Debt Relief and Trade Justice in Italy

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1. Introduction

Third world debt and international trade have been at the centre of the policy debate in the last two decades, a period marked by a process of neoliberal globalisation and deepening inequalities between North and South. Such a debate has not been confined to governments and economic decision makers; civil society in Europe has strongly voiced its concerns on the economic and social injustice associated to debt and trade liberalisation, leading to strong mobilisations, public opinion campaigns and, in some cases, changes in government policies. In Italy such activism has been widespread, rooted in the country's political cultures and has integrated debt and trade issues within the broader values and frames undepinning mobilisations on global justice, peace and the environment.

In order to investigate the evolution and policy impact of Italian mobilisations on debt and trade, we rely on the analytical framework of the politics of contention.\(^1\) The framing of issues is the first question to be addressed in order to set mobilisations in their context and explore the ways in which the issue is conceptualised, perceived and acted upon. Second, the ability of mobilisations to develop, exert influence and achieve their goals depends on the political opportunities that open up at the national and international level, creating spaces for activism, widening public opinion support, building alliances with sections of the élites, and putting pressure on policy makers. Third, we consider the mobilising structures, including the forms of organisation and the strategies pursued by activists, that shape mobilisations and their interactions with political power; three

\(^1\) We want to thank all those who shared with us their experiences of activism, and in particular the interviewees listed in the Appendix, as well as Martin Koehler, Giulio Marcon and Nora McKeon for their comments and advice.

\(^2\) See the Introduction to this book. On social movements and the politics of contention, among a large literature, see McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996), McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001), della Porta and Diani (2006), della Porta (2007, 2009). The impact of mobilisations has been studied by Giugni, McAdam and Tilly (1999) and Giugni (2004). See also the chapters by Marchetti and Pianta and by Silva in this book.
different, but often complementary dimensions are relevant here - the presence of an "epistemic community" with a shared conceptualisation of the issues; the lobbying of decision makers on specific themes; the strength of protest that may challenge the legitimacy and content of policies.

These questions, in the case of debt and trade, are not confined to national political systems; the transnational nature of the issues has led to conflicts involving supranational actors - such as the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and the European Union - and the policies of the most powerful states - such as the United States. Civil society groups have developed transnational links, built cross border networks, supported the rise of global movements that have questioned the legitimacy of supranational institutions, demanded the cancellation (or reduction) of Third World debt, new forms of international finance, a stop to trade liberalisation and more equitable economic relations between the North and the South of the world.\(^3\)

Following such a perspective, in this chapter we move from the reconstruction of the contexts of mobilisations, to a study of debt and trade activism in Italy, linking developments at the domestic and transnational levels. Our key findings on Italian activism include the following:

- activism over debt and trade has emerged out of concerns on global justice issues - North-South inequalities, neoliberal globalisation, ecology and peace - and has maintained close links to such broader themes; a framing in terms of global justice has resulted;
- there is a continuity in the mobilisations over debt and trade, with an involvement of a variety of forces in Italian civil society; specific campaigns have been relevant in particular periods, with favourable political opportunities;
- links to international networks on debt and trade have been important from the early years, confirming the transnational dimension of mobilisations;
- the organisational form adopted tends to be the coalition of civil society groups, building on the activism of many small groups with little resources, and an established culture of collaboration;
  while this has favoured the spread of public awareness, it has limited the effectiveness of "professional" lobbying for change.
- the strategies adopted combine the use of protest, with frequent (and often large) demonstrations, the search for policy alternatives with some interaction with policy makers, and a rather weak lobbying activity.

The policy impact of Italian mobilisations on debt and trade is assessed in section 6. We consider how important the search for policy change was in the development of mobilisations and which strategies have been effective. Mobilisations have led to a law on debt cancellation for poorer countries with a budget of six billion euros and to slowing down the trade liberalisation agenda.

2. The contexts of mobilisations

Debt and trade issues have been conceptualised in different ways by political and social actors, including solidarity groups, development NGOs, environmental and peace groups, trade unions and Catholic organizations. The framing of debt and trade in Italy has emerged from the political cultures that have influenced social mobilisations, from the political opportunities opening up at national level, and from transnational activism on such issues. In post-war decades both Left and Catholic political cultures devoted a substantial attention to international solidarity. Three experiences emerging in the 1970s highlight this background.

The first Italian initiative that raised awareness on global injustices - from a Left perspective - is the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal, established in 1979 by the Lelio Basso International Foundation for the rights and liberation of peoples in Rome, and based on the ‘Universal declaration of the rights of peoples’ launched in Algiers in 1976. Two sessions of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal have concerned the policies of the IMF and the World Bank, in coincidence with their

\(^3\) Cases of conflict with supranational institutions are investigated, among others, in Keck and Sikkink (1998) and O’Brien et al. (2000).

A second experience - emerging from a Christian perspective - was that of IDOC, the International Documentation and Communication Centre based in Rome, and acting since the 1960s as an independent clearinghouse on global justice issues. IDOC had extensive links with liberation movements in the third world and progressive Christian communities, and opened the way to the encounter with Marxist activists.

