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Open Essays and Researches

The Shaky Social Citizenship of Early-Career Independent Professionals: Work Transformation, Career and Life Uncertainty, Unrepresented Rights

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Abstract. The combination of a segmented and flexible labour market and a fragmented welfare system has given rise to an unprecedented risk of uncertainty for the new generation of independent professionals. Independent self-employment frequently conceals precarious working conditions, low wages and limited protection; tasks, knowledge, networking and creativity are deteriorating, with an evident decline in autonomy often leading to entrapment in poor occupational careers. A qualitative research, involving 72 early-career I-Pros in Milan, argues that the new generation of professionals is undergoing a crisis of social citizenship – since social integration through labour market inclusion, structured representation of interests, welfare protection, are lacking – and it is also showing a "culture of uncertainty", a day-by-day approach to life and career. Beyond a group of fully integrated I-Pros, most professionals show to suffer from economic and work vulnerability as well as relational fragility, whereas the weakest part of interviewed I-Pros experiences social and professional vulnerability, strong isolation at work and renunciation of personal objectives.

Keywords. Independent professionals; self-employment; social citizenship; uncertainty; vulnerability.

Until almost two decades ago, young people who were starting their professional careers were normally entering a linear and satisfying path. The combination of a segmented and flexible labour market, which inadequately rewards qualified jobs, and a fragmented welfare system, has given rise to an unprecedented risk of instability and poverty for professionals in their early careers. The current economic phase has led to an exacerbation of previous difficulties, due to post-industrial changes affecting labour market, school-work transitions and social protection.

The nature of professional jobs is itself under pressure: early-career professionals receive low salaries which do not fully acknowledge their skills;

the tasks, knowledge, networking and creativity aspects of professions are also deteriorating, with an evident decline in autonomy (Fellini 2010; Mandrone, Marocco 2012). Indeed, the "professional" label frequently conceals an employment position characterised by precarious working conditions, low wages and limited protection (Kallberg 2009; Armano, Murgia 2013), often leading to entrapment in poor occupational careers (Borghi *et alii* 2016).

Self-employment played an important role in the Italian social class composition in the industrial phase, but many changes have occurred over the past few decades. New forms of self-employment have produced a stronger differentiation within the post-industrial middle-class in terms of economic conditions and representation. Early-career professionals and atypical workers experience poor working conditions, economic hardship and a lack of union representation, which makes it more difficult for them to defend their rights and improve their welfare entitlements. In this sense, we argue that this new generation of professionals is undergoing a crisis of social citizenship, conceived as full participation in social life through labour market inclusion, structured representation of interests, welfare protection and support.

A qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with early-career independent professionals working in the urban area of Milan (Italy) addresses the effects of economic and social constraints on their capability to plan career and life paths and to access social citizenship.

SELF-EMPLOYMENT: TRADITIONAL AND NEW FEATURES

A high level of self-employment is a historical feature of the Italian labour market and social class composition (Sylos Labini 1974). This category has become extremely heterogeneous, including traditional self-employed (craftsmen; traders), "small" employers, new freelancers, and autonomous workers in each of the three main economic sectors.

The transition to post-industrial society (Bell 1973) or a flexible regime of accumulation (Harvey 1990) produced new forms of self-employment, which are experiencing a more problematic social integration process compared to traditional middle-class jobs (Bagnasco 2008). The old regulative pattern was based on controlled markets, social homogeneity, traditional habits, social and political representation – professional orders and associations, political parties, relations with local and national institutions. The current Italian social system reveals strong market competition and social differentiation in the middle class: high-level professionals have increased their income during the last twenty years, whereas a quarter of self-employed people are at risk of poverty[1]. The self-employed have become extremely diversified even considering the most qualified professionals, as individualisation has increased and autonomy decreased (Ranci 2012). Important issues are at stake, but the representation of the interests of the self-employed is a serious problem.

Labour market flexibility has been pursued particularly in Mediterranean countries through a "partial and selective" form of deregulation (Esping-Andersen, Regini 2000), which has extended the possibility to use temporary employment. In Italy, however, during the period from the mid-Nineties to at least the onset of the current crisis, there was no "explosive" growth in temporary employment (Reyneri 2009). Besides the deregulation of temporary contracts, the "Italian path to flexibility" exploited the usual preference for self-employed labour as a way to elude legal regulations and taxation on waged employment (Reyneri 2011; Ranci 2012).

