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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Managerialism Against Clientelism. A blocked process of political change in Apulia (Southern Italy)

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to explain the evolution of forms of political regulation for the allocation of resources and representation of interests in Southern Italy, at length qualified as clientelistic. It will show how managerial principles can be taken up in a context with a historical resistance to bureaucratic change as well as a political orientation which contests neoliberal beliefs. To this end, it analyses a sequence of political change in the Apulia region, while focusing on the political strategies and discourses concerning local development tools for entrepreneurs. It shows how the objective to increase the regional council's institutional capacity to deliver public policies turned into a managerial drift. It is argued that the critique of clientelism, considered the main factor hindering the development of the South, led to the prioritisation of efficiency over representation of collective interests. The critique of clientelism corresponds to the mechanism through which managerialism has spread in a context of economic crisis.

### KEYWORDS:

Clientelism, managerialism, representation, regional politics, Southern Italy

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## 1. Introduction

In the mid-2000s, the Apulia region was identified as a case of a ‘tiger economy’ in Southern Italy (Petrušewicz 2010) as well as a laboratory of progressive political change, at a time when centre-right parties—*Forza Italia* (Go Italy) and *Lega Nord* (Northern League), the latter propounding the narrative of the ‘unproductive *Mezzogiorno*’—were becoming consolidated at the national scale. At the local level, the election in 2005 of Nichi Vendola, a member of the leftist *Rifondazione Comunista* (Communist Refoundation) party, and former communist party militant, marked a major change in the partisan history of the region, which had been dominated by Christian Democrat (CD) leaders since 1945 and subsequently by the centre-right. Vendola was successfully re-elected in 2010 and the centre-left coalition went on to hold power for the following years. The long period of the centre-left regional and local governments which began with the election of Vendola has been called the ‘Apulian spring’<sup>1</sup> to exemplify the aspirations and the new course of regional politics and policies.

Now, 15 years later, is it possible to identify the election of Vendola as an historical event (Sewell 1996) paving the way for a transformation of structures and notably the clientelistic relations at length a part of Southern Italian society? In this article I will argue that the political change took a different path, away from the initial ambitions evoked by its advocates. Despite Vendola’s explicit warning during his first programmatic speech against collective faith in the virtuosity of efficiency to solve the problem of the underdevelopment of the Southern Italian regions and the particularistic use of public resources,<sup>2</sup> I will show that a managerial drift<sup>3</sup> played out in regional politics over the years, sustained by the diffusion of a spending and efficiency narrative guided by NPM (New Public Management) principles.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Apulian spring’ (*Primavera pugliese*) was initially the name of the civic electoral list supporting Vendola in the centre-left coalition for the regional election of 2005. This label was then imported to the public debate to describe the centre-left coalition’s governance of Apulia. Indeed, besides the regional government, in 2004 centre-left parties also triumphed in the municipality of Bari (regional capital), with the election of Michele Emiliano.

<sup>2</sup> In his speech upon taking office, Vendola specifically warned against the risks of a ‘technocratic turn’ engendered by the overemphasis of efficiency: ‘It is commonly admitted that to cope with social complexity, politics must choose to push the decision button, dressing up its governability aim with the clothes of technocracy, manageriality and efficiency; to command rather than listen, mediate and seek the most useful syntheses. There has been a real ideological tropism, on the right but also on the left, which has concealed this deep authoritarian drive behind scientificity: in the name of the timeliness and effectiveness of the decision, the intent is to restrict the audience of decision makers, so that complexity is exorcised and finally strangled. [...] it is precisely against this neutral and hyper-technical idea of governability that a new generation of Southern people, bearers of a new consciousness of their rights and duties, have mobilised.’ *Una Puglia Migliore. Dichiarazioni Programmatiche per il governo della Regione Puglia*. Bari, 21 June 2005, p. 58. Source: Archivio Consiglio Regionale Puglia.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term ‘drift’ to describe an unintended outcome rather than how it has been conceptualised by scholars of institutional change (Hacker 2005; Thelen and Mahoney 2010). In the latter case, drift does not occur in the event of a formal revision but is used to describe an endogenous process driven by the failed adaptation of policies or institutions to a new context, modifying the objectives of existing policies. On the contrary, in the case analysed here, an attempt was made to change existing practices, but it drifted from the initial ambitions.