A third Italian experience concerns the rapid growth of NGOs active in development cooperation, with an increase from 40 in 1979, to 100 in 1988 and 154 in 2002. They emerged from both Catholic and Left political cultures, led to the presence of thousands of Italian "cooperation workers" in developing countries and maintained a strong grassroot orientation. Much of their work supported social and economic change at the local level in poor countries and had an advocacy dimension that addressed also debt and trade issues.

From these experiences, rooted in solidarity activism with third world countries, different frames emerged in the 1980s that could be used in order to mobilise over the issues of debt and trade, including the values of economic and social justice and rights; the structural nature of global inequalities; the need to respect the sovereignty of poor countries; the looming ecological crisis.

The political opportunities for mobilisations on debt and trade in Italy were shaped by major events. The third world debt crisis first exploded in 1982 and trade liberalisation accelerated in the mid-1990s; a specific impact on Italian activism came from the presence of G7/G8 summits in Italy in 1994 and 2001, and from the 2000 Catholic Jubilee.

The diversity of the multilayered governance systems that are relevant in the cases of debt and trade needs to be pointed out. For debt, national governments were key players alongside the IMF; financial obligations were mainly between public agencies, under political responsibilities; the role of supranational bodies - such as the Paris Club of major creditor nations – and of private banks was limited. Decisions by national governments therefore remained crucial. In such a context, social mobilisations did engage in extensive transnational networking, but could develop following the traditional model of civil society campaigns targeting the national government and demanding a specific policy change.

For trade, with the foundation of the WTO and the transfer of trade negotiating power to the European Union from member countries, the role of national governments was drastically reduced.

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Key decisions on EU trade policy proposals were taken in Brussels, closer to the interests of major states and powerful business lobbies than to the deliberation of national Parliaments. Therefore, national policies lost their relevance and much of the mobilisation over trade took a transnational or local direction. On the one hand, Italian activism was linked to international civil society networks

4 This Public Opinion Tribunal was launched by the Italian Socialist politician Lelio Basso, building on his experience in the Tribunal against war crimes in Vietnam, organised in 1967 by the British philosopher and peace leader Bertrand Russell, and chaired by French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre. Since its foundation, the Tribunal has met more than 30 times, involving dozens of judges selected from well-known experts and Nobel laureates; it has examined cases of violation of rights of individuals and peoples, raised by civil society groups - from Latin America to Tibet, from Afghanistan to former Jugoslavia - and it has also addressed questions related to economic, social, and environmental rights.

5 IDOC had originally been founded by the Protestant churches to monitor the Second Vatican Council, opened under Pope John XXIII in 1962 and closed under Pope Paul VI in 1965, that contributed to modernise the liturgy and social doctrine of the Catholic Church.

6 Development NGOs obtained in 1979 and 1987 new laws that opened the way to a large development cooperation expenditure by the Italian government, with a significant role of NGOs, a policy that was reversed, however, in the mid 1990s (Marcon, 2002).
campaigning against the WTO and its ministerial meetings, with limited visibility in the domestic political arena. On the other hand, the spreading of awareness among public opinion and the search for practical initiatives that could be carried out on trade issues led to a large diffusion of "fair trade" alternative shops that became centres of activism over North-South inequalities. These specific structures of political opportunities help explain the patterns of mobilisations that can be found in Italy on the issues of debt and trade from the 1980 to the present.

3. The evolution of Italian mobilisations

Sources and methods

For the investigation of Italian mobilisations on debt and trade we have used a variety of sources, including the academic literature; the literature produced by activists and the documents of organizations and campaigns; specialised journals, magazines and newspapers with a coverage of such issues; an analysis of the websites of nine major organisations and campaigns; detailed interviews with nine key activists and experts involved in mobilisations on debt and trade (see the list in the Appendix). The combined use of these sources makes it possible a systematic coverage of major events - presented below - and in-depth understanding of the dynamics of mobilisations over debt and trade, discussed in sections 4 and 5.

Key events in Italian mobilisations

Building on these sources, the major events of the Italian mobilisations on debt and trade are summarised in Table 1; an analysis of the two campaigns is carried out in the next sections. The sequence of events shows a slow start of initiatives in the early 1990s, an acceleration since 1997 and a peak in the years 2000-2003. At first, mobilisation on debt and trade were intertwined, due to the overlapping of groups and initiatives, and framed (rather generally) in terms of global justice; since the late 1990s the two campaigns acquired their own specificity, with different forms of organisation (mainly coalitions of civil society groups) and types of action (mainly protest events).

The major characteristics of Italian activism include the following.

a. Debt and trade issues are often integrated within broader themes, such as North-South inequalities, ecology and peace. This has led, on the one hand to a framing of these issues in terms of global justice and, on the other hand, to an ability of social mobilisations to integrate different

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7 The amount of booklets, documentation files, infosheets and report produced by different campaigns, organisations, journals in order to popularise the complex issues of debt and trade is remarkable. It includes the newsletters of Idoc internazionale, GlobalizzAzione dei popoli, the publications of the Centro internazionale Crocevia, including Semi, the Bologna based journal Terre del fuoco, trade union publications such as Azimut, various publications of individual NGOs such as Terra Nuova Forum, Volontari per lo sviluppo, Solidarietà internazionale, Missione Oggi. See also Lotti et al. (1999), Tavola della Pace (2000), Regidor and Binel (2002), George (2002), Focsiv (2003), Marcon (2004), CRBM et al (2005).

