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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# THE ITALIAN ANIMAL ADVOCACY ARCHIPELAGO AND THE FOUR ANIMALISMS

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**ABSTRACT:** Italian animal advocacy is extremely divided and fragmented: in this article, we focus on its political dimension. Based upon prior studies, we expected the Italian animal advocacy archipelago to be clustered into three strata: old welfare, new welfare, and animal rights. Quantification of our survey (704 respondents throughout Italy) instead indicated a dichotomy between the animal rights area and both types of welfarists, particularly in terms of ethical values and localization on a progressive/conservative political axis. However, when we used qualitative interviews to probe the views of Italian animal advocates in greater depth, we detected a greater fragmentation and identified four ideal types of activism, defined as follows: political animalism, anarchist animalism, anti-political animalism, and moderate animalism. These ideal types are separated primarily along two dimensions: relationship with neo-liberal societal and economic structure, and degree of intersectional approach with other social movements. In the conclusions, we also offer general reflections on the coexistence of lobbying and protest, the phenomenon on NGOization, and the influence of individual activism and frame personalization on contemporary social movements.

**KEYWORDS:** Animal rights movement, animal advocacy, antispeciesism, animal welfare, political movements

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## 1. Introduction: modernity and the animal issue, an ambiguous relation

Although other researchers have offered theoretical approaches (Caffo, 2017; Maurizi, 2011; Pocar, 2005), detailed historical reconstructions (Guazzaloca, 2017; Maori, 2016), reports on the actual interests of political parties (Morini, 2018), critical analyses of the subcultural dimension of the vegan lifestyle (Righetti, 2018), or case studies on specific grass-roots mobilizations (Turina, 2010), there remains a clear gap regarding animal advocacy in the framework of political sociology and social movement studies at the Italian national level.

It is surprising - especially in a country like Italy which has a strong tradition in this field of study - that animal activism has been overlooked or, when addressed at all, considered as a branch of the environmental movement (Diani 1995; della Porta and Diani 2004). Such scholarship is far more prevalent in the US (Jasper & Nelkin; Francione, 1996; Cherry 2010) and Australia (Munro 2005; O' Sullivan 2011; Chen 2018), and related studies have also been conducted in other European countries such as the UK (Garner 2008) and France (Dubreuil 2013; Cherry 2016).

In addition to the scarcity of literature, political sociology research on Italian animal advocacy is needed due to the growing public interest in the rights and welfare of non-human animals (for detailed data, see: Bertuzzi 2018).

These preliminary observations should be considered within the extremely ambiguous relation between modernity and the animal issue (Singer 1975; Regan 2005; Nibert 2002; Hobson-West 2007), and the diffused stereotypical images of animal advocates given by mainstream media (Almiron, Cole, & Freeman, 2015; Cole & Morgan, 2011; Humphrey & Stears, 2006). These representations are effective but often minor: animal advocates are frequently depicted as generic extremists, incorporating ideologies that are very distant from each other. In fact, the Italian-language concept of "animalism"<sup>1</sup> is commonly used to identify the whole spectrum from individuals engaged in government-funded care activities to the animal liberation activists often branded as terrorists by the mainstream media. As we discuss in the following pages, this *reductio ad unum* is unwarranted, and it would be better to refer to Italian animal advocacy as a social movement coalition (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010) composed of different sub-movements (Saunders, 2007) or internal strategic action fields (Fligstein & McAdam 2012). The main objective of this article is to analyze this diversity, focusing on the po-

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<sup>1</sup> We here use the term 'animalism' to represent the Italian 'animalismo,' well aware that this term has a different denotations. There is no other word in English, however, which properly conveys the breadth of this Italian term in its reference to the animal rights area.

litical dimension, which has been studied less formally than other aspects (Bertuzzi 2018).

## 2. Research design

### 2.1 Stratification of the sample

In the research design phase, we clustered the population of Italian animal advocates into three areas: old welfare, new welfare, and animal rights. This division is based upon prior studies of animal advocacy as it transpires in other national contexts: there is often a contrast between those who adopt welfarist approaches (Garner, 1995, 2008; Munro, 2005) versus more radical and direct action strategies (Francione 1996; Nibert 2002; Best 2014). Other typologies have been proposed in order to categorize members of the animal advocacy archipelago. For example, Munro (2012) introduces a separate category for activism for animal welfare/liberation/rights, deeming this the “radical animal liberation front”. Jasper & Nelkin (1991) categorized activists as reformists, pragmatists, or fundamentalists, and Regan (2005) as DaVincians, Damascans, or Muddlers; Rowlands (2002) categorized types of activism as promoting lifestyle changes, spreading the word, or civil disobedience. However, we here adopt the classic tripartition introduced by Gary Francione (1996): namely, a division into old welfarism, new welfarism and animal rights.<sup>2</sup>

In short, the three categories can be defined as follows. The old welfare area is comprised of specific facilities and small groups aimed at the care of single species (often pets and/or protected species), primarily focused around the problem of stray animals. New welfarism consists in large national NGOs which in the past adopted a charitable approach and which still pursue lobbying and institutional paths. Finally, animal rights groups are those characterized by greater levels of contention, a “necessary” vegan lifestyle, often critical positions on neo-liberal modernity and sometimes intersections with other social movements.

