of welfare services to social cooperatives.
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37 Within this framework, the representation of educational workers is very difficult due to their high
38 employment instability. For this reason they were leading autonomously two different initiatives in
39 response to labour deregulation deployed by the city council of Bologna during the most critical
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period of the economic crisis. This article is based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews and field notes about these two experiences.

It presents the following structure: in the first section, the classic literature on the logic of action and the crisis of representation are presented, with a focus on the Italian case; in the second, the research methodology is laid out; in the third, the critical findings on the professional figure of educational workers are described; in the fourth, the main aspect of the conflicts and the strategies put in place are reported, focusing on the logic of action and on the repertoire of contention as the central topics to explore; the fifth provides an interpretation of the conflicts involving the self-organised groups of educational workers and trade unions with an explanation of the main factors obstructing or facilitating their interaction; and the conclusion outlines the potentials of a coalition between trade unions and self-organised workers and the factors influencing this strategy, as emerged by the evidence collected.

Italian trade unions' path between logic of movement and logic of organisation

Hyman (2001) defined the Italian labour movement as the most fitting example of trade unionism between class and society. This definition stems from an historical path reflecting a strong class orientation mixing with a component of social integration. The major trade union *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL) presents a major orientation toward a “logic of movement”, according to the theory of Pizzorno (1978). The author identifies two different types of logic of action leading an organisation, which are directly connected to his theory on the crisis of representation and political exchange². The logic of movement characterises the new collective subject emerging as an answer to a trade union’s crisis of representation, given by the conflict containment strategy adopted by trade unions involved in a political exchange strategy. These new subjects reject the practice of the delegation and appear fluid in their structure. The sense of belonging is given by the direct participation and they are strongly oriented to the militant action. Their claims have a large social scope and result hardly negotiable. Conversely, the logic of organisation (or institution) lead structured subjects to be set in a stable base. The relationships of trust allow for the onset of standard procedure and a method of representation based on the delegation, which make the decision making more centralised. Moreover, these organisations frame their claims around negotiable requests. This theory was elaborated through the empirical study of the social movement wave of contention of the ‘70s in several European countries. Pizzorno argues that back then Italian trade unions were able to effectively alternate these two cases of logic of action by centralising and decentralising the decision making when interacting with these subjects. Tarrow (1989) focuses on the Italian case of a social movement wave of contention during the ‘70s, as the country distinguished itself in the European landscape of contention for the length, the

1 magnitude and the outcome of the struggles. In the authors' view, the Italian labour movement of
2 '70s fulfilled the institutionalisation of important labour right through the Italian Labour Bill of
3 1970 (*Statuto dei lavoratori*), so the wave of contentions contributed in the consolidation of
4 industrial as well as political democracy. Tarrow's theory on the cyclical nature of the contention is
5 to some extent connected with the Pizzorno's concept of the two ideal type of logic of action. In
6 fact, Tarrow argues a cyclical process of mobilisation and demobilisation, in which the new subject
7 would either radicalise and increase dramatically the level of conflict and violence until being
8 isolated and repressed, or evolve consolidating their structure. This perspective results particularly
9 fitting with the concept of "trade unions as social movement", which highlight the nature of
10 "movement" as an essential characteristic of trade unionism (Fairbrother, 2008).

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18 Between the end of the '70s and the beginning of the '80s, Italian trade unions switched toward a
19 more participative commitment with governmental institutions based on wage moderation and
20 conflict containment, as a strategy to increase the unions' influence (Regini, 1982). Regini (2000)
21 applies the concept of 'political exchange' to the practices experienced by several European
22 countries in the period between the culmination of the Keynesian welfare states and its crises.
23 However, even if Italian trade unions started to consolidate their position in the public decision
24 making arena, a process of proper institutionalisation of industrial relation did not occur.

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31 The future developments of Italian industrial relations will follow a cyclical path alternating unity
32 of action and strategic fragmentation of the three main confederations, due to the different
33 ideologies leading the main major Italian unions (Regini and Regalia, 2000, Pulignano 2007). The
34 traditional leftwing orientation and the more marked conflict-orientation of CGIL made it closer to
35 a logic of movement than CISL and UIL. However, since the strategic shift of the '80s, CGIL
36 generally developed a more marked logic of organisation and a strategy of partnership with the state
37 through social pacts, in presence of a union-friendly government (namely, a government lead by a
38 Democratic Party).