8 The themes of North-South solidarity, the question of debt and later the trade challenges raised by the creation of WTO were addressed since the 1980s by a wide range of radical media, including the daily newspaper Il Manifesto, Onde Lunghe (a free magazine on social movements published between 1993 and 1995), the magazine Carta (published since 1998), the journal Capitalismo, Natura, Socialismo, etc.

9 They include: Sdebitarsi, Rete Lilliput, Associazione Botteghe del Mondo, Unimondo, Ctm Altromercato, Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale, Fair, Attac Italia.
themes related to global issues; debt and trade mobilisations were in fact at the core of the protests against neoliberal globalisation in 2000-2002.

b. There is a strong continuity in the activism over debt and trade, with a large variety of forces in Italian civil society involved. However, when mobilisations reach a critical point of contention and favourable political opportunities appear, organisational structures change, leading to specific campaigns and highly focused events.

c. The international participation is important from the early years, signalling the presence of persistent and strong links to international networks on global issues. Italian and international mobilisations on debt and trade emerge in parallel.

d. Organisers of events are almost always coalitions of civil society groups, building on a well established political culture of collaboration; this model of activism is also the consequence of the presence of a very large number of small civil society groups with little resources. This favours the spread of public awareness and protest, but may limit the effectiveness of "professional" lobbying for change.

e. The nature of events combines frequent (often large) protest events and meetings searching for alternative proposals, where the interaction with policy makers is important. Actions related to lobbying, or targeted to "epistemic communities" are less visible and weaker in the Italian mobilisations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Organisers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Sud chiama Nord, International convention on debt cancellation</td>
<td>Campagna Nord-Sud</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>G7 Countersummit by Il Cerchio dei popoli, The Other Economic Summit</td>
<td>40 Italian civil society organizations</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>Cinquecento anni bastano (500 years are enough) conference</td>
<td>Campagna Nord-Sud, Terre del fuoco</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>Assembly of the Peoples’ UN in Perugia</td>
<td>Tavola della pace - Peace Roundtable</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>Assembly of the Peoples’ UN for an economy of justice in Perugia</td>
<td>Tavola della pace - Peace Roundtable</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>First International Forum on Debt</td>
<td>Sdebitarsi</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>Second International Forum on Debt</td>
<td>Sdebitarsi</td>
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<td>1998</td>
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<td>Third Assembly of the Peoples’ UN &quot;Another world is possible&quot; in Perugia</td>
<td>Tavola della pace - Peace Roundtable</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Sanremo Music Festival, Jovanotti’s rap on debt</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>New rules for the new millennium, International Forum</td>
<td>Mani tese NGO</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>World Forum on Ethic Banks and Armed Banks</td>
<td>CRBM</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>World Forum on Alternatives: After Seattle Conference</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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<td>Ad-hoc coalition</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Rete Lilliput national activists meeting</td>
<td>Rete Lilliput</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Naples No Global Forum Countersummit</td>
<td>No Global network</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Genoa G8 Countersummit</td>
<td>Genoa Social Forum</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Fourth Assembly of the Peoples' UN in Perugia</td>
<td>Tavola della pace - Peace Roundtable</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>First European Social Forum in Florence</td>
<td>ESF coordinating committee</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Forum alternativo per un'europa sociale</td>
<td>ESF coordinating committee</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Naples: Mediterranean Social Forum</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Protest against Euromed summit</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Protest against European ministerial meeting on Cancun WTO summit</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>National Day on common goods against Cancun WTO summit</td>
<td>Fair, CTM Altromercato, CRBM</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>International conference Europe and the debt of poor countries</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>World Mobilization Week on International Trade</td>
<td>Lilliput, CTM Altromercato</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Rome: AltraEconomia public meetings, seminars</td>
<td>Lilliput, CTM Altromercato</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>VII international forum of Sdebitarsi</td>
<td>Sdebitarsi</td>
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4. Mobilisations over Third World debt

*Debt and the environment: the "Campagna Nord-Sud"

During the 1970s and early 1980s the debate on North–South inequalities was mainly a matter of political discussion with a limited outreach to public opinion. The first Italian initiative on debt has been the "Campagna Nord–Sud: Biosfera, Debito e Sopravvivenza dei Popoli" (North-South Campaign: Biosphere, Debt and People’s Survival), launched in 1988 by the environmental and peace activist Alexander Langer, who had become member of the European Parliament for the Greens. The campaign proposed bridging economic and environmental issues, identifying the question of debt as the centrepiece of a system of global injustice, leading to dramatic economic and environmental consequences. It did not start with a well developed set of policy proposals to address the issue; it raised public awareness and helped put pressure on international financial institutions – such as the IMF and World Bank - and develop alternative policy approaches (Langer, 1992; Regidor and Binel, 2002)

This also influenced the way in which the question of international trade was framed in this period. Giorgio Dal Fiume, who was involved in the campaign, argues that in the 1980s the question of debt was more prominent than the question of trade, but they were connected. The question of natural resources, the fact that third world countries were obliged to increase exports to pay their debt. Talking about debt entailed an analysis also of international trade. The campaign produced a raising awareness in Italy, in the world of NGOs, and it also began a work with institutions.

