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# Bureaucracy, Post-Bureaucracy, or Anarchy? Evidence from the Italian Public Administration

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate whether the features characterizing the modern public administrations, their organizational models, and the activities carried out, are still rooted in the old bureaucratic approach. The research gathered data from a questionnaire administered to 156 Italian public officers, employees, and managers. The analysis consists of a correlation test and a regression test to verify the hypotheses related to the aim of the study. The research shows that, despite the changes driven by NPM reforms, the Italian Public Administration is still linked to a bureaucratic model. Findings also show that Italian public servants are highly motivated despite the activities they carry out are strongly standardized. Additionally, it clearly emerges that in some cases Italian public administrations are perceived by their employees as pervaded by anarchy. The article has both interesting academic and practical implications for the management of public administrations.

## KEYWORDS

Public administration;  
bureaucracy; post-  
bureaucracy; anarchy; Italy

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to offer insights into the complex and often unclear context of the public sector management, providing an in-depth analysis of the organizational features and of the activities carried out by public servants in the modern public administration. The article is grounded in the awareness that public sector has too often shown inefficiencies despite the bloody costing measures undertaken, and from manifold perspectives such as the economic (Rothstein & Downer, 2012), social (Knott & Miller, 2006), organizational (Meyer, Egger-Peitler, Höllerer, & Hammerschmid, 2014), and institutional ones (Magone, 2011).

Behind these failures, it is possible to recognize the decadence of the classic bureaucracies, in spite of any actions fostered at multiple levels and from both the theoretical and the practical perspectives, to search for solutions. Indeed, too many issues are still hardly unsolved. The reference is, above all, to performance measurement themes, historically affected by long-settled problems among which the questions relating the “work to rule” (Blau, 1955) and the “displacement of goals” (Merton, 1940), not to talk about the obsessive focus on rules and procedures leading to proceduralization rather than fostering substantive changes. In this context, given the persistence of old bureaucracy logics (Klijn, 2008; Meek, 2010), still permeating the modern

public administration, the path toward a broad improvement of the quality of public services for stakeholders, is still far from reaching.

The research questions driving the analysis in this article are the following: *Which organizational features characterize modern public administrations? What factors influence the predominance of different models? What aspects characterize the activities carried out by public servants?*

A specific case is set on the Italian context, since its peculiar political, cultural, and contextual aspects, and since it is one of the countries within the Continental Europe that received less regard by the literature on public management. The analysis has been carried out through a correlation test and a linear regression, on data gathered by employing semi-structured questionnaires with 156 Italian public managers, officers, and employees. Issues regarding job characteristics, leadership/managerial style, human resource management (personal motivation and incentives), organizational climate, individual targets, and public administration of affiliation targets will be analyzed and discussed. These issues are key points in answering the research questions and achieving the aim of understanding which features characterize the organizational model and the activities carried out by public servants in Italian public administrations.

The article contributes to the literature on public management by providing an advancement in the discussion on bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic models. It also provides a discussion on issues that may support the development of solutions to improve operational management and perform a better change management in the public sector. Then, it contributes in giving insights in a country belonging to the group of Continental European countries—especially those in the Southern area—less regarded and still under-investigated by the literature.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Second section assesses previous literature on bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic models. Third section sets the research design and presents the hypotheses driving the analysis. In fourth section, for reasons of clarity, the results are presented in five subsections relative to the descriptive statistics; the results of the correlation test; the results of the linear regression; the specific answers to the research hypotheses; and the results related to participants' proposed solutions. Fifth Section discusses the results. Sixth Section presents the concluding remarks and future research direction.

### Assessment of previous literature on bureaucracy and post-bureaucracy

In its pure form, bureaucracy has been described by Weber (1922) as the most efficient and rational way of organizing. According to the author, bureaucratization was the key part of the rational-legal authority, and furthermore, he saw it as the key process in the ongoing rationalization of the Western society. Weber individuated several preconditions for the emergence of bureaucracy: the growth in space and population being administered, the growth in complexity of the administrative tasks being carried out, and the existence of a monetary economy requiring a more efficient administrative system. There was the belief that a system of transparent rules was better than a system without rules. Weber's ideal-typical bureaucracy is characterized by hierarchical organization, delineated lines of authority in a fixed area of activity, high standardized tasks, action taken on the basis of, and recorded in, written rules, bureaucratic officials needing expert training, rules implemented by neutral officials, career advancement made through public competitions and based on technical qualifications.

Over time, the term “bureaucracy” has become synonymous of “inefficiency” since the failure in several of its premises. During the 1940s and 1950s, literature already started advancing some negative aspects emerging from the application of bureaucratic models.

Weber himself provided some dysfunctions of bureaucracy. While recognizing bureaucracy as the

most efficient form of organization, and even indispensable for the modern state, Weber saw it as a threat to individual freedoms, and the ongoing bureaucratization as leading to a *polar night of icy darkness* (Weber, 1946, 128), in which increasing rationalization of human life traps individuals in a soulless “iron cage” of bureaucratic, rule-based, rational control. Its major advantage, the calculability of results, also renders it a model unable in dealing with individual cases, leading to phenomena of depersonalization. Thus, modern rationalized and bureaucratized systems of law have become incapable of dealing with individual particularities, to which earlier types of justice were well suited.

Merton (1940) introduced the concept of “displacement of goals,” whereby *an instrumental value becomes a terminal value* (Merton, 1940, 563). According to the author, by following bureaucracy's principles and rules, bureaucrats have come to the situation in which the rules became their goals, instead of the process or service to be delivered. While Merton agreed with certain aspects of Weber's analysis, he also considered the dysfunctional aspects of bureaucracy, which he attributed to a “trained incapacity” resulting from “overconformity.” He saw bureaucrats as more likely to defend their own entrenched interests than to act to benefit the organization as a whole. He also believed bureaucrats took pride in their craft, which led them to resist changes in established routines. Merton also noted that bureaucrats emphasized formality over interpersonal relationships, and had been trained to ignore the special circumstances of particular cases, causing them to come across as “arrogant” and “haughty.” On the same advice, Selznick (1948) suggests that bureaucrats' excessive focus on personal goals rather than on those of the organization, leads to a bifurcation of interests that hinders the efficient way of doing things.