More than elsewhere in Europe, Italy has seen the spread of self-employment based on service contracts and one-off jobs that once were limited to the traditional professions. This trend has been facilitated by various changes in the nature of work and its organisation in the post-industrial order (Piore, Sabel 1984) that have modified the structure of employment opportunities. On the one hand, a model of flexible production has emerged, where firms externalise production on a wide scale, sub-contracting to other firms or single workers, a model that is quite different from vertically-integrated Fordism (Pallini 2010; Muehlberger 2007). On the other hand, most jobs have been affected by changes in both the nature of work and its organisation. In the area of skilled work, for example,

[1] 27 per cent of self-employed people had incomes under 75 per cent of equivalent median income in 2008, according to the Bank of Italy (Ranci 2012).

there have been not only far-reaching changes in many of the traditional liberal professions, but also new types of work, new non-regulated professions and new occupational areas have emerged, often cutting across existing sectors (Bologna, Fumagalli 1997). A new model of professional work has emerged which requires autonomy, flexibility, specific and specialised technical skills, together with a solid foundation of knowledge, trust, reputation and social abilities (Butera *et alii* 2008).

At the European level, where the regulatory and welfare regime pictures are very uneven[2], similar critical issues emerge: the fragmented status of independent professionals and the consequent dualism in the professional system; the weakness of social protection, and the scrappy collective representation (Borghi *et alii* 2018). The definition of "economically dependent self-employed" has been used to single out a grey (and highly heterogeneous) area between employment and self-employment. In this area, self-employed professionals do not fully enjoy the inherent advantages of their formal position – job autonomy and high salaries – and, although their conditions are similar to those of employees, labour protection, forms of representation, social rights and access to welfare are limited, if not lacking altogether (Eurofound 2002).

Self-employment is considered to be "resilient" to economic crises, although not in all countries (European Commission 2010). The recent trend in Europe is, in fact, contradictory, as the overall incidence of self-employment decreased in many countries (Italy included), but increased in other countries, leading to an overall situation of stability. However, if we consider knowledge-based sectors (information-communication technology; financial activities; real estate activities; professional, scientific and technical activities; administrative and support service activities), professional self-employment confirmed its resilience, even in a long-lasting recession (Isfol 2013; Borghi *et alii* 2018).

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC AND LABOUR MARKET CHANGES ON INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONALS

Structural economic changes, production reorganisation, new forms of inequalities and social risks require proper theoretical attention on the post-industrial social dynamics and their consequences to individuals' lives.

Two contrasting theoretical arguments aim to clarify what kind of transformations have been occurring in advanced Capitalist societies. On the one side, the more fashionable "New Capitalism" approaches postulate qualitatively different employment and social relations (Doogan 2009) and, among them, the Risk Society theory (Beck 1986) describes the process of democratization of social risks and social class as a «zombie category» (Atkinson 2007: 354), arguing that people in post-industrial societies face a pervading insecurity due to deep changes in lifestyle, power, institutions, social participation, work and social relations. Individual biographies are more uncertain than in the industrial phase, when transition to adulthood, labour market entry and work careers were structured in typical and recurrent patterns, differentiated by social class and gender. On the other side, the class analysis scholars *rematerialise* the understanding of social development (Doogan 2009), assuming the continuity of class structure in the capitalist societies, even if affected by change processes in the last decades. According to this last argument, the involvement of independent professionals, among others social groups in the middle class, in economic risks and social uncertainty does not necessarily show the end of class cleavages, but the need for a redefinition of their effects. A qualitative and specific analysis is obviously not appropriate to provide a solution to this relevant debate, but it is just able to offer some empirical evidence supporting the resistant relevance of class cleavage to the opportunities and constraints of the new generation of independent professionals.

Castel (1997) identifies three tendencies towards the instability of work, which affect, in particular, unskilled workers and the unemployed, but also involve qualified young people still in transition towards a possible (and promised), but tangibly uncertain, stabilisation in the labour market. The first is the "destabilisation of permanent

[2] While Austria, Italy, Portugal and Spain have brought in legislation to incorporate these forms of employment through specific work contracts, most European countries have not provided them with any legal basis (Eurofound 2002).

workers", which involves the working class, some industrial sectors and older workers who have been expelled from the production system. This concept can be extended to early-career professionals: even if the self-employed cannot be made redundant, they face the difficulties of labour markets which are increasingly characterised by low remuneration, strong competition and economic fluctuations. The relative stability of professionals in the past – in terms of their ability to develop a coherent, long-lasting, continuous and upwardly-mobile career – has been replaced by uncertainty and a higher risk of failure. The second turn regards the "endurance of precariousness", which directly affects younger generations and is defined as the transformation of an exceptional or transitory situation into one which is considered normal. The third trend is represented by the "return of a supernumerary population" in the labour market after the (supposed) full employment during the Glorious Thirties (Fourastié 1979). It does not apply to all qualified self-employed people, but supports the assumption that the crisis of specific professional systems, due to strong internal diversification and competition (Sennett 1998), has impacted on professionals' career prospects. In some sectors (for example, in publishing), the Marxian "industrial reserve army" recurs under a qualified but devalued guise.