At the political level, an opportunity for action opened up when Italian socialist leader Bettino Craxi was chosen as special UN envoy on third world debt. An international convention of the “Campagna Nord-Sud" was held in Rome on 16-17 October 1990, with speakers from third world countries and the participation of Bettino Craxi, who argued that part of the debt had to be cut in order to allow third world countries to access new borrowing from private banks. This dialogue did not reduce the large distance between official policies and the views of the Campaign (Langer 1992: 140).

*Challenging the G7 in Naples, 1994

An important opportunity for addressing the problems of the global economy came with the G7 meeting held in Naples in July 1994. In the months before the summit a coalition of 40 civil society groups, supported by Left political forces and trade unions was created, with the name of "Il Cerchio dei Popoli" (Peoples' Circle). It linked up with the New Economics Foundation of London that had organised parallel summits at G7 meetings since 1984 in London, calling them "The Other Economic Summit" (TOES). The events organised in Naples included a series of conferences on global issues (with speakers such as Samir Amin, Susan George and Serge Latouche), a meeting of social movements (held in the large dismantled steel plant of Bagnoli, with a strong involvement of trade unions) and a symbolic summit of the "Seven Poors", representatives from grassroot and indigenous groups of seven countries of the South.

A letter signed by the "Seven Poors" contesting the strategy of rich countries against the world’s poors was sent to the prime ministers participating to the G7 summit; they were also received by the Mayor of Naples, Antonio Bassolino, recently elected by a centre-left coalition. Cultural events and a street demonstration with 1500 people was also organised.

The agenda of the counter-summit comprised all the range of issues which would in later years be addressed by civil society gatherings such as the World Social Forum: development, work, environment, human rights, food, trade and debt, that had a particular prominence. An emphasis was put on the need for democratic control of the processes of globalisation. The countersummit
provided Italian civil society with an important opportunity for making links with the incipient international networks working on global issues. A result of the event was an effort to develop a well-defined series of proposals submitted to the prime ministers attending the G7 summit. The proposal on debt requested:

1) Reduction in the whole stock of bilateral debt for severely indebted low-income countries of between 80 and 100% by the end of 1995.
2) Extension of debt reduction to commercial and multilateral debt (financed by new Special Drawing Rights, the sale of gold stocks by the IMF or a more creative use of reserves and profits of multilateral development banks).
3) Reform of the Paris Club of creditors to provide a more open forum which takes wider resource flows and development financing needs of debtor countries into account.

This and other proposals would develop in later years and informed the strategies of national and international campaigns on debt.

_A positive peace: an economy of justice_

As the United Nations celebrated its 50th year in 1995, in Perugia the first meeting of the Assembly of the Peoples’ United Nations, was held, a conference with civil society representatives from more than 100 countries, each invited by an Italian local authority. The Assembly heard witnesses of world problems and called for reform and democratisation of the United Nations. Organised by Tavola della Pace (Peace Roundtable), coordinating 500 Italian local and national groups and 350 local authorities, the Assembly has since then been convened every other year, focusing in 1997 on economic justice, in 1999 on the role of global civil society — arguing that ‘another world is possible’— and in 2001 on _globalisation from below_. A major event which has ended every session of the Assembly has been the 15-mile march from Perugia to Assisi, a historic peace movement route, attended on average by 50,000 people (Lotti and Giandomenico 1996; Lotti, Giandomenico, and Lembo 1999).

In the Assemblies held in 1997 and 1999 global economic issues - debt and trade in particular - were put at centre stage, using a frame of global justice. From the Perugia events, final documents emerged with specific proposals including the cancellation of third world debt, the reform of the World Bank, the introduction of the Tobin Tax on international financial transactions, a world contract on water and the defense of labour rights at the international level. Such experiences were an important anticipation of the rise of global justice movements.

_GlobalizzAzione dei popoli_

Building on the high profile events of Naples and Perugia, a campaign of awareness around global issues named "Globalizz-Azione dei Popoli" (_Globalis-action by the peoples_) was launched in Rome in 1997 by Alberto Castagnola, who had been active in IDOC, with the support of Progetto Continenti, Comunità di Capodarco and Kairos. It produced 12 booklets on global issues whose aim – he argues - was

to spread awareness about the fact that the serious issues affecting the South involve the North as well, and to promote a change in the peoples’ behaviour in the North in order to allow a change in the mechanism of trade with the South.

Grassroot mobilisations at the local level followed, and such experiences would grow into the Rete Lilliput, an important player in later campaigns.

_The creation of Sdebitarsi and the activism of the Catholic Church_
In 1996-1997 the Sdebitarsi campaign was created, with initial financial support from the city council of Rome, controlled by a centre-left coalition. The Catholic Jubilee of 2000 had been called and debt remission was a traditional element of jubilees. In parallel, in the UK the international campaign Jubilee 2000 was launched, building on the previous activity of the Debt Crisis Network; the opening conference of Sdebitarsi in Rome coincided with the meeting of the European Debt and Development network (Eurodad).

At the time, Italy lacked a culture of professional campaigns; Luca De Fraia, the first coordinator of Sdebitarsi, underlines that there was no sophisticated culture of campaigning. Before that, there had been the campaign for the ban on landmines, the other successful campaign in Italy. The only thing we had was an appeal on debt cancellation and a petition on which we collected signatures of support.