Blau (1955) moved another interesting critic to bureaucracy, related to the concept of “work to rule,” a trade union tactic according to which employees adopt behaviors to do nothing more than the minimum required by the rules of their contract: they precisely follow all regulations, which may cause a slowdown or decrease in productivity.

Thus, over time several critics have been moved to bureaucracy. First, under the economic point of view, since its inefficiency and low performances (Rothstein & Downer, 2012). Second, under the organizational aspect, since the low motivation of employees (Meyer et al., 2014), and situations such as turnover, alienation (Tichelar, 1997), lack of human resources policies (Magone, 2011), and lack of flexibility (Considine, 2000). Third, under the social point of view, since the several episodes of corruption (Knott & Miller, 2006), absenteeism, and opportunism

(Ahn & Bretschneider, 2011; Considine, 2000; Knott, 2011; Knott & Miller, 2006). Finally, under the institutional aspect, since the poor quality of public services delivered (Magone, 2011), the low attention toward the public interest (Lynn, 2001), and since citizens are treated much more as passive users, rather than as (active) customers or stakeholders (Ahn & Bretschneider, 2011).

Searching for responses to the inefficiency of the bureaucracy and putting the accent on the performance and on the “managerialization” of the public administration, became the key points of the NPM (Hood, 1991; Verbeeten, 2008). In the context of state failure, of poor performance of its bureaucracies, and with its focus on results and on optimizing the public budget, the managerial approach promised improvements in bureaucratic efficiency and accountability following the agency theory, through the creation of incentive systems that would direct bureaucrats (the agents) to meet the targets set by policy makers, political representatives, and citizens (principals) in the provision of public goods and services.

Significant research after the mid of the 2000s argued about a series of unsolved contradictions in the NPM approach, arguing that the NPM failed to deliver better value, since proponents underestimate the complexity permeating the public sector (Lapsley, 2008, 2009). An alternative perspective that emerged is that new forms of governance were superseding managerialism (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009). Osborne (2010a, 2010b), in fact, put new public governances (NPG) at the center of a post-NPM debate, based on involving more actors (both public and private), creating more consensus and voluntary participation in decision-making processes, establishing collaborative relationships and networks. However, according to Noordegraaf and Abma (2003), it should be acknowledged that this approach resulted weaker than the previous one, since trends such as “new public management” (Hood, 1991), “performance oriented management” (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000) and the rise of the “audit society” (Power, 1999) indicate that the world of public management has now become a world of measurement (Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003). On this point, many authors highlight that measuring and rewarding performance may have undesirable effects on overall performance (Burgess & Ratto, 2003; De Bruijn, 2002; Gray & Jenkins, 1993). Along with this issue, literature (e.g., Klijn, 2008; Meek, 2010) still acknowledges that public systems are strongly anchored to an ancient tradition of bureaucratic, standardized, and repeated activities characterized by high rationality (Meek, 2010).

Since nuances in the model of public administration do exist in the different countries, a look has also to be given to the countries considered in the studies of public administration. Here, with reference to the rise of the NPM, since

1991 the literature mainly concentrated on Anglo-Saxon countries (Alexander, Lewis, & Considine, 2011; Callanan, 2005; Carey & Matthews, 2017; Charlesworth, Clarke, & Cochrane, 1996; Cloutier, Denis, Langley, & Lamothe, 2016; Considine, 2000; Currie & Procter, 2005; Entwistle & Martin, 2005; Finn, Currie, & Martin, 2010; Gatenby, Rees, Truss, Alfes, & Soane, 2015; Germov, 2005; Kane & Patapan, 2006; Kelly, 2006; Kinder, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Ackroyd, 2003; Kitchener & Gask, 2003; Knott, 2011; Knott & Miller, 2006; Kothari & Handscombe, 2007; Learmonth, 2005; Martin, 2011; McGivern, Currie, Ferlie, Fitzgerald, & Waring, 2015; Meier & Bohte, 2001; Orr & Vince, 2009; Pollitt, 2009; Rothstein & Downer, 2012; Williams, Kang, & Johnson, 2016), while less attention has been devoted to the countries in the Continental Europe (Bang, 2004; Berg, 2006; Bode & Dent, 2014; Currie, Grubnic, & Hodges, 2011; De Boer, Enders, & Leisyte, 2007; Fotaki, 2011; Geddes, 2012; Gourdin & Schepers, 2009; Hammerschmid & Meyer, 2005; Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Kickert, 2005; Lega & DePietro, 2005; Lehmann Nielsen, 2006; Martin, Currie, & Finn, 2009; Meyer et al., 2014; Meynhardt & Diefenbach, 2012; Noordegraaf & De Wit, 2012; Raadschelders, 1995; Seibel, 2010; Vinot, 2014; Voets, Verhoest, & Molenveld, 2015), especially to those in the Southern area (Correia & Denis, 2016; Kickert, 2005, 2011; Lega & DePietro, 2005; Magone, 2011; Ongaro, 2006).

Two main gaps emerge from the analysis of the literature. First, there are no studies analyzing the features of the organizational model and the activities carried out by public servants in the modern public administrations. The attention has been always paid to the rules driving the PA, following the bureaucratic model; then on the performance, following the NPM reforms; finally, on the search for collaboration, networks, and partnerships in light of the NPG approach.

Second, there is a lack of attention toward the countries in the Southern Europe. These countries present interesting and peculiar characteristics due to historical, cultural, and political differences respect to the Anglo-Saxon and other Continental European countries.

On this ground, this article aims to fill these gaps by providing an in-depth analysis of the features of the organizational model and the activities carried out by public servants in the Italian context.

## Research design and hypotheses

The analysis relies upon the administering of semi-structured questionnaires to 156 Italian public managers, officers and employees, during different training courses that the participants were attending on issues regarding the public administration.