In this article we test the validity of this stratification with specific reference to the political dimension of Italian animal advocacy. The political dimension herein refers to

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<sup>2</sup> Gary Francione is normally represented in this debate as an exponent of ‘abolitionism’ (in particular as opposed to welfarism). However we use the expression ‘animal rights’ and not ‘abolitionism’ because within the Italian debate, there is a clear difference between abolitionist and liberationist perspectives, but both fall within the general label of ‘antispeciesism’, and the most similar expression in the English vocabulary is still the generic “animal rights” perspective.

the different animal advocacy areas, their ideologies, ethical values, and institutional trusts.

## **2.2. The data sources: survey and interviews**

We primarily rely on two data sources: 1) 20 semi-structured interviews conducted with prominent members of 8 groups and associations in the area of Milan (official leaders when possible, and particularly charismatic individual activists from those groups with less formal structures); 2) a series of questions presented in an online questionnaire that we administered to members, activists and volunteers engaged in animal advocacy activities and answered by 704 individuals at the national level. We analyze our data both qualitatively and quantitatively as triangulation is quite useful in social movement studies (Ayoub, Wallace & Zepeda-Millán 2014) and especially for similar overlooked phenomena.

Our survey is not statistically representative. In fact, a list of members of animal advocacy groups (as well as a list of the groups themselves) is not available. We attempted to distribute the questionnaire as broadly as possible, in collaboration with the queried associations and groups; in some cases they provided e-mail addresses of their members, while in other cases they circulated the questionnaire directly.

In the survey we investigated the following dimensions: socio-demographic profile; political/ideological positions; political careers; tolerance towards welfarist actions; opinions towards institutions, both local and national; relationship with other movement areas; promotion of lifestyles; time dedicated to animal advocacy; priorities to pursue; ethical-moral values. Beyond confirming the hypothesized tripartition (old welfare, new welfare, animal rights), we also want to consider distinctions between animal advocates (from all areas) when compared to the general Italian population. For this reason we discuss contrasts between our results and other surveys such as the World Value Survey or the Istat Multiscope Survey.

In the interviews we investigated organizational structures, political strategies and the relations between the various islands of the archipelago (Diani, 1995), focusing on animal advocates based in Milan. In the following we give a brief presentation of the groups selected for this qualitative focus.

## **2.3. Groups based in Milan**

We selected two groups as being typically representative of the old welfare area.

Vita da Cani, a historic Milanese association, manages two of the province's largest shelters as well as other facilities, working with both pets and other animals as well. This association presents itself as a "political" group. It promotes initiatives for veganism and maintains close ties with some animal rights groups – several of its members belong to such groups as well.

Mondogatto San Donato, a large cat shelter located in the San Donato Milanese area, focuses on the issue of stray animals and pet care, particularly cats. This organization is more typically representative of other old welfare associations.

For the new welfare area, we selected the local headquarters of two of the most important national associations, Ente Nazionale Protezione Animali (ENPA) and Lega AntiVivisezione (LAV), which, despite having several important characteristics in common, have followed divergent paths in recent years. This divergence can be summarized as the greater "radicalization" of LAV, whereas ENPA has maintained the historical moderation of Italian welfarism.

To represent the animal rights area, we selected four groups that share a greater radicalism compared to the above organizations, but are also extremely different one from each other. Oltre la Specie, for example, was created several years ago and has prompted a high cultural debate on both the local and national level. It is the group that most embodies philosophical elaboration and movement strategies. Moreover, thanks to some parallel projects, it became the propulsive force behind important campaigns such as the Bioviolenza Project or the Collettivo Resistenza Animale.

Essere Animali is descended from previous historical groups of the Italian animal rights area, in particular Nemesi Animale. It has national reach, but its main headquarters are Milan and the Romagna. Although this group has in recent times endorsed moderate positions, which might seem to qualify it as belonging to the new welfare area, their direct actions (particularly undercover investigations) and strong insistence on veganism, indicates that it best fits within the animal rights arena.

Cani Sciolti is (or possibly was, as several of its members recently joined another group, Iene Vegane, which has partly "substituted" for Cani Sciolti) a fairly recent group, whose members are largely drawn from other formations such as Fronte Animalista and Centopercento Animalisti. These groups have often been accused of proximity with the extreme right-wing because of the political roles assumed by some of their leaders.

Farro & Fuoco was a group initially born as a kitchen-group in anti-fascist environments. It then became independent while maintaining strong ties with numerous collective organizations not related to the animal advocacy area. The group disbanded in 2015, although some of its members continued their actions as members of other

groups, such as *Liberati da Expo*, which formed to oppose the Universal Exposition from an animal rights perspective (Bertuzzi 2017).

In the next section we propose a general summary of the past and present relations between Italian politics and the national animal advocacy archipelago, based on online documents, prior historical researches on the topic, and information collected during our interviews.

We then analyze the empirical data gathered in the research. In particular, we first present our survey data in a descriptive way with respect to the political positioning, political/economic opinions and trust in institutions of the animal advocates. Then, we outline a typology based on the semi-structured interviews, from which 4 ideal-types of “animalism”<sup>3</sup> have been isolated.

### **3. Relation with politics**

The first national organization promoting animal welfare dates back to 1871 when Garibaldi founded the “Society for the Protection of Animals against the Treatments They Suffer from Wardens and Drivers” (my translation)<sup>4</sup>.