Speakers of the campaign would tour Italy to present the issue and collect signatures on the petition, relying on grassroot activism, including that of “Rete Lilliput”, of the catholic organisation Caritas and missionary groups. In 2000, a communication campaign aiming at public opinion started, with spots on local radios. This media-oriented approach led to the appearance of the singers Bono and Jovanotti at the Sanremo Italian Song Festival in February 2000 with a message on debt relief.

At the same time, the Catholic Church, on the eve of the Jubilee of the year 2000, intensified its mobilisation on third world debt. Pope John Paul II made a series of speeches in favour of debt relief and the encyclical Tertio Millenio Adveniente addressed the issue. In September 1999 the Pope showed his support to the international campaign Jubilee 2000 by receiving a delegation including the singer Bono, Bob Geldof and a representative of the Italian campaign Sdebitarsi.

While catholic activism broadened the consensus around debt relief, it also created problems for the consistency of the frame of mobilisation. At the beginning of 1999 the Italian Catholic Church set up its own “Campagna ecclesiale per la riduzione del debito dei paesi più poveri” (Church Campaign for the reduction of debt of the poorest countries). As Luca De Fraia highlights initially it was quite traumatic, because groups that were initially part of Sdebitarsi joined that campaign. Catholics were divided and it became very difficult to manage a situation with two campaigns on debt.

The Catholic Church campaign framed the issue in terms of debt reduction rather than debt cancellation, demanding a revision of the IMF-sponsored agreement on Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). The main initiative organised, “Tu in azione” (You in action) emphasised individual involvement and aimed at collecting 100 billions lire for a buy-back of the credit Italy had with two highly indebted African countries.

Sdebitarsi maintained a focus on requests for policy change but avoided criticism of the new campaign and tried to cooperate; the head of the Catholic campaign, Riccardo Moro, responded to criticism from the missionary world arguing that “the campaign of the Catholic Church is not an alternative to analogous initiatives at the Italian and international level […] rather it aims at a pastoral action […] that cannot be done by lay organisations” (Missione Oggi, October 1999).

Success and decline of debt relief activism

The coexistence of the two campaigns extended the reach of mobilisation, but watered down its demands. Sdebitarsi had first demanded the cancellation of debt through a government decree, but later asked for legislation to be approved in Parliament. Under mounting pressure from the Vatican and the Catholic Church in April 1999 the Italian government, led by a center-left coalition announced an initiative on third world debt. According to Luca De Fraia
at that time, the scene change. We move from petitions to a more institutional work on the law. We had won the recognition of the principle of debt relief, but government proposals did not satisfy us. We started to lobby Parliament to influence the elaboration of policy.

The result was the law 209/2000 on debt cancellation, approved in 2000; the content and outcome of the legislation is examined in section 6 below. The high visibility of the issue of third world debt - as a result of years of campaigning and of the intervention of the Catholic Church – had eventually led to an important policy change, a pioneering initiative among European countries and a major turning point for Italian activism (De Fraia and Chiodo, 2001; Pettifor 2001a,b).

The campaign on third world debt maintained a high profile during the protests against the G8 in Genoa in July 2001, organised by the Genoa Social Forum. Debt was presented as a major issue of conflict in a radical critique of neoliberal globalisation. During the days of the G8 the city was covered with posters representing a starving black woman breast-feeding a fat white child, with the caption “didn’t you have enough?”.

Sdebitarsi hoped to use the event to showcase the Italian initiatives and legislation on the international stage. The outcomes of the G8 summit in terms of policy decisions around debt were disappointing; the only initiative was the creation of a global fund against AIDS–HIV. The violent repression of the protests in Genoa weakened the mobilisations on debt and on other global issues. For Raffaella Chiodo:

During the G8 in Genoa, the issue of debt was central, everybody was paying attention to it. Then it went out of fashion. People started to believe it had been solved because a law about it had been approved. This impression was reinforced by Tony Blair’s declaration at the G8 summit in Gleneagles in 2006 that debt had been cancelled. But they were talking about just 10% of third world debt.

Other initiatives have also taken place; third world debt and trade agreements with Europe have been addressed by the Campaign "Chiama l'Africa", launched in 1997 by 147 Italian NGOs, with a strong presence of Catholic organisations (Terre del fuoco, 1997). An assessment of the outcomes of mobilisations is provided in section 6 below.

5. Mobilisations on international trade

During the 1980s and the early 1990s international trade was not an issue of political contention in Italy. Around the mid-1990s, the rounds of trade liberalisation, the creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the OECD proposal for a Multilateral agreement on investments (MAI) that would protect foreign investment turned trade into an issue of social mobilisation.

From MAI to Seattle

The first initiative addressed the OECD proposed MAI agreement. An ad-hoc campaign “Mai al mai” (Never MAI) was set up by Associazione Botteghe del mondo, Bilanci di Giustizia, GlobalizzAzione dei popoli, Chiama l'Africa, Mani Tese, Nigrizia, Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale, Sdebitarsi, Centro Nuovo Modello di Sviluppo, WWF and Pax Christi. These groups were the ones which had gathered around the “Tavolo intercampagne” promoted by the Lilliput network; this experience contributed to coordinate different campaigns on global issues, giving shape to one of the backbones of the emerging global justice movement in Italy.