In more detail, the questionnaire was structured in 20 questions. The first 13 were multiple-choice questions concerning age, the public administration of affiliation, the job qualification (manager/officer/employee), the number of years in service, the priority of the PA of affiliation, the job horizontal specialization degree (4-point scale), the job vertical specialization degree (4-point scale), the formalization degree (6-point scale) within the PA of affiliation, the managerial style perceived within the PA of affiliation (coercive/participative/democratic), the degree of personal motivation (6-point scale), the conflict degree (6-point scale) within the PA, the personal target and solutions to improve personal motivation.

Following Mintzberg (1979) regarding job characteristics, the definition of job horizontal specialization degree is related to the number of tasks to perform: the less is the number of activities assigned to an employee, the more the job will be specialized. Indeed, the definition of job vertical specialization degree is related to the degree of control over the job assigned to the employee: the less will be the autonomy given to the employee, the more the activity will be specialized.

Regarding the managerial style, it is worth noting that a fourth category has been added to the three categories reported within the questionnaire (coercive/participative/democratic), since numerous participants, while completing the questionnaires, asked whether it was possible to add the term “anarchy,” explaining that, within their administration of affiliation, they perceived a climate and a method of managing that could be defined more accurately as anarchy.

The last seven were open questions, aiming to better understand which solutions the participants have in mind to solve the negative aspects related to the main features characterizing the activities they carry out, to the organizational climate, and the managerial style within their administrations, and to overcoming bureaucracy's negative aspects. In greater detail, questions were related to interventions in the formalization degree, specialization degree, conflict resolution, desired managerial style, solutions to improve employees' motivation and solutions to overcome bureaucracy's hurdles.

The focus on the Italian setting is due to the lack of attention emerging from the literature first to those countries in the southern part of Europe, then to the specificity of the Italian context, characterized by peculiar political, cultural, and contextual aspects. The Italian context has a persistent influence of the administrative law paradigm characterizing its tradition of governance, along with a high degree of prevalence of formality on the substance, that might explain the dynamics of administrative reforms in Italy (Ongaro, 2006). On this ground, the first hypothesis to be tested is:

*H1: Italian public administrations are still rooted in a bureaucratic model.*

Consequently, the job characteristics should be imprinted with high specialization, both horizontal and vertical, high formalization, and low employee motivation. Indeed, here it is considered what stated by Merton (1940) on his belief that bureaucrats took pride in their craft, thus it is expected a high motivation degree.

In turn, personal motivation should depend positively on high degrees of specialization, formalization, on democratic and participative managerial styles, and negatively on the degree of conflict. Thus, the second hypothesis is as follows:

*H2a: Jobs' characteristics present high standardization (both horizontal and vertical), high formalization, and high motivation*

and

*H2b: Personal motivation depends positively on a high specialization degree (both horizontal and vertical), high formalization degree, the managerial style, and negatively on a high conflict degree*

Additionally, the managerial style in line with these characteristics should be mainly coercive. Thus, the third hypothesis is proposed as follows:

*H3: The managerial styles adopted mainly present the characteristics of a coercive approach.*

## Data analysis

To test these hypotheses and to answer the research questions, descriptive statistics will be supported by a Pearson's correlation test and a linear regression performed with the statistics program SPSS 16.0.

## Pearson's correlation test

A correlation test was conducted between all the variables. Specifically, the variables were interpreted as follows.

- Age: less than 30 = 1; from 30 to 40 = 2; from 40 to 50 = 3; over 50 = 4
- Horizontal specialization degree: from 1 (low) to 4 (high)
- Vertical specialization degree: from 1 (low) to 4 (high)
- Formalization degree: from 0 (null) to 5 (very high)
- Personal motivation: from 0 (null) to 5 (very high)
- Conflict degree: from 0 (null) to 5 (very high)
- Job qualification, public administration of affiliation, public administration's priority, managerial styles, and solutions to improve motivation were treated as polychotomous variables

## Linear regression

Linear regression was performed to test the dependence of personal motivation on the specialization degree, the complexity degree, the formalization degree, the conflict degree, and the managerial style. In this case, the variables were labeled as follows:

- Horizontal specialization degree: from 1 (low) to 4 (high)
- Vertical specialization degree: from 1 (low) to 4 (high)
- Formalization degree: from 0 (null) to 5 (very high)
- Personal motivation: from 0 (null) to 5 (very high)
- Conflict degree: from 0 (null) to 5 (very high)
- Managerial style: anarchy = 0; coercive = 1; democratic = 2; participative = 3

## Results

### Descriptive statistics

The observed sample shows that most of the participants are aged from 40 to 50 (nearly 80%) and they have mostly been in service for 10–20 years (44%). Most of the participants come from local (48%) and central government (27%) institutions. More than half of them are officers (56%), 31% are employees, and 13% are managers. Table 1 provides the complete picture of the descriptive statistics about personal information.

Table 2 shows results relating to the job characteristics. The table shows that both horizontal specialization and vertical specialization are “relatively high” (respectively, 71% and 67%) or “high” (23% and 27%). These data become even more interesting when cumulating the percentages of degrees 3 and 4, which cover 94% of cases.

The table also shows the level of personal motivation and solutions to improve employees’ motivation.

Table 2 shows “relatively high” motivation among 40% of the participants, and “high” motivation among 19% of the participants. Indeed, the table shows that most of the participants gave greater importance to career development (42%) and monetary incentives (33%) as solutions to improve personal motivation. Only 15% reported the development of informal leadership, 8% indicated non-monetary incentives, and just 2% recognized a positive influence on motivation in superiors adopting behaviors to set an example for their employees.

Table 3 provides the results relating to the organizational characteristics. The organizational characteristics, analyzed through the questionnaire, are related to

**Table 1.** Participants’ personal information.

Participants’ age	N	%
Under 30 years old	9	6%
Between 30 and 40 years old	15	10%
Between 40 and 50 years old	123	79%
Over 50 years old	9	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Years in service</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 5 years	9	6%
Between 5 and 10 years	15	10%
Between 10 and 20 years	69	44%
More than 20 years	63	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>PA of affiliation</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Local government	75	48%
Central government	42	27%
Health and social care	9	6%
Education	18	11%
Research institute	9	6%
Social insurance institute	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Job qualifications</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Manager	21	13%
Officer	87	56%
Employee	48	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>

the formalization degree, the priority of the PA, the managerial style, and the conflict degree. Relating to the formalization degree, surprisingly, the balance needle is more oriented toward a low degree (38% “relatively low”; 52% when cumulating “null,” “low” and “relatively low”). There are nevertheless high percentages of “relatively high” (31%) and “high” (15%).