As Castel (2004) indicated, the crisis of the "salary society" led to a "fragmented society", where inequalities and risks do not produce clear-cut separations between *in* and *out* positions, but a complicated situation of vulnerability and social insecurity with an extended – if not pervasive (Beck 1986) – risk of personal and professional crises.

The "decomposition of wage-earning society" described by Castel (1995) seems to affect also the independent professionals' citizenship. Classically defined as the access to civil, political and social rights, where these last mentioned are conceived as welfare rights (Marshall 1965), citizenship is far from the overcome of inequalities, but corresponds to the liberal idea of full social participation and mitigation of market inequalities through a welfare state (Therborn 2009). The most recent generation of professionals in Italy is irremediably undergoing a crisis of social citizenship, since their participation in social life – through labour market inclusion, interest representation, welfare protection and social networks support – is not fulfilled. The uncertainty associated with unemployment or having precarious jobs has negative effects, in particular, on young people and, among them, those who are trying to develop a freelance career. Whether they belong to the lower or middle classes, as we noted in the interviews, both categories have to face private and professional challenges.[3] The application of Castel's approach to early-career professionals allows us to combine social relations (in a rather broad sense) and working conditions in order to observe whether people are socially integrated or at risk of exclusion. During the Glorious Thirties social inclusion was based on a strong connection between employment and social protection (Castel 2009), embodied by different welfare patterns, all inspired by a universalistic concept of citizenship (Crouch 1999). This institutive relation fell into crisis with the transition to post-industrial society and its fragmentation (Mingione 1991). Full social inclusion depends on job stability and social participation (that is, strong and reliable social ties); vulnerability arises when work and social relations become unstable. Disaffiliation – the extreme adverse condition – is due to unemployment or occasional jobs, on the one hand, and social isolation, on the other hand (Castel 1995).

One of the more dramatic effects of post-industrial flexibility on individuals regards the capacity of workers to plan their careers and lives according to personal preferences. The new generation of independent self-employed has been strongly affected by these radical changes concerning their personal and work prospects. Social scientists usually focus on the weakest sections of the workforce, including unskilled workers, the low-educated and intermittent workers. In this paper, we look at the weakest section of self-employment – independent professionals in the early stages of their career – which can adequately show the relevant transformation occurring to the whole professional group. Economy and labour process restructuration, labour market changes, lack of welfare protection and social representation clearly reinforce social risks and their consequences. Given that they are still at an early stage in their career, these professionals face difficulties entering into specific labour markets, creating and stabilising relationships with clients and colleagues and, more generally, achieving career continuity as well as professional objectives. This uncertainty also invades their personal life and ability to start a family, to purchase a house and more generally to plan their future (Borghi *et alii* 2016; Sennett 1998).

[3] However, social class seems to affect their capacity to overcome these challanges.

Following these theoretical issues, two research hypotheses were identified, in order to better interpret the impact of so radical changes on the new generation of independent professionals:

1. A "day-to-day orientation" has been adopted by new professionals, giving rise to a sort of "culture of uncertainty" (Castel 1995; 1997);
2. The social citizenship of early-career professionals is strongly challenged, due to difficult working conditions and weak social relations; scarce revenue, job discontinuity and professional dissatisfaction, on the one side, combined with insufficient economic and relational means provided by personal and professional networks and fragmented supply of welfare protection and representation, on the other side, expose independent professionals to economic and social risks.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This article deals with two groups of independent professionals, I-Pros (Rapelli 2012), namely managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals who work as own-account self-employed or (few cases) with temporary contracts: the self-employed in the traditional "liberal" professions and the new, highly-qualified, self-employed freelancers or those with temporary contracts in the recently regulated[4] "new" professions of service and innovative sectors (technical services for companies, creative sectors, ICT, financial activities, welfare and healthcare services).

72 semi-structured interviews were carried out in 2013-14[5] with a view to exploring the relationship between major life choices, economic and professional constraints and coping strategies. Biographies – education and working careers, transitions to adulthood – resources and limits, expectations, social needs were analysed in order to study professional and biographical patterns and the most relevant working and social issues for early-career independent professionals. The relationship between working conditions, choices and opportunities reveals early-career professionals' life plans and career strategies, as well as related constraints and coping strategies.