For a long time, the welfarist approach dominated Italian animal advocacy (Tonutti 2007; Bertuzzi 2018). The most contentious and radical initiatives developed much more recently, during the Nineties and bolstered by protest campaigns against fur and vivisection promoted in the early 2000s by radical groups of anarchist and ecologist inspiration (Bertuzzi and Reggio 2019). In recent years, an increasing number of grass-roots campaigns developed, although they usually lasted for a short time and were focused on specific issues. Some examples of national mobilizations are those of *Fermare Green Hill* (2010-2012), a campaign aimed at the liberation of dogs used for cosmetic industry that culminated with the closure of the breeding centre of Montichiari (Brescia); or the *Chiudere Morini* campaign (2002) which sought the liberation of animals illegally used in a breeding centre in San Polo d'Enza (Reggio Emilia), inspired by the SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty) campaign born in the UK during the Nineties (Ellefsen, 2016). Many other grass-roots animal rights initiatives have followed (Bertuzzi 2018), among which we mention only a few relevant examples: the *No-Delfinario* campaign in Rimini; the *No-Zoo* in Turin; the campaign for the abolition of meat; the

<sup>3</sup> See note 1.

<sup>4</sup> The original name in Italian was: Società Protettrice degli Animali contro i mali trattamenti che subiscono dai guardiani e dai conducenti.

protest against the RBM toxicological research firm; the AIP (Attacca l'Industria della Pelliccia, Attack the Fur Industry) campaign; the undercover investigations on breeders of minks, horses and other animals; the information pages on animal resistance and the contradictory aspects of biological breeding; the Incontri di Liberazione Animale (Animal Liberation Meetings).

However, it is not our objective to provide a historical reconstruction (Tonutti 2007) but rather to briefly reflect on the recent relations between this type of mobilizations and the political dimension. In the past, the national parties that showed interest in animal issues were those belonging to progressive areas, in particular the Verdi (Greens) and the Partito Radicale (Radical Party). Recently, the phenomenon has gathered support among right-wing political actors. Silvio Berlusconi has expressed concern for the well-being of pets and for similar instances that are more and more widespread even among the general public (and the general electorate). Additionally, some political exponents close to his party – Forza Italia – have assumed a relevant role in the animal advocacy field, at least on the mainstream media and in the perception of public opinion. For example, Michela Vittoria Brambilla, the right-wing entrepreneur turned politician who has worked closely with Berlusconi, recently founded Movimento Animalista, a full-fledged political party that has attracted support from several of the main Italian NGOs and welfare associations working on animal issues (Bertuzzi 2018).

Forza Italia is not the only party to reconsider its stance on the animal question. For example, various exponents of the Movimento Cinque Stelle (5 Stars Movement: or 5SM) are close to animal rights/environmentalism and many of them follow a vegetarian or vegan diet.

More surprisingly, prominent members of Lega (League) have explicitly endorsed animal advocacy over the past months. Although their public positions are still always related to an old-fashioned or welfarist approach, some of their new discourses are in contrast to past policy. In fact, Lega has always defended traditional practices (many of the members are strenuous defenders of hunting) and local customs, among which cuisine, often meat-based, is one of the prime components in Italy. For example, Lega has strongly condemned the slaughtering practices of Islam or the consumption of dog meat in China, as well the kebab in Western societies, instead promoting the consumption of Western-centric (specifically Italian or Northern Italian) meat-based food.

However, the recent alliance between 5SM and Lega presaged several elements of evident contradiction, particularly in the contrast between the traditional carnist (Joy 2010) legacy of Lega versus the supposedly progressive, environmentalist, and pro-

animal-welfare stance of 5SM.<sup>5</sup> We say “supposedly” because recent episodes hint that these positions do not stem from deep-seated beliefs. For example, the current Mayor of Turin, 5SM Chiara Appendino, who declared the city a “vegan capital,” also personally inaugurated “Steak Day” on June 15th, 2018 (“Bistecca Day” in Italian), a development which came just after the formation of a new national government in alliance with Lega. Another example is the current Mayor of Rome, 5SM Virginia Raggi, who has failed to uphold various electoral promises she made regarding animal welfare such as the transformation of the urban zoo into an animal recovery facility or the banning of “botticelle,” a Roman tourist attraction that involves the exploitation of horses.

In such situations, the left-wing (both the moderate and the most “radical” one) seems to undervalue an issue with respect to which it should make itself heard. Environmental and subsequently animal issues originated as “leftist” and progressive issues, especially among the post-materialist left close to the new social movements. Some sectors of the Italian environmental movements were later supported, absorbed and somehow subsumed by the Greens and also by other more “generalist” parties (della Porta and Diani 2004). The same thing did not happen with animal rights and welfare. This is probably due to a simultaneous desire of (many) animal advocates to remain distant from mainstream political dynamics and also to the current unwillingness of the political system to satisfy their demands (Giugni & Grasso, 2015). There have been some exceptions such as proposals of the Italian list *Altra Europa con Tsipras* (The Other Europe with Tsipras) during the European elections of 2014, but in general these parties have demonstrated a lack of interest in the animal-centric requests coming from the general public, entailing the risk of losing electoral support and allowing right-wing parties to commandeer a cause they should have little to do with.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4. From the tri-partition to the dichotomy**

Given this historical framework and notes on the actual approach of the main Italian political parties to the animal issues, in the following we analyze our empirical data on the Italian animal advocates.

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<sup>5</sup> We use this term following Melanie Joy (2001), who proposes to call “carnists” those who build their identity also on the meat consumption.

<sup>6</sup> For a broader comparative picture of international political parties dealing with animal issues, a recent article by Morini (2018) can be consulted.

Although the quantitative data obtained through our questionnaire suggest that the tripartition proposed by Gary Francione could be reduced to a dichotomy (welfarist versus animal rights approaches), our qualitatively-analyzed interview data depict an even more complex scenario composed of four ideal types of Italian animal advocates.