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45 The last economic crisis signed a dramatic decline of trade unions' influence in those countries that
46 have traditionally resorted to social pacts. Culpepper and Reagan (2014), argue that the political
47 exchange is no longer an attractive option for governments who have previously resorted to this
48 pattern of negotiation. With regards to the Irish and Italian cases (two opposing cases of countries
49 resorting to political exchange practices) in the aftermath of the crisis of 2008, the threat of strike
50 calls became ineffective and trade unions appeared scarcely representative of the groups of
51 population principally concerned by the reforms deemed necessary (as the youth and the precarious
52 workers). In the Italian case, the last social pact traces back to 2007. The anti-union orientation of
53 the Berlusconi government later followed by the union hostility of the Democratic Party's new
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1 leadership of Renzi signed the end of social partnerships. In 2014, the Renzi government approved
2 a labour market reform (*Jobs Act*); introducing the “rising-protection employment contract” which
3 facilitated the dismissal for the newly hired, further exacerbating the structural labour market
4 dualisation. The attitude of the Renzi government produced a rupture between CGIL and the
5 Democratic Party, at least at a national level.
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8 Moreover, the high degree of segmentation of the Italian labour market, the difficulties of the trade
9 unions to effectively represent precarious periphery workers and the media attacks against trade
10 unions have further fuelled a progressive deterioration of the trade union reputation in the public
11 opinion.
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14 In this framework, new actors arose as a consequence of the trade unions’ crisis of representation,
15 especially among the workers considered to be outsiders. The literature analyses two main
16 experiences based on this respect: the so-called “knowledge workers” and the case of *San Precario*.
17 Ciarini *et al* (2013) studied the ascent of self-organised groups of precarious high-qualified
18 professionals labeled “knowledge-workers”. This category have been largely affected by the Italian
19 labour market reform in 2002, modifying the traditional assets of autonomous work and the access
20 to welfare arrangements. Such groups emerged to represent a category of workers or to support
21 larger political instances more than to fill a representational gap or to supply the lack of social
22 protection. According to the authors, it is possible to operate a rough distinction among these self-
23 organised groups of workers depending on their main goals. Moreover, they argue that Italian self-
24 organised precarious workers search for a more inclusive decision-making process in the system of
25 representation, rather than refusing the practice of delegation.
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28 Other self-organised subjects are characterised by their critical attitude toward traditional trade
29 unions and by a more pronounced orientation to radical militant actions. This is the case, for
30 instance, of *San Precario*, a network of self-organised precarious workers who arose in 2005 from
31 the development of the “Chain workers collective”, founding the precarious workers European
32 platform *Euro Mayday*. *San Precario* was lately involved in a specifically large labour issue with a
33 large-scale lay-off resulting from the outsourcing of the communication company *Omnia*, in which
34 it took over the trade union’s role by promoting legal action and protests. (Colleoni *et al.*, 2014).
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37 The main contribution offered by the trade unions’ revitalisation literature assumes the need for
38 trade unions to radicalise their actions and to “enlarge the traditional playing field” to the social
39 sphere by building coalitions with other external actors (Waver, 1998; Tattersall, 2010), as the ones
40 just named. However, strategic legacies can obstruct trade unions’ abilities to be innovative, as has
41 been seen by some unions embedded in neo-corporatist countries (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1999). In
42 the Italian case of neo-corporatist vocation of the industrial relations system, the lack of a proper
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1 institutional consolidation is supposed to mitigate this problem. According to Regalia (2009), this
2 characteristics of Italian employment relations facilitate the awareness around the change in
3 progress and the need to innovate trade unions' logic of action logic of action.
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5 The alternating between logic of organisation and logic of movement is a crucial ability for trade
6 unions to develop an effective strategy of representation, as emerged by the literature traced back.
7 The logic of organisation transpiring by the social partnership with the state legitimised Italian trade
8 unions representation as long as they were recognised as influent interlocutors of the public
9 authority. With the decline of trade unions' public influence, one can wonder if they should go back
10 to developing a logic of movement by connecting with their rank-and-files and radicalising their
11 action.
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18 *Methodology*

19 **The research has been conducted through the participant observation of several meetings and public**
20 **protests developed by self-organised educational workers and trade unions in Bologna from**
21 **November 2015 to May 2016:** 15 semi-structured interviews have been completed with the main
22 activists of these groups (7), trade unionists (6) and the main representatives of educational workers
23 associations (2). They were selected according to their role played in the conflict and/or for their
24 relationship with trade unions and self-organised groups of workers.
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32 The central thematic pillars of each interview have been: 1) the labour conditions of educational
33 workers; 2) the strategies of each organisation involved in the representation of educational
34 workers' interests, and 3) the interaction between these same organisations during the contentions
35 analysed. In order to ensure the confidentiality of each participant, all the interviews have been
36 transcribed and verbatim have been associated with a code as follows: 'Act' represents educational
37 workers militating in the self-organised groups; 'TU-FP' represent trade unionist officers and
38 representatives in the socio-educational sector coming from the traditional trade unions involved in
39 the contentions, and 'TU-USB' are for those coming from a radical trade union. The following
40 sections report the most important results extracted from the interviews and the discussions carried
41 out during the analysis according to the research topics of this study.
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51 *Labour conditions of educational workers*