The campaign against MAI stressed the increased power of multinational corporations and the loss of sovereignty of countries that would follow the MAI agreement. Actions for raising awareness were carried out at the local level, with some international links. Eventually, European mobilisations led the French government to withdraw support for the proposal; the collapse of the OECD MAI agreement was a first case of success of global movements against neoliberal globalisation (Pianta, 2001).
In 1999 attention turned to the WTO, its Millennium Round of trade liberalisation and its Ministerial meeting in Seattle. The huge protests held is Seattle at the end of November 1999 are widely considered as the birthdate of the global justice movement. The Italian participation to the events was limited to a representative of the MAI campaign and Lilliput Network, Maurizio Meloni, and to a representative of the Fair trade organisation CTM Altromercato, Giorgio Dal Fiume, evidence of the scarce resources available to Italian groups and of the modest attention that trade issues had received so far. However, about 50 events in support of the protest in Seattle were organised in different cities by the Lilliput network and other groups (Meloni, 2000).

The Seattle protests launched opposition to trade liberalisation as a new area of activism, building on the rich Italian experiences of North-South, peace and the environmental mobilisations. There was also rapid learning from international experiences, with participation to the cross border networks that started to challenge the financial order centred on the IMF and the World Bank. The French mobilisation against MAI had led to the creation of a new organisation, Attac, proposing the Tobin tax on currency transactions and alternatives to neoliberalism; the Italian section, Attac Italia, was soon established.

The specificities of trade issues had to be learned by Italian activists, and several groups become actively involved in campaigning for trade justice. Among them, the Campaign for the Reform of the World Bank (CRBM), whose coordinator, Antonio Tricarico, explains that

> the WTO is a complex structure, you need to understand how it works, you need a high level of technical expertise. All this was initially difficult to translate into a public campaign, as it later happened with the Italian mobilisations against the WTO Cancun summit.

These experiences, however, never gathered under a single campaign, as in the case of Sdebitarsi; the groups active on trade justice remained more dispersed, broadly divided between “élite” groups involved in international advocacy networks – large NGOs or specialised campaigns with high technical competences on trade issues – on the one hand, and on the other hand the constellation of local groups, fair trade cooperatives, associations - such as those of the Lilliput network - that were active at the local level. Several reasons explain these developments. First, the scope for mobilisations for policy change at the national level was limited, as decisions were made in Brussels and at the WTO. Second, the need for competences, the complexity of issues and the difficulty to turn them into objectives of activism easy to communicate to public opinion and civil society made the launch of focused mobilisations difficult. Third, the critique of trade liberalisation developed in particular within the context of protest against neoliberal globalisation; such more radical frame for mobilisation was not shared by moderate and Catholic groups, whose involvement remained limited.

**Genoa, Florence and Cancun**

In the Genoa protests against the G8 summit of 2001 the issue of trade become relevant for the global justice movement as a whole, but no specific campaign was in place. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the start of the war in Afghanistan, the Doha meeting of the WTO in late 2001 was met by limited mobilisation at the national level. Mobilisations reorganised with the European Social Forum held in Florence in 2003. According to Antonio Tricarico

> the international campaign against the trade liberalisation agreement planned for the WTO meeting in Cancun of 2003 was launched at the European Social Forum in Florence and had a strong impact in Italy, with a large number of initiatives. Italy probably had one of the most successful mobilisations on this issue.

Italian NGOs had also became more knowledgeable and active on the international scene. As Monica Di Sisto of Fair points out
initially the campaigns on WTO and on bilateral agreements were rather generic and limited to slogans such as “stop subsides”, “no agriculture in the WTO”, “water is a common good”. Then the movement came to acquire an expertise on these issues and it was able to develop proposals, especially on bilateral agreements that are more technical. We moved from opposition to the WTO to trying to understand what we wanted, with less media impact but with more effectiveness on specific points.

A crucial development at the international level was the creation of the global network "Our world is not for sale" that attracted widespread participation from Italian civil society groups and effectively shaped the patterns of trade mobilisations in many countries of the North and South. Its activities in the European context were coordinated through the “Seattle to Brussels network”. As decision making on trade issues was taking place in Brussels, Geneva and at WTO conferences, such global and regional networks became the appropriate place for organising protest, lobbying and developing alternatives to the neoliberal trade regime. The scope for activism at the national level was reduced to raising consciousness on the importance of issues and spreading the agenda developed by international networks.

Other activities on trade issues in Italy have included the No dumping campaign carried out by the federation of Catholic NGOs Focsiv, with the support of 20 other organisations, asking the EU to stop subsidies to agricultural exports (Focsiv, 2003). In more recent years activism has focused on bilateral trade deals, the European partnership agreements (EPA) with developing countries that include trade liberalisation requirements. More specific actions have focused on trade in food products, with campaigns to assert the principle of food sovereignty against the logic of global markets that has led to speculation and rising food prices (McKeon, 2009).

Facing the lack of opportunities for introducing policy change at the national level, concerns over trade as a source of North-South inequalities have led to a search for different ways of achieving change. Links between poor producers in the South and responsible consumers in the North have developed outside the logic of global markets and have led to a rapid growth of "fair trade" of goods that are produced respecting the rights of workers and the environment, supporting local development, with prices set above market standards. In parallel, the model of opulent consumption in the North has been questioned, searching for more sustainable and sober behaviours; in Italy this has led to the growth of collective purchasing groups (GAS) linked to specific producers certified to be environmentally and socially friendly. Giorgio Dal Fiume argues that the emergence of fair trade in Italy towards the end of the 1980s and its establishment during the 1990s with hundreds of botteghe del mondo (world’s shops) as places for social action and education has made the question of international trade more visible at the national level. Fair trade has become not just a form of alternative consumption, but a concrete action for fairer trade rules.