#### **4.1. Political self-positioning and ethical aspects**

We asked our questionnaire respondents to position themselves on the left/right political spectrum using a scale from 1 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). As can be seen in table 1, a significant difference emerged between the three areas, particularly between the animal rights one and the other two “welfarist” areas. The responses from the old and new welfare areas show a similar trend with a low percentage at the two extremes of the political spectrum and most positions concentrated near the center and center-left. The animal rights activists, on the other hand, are more displaced towards the extreme left.

Those indicating "central" positions are probably claiming anti-political stance and distance from the classic left/right dynamics. Possibly, some of these respondents sympathize with the 5SM, which in the past often used a similar rhetoric.<sup>7</sup>

The self-evaluated data on political positioning are however insufficient to determine the real positions of activists and members. We also used classic questions on public policies and ethical values, and a battery of questions about trust in specific institutions.

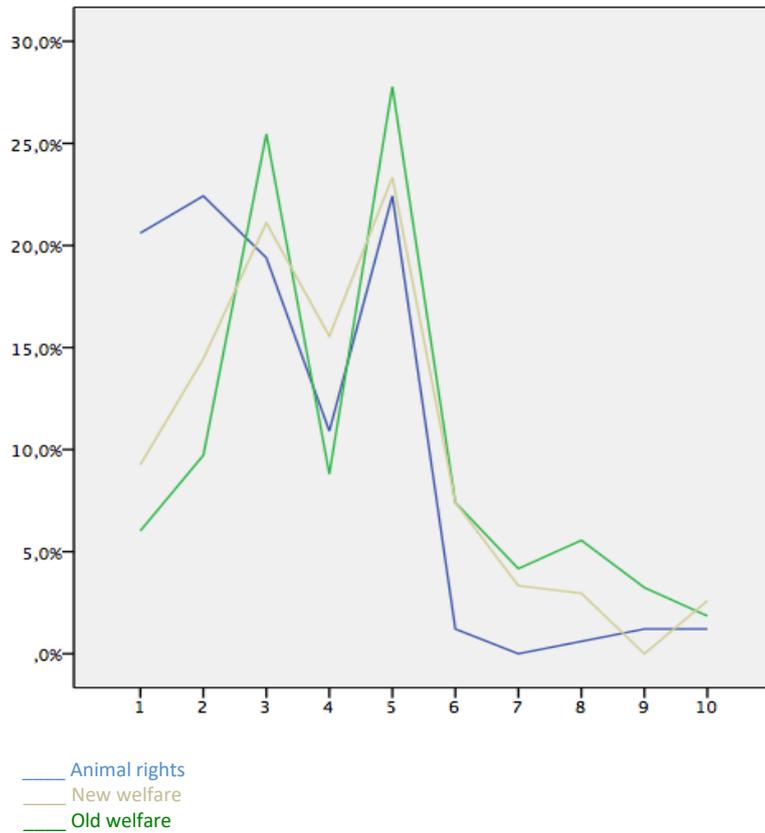
Even in these cases, differences emerged between the animal rights area and the other two areas, which take on more conservative positions. As an example, we present the data concerning the relationship between immigration and the "job market emergency": as can be seen in figure 2, the animal rights respondents conform to more progressive positions. It is relevant to compare the findings with answers provided by the general Italian population to the same question in the World Value Survey (2005-2009). The responses of the Italian population at large are particularly conservative, with 63.9% in favor of a greater consideration for the compatriots, 16.8% undecided and only 19.3% who consider anti-immigrant discrimination to be inappropriate. Therefore, beyond the important differences between the areas of animal advocacy, the comparison with the general population shows that animal advocates are generally

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<sup>7</sup> A clarification is important: in our research, despite multiple attempts made in first person and with the help of several gatekeepers, we faced remarkable difficulties to get in touch with subjects considered to be members of the "far right".

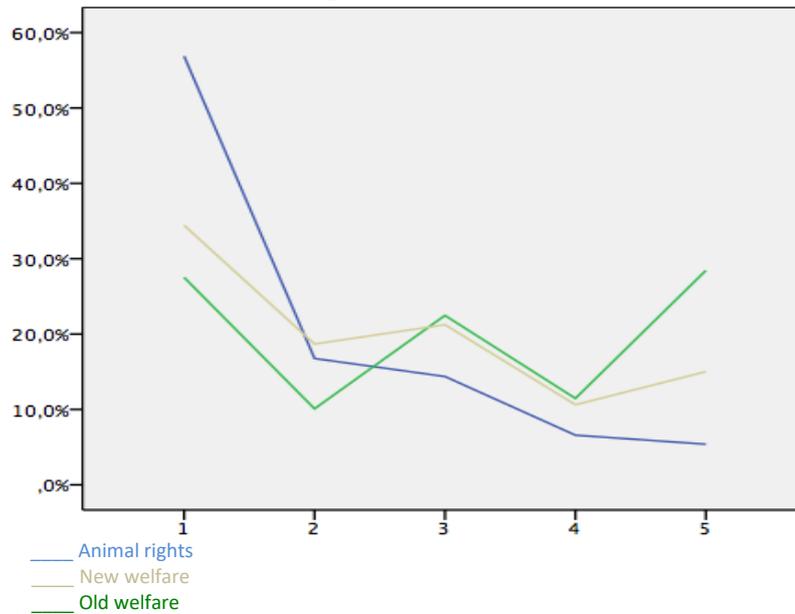
more supportive of minority rights (including ethnic rights), an inclination already highlighted in previous studies conducted in other national contexts (Nibert 1994; Munro 2012).