The qualitative analysis involved independent professionals in the early stages of their careers[6] working in the Milan urban area, where qualified service and intellectual activities are strongly concentrated and therefore represents an interesting case to observe economic, social and working trends related to independent professionals. The sample's characteristics reflect the increase of female participation in the qualified labour market in Northern Italy and demographic changes: around half of interviewees were women; half of them had no children even if they lived in cohabitation or were married; one interviewee out of five was single. The interviews with independent professionals lasted 1.5-2 hours on average and allowed detailed self-reported careers, including information on education and training, the first job and the most relevant career's stages until the current status. Even the though general bias of self-reported histories, interviews proved to be very effective for a rich reconstruction of career dynamics. They were codified and analysed with NVivo software, aiming at identifying homogeneous profiles of subjects according to the two research hypotheses.

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[4] These professions were regulated by the 2013 framework law (Law No. 4/2013), strongly demanded by some professional associations, which introduced the possibility to organise the "new" professionals in associations recognised by the State.

[5] The author cooperated with the local research unity at the University of Milano-Bicocca within a national research project (2011-14), financed by the Italian Ministry of University and Research, on the working conditions and interest representation of weak and unrepresented groups in the Italian labour market.

[6] Individuals were selected on the basis of their career's duration as independent professional: they have been working as independent self-employed/freelancers (or collaborators) for at least five years and 10 at most (few outliers with 15 years seniority), regardless of their age (between 32 and 49 years old).

A "CULTURE OF UNCERTAINTY"? HOW EARLY-CAREER PROFESSIONALS DEAL WITH THEIR LIVES AND WORKING CAREERS

Our qualitative analysis focused on professionals' attitudes toward planning work and personal trajectories. In particular, we aimed to understand whether early-career professionals express a "culture of uncertainty" (Castel 1995), based on the subjective assimilation of the increased labour flexibility and social risks: an enduring condition of precariousness produces anxiety for the future and a tendency to live a "day-by-day" existence. Castel explicitly refers to the effects of the transition from the "salary society" to post-industrial society, in particular on young people with flexible and low-paid jobs, who often experience periods of unemployment. We suggest – on the basis of the deep transformations already described and of our analysis – extending the theory of the "culture of uncertainty" to that part of early-career professionals who have not yet achieved a successful career and to those who are closer to atypical workers.

From our analysis, it is possible to understand whether and how these early-career professionals have planned and continue to plan their lives and careers. Three profiles of independent professionals emerge from this analysis. Two of these include individuals who do not plan objectives and careers, representing variations on the hypothesised "culture of uncertainty"; only one involves professionals who are able and willing to make plans.

1. Individuals who are "trapped in the present" are professionals who are not capable of making plans because of their work situation. They have scarce career possibilities and low incomes, which leaves them with little leeway to imagine changes, to think of exit strategies and to remain optimistic, at least in the short term.

> My partner and I live totally by the day, and we decided that this is better than to be too distressed or to make ourselves ill over that situation. A couple of years ago, we tried to buy an apartment, but nobody granted us a mortgage because I am precarious in the publishing sector and my partner is a precarious school teacher; they laughed in our face, literally (...). (Int. 41, F, 35, publishing industry, self-employed)

Economic difficulties prevent them from planning their personal lives and professional projects:

> Working as a solo self-employed is a condition imposed by the market. (...) The negative aspect is the precarity: I cannot forecast my professional activities in the next month. Maybe I will work a lot, but I cannot forecast it. (Int. 23 architect F, 23, self-employed)

Economic and professional difficulties also contrast with personal priorities:

> [...] luckily, I do not have any maternal instinct, and I wonder how people who want children can manage it, because they can be blackmailed [by employees or clients]; moreover, many of them can count on economic supports. (Int. 42, F, 36, publishing industry, unemployed)

> [...] Also to decide to have children, you need a discrete dose of imprudence, and I cannot afford to be imprudent; I am barely able to feed myself, how can I decide to have a child? (Int. 41, F, 35, publishing industry, self-employed)

As regards their careers, professionals can just imagine the chance to protract their (or their partners') contracts and achieve short-time job continuity:

> My view of the future is that things are worsening, my partner will not have his contract renewed at the end of the year; therefore, we have to move to the Marche [Italian Central Region]. That would mean that we will not need to pay a rent. I get by, but my partner has not found any job openings. The prospect that I am hoping for is that my partner's contract will be renewed. (F, 35, architect, self-employed)

Ultimately, even individual expectations risk falling victim to precariousness: it seems to be hard to elaborate and maintain initial ambitions, with the result that some professionals are forced to adopt a day-by-day construction of their future:

> With regards to aspirations, what drives me mad is that I do not have great aspirations: I would like job supply to increase a bit and for it to be possible to work more in the social research sector. (Int. 55, M, 36, social researcher, self-employed)

2. Professionals who "identify with the present" are those who concentrate on the "here and now", considered not as a constraint but as the essential focus of their efforts. Their personal and professional lives are conceived as step-by-step processes: each relevant work or life step can open up new possibilities, and a mid- or long-term project cannot even be conceived. Compared to the first group, these individuals do not suffer as a result of their short-term prospects; they are completely aware of their individual and collective condition and prefer to use their energies to find solutions to current obstacles or to take decisions for the next short period.