Table 3 also shows the answers to the question *what do you think is the priority of your PA of affiliation?*. The results interestingly show that the priority of the PA is represented in 68% of the cases by *respecting the rules*.

**Table 2.** Job characteristics.

Horizontal specialization degree	N	%
1 (low)	3	2%
2 (relatively low)	6	4%
3 (relatively high)	111	71%
4 (high)	36	23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Vertical specialization degree</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
1 (Low)	0	0%
2 (Relatively low)	9	6%
3 (Relatively high)	105	67%
4 (High)	42	27%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Personal motivation</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
0 (insufficient)	3	2%
1 (low)	9	6%
2 (relatively low)	24	15%
3 (relatively high)	63	40%
4 (high)	30	19%
5 (very high)	27	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Solutions to improve personal motivation</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Monetary incentives	51	33%
Non-monetary incentives	12	8%
Career development	66	42%
Developing informal and participative leadership	24	15%
Superiors adopting behaviors to set an example	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3.** Organizational characteristics.

Formalization degree	N	%
0 (null)	6	4%
1 (now)	15	10%
2 (relatively low)	60	38%
3 (relatively high)	48	31%
4 (high)	24	15%
5 (excessive)	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Public administration's priority</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Respecting the rules	105	68%
Improving economic and financial performance	27	17%
Satisfying public stakeholders	24	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Managerial styles</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Anarchy	51	33%
Coercive	48	31%
Participative	42	27%
Democratic	15	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Conflict degree</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
0 (null)	0	0%
1 (low)	3	2%
2 (relatively low)	18	11%
3 (relatively high)	81	52%
4 (high)	45	29%
5 (very high)	9	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>

Another question asked the participants to indicate which managerial style is mainly adopted within their PA of affiliation. There were three possible answers: coercive, participative, and democratic. As previously highlighted, during the questionnaire submission, numerous participants asked whether it was possible to add the term “anarchy”; thus, after the first 10 responses, the term was included in the subsequent questionnaire submissions. Table 3 shows the final results: anarchy resulted as the most selected style (33%), while the second choice was “coercive” (31%).

Finally, to obtain a proxy for the organizational climate, the participants were asked to indicate the degree of conflict within their PA of affiliation. Table 3 shows that more than half of the participants reported a “relatively high” (52%) degree of conflict, and another relevant percentage (29%) reported a “high” level of conflict.

The final question was intended to understand the personal target of the participants (see Table 4). The possible options suggested were: respecting the rules, finding solutions to citizens' problems, reaching PA targets, and reaching individual targets. Table 4 shows that the main target is represented by “reaching PA targets” (35%), followed by “finding solutions to citizens' problems” (33%) and “respecting the rules” (29%). Indeed, “reaching individual targets” represents only 4%.

**Table 4.** Personal targets.

Personal targets	N	%
Finding solutions to citizens' problems	51	33%
Respecting the rules	45	29%
Reaching PA targets	54	35%
Reaching individual targets	6	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Correlation test

Table 5 shows the results from Pearson's correlation test.

The results can be illustrated starting with participants' age, which is found to be correlated positively with the job qualification as a manager (0.195\*), with the perceived priority of the PA in respecting the rules (0.228\*\*), with the horizontal specialization degree (0.351\*\*), with the vertical specialization degree (0.162\*) and with the democratic managerial style (0.192\*). Indeed, age has a negative correlation with the job qualification as an officer (−0.228\*\*), with the perceived priority of the PA in satisfying public stakeholders (−0.368\*\*), with the coercive managerial style (−0.245\*\*) and with monetary incentives to improve motivation (−0.166\*).

Relative to the PA of affiliation, the *central government* is positively correlated with the job qualification as an employee (0.159\*), with the years in service (0.328\*\*), with performance as the PA priority (0.295\*\*), with the formalization degree (0.166\*) and with monetary incentives to improve motivation (0.313\*\*). A negative correlation exists with the job qualification as a manager (−0.239\*\*) and with the vertical specialization degree (−0.323\*\*).

*Local government* is positively correlated with respecting the rules as the priority (0.197\*) and with the horizontal (0.191\*) and vertical (0.173\*) specialization degrees. It is negatively correlated with the years in service (−0.222\*\*), performance as the priority (−0.237\*\*) and personal motivation (−0.237\*\*). No significant correlations emerge with solutions to improve employees' motivation, with the exception of non-monetary incentives (0.150 by extending  $p < .10$ ).

*Health and social care* institutions are positively correlated with the job qualification as an officer (0.220\*\*), with the democratic managerial style (0.199\*) and with career development as the motivation incentive (0.289\*\*). Negative correlations exist with the years in service (−0.255\*\*), with the horizontal specialization degree (−0.358\*\*) and with non-monetary incentives (−0.172\*). No significant correlations emerge with the PA priority, with the exception of the satisfaction of stakeholders (0.144 by extending  $p < .10$ ).

*Education* institutions present only positive correlations with the satisfaction of stakeholders as the priority (0.210\*\*) and with the vertical specialization degree (0.196\*). No significant correlations emerge with the managerial style, with the exception of anarchy (0.133 by extending  $p < .10$ ). By extending the significance to  $p < .10$ , another positive correlation emerges with personal motivation (0.139).