The specific outcomes that such models of activism have had in Italy are assessed in the next section.

6. Assessing outcomes and policy changes

Comparing mobilisations and outcomes

The previous sections have shown that from the mid 1990s the questions of debt and trade became increasingly separate; Table 2 summarises the main differences. In terms of organisation, on debt a campaign styled on Northern European models took shape, with a focused mobilisation. On trade the mobilisation maintained a more dispersed form, as different groups were active at the national level and participated to the same coalition Our World Is Not For Sale at the international level.
Table 2. A comparison of debt and trade mobilisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Debt</th>
<th>Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National coalition, linked to international campaigns</td>
<td>International network with national nodes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Debt</th>
<th>Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying, raising awareness (mass mobilisation)</td>
<td>Raising awareness, Protest, Proposal of alternatives, Lobbying (élite campaign)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frames</th>
<th>Debt</th>
<th>Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Justice</td>
<td>Anti-neoliberalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobilisation cycle</th>
<th>Debt</th>
<th>Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focused and sustained</td>
<td>Intermittting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key events</th>
<th>Debt</th>
<th>Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990: Early campaigns on debt</td>
<td>1997: Italian participation the campaign “Stop MAI”;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999: Law on Debt enters parliamentary discussion,</td>
<td>Seattle, Cancun, Hong Kong; National days of action on trade, GATS,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000: Approval of the law,</td>
<td>etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001: Debt is central in the Genoa G8 protest</td>
<td>2006: mobilisation against EPA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale of action</th>
<th>Debt</th>
<th>Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National, transnational</td>
<td>Transnational, local, national</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This differentiation is associated to two main factors. First, in the analysis of political opportunities we already pointed out that debt mobilisations could focus on demands to the Italian government, while trade entailed a complex system of international governance with a reduced power of national governments.

Second, a divergence in the framing of issues emerges, with debt being conceptualised in terms of global justice and trade being framed in terms of anti-neoliberalism. Antonio Tricarico, coordinator of CRBM, observes that the mobilisation on debt has been broader and had more of an ethical character. The mobilisation on trade, instead, had to be more political, being crucial for the critique to neoliberalism. Debt is historically the consequence of a series of neoliberal economic policies, but it can also be approached from a more ethical and conciliatory standpoint and this is why the Church has always concentrated on this initiative. Conversely, the movements on debt in the South have always been more political. But if you look at the Italian context you see that - also through the use of celebrities in media-oriented events - a de-politicisation was brought about; this allowed to mobilise larger support, but banalised the problem.

The policy outcomes of the campaigns on third world debt and international trade are coherent with the frames and political opportunities which have come to characterise these two streams of activism. The centralised, focused character and wide reach of debt mobilisation is matched by an important policy outcome: the law on debt relief approved in 2000. The more dispersed nature of the campaign on international trade has led to different results of smaller relevance, including steps that have slowed down the trade liberalisation agenda pursued by all Italian governments - of both centre-right and centre-left - in the last decade.
Table 3. Assessing the impact on policy of debt and trade mobilisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Debt</th>
<th>Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local level</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None on Int'l trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On fair trade, Regional laws (Tuscany, 2005; Liguria, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National level</td>
<td>Law on debt cancellation with a funding of 6 billion euros</td>
<td>Slowing down of trade liberalisation agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational level</td>
<td>Italy favours debt relief in multilateral institutions; pioneering role of debt cancellation law</td>
<td>Slowing down of trade liberalisation agenda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The national law on the cancellation of third world debt

The policy outcome of the Italian campaign on Third World debt has been, at first sight, quite important. The parliament introduced a law for the cancellation of debt (legge 209, 2000) which eliminated 6 billions euros of Italian credits with Third World countries. The result is particularly significant since it was the first law among Western countries regulating the cancellation of debt, and for a long time the only one. After six years, Spain produced a similar law during the first government led by Socialist leader Zapatero. Luca De Fraia who has been involved in the campaign during the period between 1997 and 2001 asserts that

the campaign aimed at a legislative initiative. The law was approved. A number of billions euros of debt have been cancelled and we also have instruments of transparency to monitor the cancellation of debt. I think that we can be satisfied by that.

The law was produced in a period of favourable political opportunities. Besides the interest of the Catholic Church, the government of the center-left coalition headed by the post-communist leader Massimo D’Alema came to consider the cancellation of debt as an important political initiative.10

However, a series of problems ensued during the implementation of the law. The electoral victory of Silvio Berlusconi’s center-right coalition in 2001 changed the political climate. An executive regulation by the new government slowed down the distribution of debt relief funds and they were used to cover a deep cut in foreign aid.11 Raffaela Chiodo, who has coordinated the campaign in recent years, points out that

10 The approval of the law was extremely rapid for Italian standards. It just required six months of discussion in the two chambers, and at the final vote was approved with overwhelming bipartisan support.
11 By counting the funds destined for debt cancellation as a form of foreign aid, the government claimed that aid had increased to 0.16% of GDP.
during Berlusconi’s government the time-frame of debt cancellation was distorted. According to the law 6 billions euros should have been cancelled in 3 years. In 5 years only half of those have been actually cancelled. This has been a problem especially for the countries which were relying on Italian plans of debt cancellation. This did not happen by chance, it was coherent with Berlusconi’s political plans.