52 The privatisation of social services in Italy provoked specific social claims with reference to the
53 increasing job precariousness due to strong outsourcing processes in the labour market and to the
54 consequent increase of cooperative associations in the public sector.
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59 The Italian Region of Emilia Romagna represents a paradigmatic case in Italy for the role of social
60 cooperation in the outsourcing of local public services. The regional social expense is one of the
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1 highest in the country, which implies an important impact on the occupational level in this sector.
2 The social cooperation has represented a model of local development encouraged by the traditional
3 leftwing political culture of the region. For this reason, Emilia Romagna is the head-quarter of some
4 of the most important Italian cooperative associations.
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7 In the province of Bologna, almost all public services are outsourced to social cooperatives and the
8 sector of the social cooperation involved around 8,000 workers, mainly employed in care services,
9 kinder-gardens and socio-educational services. The socio-educational sector concerns non formal
10 education services and social aid addressed to people with disabilities or in a condition of social
11 marginality.
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16 We distinguish three main professional situations in the fragmented sector of social education. In
17 the first one, each educational worker is entitled to display his or her functions for people with
18 serious disabilities or drug addictions: this worker has a specific title (*educatore professionale*)
19 gained through an academic education in the Faculty of Medicine, or as the result of previous legal
20 regularisation of equivalent professional experiences. In the second one, the educational workers
21 have another title gained through a specific degree in the Faculty of Education (*educatore socio-*
22 *culturale*) which does not allow them to work with people affected by serious disabilities. These
23 differences are extremely blurred and the normative is subject to various interpretations in each
24 region of Italy. The consequent normative void in this regard has created a heterogeneous situation
25 at the national and local level. For this reason, a third professional situation may exist in which the
26 educational workers do not have any of the previous academic degrees for their qualifications.
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36 Compared to other groups of social workers, the educational workers are scarcely unionized and
37 more difficult to mobilise. This can be attributed to several reasons. First of all, they have problems
38 in being defined from a legal standpoint. In the national landscape there is a wide variety of
39 professional figures in charge of various tasks as educational workers. The plurality of the working
40 status contributes to consolidate the legal gap. As a consequence, it is difficult to label the
41 educational workers and they may be exposed to arbitrary management. Another important aspect
42 marking the difficulties of educational workers in terms of representation is the instability of their
43 contractual tenure. In Bologna most of the contracts provide hourly-based payment, but the working
44 schedule can be reduced for reasons unrelated to the workers' willingness (i.e. the closure of the
45 school for weather reasons), affecting the continuity of their salary. Moreover, the job tenure is
46 related to the awarding of a public call for tender. A social clause in the collective agreement of the
47 social cooperation states that the workers have to be relocated by the cooperative when the services'
48 trustee changes. Nevertheless, sometimes the contractual stability is difficult to guarantee: the
49 cooperatives cannot employ their workers in other services if there are not other jobs available for
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them. This implies a further vulnerability for these employees, as we outline from evidence collected.

We are all precarious workers ...even if I am hired under an open-ended contract, the cooperative for which I work is always subject to the dynamic of the public call for tender. If the cooperative loses the management of the service, it's hard to relocate me because the job no longer exists, or just few positions are available. If I have always behaved in a certain way, according to the mission of the cooperative, maybe I will be relocated. Otherwise, if I expose myself as being against the cooperative or if I have a polemic attitude, most likely I will not be chosen again for relocation
(Act).

The vulnerability of this group of workers is also given by the particular status of the people employed in a cooperative. Most of them are working members of the cooperative of reference, and a less favourable normative is applied for their professional status. Lastly, the difficulty in mobilising socio-educational workers comes from the relationship with the people they work with and with their families, which fosters a remissive attitude. The lack of a precise and uniform definition of this professional figure is often considered an obstacle for the empowerment of the educational workers⁴ as they are unable to rely on a given set of tasks, duties, and benefits. This is effectively summarized by a key informant's statement:

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

Several informants agreed on stating that the normative on the professional title is being applied in a more strict way in order to cut down on the number of workplaces, by restricting the labour market of those without a specific degree for their qualification.