**Table 5. Results from the correlation test.**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28							
1. age	1																																		
2. PA_central_gov	0.011	1																																	
3. PA_local_gov	0.054	-.584**	1																																
4. PA_health_social_care	-0.074	-0.15	-.238**	1																															
5. PA_education	-0.008	-.219**	-.348**	-0.089	1																														
6. PA_research_institute	-0.074	-0.15	-.238**	-0.061	-0.089	1																													
7. PA_social_insurance_institute	0.036	-0.085	-0.135	-0.035	-0.051	-0.035	1																												
8. role_manager	.195*	-.239**	0.072	-0.098	0.034	0.144	.355**	1																											
9. role_officer	-.228**	0.017	0.004	.220**	-0.042	-0.112	-.157*	-.443**	1																										
10. role_employee	0.101	.159*	-0.058	-.165*	0.02	0.014	-0.093	-.263**	-.749**	1																									
11. years_service	.482**	.328**	-.222**	-.255**	-0.011	0.042	0.136	0.044	-0.12	0.096	1																								
12. PA_priority_rules	.228**	-0.075	.197*	-0.15	-0.084	0.036	-0.085	0.142	0.017	-0.123	0.12	1																							
13. PA_priority_performance	0.117	.295**	-.237**	0.105	-0.006	-0.113	-0.064	-.180**	0.1	0.025	0.016	-.278**	1																						
14. PA_priority_satisfaction	-.368**	0.015	-0.154	0.144	.210**	-0.098	-0.055	-0.156	0.011	0.103	-.362**	-.239**	-.180**	1																					
15. PA_priority_all	-0.04	-.169*	0.111	-0.045	-0.066	0.122	.164*	0.118	-0.099	0.019	0.129	-.520**	-.392**	-.338**	1																				
16. H_specialization_degree	.351**	0.065	.191*	-.358**	0.008	0.078	-0.038	0.092	-0.031	-0.034	.344**	.217**	-.034	-.206**	-0.026	1																			
17. V_specialization_degree	.162*	-.323**	.173*	-0.099	.196*	0.057	.208**	.267**	-0.083	-0.109	0.082	-0.078	-0.086	0.055	0.099	.402**	1																		
18. formalization_degree	0.000	.166*	-0.129	0.039	-0.115	0.039	0.067	-0.027	0.092	-0.08	-0.022	-.207**	0.121	0.081	0.037	0.097	-0.086	1																	
19. managerial_style_participative	0.155	0.023	-0.063	-0.15	0.052	0.036	.231**	-0.112	-.158*	.253**	.172*	.218**	-0.048	-0.239**	0.007	.217**	0.003	.207**	1																
20. managerial_style_democratic	.192*	-0.051	0.078	.199*	-0.118	-0.081	-0.046	-0.129	.159*	-0.076	.160*	-.198*	0.023	-0.129	.249**	-0.088	0.116	0.093	-.198*	1															
21. managerial_style_coercive	-.245**	0.065	0.109	0.014	-0.11	-.165*	-0.093	-0.019	.174*	-.174*	-0.154	-.405**	.246**	-0.019	.188*	-0.107	-.265**	.199*	-.405**	-.217**	1														
22. managerial_style_anarchy	-0.026	-0.053	-0.096	0.003	0.133	.179*	-0.098	.206*	-0.122	-0.02	-0.112	.316**	-.210**	-.348**	-.326**	-0.044	.186*	-.450**	-.423**	-.227**	-.465**	1													
23. personal_motivation	-0.035	0.075	-.237**	-0.114	0.139	.165*	.212**	0.12	-0.037	-0.049	0.056	0.038	0.047	-0.071	-.002	.353**	.327**	.163*	.148	-.169*	-.015	0.149	0.15	-0.022	1										
24. motivation_career	-0.04	-0.081	-0.123	.289**	0.056	0.122	-0.12	0.004	-0.099	0.104	-0.104	0.095	0.123	0.118	-.261**	-0.095	-0.121	-0.074	0.007	-0.015	-0.119	0.083	1												
25. motivation_monetary_incentives	.166*	.313**	-0.133	-0.071	-0.104	-0.071	-0.04	-0.114	0.112	-0.036	0.107	-0.013	0.059	-0.114	0.045	-0.078	-0.115	0.000	0.15	-0.094	0.12	-.201*	0.131	-.247**	1										
26. motivation_non_monetary_incentives	0.11	-0.053	0.15	-.172*	0.133	-.172*	-0.098	-0.155	0.125	-0.02	0.134	0.039	0.006	-0.035	-0.016	0.1	.263**	-0.098	-0.053	0.051	-0.02	0.039	.187*	.187*	-.597**	1									
27. motivation_informal_leadership	0.02	-0.018	0.016	-0.106	-0.154	0.123	.328**	.300**	-0.05	-.169*	-0.098	-.259**	-.195*	-0.012	.390**	0.072	-0.069	.305**	-0.018	0.042	.178*	-.184*	-.166*	-.365**	-.201*	-.297**	1								
28. conflict_degree	-0.119	-0.027	0.036	-0.077	0.112	-0.077	-0.043	0.087	0.084	-0.155	-0.043	-0.027	-0.079	-0.052	0.121	-0.084	0.146	-0.034	-0.242**	-0.02	0.103	0.14	-0.136	0.024	-.179*	-0.114	0.132	1							

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Research institutes* are positively correlated with an anarchic managerial style (0.179\*) and with personal motivation (0.165\*). A negative correlation exists with the coercive managerial style (-0.165\*) and with non-monetary incentives (-0.172\*). No significant correlations emerge with the PA priority.

*Social insurance institutes* are positively correlated with the job qualification as a manager (0.355\*\*), with the vertical specialization degree (0.208\*\*), with the participative managerial style (0.231\*\*), with personal motivation (0.212\*\*) and with the development of informal leadership as a solution to improve motivation (0.328\*\*). A negative correlation exists with the job qualification as an officer (-0.157\*). No significant correlations emerge with the PA priority.

Regarding the *years in service*, the correlation test also shows a positive correlation with the horizontal specialization degree (0.344\*\*) and with the participative (0.172\*) and democratic (0.160\*) managerial styles.

Relative to the *managerial styles*, interesting results emerge showing a positive correlation between the participative style and rules as the PA priority (0.218\*\*) and between the coercive style and performance as the priority (0.246\*\*). Indeed, anarchy surprisingly has a positive correlation with respecting the rules (0.316\*\*) and with satisfying public stakeholders (0.326\*\*); a negative correlation exists with performance as the priority (-0.210\*\*).