Figure 1 - Political spectrum of Italian animal advocates (1=Extreme left – 10=Extreme right)



Source: Author's empirical research

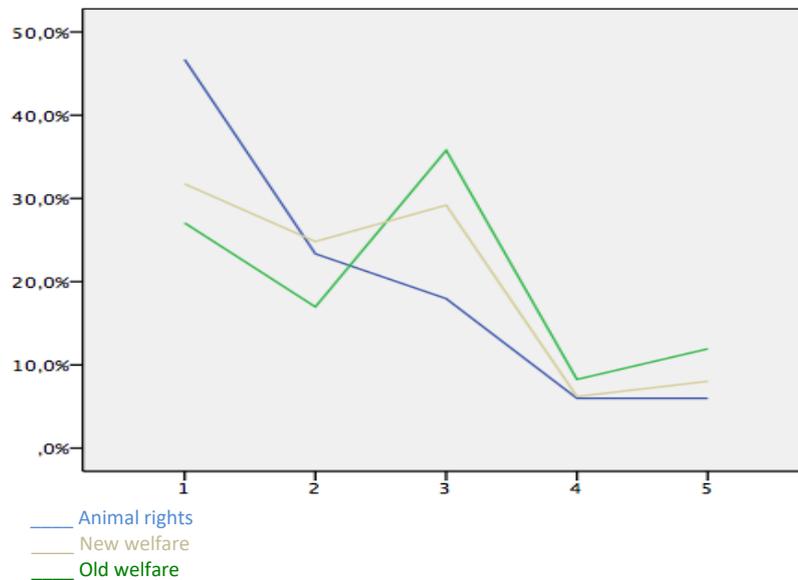
Figure 2 - Distribution of the answers (scale 1-5) at the following sentence: "In condition of job market emergency, Italians should be favoured on immigrants"



Source: Author's empirical research

A dichotomy between animal rights and the other two areas was demonstrated by almost all the questions investigated, in particular by questions concerning civil rights and individual behaviors. This is also confirmed considering the opinions on economic issues: more distant positions from neo-liberal policies can be found in the animal rights area (see Fig. 3). Among animal rights respondents, in fact, a general aversion to the deregulation of the market and in favour of public intervention emerged. This is interesting, especially in light of the contemporary distrust towards political institutions.

Figure 3 - Distribution of the answers (scale 1-5) at the following sentence: "Firms should be freer to hire and fire"



Source: Author's empirical research

We used the survey responses to calculate an ethical index value, related to political/economical aspects, civil rights and specific individual behaviors.<sup>8</sup> This calculation allows us to position respondents with respect to the axes libertarianism/authoritarianism and progressivism/conservatism, as utilized in well-known studies such as those of Rokkan and Lipset (1967) or Inglehart (1977). A strong relationship between membership area and the average value of the index can be found (see table 1), with the animal rights subjects taking on more progressive and libertarian positions, and those belonging to the other two areas more inclined to authoritarian concepts and the conservation of the existing situation: the new welfare area closer to the general average of the index, and the old welfare area characterized by more conservative positions.

<sup>8</sup> The index has been standardized, so that the variation range goes from 0 to 100.

**Table 1 - Mean value of the ethical index according to the animal advocacy area**

	N	Mean
Animal rights	162	22,7734
Old welfare	210	30,2041
New welfare	266	25,2148
Total	638	26,2371

Source: Author's empirical research

#### **4.2. Institutional trust**

We proceeded in a similar way with the analysis of institutional trust. Here too, membership area is linked to the average value of the index, moving from very low levels of institutional trust for the animal rights area, with higher levels apparent among the new welfare area and even higher in the old welfare area<sup>9</sup>. Thus, a clear dichotomy is apparent between animal rights activists and the other two areas, rather than the expected tripartite clustering of the sample. Beyond the differences regarding single institutions, the new and old welfare areas are essentially similar with respect to the general index of institutional trust and could be synthetically definable as welfarist, moderate, institutional and lobby-oriented (see: Table 2).

**Table 2 - Mean value of the institutional trust index according to the animal advocacy area**

	N	Mean
Animal rights	161	19,4444
Old welfare	214	28,2970
New welfare	271	26,8655
Total	646	25,4902

Source: Author's empirical research

However, we consider useful to also report some analytical data concerning trust in specific institutions. The distrust in unions, Government and Parliament appears to be generalized among all three areas of animal advocacy, confirming that skepticism to-

<sup>9</sup> See previous note.

wards those actors may compel the citizens' interest in personal advocacy. Without any statistical significance, we mention a comparison to the Italian population at large, based on the 2013 Istat Multiscope Survey in which respondents were asked to express the level of trust in political institutions on a scale from 1 to 5. All Italians demonstrate rather low trust toward Parliament (in the Istat survey, the Government was not considered), with 39.8% declaring total distrust (response=1) and only 9.1% providing positive answers. Despite such diffuse distrust, animal advocates expressed even more negatively, with 57.3% indicating the minimum level of trust. A similar situation concerns trade unions: although generally little appreciated by the general population, the degree of distrust towards them is even greater among animal advocates, where only 6% expressed a positive opinion.