In this scenario, two self-organised groups arose protesting against budget cutting in the socio-educational services: *Educatori uniti contro i tagli* (Educational Expert United Against Cuts, *Educit*) created in 2011, and *Rete degli educatori e delle educatrici di Bologna* (Network of Educational Workers of Bologna, *Rete educatori*) created at the beginning of 2015.

This situation shows how different subjects contribute in the representation of the socio-educational sector, each of them pursuing a variable range of strategies and interacting in discontinuous ways, as it is described in the following section.

Contentions in the socio-educational sector of Bologna

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2 *Educit* and *Rete Educatori* were created in a situation of emergency and with the aim to face
3 consistent budget cuts in the socio-educational services during the economic crisis. The Federation
4 of Public Workers (FP) affiliated with CGIL is the main union representing the sector at the
5 provincial level, followed by the radical union USB. In the case of *Educit*, two representatives of
6 both unions were part of the group and were involved in the negotiations with the cooperative and
7 the institutions protesting against the budget cut in 2011. In that instance, FP refused to call for a
8 strike, so the group organised a protest directed at Casalecchio's district administration, which was
9 attended by almost 500 people including the association of parents of the recipients of the services
10 CGIL and USB. After the mobilisation and the following negotiations, the budget cut was strongly
11 reduced.

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13 The activists of *Educit* considered the lack of a clear defined political ideology as an element of
14 strength allowing them to be highly inclusive. They define their actions as creative and original.
15 Recurring evidence emerging among the activists is the episode related to the building of a snow-
16 panda in front of the Casalecchio City Council, protesting the unpaid hours of the educational
17 workers caused by school closures due to a snowstorm.

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You should be the least ideological you can, having the necessity to bring into this path a lot of people whom are not really inclined to this kind of action. I would be willing to occupy the city council, but some kinds of political action 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 a group after all these years (Act).

You should do nice and ironic things when there are not so many persons and they are not able to mobilise the masses...I'll give you an example, I've interviewed a famous local showman who in a minute and a half told me who the educational expert was. He told me so many deep and beautiful things...then I got a transcript of the interview and I 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 have had the same effect. You should also do a sit-in, but in this historical moment getting hit by the police who are not open toward the movements is very dangerous, you risk being manipulated and your enemy becomes strengthened (Act).

Once the budget cut was suspended, the group started to change its efforts toward the creation of an identity for the educational worker at a widespread territorial level. At the local level, from 2011 to