> I am a convinced precarious of self-employment, I would never work as an employee. (Int. 18, M, 42, psychologist, self-employed)

Each personal and professional step thus becomes of the utmost importance, because it determines their chances along a sort of unclear chain of events. To select an academic degree course or another, to accept a job proposal, to complete a project or to establish a new job contact, all appear as *ad hoc* decisions without any link to mid-term plans. Professional opportunities arise purely as a consequence of choices made by following personal desires and aspirations:

> My story is quite specific; I have not taken a linear path as others in the design sector – I studied as an accountant [...]. I've never been someone who makes plans for their career, I've always worked with a passion for my job, I've always liked working on good projects without even thinking about visibility and economic returns. Results come later, because if you work well and are lucky to some extent, then things happen, but there are some rules to the game: you have to be at the top [...]. [...] I wanted to do something important for society, and I was passionate about design, so I said to myself: I am at home [for health problems], let's try to do something. (Int. 58, F, 43, Designer, self-employed)

A lack of "dynamism" with regard to professional networking can become a disadvantage in the long term, as professionals who have never faced market problems or had difficulties with career development risk finding themselves trapped in a dependent relationship with clients (often with a single client) with limited opportunities. In this sense, social relations are essential not just for finding a job (Granovetter 1973), but also as a social resource more generally (Sennett 1998; Giddens 1990).

> I am very lazy in that kind of thing [networking]. Now I regret it – I should have cultivated more relationships, but I have never done that. For example, I have never insisted on going to conventions and presentations. (Int. 57, M, 49, publishing industry, collaborator)

Some professionals included in this group are simply happy with their current situation and have no problem living "day by day", and this does not appear to prevent them from achieving their short-term goals. This attitude reveals an internalisation of the spirit of job and life flexibility, namely, according to its proponents, the ability to be ready to change and adapt to new situations and economic needs (Sennett 1998).

In some (borderline) cases, professional success is so strong that the independent workers do not need to plan nor to make any effort, as they constantly receive invitations to work, and have the chance to improve their professional career.

> When I started in the earlier Nineties, I used to receive 4-5 calls a day offering jobs. Moreover, when I went to interviews, they would ask whether I had any friends who could do the same job, as there was strong demand. Moreover, I had the chance to choose what project I wanted to work on. I wrote my first CV after working for three years – earlier I did not need one, since so many offers were coming in. (Int. 15, M, 44, IT consultant, self-employed)

3. "Future planners" are those who consider their careers as a direct outcome of rational and well-constructed plans. These independent professionals perceive a causal relation between decisions and consequences: in most cases, they have succeeded in reaching their objectives and tend to rely on a strong link between education, training and career.

> Insurance broker was a good position, I had no problems, but I wanted to do something else... The transition to financial promoter came because I saw an ad in a newspaper. [...] I did the State certification exam because I wanted to achieve a personal goal. I did study a lot, and I enjoyed it. (Int. 5, M, 42, financial promoter, self-employed)

Some of these professionals have a sort of list of priorities that guides their decisions. Their careers seem to be the outcome of a consistent relationship between educational goals and job content.

> My education path is coherent with what I'm doing now. I am less technical and scientific than when I was at university. After graduation, I collaborated for one year with a university laboratory – it was sort of in preparation for a PhD I did not really want to do, and then I started to search for work, I shifted to something else and moved to Milan. [...] I did enjoy what I was studying at Environmental Science – I was really free to choose my own study plan, inserting focused courses as much as possible. (Int. 50, F, 37, consultant for sustainable development, self-employed)

> I took this kind of decision [to study Economics at an English university in Milan] because I knew I wanted to do this kind of job. It has been my dream since I was eight years old. Well, I realised over the years how lucky I have been. Talking with young people who have just finished secondary school or were starting university, it was astonishing to find out that they did not know what they wanted to do. [...] I enrolled at the university that seemed best to me, and it gave me the education I absolutely needed [...]. I graduated quickly, and the day after, I started my own company. (Int. 51, M, 34, film-maker, self-employed)