The distrust appears to be relatively lower, or at least less generalized, towards local (Municipality, Province, Region) or supranational institutions (European Union), and towards those institutions more linked to economic than political aspects (banks, but also the European Union itself). A possible explanation might be the greater importance and role, compared to that of national States, that these institutions have had and continue to have towards animal issues. Many relevant decisions are left to local institutions, and the European Union has in recent years assumed, at least in theoretical terms, relatively animal-friendly positions, e.g the definition of non-human animals as "sentient beings" in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty<sup>10</sup> (Vedder, 2010).

We find a particularly high level of generalized distrust towards the Catholic Church, while more diversified positions emerged towards the media, the judicial system and the police forces. Distrust toward the police is perhaps the issue where the gap between the areas of animal advocacy widens most, with the peculiarity of animal rights activists clearly apparent. Distrust towards police forces is widespread in this area, while the new and old welfare's curves follow a Gaussian trend. This data should be considered according to the moderation that characterizes the welfarist areas (Bertuzzi 2018 b). Moreover, also the different forms of advocacy action commonly practiced by the areas should be considered: animal rights groups confront police forces more directly, which leads them to take on more negative opinions (Bertuzzi 2018).

The moderate character of new welfare associations was apparent from the data related to the judicial system. In this case, the real gap occurs between new welfare and the other two areas, with respondents of the old welfare and animal rights areas partially sharing a greater distrust, even if expressed with different degrees of intensity: higher among animal rights activists (55.8% of answers 1 and 2), slightly lower for the

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<sup>10</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12007L%2FTXT>.

old welfare members (46.6% of answers 1 and 2). The negative opinion expressed by the old welfare area may be somewhat surprising. However, a more careful analysis shows that at least two elements can help explain it. On the one hand, the emergency situations in which the subjects belonging to this area usually find themselves acting, which are hardly compatible with the delays (or at least the perception of delays) of bureaucracy and the Italian judicial system. Also, the old welfare area counts among its members the highest percentage of individuals politically positioned on the right-wing, and especially on the center-right of the political spectrum: it is well known that this political area has often critically judged the work of the Italian justice system, particularly in reference to the many trials that affected former Prime Minister Berlusconi (Mazzoleni and Sfardini, 2009). It is helpful to compare the data concerning animal advocates with that of the Italian population. In this case, in fact, the gap appears smaller than in all the items previously presented, due to the answers provided by the new welfarists: they are much more confident than the average Italian population in the judicial system, with only 11.7% declaring total distrust (compared with about 22% of animal rights activists and members of the old welfare area, and 26,4% of Italians in general) and a 26.2% indicating values of 4 or 5 (against 15.9% of the animal rights activists, 19.3% of members of the old welfare area, and 20,7% of the Italian general population).

## 5. From the dichotomy to the 4 animalisms

Aside from specific exceptions (such as the previously discussed trust in the judicial system), the data presented thus far suggest that the initial tripartition could be simplified into a dichotomy between animal rights and the other two areas, which could be combined under the “welfarist” label. However, our semi-structured interviews revealed a more fragmented pattern within Italian animal advocacy.

More specifically, we identified four distinct approaches, which we propose to define as follows: political animalism, anarchist animalism, anti-political animalism, and moderate animalism.<sup>11</sup> This division into four categories is due to the internal variety of the animal rights area and can be seen as the intersection of two dimensions (see table 3): the acceptance versus refusal of representative democracy (above all the possible aversion towards the current political arena in an antisystemic, or at least alter-systemic, perspective) and the degree of support for the insertion of animal advocacy

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<sup>11</sup> See note 1.

into a broader, intersectional discourse of contention against neo-liberal politics, referring not only to non-human animals. Our empirical analysis is based upon the Italian case (specifically the urban area around Milan), but we hope this typology could be useful for researchers studying other national or local contexts.

Table 3 - The 4 animalisms

	<i>Alter-systemic</i>	<i>Anti-systemic</i>
<i>Intersectionality</i>	Political animalism	Anarchist animalism
<i>Only animal issues</i>	Moderate animalism	Anti-political animalism

Source: Author's empirical research

#### A) *Political animalism*

Some activists indicate the explicit "leftist" nature of their commitment, underlining their anti-fascist positions and their links with other social movements and liberation struggles. This approach is not limited to general discourses of abstract nature, but identifies both neo-fascism and political indifference as specific enemies to be fought, as clearly expressed in the following excerpts:

Right-wing animalism can exist, because it actually exists. Having said that, the problem is to identify the contradictions of right-wing animalism: there are many, often very similar to those of apolitical animalism ... but for me, being right-wing is wrong in itself. Even aside from the animal issue it is a problem in itself. (Oltre la Specie, Interview 1, M.R.)

The real strength of antispeciesism is that it fights all forms of discrimination, so hearing about people fighting for animal liberation who don't know what they're talking about and declare themselves to be fascists, or who sympathize with Lega, seems to me like an absurd contradiction. These people should be fought exactly as we fight farmers or exploiters in general. (Vita da Cani, Interview 2, G.F.)<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that this category of respondents does not totally exclude political institutions as referents of their requests. Political institutions are considered for requests of social change; however, the relations with them is almost always conten-

<sup>12</sup> In the excerpts of interviews, we adopt the concept of 'antispeciesism' translating literally from the Italian. In Italy in fact this term and frame is quite diffused among animal advocates.

tious, even if they can be particularly important in the management of specific cases. An example reported in one of the interviews concerns a cattle fair that was held until a few years ago in the province of Monza, north of Milan: alongside other less conventional forms of protest, advocates engaged the local administration in dialogue. After an initial opposition coinciding with a period of League administration, the election of a Partito Democratico's (Democratic Party) junta led to an improvement in relations, and subsequently to the banning of the fair itself. The episode is summarized in the following lines:

We followed this thing for three years... It was a local campaign, it was quite contentious but we played it subtle: for example we were there once a month when the city council was meeting and once we gave all the city councilors a booklet on antispeciesism, another time we gave them a dvd, another time we handed questionnaires asking politicians whether they would abolish the fair in the future if they ruled the city... then we were lucky that the junta changed: the new mayor said he was against the cattle fair, and then they stopped doing it, initially under the pretext of the economic crisis, but then once removed it was not repropose. (*Oltre la Specie*, Interview 3, A.G.)