1 present, they have been undertaking a project with a local radio station consisting in the weekly
2 broadcasting of a program called ‘Ladies and gentleman, welfare has disappeared’ where they
3 discuss issues related to the local welfare from the educational workers’ point of view. Moreover,
4 *Educit* has collaborated with the group *Rete educatori* for the creation of the guidelines for a public
5 call on socio-educational services in the metropolitan area of Bologna, which they promoted at the
6 institutional level.
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10 In 2014 *Educit* developed a network called *Rete Nazionale Operatori Sociali* (National Network of
11 Social Operators, *RENOS*) formed by other self-organised groups of social workers from all over
12 the country. *RENOS* was founded by self-organised groups of precarious workers coming from
13 different areas of the welfare sector sharing the problems tied to the outsourcing of public services,
14 with a numeric preponderance of workers from the socio-educational sector. Beyond the general
15 aim of defending high quality public welfare, *RENOS* deals with issues strictly related to the
16 employment conditions of social workers, especially those from the socio-educational sector.
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23 One of the first documents produced was a platform for social workers, representing a draft for a
24 new sectoral agreement aimed at simplifying the contractual heterogeneity characterising the social
25 sector. The platform also speaks to the need to recognise the arduous work of social workers, stating
26 that they should acquire a higher working status. About a year after the creation of *RENOS*, the
27 educational expert became the central professional figure in the political agenda of the network,
28 which promoted the representation of this category of workers. Another *RENOS* topic has been the
29 discussion on defining legal criteria for accessing this profession, the so-called ‘Iori law’³. They
30 established direct contact with the congresswoman proposing the law and participated in the
31 parliamentary audit with other associations of educational workers.
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40 The second group, *Rete educatori*, arose in 2015 after a meeting called by FP to discuss the
41 consequences of the change of trustee in charge of some of the socio-educational services in
42 Bologna. The workers of the same cooperative met for the first time all together and started to
43 mobilize, distancing themselves from the trade union. An activist of the group speaks about the
44 discourse he gave during that meeting:
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51 *The point of view of CGIL was... “Let’s negotiate, let’s try to take back what we had before”. It*
52 *sounds like what we had before was ok, but this is not true, and it was still not ok. I said...let’s*
53 *block the city council, let’s show our opposition. We are not gonna stand with this, they didn’t*
54 *consider us, the educational workers, in writing this call (...) CGIL assumed a wait-and-see*
55 *attitude. They tried to tone down the issue (Act).*
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1 The educational workers broke into the city council interrupting a meeting and denouncing the large
2 budget cuts and the modality of assigning these services, asking for a more participative process in
3 defining the public call on socio-educational services.
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5 After the new trustee renounced to manage the service due to a lack of resources, the cooperative
6 previously in charge of such service was entrusted with it once again. Even if a budget-cut of a
7 different entity was still foreseen (6% below the base bid instead of the 11%), the cooperative
8 declared to be available to personally absorb the costs without affecting the educational workers'
9 conditions. When the contention ended, the group decided to continue its activity and organised
10 several public assemblies centred on the public call for tender of welfare services and on the role of
11 the educational experts in society. During the assembly they made contact with the case workers of
12 Bologna and allied with them against the privatisation of the services announced by the
13 municipality. They called for a strike and a march towards the city council supported by USB and
14 attended by 500 people, obtaining the postponement of the privatisation to 2017. *Rete educatori*
15 decided to create a different group together with the caseworkers called *Coordinamento lavoratori*
16 *del sociale di Bologna* (Coordination of the Social Workers of Bologna).
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18 In the summer of 2015, *Rete educatori* developed a strong tie with the housing movement of
19 Bologna and organised play activities with the children living in the squatted housing areas. As
20 already mentioned, they worked with *Educit* in the creation and promotion of the guidelines on the
21 public call for socio-educational services. In 2016, *Rete educatori* disbanded and continued to
22 collaborate with the Coordination of the Social Workers.
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24 In the five years time considered, the two trade unions locally representative of the socio-
25 educational sector undertook several actions addressed to social workers. In 2015, FP started a
26 process of negotiation with the cooperative associations about a platform for an integrative
27 agreement at the provincial level enclosing common issues for all the professional figures involved
28 in the social cooperation sector. Given by the refusal of the cooperative associations to consider any
29 economic request, FP called for an assembly of all the workers within the social cooperation of the
30 province, attended by 650 people. The assembly delegated FP to organise an 8-hour strike, which
31 was divided in two sets of 4 hours. The first strike was called for the 3rd March 2016. The
32 educational workers and the kinder-garden workers turned out to be the central groups participating
33 in the strike, with an estimated 70% of the total participation, since they were not subject to the law
34 on the minimum essential services, unlike, for instance the care-giver workers. In response to the
35 persistent indisposition of the counterpart in the aftermath of the strike, FP organised a series of
36 flash mobs outside the working hours displaying banners rallying for the provincial contract. These
37 took place in front of the main headquarters of the cooperative associations. They also started a
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1 campaign on social networks by trying to undermine the reputation of the cooperative associations.
2 The key informants of FP have often underlined the concept of ‘staying in the limit of legality’
3 when referring to such initiatives.
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7 *We did a sit-in during the ten-year anniversary celebration of the consortium of cooperatives*
8 *entrusted by most of the in-home care services here in Bologna. We didn’t want to spoil the party,*
9 *but we wanted them to understand, in the limit of the law, of course, that the provincial contract is*
10 *something important for 8,000 workers of the social cooperation and we will use any lawful way to*
11 *continue to speak up for our will (TU-FP).*
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18 *... In this moment we need alliances for convincing the employers, we are trying to encircle them*
19 *and those who represent them. We agreed with the delegates to avoid situations that could put walls*
20 *up... (TU-FP)*
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25 Since 2011, USB undertook a strategy of claiming better employment conditions in the socio-
26 educational services and resorting to some radical actions addressed mainly at the public institutions
27 (e.g. sit-in protests, interruption and occupation of Bologna city council). USB was not considering
28 the cooperative association as its main counterpart against which to address its claims. For similar
29 reasons, it didn’t support the platform of FP for the provincial contract. A trade union representative
30 of USB explains this choice in the following statements:
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38 *We have never mobilised against the cooperative association and I don’t think it was necessary. We*
39 *work on entrusted public services. Every year the municipality decides how many hours of*
40 *educational support are needed for the minors with certified cognitive impairments. And every year*
41 *it happens that, for instance, a boy having the right to 10 hours of educational support has suddenly*
42 *half of the hourly coverage with the new criteria. So, if before three educational workers were*
43 *needed, now two are enough. In a case like this, I can’t see the point in considering the cooperative*
44 *association as my counterpart (TU-USB).*
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52 *The cooperative for which I work on the extra-scholastic services recognized the “territorial*
53 *retributive element” (an efficiency-rating hourly-based), so the integrative provincial contract*
54 *doesn’t make any sense, especially since the sectoral collective agreement has been expired for four*
55 *years (TU-USB).*
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1 USB was critical with the city council administration: during the electoral campaign of 2016 they
2 addressed several protests directly at the mayor, a candidate for the second electoral term for the
3 Democratic Party, contesting his policies and the working conditions of educational workers. The
4 union supported both groups of educational experts, participating in the negotiations related to the
5 budget cut in Casalecchio in 2011 and calling the strike against the privatisation of the social
6 assistance on the behalf of *Rete Educatori*.
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10 The overall picture emerging from the commentary on the conflicts is an enlarged labour movement
11 in which heterogeneous sets of strategies are put in place by its components. The factors influencing
12 the strategic orientation of the actors and their way of interacting will be analysed in the next
13 section.
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18 *The interaction among the actors*