"Future planners" show a strong dynamism in the labour market with frequent job transitions. They prefer to change client than to maintain a satisfying professional assignment when there is a risk of failing to make progress in remuneration or work satisfaction. Even risky or seemingly inconvenient choices are part of this approach to career planning:

> After one year [working as an employee] in the agency – the one I am currently collaborating with – I wanted to do something else in my life. I understood that if I kept working 12 hours a day, I could never achieve this. As a manager and permanent employee, I went to the director and asked to switch to freelance status. He tried to discourage me very politely, saying that it was not a good idea for me. I explained that I wanted to work as a freelance, but not in the fake way of many others who are de facto employees. I wanted to work X days for the agency as a consultant, to have an assured income to survive on, while opening up the possibility of working from home and managing my job in complete autonomy, to be there and not to be there... (Int. 52, F, 37, strategic planner in the advertising sector, self-employed)

Unlike other professionals, the members of this group see self-employment as a voluntary condition, never imposed by clients; the freelance status is perceived as a chance to be free to define prospects, objectives and the right path to achieve results. There is a certain pride in being self-employed and adopting an entrepreneurial approach. Self-promotion is obviously very important, but not at all costs: proficiency is the best strategy and a priceless resource. In fact, these professionals are not willing to sacrifice job quality and its full acknowledgement by clients.

> There is sort of cliques; there are major league and minor league photographers [...]. Now, I do not candidate myself to companies in this area [near Milan, less demanding but also not disposed to pay well] as I've done before; if they want to, they contact me, but at this point, it's me the one who dictates the rules. (Int. 31, M, 33, photographer, self-employed)

These professional abilities represent an important element to invest in, in order to make steps forward and to stabilise the career.

> In this career, my current one, I am trying to improve my abilities as much as possible, without resorting to training courses, unfortunately... to direct my knowledge towards the world of the iPad and eBooks... because the natural course of things is leading publishing in that direction. (Int. 45, M, 40, publishing sector, self-employed)

SHAKY SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP: PROFESSIONALS BETWEEN INTEGRATION AND VULNERABILITY

Social inclusion of the new generation of independent professionals seems to be at risk, as their vulnerability arises as a consequence of labour market hardship and weak social protection. In order to verify our second hypothesis about their shaky citizenship, we look at the new professionals' working conditions in terms of revenue, job continuity and professional satisfaction, and try to understand whether these professionals have already fulfilled their objectives or whether they seem to be able to reach them.

Social relations are analysed in two aspects. First of all, they are conceived as comprising the resources that early-career professionals can resort to in order to cope with work problems, to overcome financial and practical difficulties and to fulfil their goals. These resources, which may be used by independent professionals during their early careers or subsequently to overcome obstacles, include: a) ascribed family resources, in terms of economic and relational means provided by parents and relatives; b) professional networks, which may be useful in finding out about work opportunities and receiving help from colleagues. Social relations also include interest representation and collective support (Mingione *et alii* 2014a; 2014b; Borghi, Cavalca 2015; Borghi, Cavalca 2016); the issue of social representation expands Castel's original model to encompass the following questions: do I-Pros need representation? What kind of collective organisation do they consider helpful? In what situations have they identified satisfactory solutions involving representative organisations? The possibility of resorting to collective organisation represents an important potential resource to contrast professional isolation, to obtain qualified support and protect rights and professional claims.

The qualitative analysis helped to identify three profiles of professionals, differentiated by the combination of resources that they have access to working conditions and expectations, on the one hand, social relations and collective support, on the other[7].

1. Accomplished individualist professionals: people who do not claim any kind of social or work protection and do not seek collective representation of their interests, as they feel capable of defending these by themselves. They rely on personal skills and professional networks without drawing on family, economic and relational resources or collective organisations, in faithful alignment with the "new spirit of Capitalism" (Boltanski, Chiapello 2005). They present themselves as the masters of their own destinies, aware of risks, happy to face challenges, but also satisfied to have already achieved professional goals (or confident about achieving them in the future). These are arguably the winners of market competition or, alternatively, the "individual in excess", a narcissistic subject exclusively engaged in her/his self-realisation, resulting in an inflation of subjectivity (Castel 2009).

According to our interviews with professionals, this profile emerges as a combination of individualism – defined as the attitude and behaviour of considering mainly one's own interests without considering those of other people – and taking responsibility for (possible) risks and (expected) results. They are not at all naïve, as they have typically experienced contrasts and difficulties during their careers. The individualised professional does not ignore the rights issue in general, nor the difficulties in obtaining specific rights in their own situation; nevertheless, they prefer individual action to cope with problems and conflicts and typically choose to negotiate individually with clients and employers.