If we consider the implementation of debt legislation, we therefore find a more modest impact. Still, by the standards of Italian relationship between social activism and government policy making, the debt campaign was an important breakthrough in the ability to influence Italy's legislation and international action. In the international context, the passing of Italian legislation was a pioneering achievement in Europe and Italy in some occasions used its modest influence in multilateral institutions to favour debt relief projects.

**The impact on Italian and EU trade policy**

In the case of trade, we find nothing similar in terms of policy impact. The commitment to trade liberalisation by all Italian governments since the creation of the WTO, the bipartisan consensus among major political forces and the EU responsibility on trade issues meant that the political opportunities for change in trade policies were minimal. However, a patient work of lobbying by specialised civil society groups and trade unions has tried to influence the Italian government negotiating positions and the implementation of specific bilateral and multilateral agreements. According to Monica Di Sisto, of Fair, member of the international network *Our World Is Not For Sale*,

Italian trade activists have acquired more expertise of the specificity of trade negotiations, have been effective in some cases in putting pressure on the government and have now a credibility not just because we take people to the streets, but because we are able to advance policy proposals. In this way, we managed to slow down the neoliberal agenda, or at least to point out its contradictions, opening up a public debate. Moreover, international networks are now stable and provide a constant flow of ideas and strategies to those who want to develop policy alternatives.

Trade unions have played an active role on trade issues, with a close collaboration with civil society groups. In particular, unions emphasise the need to include in trade agreements rules for the protection of labour and social rights. Cecilia Brighi, International Secretary of the CISL trade union and member of the board of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) points out that

Our work for introducing social, labour and environmental concerns in trade agreement has been very difficult. Governments and policy makers were impermeable to our pressure, and even more so was the bureaucracy of negotiators committed to trade liberalisation. Even though the current negotiations are in an impasse, there is a lot of work we still have to do. Perhaps there are more political opportunities at the supranational level; the global system is in crisis and needs to address some key issues in order to regain credibility. At both levels, however, the problem is the lack of coherence between what politicians say and what they do.

In assessing the policy impact of trade mobilisations, the supranational dimension emerges as the critical one for shaping (and contesting) trade arrangements, with limited political opportunities left at the national level.

**Lessons from policy outcomes**

A number of lessons on the relationships between activism and policy making on debt and trade issues can be drawn from the Italian experience.

First, the heritage of national political cultures has remained strong and influential on the ways mobilisations have developed, and on the forms of interaction with institutions and policy makers. This is coherent with the findings of several comparative studies on the growth of global justice movements in the last decade (della Porta, 2007, 2009). The high degree of political awareness of
Italian civil society (compared to other European countries) has influenced the development of mobilisations and the integration of these issues with the broader themes of North-South inequalities, with debt mainly framed in terms of global justice, and trade in terms of resistance to neoliberal globalisation.

Second, the way Italian mobilisations have been organised highlights strengths and weaknesses of the country's political cultures. The typical actors of Italian activism are a large number of small groups with few resources, linked in networks and campaigns, building on a strong "political and social capital" of previous activism, and on extensive practices of collaboration. Such a model has few parallels in European countries. These actors favour the spread of public awareness, the integration between different themes and have proved to be effective in mounting very large and frequent protest events. They have also favoured the integration between traditional advocacy activism and the development of alternative practices and grassroot initiatives, such as fair trade and responsible consumption.

However, their small scale and limited resources often prevented the reach of a "critical mass" of commitment, competence and activism on specific and complex themes. In issues such as debt and trade, there is a strong need for sustained active participation to global advocacy networks and for developing a "professional" ability of lobbying national and international decision makers for change in policies. The weakness of Italian mobilisations in these aspects has contributed to the limited impact we have identified.

Third, the context of political opportunities - at the national and supranational level – helped the success of the debt mobilisation and limited the impact of trade activism. In the case of trade - as shown in the chapter by Federico Silva in this book - what can make a difference in civil society impact is the presence of stable, large and well organised global networks, capable of countering trade liberalisation policies at several levels. They have to combine an ability to organise large protests events and access to decision makers for carrying out highly competent lobbying on the details of trade agreements.

Such a landscape of political opportunities for policy change highlights the great potential that the EU could have if European policies opened up to arguments of civil society. Europe could assert itself as an arena for deliberating policies on global issues, linking the intense activism of civil society, the role of national governments and the major influence the EU has at the global level. This "virtuous circle" of democratic debate between activism, national and supranational politics in the EU context has taken place in cases concerning human rights (e.g. the creation of the International Criminal Court), the environment (e.g. climate change) or selected disarmament treaties (e.g. the landmine or cluster bomb bans), but never on issues concerning the global economy. In a context of decreasing legitimation of the project of European integration, the opening up of EU policies to mobilisations on social and economic justice could represents an important possibility for reconstructing a widely shared vision of Europe's role in a less unequal world.
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