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21 The logic of action and the repertoire of contention are supposed to orient the strategies of the
22 actors and their patterns of interaction. The relationship between CGIL and the other actors was
23 undoubtedly the most controversial. Those interviewed from USB, *Educit* and *Rete Educatori*,
24 agreed in assuming a political connection between Bologna city council and CGIL. CGIL is
25 considered as traditionally close to the Democratic Party, at the national and especially the local
26 level. This view was shown by the unionists of USB, who considered the Democratic Party to be
27 particularly close to the cooperative associations. As a consequence, they depicted CGIL as partly
28 responsible for the privatisation of welfare and for the worsening labour conditions for educational
29 workers. For this reason, the choice of CGIL to negotiate with the central cooperatives without
30 addressing strong claims to the local administration was traced back to political reasoning. The
31 choice of dividing the 8-hour strike in two tranches was interpreted as a strategy of containment, in
32 order to not damage the local administration or the cooperative associations.
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43 The two groups analysed outlined divergent perception over the role of trade unions. Both of them
44 shared the idea that trade unions are as an 'institutional tool' for the workers. Moreover, there was a
45 delegate from USB in both groups. Nevertheless, in the case of *Educit*, this idea coexisted
46 ambiguously with a sceptical view toward trade unions. CGIL was considered an unreliable subject,
47 especially after some episodes in which they excluded *Educit* from the discussion of relevant issues
48 they had contributed to bringing to the institutional level. At the same time, *Educit* considered the
49 strategy of *USB* too radical and rigid.
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56 Nevertheless *Educit* and *Rete educatori* supported the strike called by FP on the provincial contract
57 by writing a joint document. *Educit* invited the unionists of FP to participate on their radio program
58 to promote the strike. The reason for the support on the strike called by CGIL was the inclusive
59 nature of the group, which defines itself as a multiplier of educational worker mobilisations.
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1 FP was the main promoter of the platform for the provincial integrative agreement of social
2 cooperation. Beyond the aim of improving the working conditions of the workers of social
3 cooperation, embracing all the professional figures involved, the union wanted to lose the bond with
4 the Democratic Party. The FPs' trade unionists were refusing the accusation of political collusion
5 with the city council, even if they admitted to a general tradition of privileged relationship with the
6 party in power.
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12 *Clearly as in all structures there are different cores and among those there are also those*
13 *who are still very close to this party (the Democratic Party). So, this tie has been true for a period,*
14 *and I also think that no one would deny it because it was so evident that you could not hide it. But it*
15 *is also true that after our group of delegates and trade union officers of the social cooperation*
16 *started to grow, we started to talk about the fact that CGIL has to take a position on the labour*
17 *condition of the workers from cooperatives, especially for the lawlessness that emerged. CGIL*
18 *cannot turn a blind eye to it (TU-FP).*
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27 Even if most of the contents proposed by *Educit* and *Rete Educatori* were appreciated and shared by
28 FP, after the end of the contention in Casalecchio there was not any interest in creating a stronger
29 connection with the self-organised educational workers. These groups were perceived by FP as
30 political entities lacking professional awareness and concrete requests for improving their labour
31 conditions. At the same time, they were also considered too small numerically and consequently not
32 representative, with an apparent lack of any potential influence. Finally, self-organised groups of
33 workers were seen as sectarian and not accountable, meaning they were neither able nor willing to
34 undertake a far-sighted strategy in order to hold together the interests of a consistent number of
35 affiliates.
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43 *Rete Educatori* and *Educit* were close in terms of contents and goals, but they often defined
44 themselves as distinct. *Rete Educatori* recognised itself as a movement and started to deal with
45 general issues related to local welfare after the main contention. Several squatted housing locations
46 were evicted by the police at the end of the electoral term of the Bologna administration. The
47 conspicuous presence of families with children demanded the intervention of caseworkers who were
48 already active in the Coordination of the Social Workers with the educational workers. Such
49 circumstances brought the group to collaborate with the housing movement, organising play
50 activities with the children in the squatted housing units and supporting the protest against the
51 eviction. They elaborated a large set of overt social claims which presented difficulties to negotiate
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1 an end-goal. *Educit* and *Rete Educatori*'s main collaboration came from drafting the guidelines for
2 public call for socio-education services.