Concerning personal motivation and solutions to improve motivation, other interesting results emerge from the positive correlation between non-monetary incentives and the vertical specialization degree (0.263\*\*) and from the positive correlation between the development of informal leadership with the formalization degree (0.305\*\*) and with the coercive managerial style (0.178\*).

### Linear regression

Linear regression aims to test the dependence of personal motivation on the main variables characterizing the job assigned and the organizational climate, such as the horizontal and vertical specialization degrees, formalization

degree, conflict degree, and managerial style. Table 6 shows the results from the test, with  $F = 8.507$  and  $\text{sig.} = .000$ .

With the exception of the managerial style (0.216), all the other variables resulted as significant in the model.

### Answers to the research hypotheses

According to Mintzberg (1979), the bureaucratic model is characterized by high standardization, high formalization, and centralized decisions. The aim of this model is to achieve internal efficiency by respecting the rules. Thus, the first hypothesis is as follows:

*H1: Italian public administrations are still rooted in a bureaucratic model.*

Table 7 reports the values of the mentioned characteristics within the analyzed case of Italian public administrations.

The values that emerge from the case study highlight that jobs are characterized by both high horizontal and high vertical specialization (3.15 and 3.21 on the 4-point scale from 1 to 4), in line with the settings of the bureaucratic model. Indeed, the formalization degree is well distributed around the average value (2.50 on the 6-point scale from 0 to 5), thus revealing a lower value than that stated by Mintzberg. Relative to the last aspect, achieving internal efficiency, it is possible to note that, by cumulating the percentages resulting from the answers on the PA priorities "rules" and "performance," a very high value emerges (85%).

On the basis of these results, and considering that the formalization degree is nevertheless quite high, it is possible to assert that

### H1 is verified

The second hypothesis is as follows:

*H2a: Job characteristics present high standardization (both horizontal and vertical), high formalization, and high motivation*  
and

**Table 6.** Results from the regression.

Coefficients (a)		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
Model		B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(constant)	0.190	0.713		0.267	0.790
	H specialization degree	0.467	0.169	0.224	2.764	0.006
	V specialization degree	0.612	0.180	0.275	4.391	0.001
	Formalization degree	0.220	0.088	0.195	2.500	0.014
	Conflict degree	-0.257	0.111	-0.175	-2.310	0.022
	Managerial style	-0.099	0.080	-0.100	-1.243	0.216

**a. Dependent variable: personal motivation**  
**F = 8.507\*\*\***  
**Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.195**

**Table 7.** Information regarding the answer to H1.

Variable	Value	Source
Horizontal specialization degree (from 1 to 4)	3.15	Average score on $N = 156$
Vertical specialization degree (from 1 to 4)	3.21	Average score on $N = 156$
Formalization degree (from 0 to 5)	2.50	Average score on $N = 156$
Respecting the rules and improving performance	85%	Cumulated percentage of answers "rules" and "performance"

*H2b: Personal motivation depends positively on a high specialization degree (both horizontal and vertical), high formalization degree, the managerial style, and negatively on a high conflict degree.*

Following Mintzberg’s (1979) settings of the job specialization matrix, Figure 1 shows the application of the matrix to the specific case study, reporting the corresponding number of participants in each square.

Figure 1 shows that the balance needle is strongly oriented toward highly specialized jobs, typically characterizing the “machine bureaucracy” defined by Mintzberg. Since the high motivation degree also confirms what stated by Merton (1940) on his belief that bureaucrats took pride in their craft, despite the standardized and repetitive tasks, it is possible to assert that

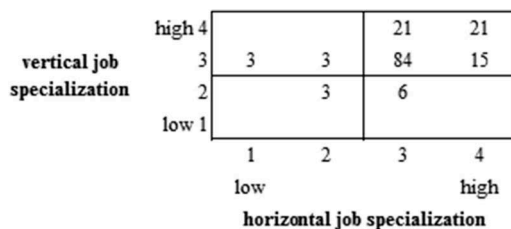
**H2a is verified**

The dependence of personal motivation (positively on a high specialization degree [both horizontal and vertical], high formalization degree, the managerial style, and negatively on a high conflict degree) was tested through a linear regression:

$$M = \beta_0 + \beta_1MS + \beta_2Hsd + \beta_3Vsd + \beta_4Fd - \beta_5Cd,$$

where  $M$  is motivation,  $MS$  is managerial style,  $Hsd$  is horizontal specialization degree,  $Vsd$  is vertical specialization degree,  $Fd$  is formalization degree, and  $Cd$  is conflict degree.

The results from the regression test quite confirm what was hypothesized: a positive relationship emerges with high degrees of specialization (both horizontal and vertical, respectively, with sig. 0.006 and 0.001), a high formalization degree (sig. 0.014). Even the negative impact of the conflict degree is confirmed (sig. 0.022),



**Figure 1.:** Mintzberg’s job specialization matrix.

while no significant relationship emerges with the managerial style (sig. 0.216). Thus,

**H2b is partly verified**

The third hypothesis is as follows:

*H3: The managerial styles adopted mainly present the characteristics of a coercive approach.*

Table 3 clearly indicates that of the three managerial styles initially reported within the questionnaire (participative/democratic/coercive), the coercive approach is the most indicated (31%). This result has to be linked to the conflict degree, which on average is 3.25 on the 6-point scale from 0 to 5 and which, by cumulating the percentages of the degrees from 3 to 5, amounts to 87% of cases. Indeed, since 33% of the participants surprisingly indicated anarchy as the most recurring managerial style (or, a better term in this case, organizational model) within their PA of affiliation, it should be asserted that

**H3 is not verified**

Even though the third hypothesis is not verified, the result seems to be interesting, since the response “anarchy” represents a possible answer to the question regarding which kind of organizational model is mostly adopted in the Italian setting. The answer is even more interesting considering that it emerged spontaneously from participants’ observations.