2. The second profile consists of "twice-betrayed" professionals. They experience difficult careers and face a considerable risk of failing as a freelance professional, on the one side, and show weak social networks and a lack of social representation.

Their income is quite low and can be compared with the poor working conditions of temporary workers in the unskilled service sector. They are "economically dependent freelancers" (Eurofound 2002): formally self-employed, they are generally dependent on a single employer for their income. Moreover, their job autonomy, in terms of concrete ability to organise their own work tasks, is purely formal, as they work continuously in a single workplace, where they are typically under direct supervision, with timetables and tasks imposed by their client/

[7] The profiles' denomination refers to these two dimensions.

employer. In other words, they work under a fake freelance status or with some other type of self-employment arrangement.

Even if they know many colleagues in their own sector and may even share the same workplace, these independent professionals usually work alone and are rarely motivated or able to aggregate other professionals in order to discuss work conditions and problems. They resort to limited personal and family resources – revealing vulnerability – and inadequate social representation claiming general rights – unfulfilled "universalism".

In the face of difficulties, these vulnerable professionals cannot rely on social networks. In fact, their family ties prove to be useless in terms of social capital in the labour market and limited in their capacity to provide economic support. These professionals had received limited help from their families, but in many cases this was simply to leave home or in the case of extreme economic difficulties. They can sometimes find support within their new household, rather than their family of origin, such as partners who have a stable job or a property which represents an economic and psychological guarantee. Ultimately, social class shows to bear on working outcomes and social inclusion.

The "twice-betrayed" professionals do not feel protected by any representative organisation, neither professional associations nor unions, but would like to receive some collective protection from a different form of organisation. They are very critical of existing professional orders and associations. Orders are considered conservative organisations, managed by old professionals who defend their privileges and do not support young professionals' claims or even exploit them as collaborators, while granting low remuneration and scarce autonomy. Some associations are criticised because they include the professionals and studios they work for, and because they seek to control their members for political reasons (lobbying activities) rather than supporting them. Then, the "betrayed" professionals can be considered the natural target of new organisations that have arisen in the last two decades, partly occupying the space left by traditional representative organisations. Nonetheless, these organisations have encountered many difficulties in establishing themselves and involving professionals on a stable basis, due to scarce financial resources and staff, since they often depend on voluntary activities[8] (Mingione *et alii* 2014a; 2014b; Borghi, Cavalca 2015; Borghi, Cavalca 2016).

3. The last profile includes "confident familist-corporatist" professionals, who experience rather good professional satisfaction and are optimistic in terms of career development but still in search of a consolidated status through stronger professional integration. They resort to family support and personal networks – "familism" and the strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1973) – and participation in professional orders or associations – "corporatism" – in order to find *ad hoc* solutions to career problems.

Even if they perceive difficulties in fulfilling private and professional objectives, these professionals experience moderate levels of job satisfaction and feel rather optimistic about their prospects. Nonetheless, they seem vulnerable in terms of professional networks and support; in their work spheres, they show a relational fragility. They see interest groups and professional networks as important, and with regard to working problems ask for support from professional associations. These professionals aim for corporative protection through self-organised associations or, more rarely, professional orders. They seek targeted services and specific welfare protection but rule out the intervention of unions or any form of universal support. They are ready to turn to professional associations whenever they encounter specific problems, demanding qualified support in order to overcome their inexperience with technical issues and to help in the full development of their career. In fact, they often ask for support from other professionals, like lawyers or fiscal consultants and seek to expand their professional contacts. Members of associations are obviously concentrated in this subgroup and are more frequently members of new, specialised (occupational) associations rather than cross-sectional associations.

They benefit from their family and social ties as a form of support at the beginning of their careers as well as to consolidate these. Some remain as long as possible with their parents, in order to save economic resources and gain

[8] These organisations are professional associations founded by young independent professionals/freelancers or broader associations that organise professionals and/or atypical workers. The former have grown mostly within regulated professions, as an alternative to professional orders, while the latter have a distinct political identity and demand radical reforms of the Italian welfare system.