3 Lastly, *Educit* perceived *Rete Educatori* as too ideological and scarcely pragmatic for its radical
4 style of protest. The group did not join the strike against the privatisation of the social assistance
5 organised by *Rete Educatori* and *USB*. They declared their solidarity to the workers on strike,
6 justifying their abstinence of participation on timing and logistics. In the contention of 2011, *Educit*
7 allied with the association of the recipients' families who received services.

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12 *Educit* also established a connection with other associations of educational workers, as the National
13 Association of Educational Workers. They collide with the Association of Italian Educational
14 Experts and Educational Workers, representing the educational path and standing against
15 educational workers employed without professional titles. The main channel of alliance was the one
16 among the different self-organised groups of educational workers around the country looking
17 toward the creation of a professional lobbying force, maintaining their lean structure.

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23 The scenario that emerged is controversial, resulting from the employment relationship in
24 outsourced public services. In spite of the deep changes characterizing the labour movement in the
25 post-industrial context, the analytical approach of Pizzorno still serves the scope of interpreting the
26 dynamics of interaction among the actors playing in the labour movement, although a slight
27 variation is proposed here. This author sees the logic of action and the repertoire of contention (in
28 terms of level of conflict) as two variables with a direct and proportional correlation. Instead of
29 considering a linear relation between these dimensions, it is possible to cross them in order to show
30 how they jointly worked in influencing the interaction between the collective actors analysed.

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38 Figure 1 and Figure 2 sketch graphically the strategic orientation of the actors as it appeared
39 respectively in 2011 and 2015. The longitudinal perspective highlights how the agents modify their
40 attitude according to the perceived convenience of a specific strategy to follow. The two dimensions
41 are represented as a continuum: the logic of action goes from the two opposed extremes of
42 'movement' and 'organisation'; the repertoire of contention develops along the degrees of
43 'radicalism' of the action, going from the highest level of 'radical action' to the lowest one which
44 can be represented by conflict containment.

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1 view on social rights, showing to be a trade union more inclined towards a logic of movement,
2 while its repertoire of contention includes high impact of radical actions.

3 *Educit* was a newly born group with a more marked logic of action, inclined to innovative actions
4 with low conflict intensity. Moreover, FP accepted to share the decisional process with the rank-
5 and-file, getting closer to a logic of movement. USB adapted to a more moderate style of protest,
6 getting closer to the other actors under this aspect. The two unions temporarily overcame their
7 political and strategic fracture concurring in this way in involving the parents' recipients
8 association. The need for facing a situation of emergence, the agreement on targeting the
9 municipality as the main counterpart and the presence of unionised activists in the self-organised
10 groups, pressing their union of reference for a joint strategy, contributed to fostering a close
11 cooperation among the subjects involved.

12 Figure 2 depicts the scenario emerged in 2015, characterised by the heterogeneity of the strategies
13 and a sensible distance between the actors. FP pursued a bargaining strategy, alternating the steps of
14 the negotiation with less conflictive actions. FP considered itself the only legitimate actor in the
15 sector, especially for the high level of participation at the organised assembly. The incentive to
16 cooperate with other actors and share a participative process with the base was consequently low.

17 *Educit* registered an evolution in its logic of action, developing the vocation to represent the
18 professional category of educational workers in open competition with trade unions. It refuses to be
19 structured in stable organisations and promotes the direct participation of workers.

20 *Rete Educatori* was created as a new entity with strong social movement configuration, as a
21 consequence of its fluid structure and its tendency to enlarge the strict professional claims to other
22 spheres of local welfare. The group immediately collided with FP because of a disagreement on
23 strategies and oriented itself toward a radical style of protest. The two dimensions explain the weak
24 connection among *Rete educatori*, *Educit* and FP as well as the closeness between *Rete educatori*
25 and USB. The rank-and-file union supported *Rete Educatori* with different kinds of resources
26 (human, legal and organisational). *Educit* collaborated with *Rete Educatori* for drawing the
27 guidelines on public calls for tender of social-education, as they perceived it to be a concrete labour
28 claim.