**Solutions proposed by the participants**

The last seven open questions aimed to understand participants’ opinions about possible interventions in the formalization degree, specialization degree, conflict resolution, desired managerial style, solutions to improve employees’ motivation and solutions to overcome bureaucracy’s hurdles. Responses have been labeled and are summarized in Table 8.

The first question was about interventions in the horizontal job specialization degree. Most of the participants replied that they had no suggestions regarding this aspect (46%), while 40% answered that there is a need to increase employees’ job training. This result is interesting considering the high level of motivation associated with a high level of specialization; this may also be confirmed by the fact that other replies, despite amounting to only 4%, indicated the need to “increase specialization,” as the respondents seemed to feel comforted by a high level of specialization.

Even in the case of interventions in the vertical job specialization degree, most of the participants answered that they had no solutions to suggest (60%). The most important answer related to the vertical specialization

**Table 8.** Interventions suggested by participants.

Interventions in the horizontal job specialization degree	N	%
No suggestion	72	46%
Increase flexibility	6	4%
Increase specialization	6	4%
Increase training	63	40%
Increase collaboration	6	4%
Process re-engineering	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
Interventions in the vertical job specialization degree	N	%
No suggestion	93	60%
Increase decisional autonomy	12	8%
Increase collaboration	18	12%
Process re-engineering	15	10%
Employee involvement	9	6%
Simplify norms and procedures	6	4%
Improve coordination among activities	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
Interventions in the formalization degree	N	%
No	81	52%
Monitor the correct application of procedures	6	4%
Specific training	3	2%
Implement technologies that are useful for sharing	3	2%
Increase flexibility	3	2%
Increase the culture of work	3	2%
Improve communication	6	4%
Clearer attribution of roles and responsibilities	42	27%
Guarantee transparency	3	2%
Reduce the hierarchy	3	2%
Increase collaboration	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
Desired managerial styles	N	%
Coercive	3	2%
Participative	138	88%
Democratic	15	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
Interventions for conflict resolution	N	%
Sharing targets with employees	78	50%
Managing HR with incentives	27	17%
Creating a positive organizational climate	30	19%
Creating a uniform culture	18	12%
Distributive justice	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>
Interventions for overcoming bureaucracy's inefficiencies	N	%
Working on individual behaviors	96	62%
Managing by projects	45	29%
Building a culture of service	3	2%
Seeking efficiency	3	2%
Increasing reunions	3	2%
Reducing the excessive regulations	6	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>

degree, “increasing decisional autonomy,” only reached 8%. Among the answers that received much more attention, the participants indicated as possible solutions “increasing collaboration” (12%) and “process re-engineering” (10%).

Again, in the case of the formalization degree, more than half of the participants answered that they did not have solutions to suggest, while 27% answered reporting interventions that involve a clearer attribution of roles and responsibilities.

Concerning the desired managerial style within their administration, most of the participants (88%) indicated a participative style, while 10% reported a democratic style, and 2% asserted that “leadership is not required; only coercion and authority are needed.”

The answers related to the interventions for conflict resolution, show that half of the participants indicated “sharing targets with employees,” and 19% indicated “creating a positive organizational climate.”

The solutions proposed by the participants to improve employees’ motivation are shown in Table 2. Here it is recalled the strong preference for career development possibilities (42%) and monetary incentives (33%), while scarce attention has been devoted to other kinds of solutions, such as non-monetary incentives (8%), developing informal and participative leadership (15%) and using superiors’ behaviors as an example for employees’ behaviors (2%).

Finally, the table shows the results of the discussion with the participants about the solutions that they would propose to resolve bureaucracy’s inefficiencies. Interestingly, 62% of the participants gave answers that can be labeled as “working on individual behaviours,” while 29% proposed to adopt organizational models based on project management. Among the other answers, it is worth highlighting that some participants (4%) reported the need to reduce the excessive regulations.

## Discussion

The discussion of the results will follow two main directions, aiming to highlight the most recurring models by type of public administration and the overall model recurring in the Italian public sector.

Interestingly, by examining the characteristics of the central government emerging from the analysis, the resulting model reflect perfectly the NPM features. In fact, there is a great focus on performance confirmed by a perfect correlation between central government and performance as the priority. Additionally, there are positive correlations with the high formalization degree and developed role for employees, in line with the decentralization principle led by the NPM approach. Finally, there is also a positive correlation with monetary incentives, again in line with the NPM principle according to which employees are much more motivated by monetary incentives.

As the opposite of this model, there is the model recurring in local government, mostly presenting the characteristics of classical bureaucracy. In this case, the priority is represented by the attention to rules, and there is a positive correlation with the horizontal and the vertical specialization degree, while a negative correlation exists with performance. Along with this a negative correlation with motivation exists, thus confirming the general statement that the bureaucratic model is associated to a low motivation degree.

This result might be highlighted considering that local governments are characterized by highly standardized and repetitive tasks oriented toward providing basic services to the citizenship. This, on one side, assures the possibility to reply quite quickly to similar requests, but, on the other side, due to the proximity of these institutions to the citizenship, it might also create problems when variations to a standardized service are requested. This represents an important issue to be debated, especially in consideration of the increasing degree of complexity that characterizes the modern society and leads to the need to find customized solutions for citizens/customers/stakeholders.

Health and social care institutions confirm the adoption of the professional bureaucracy model by showing a positive correlation with the orientation toward customer satisfaction and with career development as the main incentive to improve employees' motivation.

Public administrations in the education and research fields show positive correlations with the characteristics concerning anarchy, even though they also show a strong and positive correlation with high degrees of motivation. This could be highlighted in association with the fact that Italian institutions in these fields suffer from the assignment of low budgets to their activities; thus, employees working in these institutions require high degrees of intrinsic motivation to carry out their activities and develop a flexible way of working and reasoning that might help them to overcome the highly formal and staid bureaucratic procedures, thus resulting in a sort of anarchy.

Social insurance institutions proved to be the most informal type of public administration due to the positive correlation with the adoption of a participative managerial style, a high motivation degree and a motivation incentive represented by the presence of informal leadership. This result is, at least, surprising, since it is expected that this kind of public administration is strongly characterized by bureaucratic features.