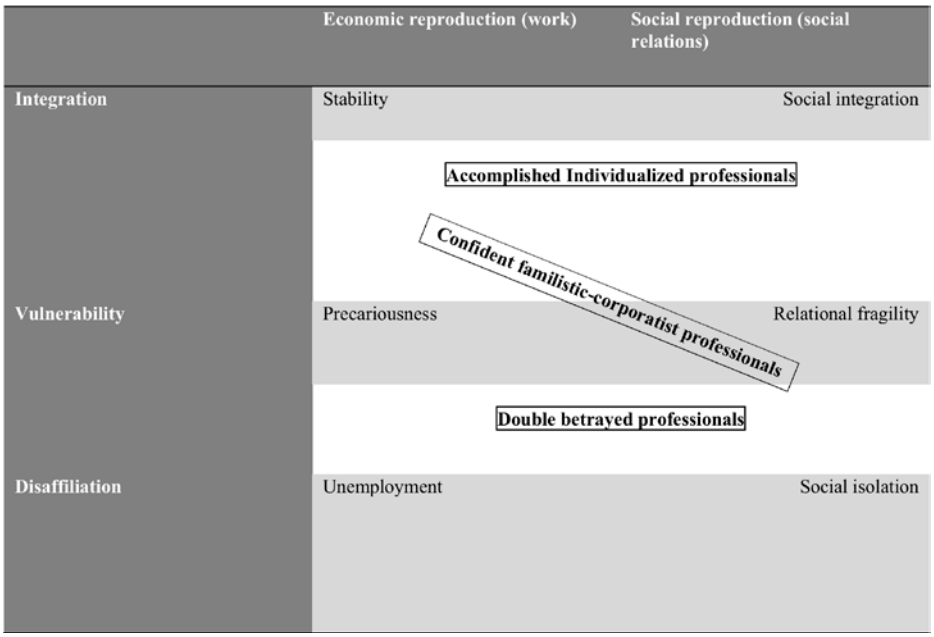

Figure 1. I-Pros profiles in the Castel's "disaffiliation" approach.

job experience, waiting for the right time and adequate economic strength to become independent, increasing their possibility of success. Strong economic support from their families is also useful during critical periods such as the transition between assignments or jobs, and such support can last for long periods, enabling independent professionals to pay for training courses or to bear other professional expenses.

Returning to Castel's disaffiliation approach, it is possible to insert these professionals' profiles in the original theoretical scheme (see Figure 1).

None of the interviewees' profiles can be situated in the "disaffiliation" area, even if some individuals among the "twice-betrayed" professionals seem to be at risk, at times, of sliding into this condition. As Figure 1 shows, whereas the first two profiles can be placed within a single area – the "individualist" professionals within the integration area, and the "betrayed" independent professionals within the vulnerability area, the "familist-corporatist" profile is cross-cutting, because it shows integration in terms of working conditions but vulnerability with regard to professional networks and prospects. In fact, these professionals are mainly interested in finding specific and qualified forms of support, as they are perfectly aware of the decisive role that relational resources play in creating new job opportunities and achieving professional accomplishments.

CONCLUSIONS

The younger generation of professionals is undergoing a crisis of social citizenship as a consequence of social, economic and labour market changes, on the one hand, and a lack of representation of their interests and rights, both as workers and citizen, on the other. Focusing on the early stages of their career permitted to understand those mechanisms which shape independent professionals' vulnerability, clearly distinguishing the second generation of professional labour from the traditional one, which used to be performed with work and organisational autonomy, with a wide portfolio of clients and to enable social integration.

Vulnerability and shaky citizenship originate from the interaction between market risks (instability, extreme competition among an increasing number of freelance, low remuneration of qualified work), intensified by structural economic and organisational changes, on the one side, and a lack of Welfare protection. Those independent

professionals with few relational and economic resources (class matters, in this respect) and scarce professional network (few clients and inadequate development strategies) are particularly exposed to risks of professional failure and economic fragility, often forced to be dependent on client(s), and to rely on their own personal, familial and social resources. This happens especially in the Southern European countries, and Italy can be considered one relevant case study. These trends are shared by all of the economic sectors involved in our research – all affected by liberalisation and deregulation processes – but some specific markets prove to increase professionals' exposure to risks, such as publishing and journalism among the recently regulated professions, or architecture and legal sector among the traditional liberal professions.

The analysis on the Milan case shows that a "culture of uncertainty" has become familiar among the early-career independent professionals, who are used to tackle their personal and work objectives on a day-by-day basis. Some of them deliberately choose this approach, considering life essentially a step-by-step process; others are forced to adopt this stance by scarce career prospects and poor levels of remuneration.

With regard to social integration, beyond a group of fully successful solo self-employed, most of the interviewed professionals show to suffer from economic and work vulnerability as well as relational fragility. Some independent professionals seem to be rather confident in fulfilling their professional objectives, but perceive a relational fragility concerning their professional context and demand specific professional representation and qualified support. Others experience social and professional vulnerability, strong isolation at work and renunciation of personal objectives.

The interaction, observed by this qualitative research, between a culture of uncertainty and lacking resources to cope with professional difficulties and to develop satisfying careers, contribute to foster the risk of entrapment into fragmented work and personal paths among a consistent part of the new independent professionals.

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