29 The fragmentation of the actions seems to prevail without any urgency to respond to a concrete
30 emergence involving the educational workers. All the actors involved in the socio-educational
31 sector have stayed divided pursuing different objectives and interacting just on an occasional basis.

32 *Conclusion*

33 The analysis of the interaction between self-organised groups of precarious educational workers and
34 trade unions in Bologna leads to some important implications with regards to the definition of these
35

1 new actors, and the effectiveness of a strategy of cooperation or/and alliance between trade unions
2 and self-organised workers in the Italian framework. Firstly, it is possible to agree with the scholars
3 whom divide these groups between those aimed at representing specific categories of workers or
4 overt general issues. In the case observed, *Educit* reflects the first group, and *Rete educatori* the
5 second. In the first case, the scepticism towards trade unions appears more related to a question of
6 transparency, democracy, and inclusiveness in the decision-making process. The cooperation with
7 these subjects by restoring the logic of movement represents a viable strategy for traditional trade
8 unions. The coalition-building between the two trade unions and *Educit* showed effective results in
9 fulfil the revocation of the budget cut by exerting political pressure. In the case of *Rete educatori*
10 there is an open refusal of the system of delegation as a consequence of a more accentuate logic of
11 movement. The general social extent of their claims and the radical style of action of this group
12 bring them closer to radical unions and social movements. FP demonstrated a certain degree of
13 openness in experimenting new strategies and a repertoire of contention. The perception of being
14 the most representative subject in the social cooperation and the characteristics of the other actors
15 showed to be the most relevant influencing factors. The more a subject appears “radical” in terms of
16 claims and mobilisation style, the least likely a traditional union will cooperate with it. The main
17 strategic legacy emerged is the difficulty of going beyond the strict labour claim, enlarging to social
18 issues. This is reflected by FPs’ choice of targeting mainly the private counterpart in the contention
19 of 2015, when the public responsibility was not that spectacular, as in the previous contention.

20 In a changed context of growing labour deregulation and job precariousness, the cooperation
21 between self-organised precarious workers and trade unions still represents a valuable strategy for a
22 new endorsement of labour movements, as it has been found for the self-organised groups of
23 educational workers in Bologna. Strategic legacies and the characteristics of the actors involved in
24 the local labour movement resulted in being the main determinant leading the choice of adopting or
25 not this approach, in a perspective jointly accounting for institutional context and the actors’
26 strategic choices.

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Endsnotes

1 This professional figure is a specificity of the Italian social sector. The educational worker is a social worker specialised in health and social-educational interventions on social marginalisation and disability.

2 Pizzorno detects three types of exchanges: an individual exchange between the employer and the employee, the collective bargaining between an organised subject representing the two parts, and the “political exchange, where the trade union counterpart is the political administration and the object of the exchange is the political consensus.

3 The ‘Iori law’ was finally approved on the 20th of December 2017, reiterating the former draft of law.

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Logic of Action and Repertoire of Contention in the socio-educational sector in Bologna: a comparison between 2011 and 2015*

Figure 1: 2011

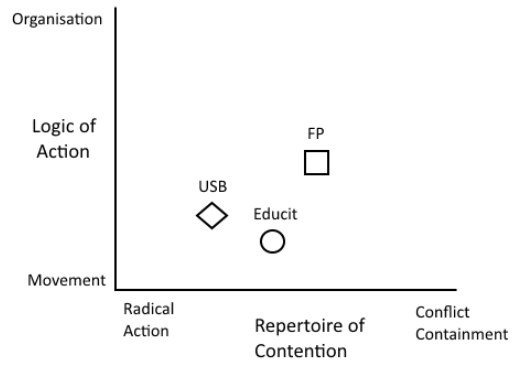
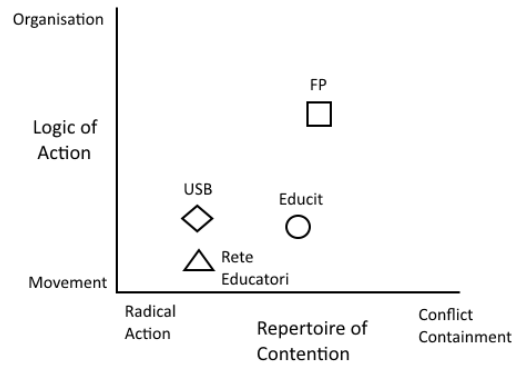


Figure 2: 2015



* *Own elaboration of the authors*