Finally, to verify which model occurs overall in the Italian public sector, Mintzberg's (1979) specialization matrix was applied to determine whether Weber's statement about the high specialization degree associated with the bureaucratic model also occurs in the specific case analyzed. On this basis tasks' characteristics, as they emerged from the participants' answers about their tasks' specialization degrees, were analyzed. The results from the analysis show high degrees of specialization (both horizontal and vertical), thus confirming that the tasks performed by the participants may be collocated perfectly within the bureaucratic domain.

According to the literature, these kinds of tasks are usually associated with a low motivation degree due to

the high specialization and repetition of the activities carried out by employees. Indeed, here it has been considered what stated by Merton (1940) on the fact that bureaucrats took pride in their craft, which leads them to resist changes in established routines. The results from the analysis are perfectly in line with this claim, showing a high degree of motivation associated to high degrees of horizontal and vertical specialization. On this ground, it could be argued that Italian public employees are "happy bureaucrats": they are strongly motivated by performing highly standardized tasks with low responsibilities, by the presence of monetary incentives and by having career development possibilities.

Along with these results, another interesting discussion emerges considering the conflict degree: by cumulating the percentages associated with the higher degrees, an overall percentage of 87% emerged, indicating a very high degree of conflict occurring within the observed public administrations. These data, associated with the desire expressed by 88% of the participants for a different managerial/leadership style that is much more oriented toward a participative one, produce an issue related to the low degree of involvement of employees in the processes and a negative organizational climate. This is also confirmed by the answers given by the participants about conflict resolution, in which 50% indicated the need for shared targets and 19% reported the need to create a positive organizational climate.

Again, the fact that, in reporting which kind of style/organizational model is adopted within their administrations, 33% of the participants indicated "anarchy" shows that Italian public administrations are often characterized by the absence of a well-structured organizational model, with no clear attribution of roles and responsibilities, as highlighted by 27% of the participants when asked which kind of interventions they imagined in the formalization degree.

## Conclusions and future research directions

The aim of this study was to provide insights on the features characterizing the modern public administration, their organizational models, and the activities carried out. The research questions that drove the analysis in this article were the following: Which organizational features characterize modern public administrations? What factors influence the predominance of different models? What aspects characterize the activities carried out by public servants?

It has been argued that two main gaps emerge from the analysis of the literature. First, there are no studies

analyzing the features of the organizational model and the activities carried out by public servants in the modern public administrations. The attention has been always paid to the rules driving the PA, following the bureaucratic model; then on the performance, following the NPM reforms; finally, on the search for collaboration, networks, and partnerships in light of the NPG approach. Second, there is a lack of attention toward the countries in the Southern Europe. These countries present interesting and peculiar characteristics due to historical, cultural, and political differences respect to the Anglo-Saxon and other Continental European countries.

Findings from this analysis reveal two faces of the Italian public sector: on one side, there are “happy bureaucrats,” strongly motivated by repetitive and standardized tasks and monetary incentives and strongly convinced to maintain the *status quo*, as assumed by Merton (1940) and as revealed by the high percentages of participants not reporting/proposing solutions to solve problems related to the specialization and formalization degrees. A consideration related to this result might be the fact that the introduction of the NPM principles has probably only led to employees’ target displacement from rules to the achievement of personal targets related to monetary incentives.

On the other side, there are employees working in contexts in which anarchy is the most recurring organizational model, with no clear attribution of roles and responsibilities, and no employee involvement.

Considering the results produced by this analysis, it seems that in Italy the reform led by the NPM principles during the 1990s has never been completed. The NPM principles have only been applied partially to some aspects of the public service provision process, while it appears that managers and employees are still rooted in the ancient bureaucratic way of thinking, operating, and behaving. Moreover, they appear to be “happy” to be bureaucrats, despite being entrapped in standardized and repetitive tasks. It appears that the NPM introduction of monetary incentives, related to the achievement of specific targets, is a sufficient reward and motivating factor for Italian public servants.

On this basis, the results from this analysis show that a decoupling is taking place between theory and practice. In fact, while most of the literature suggests that employees carrying out repetitive tasks suffer from turnover, alienation, and low motivation, in practice, at least in the case analyzed, we are closer to what stated by Merton (1940) on the fact that bureaucrats took pride in their craft, and resist to the changes in their established routines. In the Italian case, employees show a high degree of motivation, as it seems that they

are defending the *status quo* that allows “having more by doing less.”

Surely, an action that the Italian Government should consider taking is related to a tentative to reduce the excessive regulations, which often create overlapping laws and confusing situations, for which public employees themselves have no instruments to find solutions.

Then, the fact that many of the participants spontaneously indicated “anarchy” as the “organizational model” operating in their administration, shows that the Italian Government needs to rethink the way in which public administrations are organized and managed, especially in consideration of the fact that 27% of the participants highlighted no clear attribution of roles and responsibilities within their administrations.

The results obtained from the questionnaires confirm that the core problem to be faced within public administrations is related to the lack of an organizational culture oriented toward managing the public in the public interest, and not in the interest of managers and employees trying to attain personal performance rewards. Thus, a suggestion for future research is to provide more in-depth analyses of the individual and behavioral dimensions to assure that managers’ and employees’ behaviors are in line with the development of a different culture that should then improve the way in which public administrations are managed and organized to pursue the public interest. Additionally, future research might provide a more in-depth analysis on the reasons behind the rise of the “anarchic” model in the Italian context.

The article has manifold interesting implications. First, it contributes to the literature on public management by providing an advance in the discussion on bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic models. Second, it suggests that there is a need to pay much more attention to the individual and behavioral analysis, both in studying and in managing public administrations. It builds a discussion on issues that may support the development of solutions to improve operational management and perform a better change management in the public sector: if the awareness about the above-mentioned dimensions is also raised in the public sector domain, it will be possible to develop better organizational models that balance the satisfaction of public stakeholders and the respect of the principles of performance and efficiency. Third, despite the Italian setting may represent a peculiar case, this study contributes in giving insights in one of the countries belonging to the group of Continental European countries—especially those in the Southern area—less regarded and still under-investigated by the literature.

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