#### *B) Anarchist animalism*

This second category comprises those who do not want to have any relationship with institutions: as these advocates are close to the anarchist area, they do not recognize the legitimacy of government institutions. This position is linked both to specific episodes and to a more general reflection on the forms of delegation in contemporary democracies and of exploitation in advanced capitalist societies. In the interviews this was explained with both abstract reflections and reference to specific episodes, as shown below:

We were asked if we could make a contribution as cooks, once a week on Sundays, alongside three other associations, to help feed the immigrants staying in Porta Venezia ... above all, if the immigrants are in those conditions, it is not our fault, but the institutions ... the problem is to interact with the institutions that created these problems, because the institutions could very well solve them, but do not want to. Who is it that made them come here? Because it was convenient for the system, for the black market, for exploitation ... if those people need food we are the first ones, very well, let's go, but the problem is that the system is not good. (*Farro & Fuoco*, Interview 1, F.L.)

Although a total refusal to converse with establishment institutions distinguishes anarchist animalism from political animalism, they both share a proximity to other struggles and social movements. Another aspect shared between these categories is their radical critique of capitalism; their advocacy is not limited to the pursuit of a vegan diet and the abolition of animal exploitation, but extends toward a movement for total liberation (Best 2014). The anarchist inclination of such a position is visible in the next interview:

To have a radical sense of liberation, animalism and antispecism must be placed in a context of broader struggles; this leads me to identify this type of struggle with a political position linked to anarchism, rather than to a traditional left... a radical change such as the liberationist one (namely, the end of the exploitation of all living beings), needs a radical change in the organization, culture, and habits of all human beings living today. (Farro & Fuoco, Interview 2, L.C.)

### *C) Anti-political animalism*

In addition to the above two categories, which both have a strong political reference, there are those who call for an anti-political (or at least apolitical) spirit of the animal advocacy. These advocates argue that other social issues have little relevance to the treatment of non-human animals, especially from the perspective of the non-human animals themselves. Therefore, a political transversal perspective is proposed. Because these advocates are adverse to the construction of a wider critical discourse towards power relations in neo-liberal societies, the vegan diet assumes absolute centrality among these respondents, often leading to strongly identity positions (Bertuzzi 2018).

We are not a political group, we are an apolitical group, antispecist, and now peaceful ... we do not believe that we belong to a certain type of politics, right or left or center. We emerged from a group that is considered a fascist group, we have often been labeled as fascists ... we would like to just inform everyone that there is something to do to save the planet. (Cani Sciolti, Interview 1, T.G.)

This category also includes those who declare indifference, and at times a certain aversion, towards institutions, in a more general anti-systemic frame. However, these respondents specify that, on the basis of specific situations, they are willing to pursue institutional alliances even with specific political parties. While in the recent past this

attitude has led to accusations of a (more or less) latent sympathy for right-wing or even far right-wing parties, nowadays it seems to involve a closeness to the 5SM. On this point, some respondents acknowledge that they had a better response from the 5SM compared to other Italian parties. However, this does not imply their adhesion, but rather an assessment regarding the possibility of using the 5SM as a privileged interlocutor and lobby supporter for some issues in specific political/institutional arenas.

The reference to the 5SM is usually employed as a corollary of a deeper skepticism towards traditional institutions and political parties, which are often accused of a general lack of interest in issues concerning non-human animals. In this sense, the oppositional approach seems to find a fair reception, both in more abstract terms and in reference to issues related to local public policies. Similar discourses emerged in several interviews, as shown below:

Of course I'm not right-wing because I do not agree, I'm not left-wing, it is obvious that if a 5 Stars Movement is approaching our ideology, I look at it with different eyes. (Cani Sciolti, Interview 1, T.G.)

The 5SM is the only political party that contacted us when they knew about [the construction of a road in front of the local cat shelter], and told us, "Look, you risk being cut in half!" (Mondogatto SD, Interview 2, L.C.)

#### *D) Moderate animalism*

Finally, we identified a fourth category, members of which reaffirm the autonomy that animal advocacy should maintain and the transversal nature that should characterize it, but without hiding a certain closeness to the political centre-left (represented by the Partito Democratico area in the actual Italian panorama).

This category includes mainly those subjects who have a strong relationship with local policies and with the enforcement agencies responsible for animal protection, in particular the associations that belong to the new welfare and old welfare areas. However, such relationships remain confined to care activities such as the sterilization and housing of stray animals. In this regard, several respondents are critical of local institutions: the scant effectiveness of the offices in charge is underlined, perhaps explainable due to a general political immobilism or electoral calculations. As an example, we quote two interviewees expressing frustration with the Office for the Protection of Animal Rights of the Municipality of Milan.

Instead of being regulatory bodies, they behave as if they were animal welfare associations. We can't get any results. As for the regulation plan for animal protection of the City of Milan, it was supposed to be released 5 years ago, and we have come to a regulation that is completely useless ... the methods are missing, the boundaries aren't set ... the guarantor must guarantee, but it does not guarantee anything: Valerio [Pocar, former Guarantor of animal rights in the city of Milan] has a very fundamentalist vision that inevitably leads him to clash with the reality of local councils, and eventually this regulation will probably not help. (ENPA, Interview 2, E.G.)

The animal rights office has always tried to work with the associations, at the time of both [Letizia] Moratti's and [Giuliano] Pisapia's administrations.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the office of the previous administration was less prepared on a theoretical level, but more operational... [Gianluca Comazzi], the guarantor of Moratti's administration, had a team of followers linked to him by personal sympathies; on the contrary, the more institutional approach of professor [Valerio] Pocar has led to a lower emotional involvement. (LAV, Interview 2, C.B.)

This 4-category typology clarifies the identity of Italian animal advocates beyond what can be seen with the tripartite division following Francione's typology. These four categories of individual advocates cannot be assigned in a unilateral way to the collective groups that were the focus of our qualitative study, however. As an example, the anti-systemic groups that openly adopt either an anarchist paradigm or a radical critique of the current political system (e.g. Farro&Fuoco or Oltre la Specie) are very different from other groups that base their existence solely on the animal question (e.g. Cani Sciolti). However, we can generally conclude that individuals who adopt the positions of political animalism, anarchist animalism, or anti-political animalism are more likely to belong to the animal rights area, demonstrating this area's pronounced internal variety and multitudinous identity. This breadth of practitioner identities also confirms the nature of Italian animal advocacy as a movement coalition (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010) or a strategic action field (Fligstein & Mc Adam, 2012) composed of different sub-movements (Suanders 2007).

Moderate animalism, on the other hand, is often related to the old and new welfare areas. However, some members of the old welfare area are best categorized as pursuing anti-political animalism, or occasionally political animalism.

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<sup>13</sup> Letizia Moratti was the Mayor of Milan between 2006 and 2011, leading a right-wing coalition. Her successor, Giuliano Pisapia governed the city between 2011 and 2016, leading a left-wing coalition.

## Conclusions

In this article, we analysed the Italian animal advocates in their political dimension, evaluating their relationship to institutional politics: their political visions and pursuit of political collaboration on specific demands. After a historical reconstruction of the main episodes of recent decades, the analysis focused on contemporary advocacy. Our analyses demonstrated a considerable differentiation within the Italian animal advocacy archipelago, which is in every sense a variegated social movement coalition (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010) composed of actors who are quite distinct from each other (Bertuzzi 2018). Our analysis indicates that it is incorrect to treat Italian animal advocacy as a unified coalition, as often happens in the public debate and on the mainstream media, often with strong stigma and stereotypical representations (Almiron, Cole, & Freeman, 2015; Cole & Morgan, 2011).

Although Italian animal advocacy was well represented by a tripartition in past eras, contemporary animal advocacy more closely resembles a dichotomy between animal rights and the other two areas. This is especially stark when considering members' opinions on political and economic issues. As regards the individual advocates' views on institutions (assessed first with the survey data and later in more depth via semi-structure interviews), the picture seems to be even more complex. In light of our findings, we proposed a typology of four ideal types: political animalism, anarchist animalism, anti-political animalism, and moderate animalism.

Beyond the results of our empirical research, some final reflections on the actual characteristics of social movement coalitions and more generally of collective mobilizations can be advanced. Internal composition is almost always highly differentiated within complex alliances between different subjects. This is not a novelty in the social movements panorama, but some typical characteristics of modernity help legitimize and normalize such internal variety. This could represent both a shortcoming (due to a possible confusion and dispersion of resources and political demands) but also a virtue if correctly addressed and capitalized upon. Lobbying and protest often coexist (Imig and Tarrow 2001): this is not only a trend impossible to counteract but also a potential benefit for an ideological movement coalition as regards its potential to influence the political structure (Bieler 2011; Leiren and Parks 2014). The same internal divisions were seen in the environmental movement (Diani 1995; Rootes 2003) and more generally within other forms of contentious politics (Tarrow and Tilly 2007).

At the same time, the NGOization and professionalization of relevant parts of the movement coalitions should be considered with caution. In the case of animal advocacy, this process is accelerating considerably. This has made possible several institution-

al achievements, especially drawing public attention toward animal issues, as can be seen for example with the more than 1.300.000 signatures collected for the European Citizens Initiative called Stop Vivisection (although this initiative was later rejected for formal reasons by the European Commission). At the same time, the professionalization of advocacy can clearly reduce its cultural impact and the real dimension of participation and conflict in such revolutionary perspectives as animal rights, especially if intended in its original political anti-capitalist and anti-systemic nature (Bertuzzi and Reggio 2019).

The present case study also stresses the importance of individual agency within collective movement coalitions, an aspect more deeply analyzed elsewhere (Bertuzzi 2018). The production of multiple identities (Monterde et al. 2015) could represent a vantage point as well as a possible downgrading, for example transforming an ethical and political stance into a lifestyle movement (Haenfler et al. 2012) or something in the form of a religion (Jacobsson and Lindblom 2017), amplifying the gospel of frame personalization (Bennett and Segerberg 2013), not only typical of social movements but favored within them. Of course, the fact that activists and protestors are generally more progressive, at an individual level, than the population at large, makes this focus on the individual actor also a potential virtue. This was quite apparent in our case study: despite their internal differences and distinctions, animal advocates remain far more progressive than the Italian general population.

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