<sup>4</sup> Here I intend NPM as an administrative paradigm or doctrine centred on performance measurement and based on the adoption of market principles and values by public administrations. This paradigm comprises several principles (Hood 1991) such as separation of strategic and steering functions from operational and implementation functions; disaggregation of public

In the case of the Apulian regional government, the penetration of NPM principles can be explained by the collective representation considering isolation of policymaking from the partisan and electoral arena a solution for the efficient allocation of resources for local development. Its causal power was activated by the economic crisis of 2008 which exacerbated the exogenous pressure perceived by regional policymakers to engage European funds in order to sustain investments. Indeed, the *Mezzogiorno* (Viesti 2014) and Apulian economy, which is historically dependent on exogenous investments in manufacturing (Martinelli 1985), was hard hit by the international crisis. Still, it needs to be explained why and how local policymakers came to believe that managerialism was a potential solution despite Southern European bureaucracies' resistance to managerial reforms (Sotiropoulos 2006) and the ideological orientation of the regional governing coalition which refuted neoliberalism and managerialism. Beyond the economic crisis and the need to satisfy the demands of social constituencies, it is important to factor in the cognitive structure within which regional policymakers were embedded. The end of the 'extraordinary intervention' at the beginning of the 1990s has contributed to reinforce among academics, technocrats, and regional development experts a diagnosis about the socio-political causes of the underdevelopment of the South which considers clientelism a pathology of Italian political development (Briquet 2009) and a bad practice to be discarded through institutional reforms.

This article aims to account why clientelism<sup>5</sup> evolved to managerialism as a form of regulation of public resources and representation of interests in the case of Southern Italian societies. In the past clientelistic practices were particularly common in municipal policies (Caciagli 1977) and also spread to the regional scale (Maraffi 1985) but the political changes and reforms implemented in the 1990s altered the institutional conditions upon which clientelistic relations developed during the so-called First Republic (Bobbio 2005). As for the regional scale, regional governments were entrusted with new competences, which as of the early 2000s included the direct management of European structural funds and a renewed form of political legitimacy with the introduction of the direct election of regional presidents. Europeanisation played a great role in encouraging the institutionalisation of the regional arenas of policymaking and interest representation (Fargion, Morlino and Profeti 2006). Research focusing on the Southern regions has shown that the parties' role was drastically undermined in favour of local administrative actors (Graziano 2006) and that this resulted in differentiated levels of administrative capacity (Terraciano and Graziano 2016).

The research focuses on the Apulia region, a least-likely case for the diffusion of NPM principles. Indeed, since 2005 Apulia has been governed by a centre-left coalition whose ideological orientation refuted managerialism, while in other regions, such as Lombardy, it became a public philosophy underpinning regional policies (Biorcio and Vitale 2014). Like many other regions in Southern Italy, Apulia was historically a bastion for CD leaders (Allum 1995) and, before the 1990s, was a typical case of clientelistic relations (Piattoni 1998). The election of the first centre-left regional council since the establishment of the region in the 1970s can be considered a turning point in the contemporary political history of the region. Local politicians and notably the regional president sparked a reflection on the necessity to challenge existing patterns of clientelistic relations while also introducing a new regional development agenda combining forward-looking investments and redistributive policies (Beramendi, Häusermann, Kitschelt, and Kriesi 2015).

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sector organisations with the creation of independent units and agencies; introduction of competition; more autonomy and independence for the implementation units; adoption of performance measurement indicators.

<sup>5</sup> I consider clientelism as both a form of political regulation for the allocation of public resources and a form of representation of interests based on the distribution of benefits and the granting of selective access to state-administrative goods against the promise of political support (Piattoni, 2001: 195).

The article embraces an approach inscribed within historical sociology (Paci 2013). By taking historical time seriously (Kreuzer 2010),<sup>6</sup> it sets out to explain the transformation of structures, in particular the linkages between regional government (elected officials and administrative actors) and entrepreneurs as beneficiaries of public funds. In the article I will rely on the practice that Ermakoff (2019) defined as ‘genetic’ causal inquiry, which identifies the processes and mechanisms of emergence to investigate how a specific outcome came about. My approach is situated within critical realism (Collier 1994; Somers 1998; Steinmetz 1998). Accordingly, it considers mechanisms to be non-observable entities which can deploy causal powers in specific contextual historical conditions, thus recognising contingency against the search for general laws. Here causal mechanisms are defined as process links between an initial condition and an outcome (Maynzt 2003) which can be activated in specific contexts (Pawson 2000) or in interaction with conditional factors (Ermakoff 2019).<sup>7</sup>

Empirically, the article builds on discourses of political, administrative and socio-economic elites (business associations and unions) about policy instruments<sup>8</sup> to encourage local development through the allocation of ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) financing to companies (Table 1). A policy tool is a technical instrument that carries a specific conception of state and society relations (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2005, 14). The evolution over time of the discourses associated with policy tools can thus inform us about how local politicians organise their linkages with citizens—and primarily entrepreneurs<sup>9</sup>—as the beneficiaries of these resources. The empirical material was collected through 12 semi-structured interviews carried out with regional elected officials in charge of economic development, administrative actors, advisors and local development and innovation policy experts as well as representatives of business associations and unions (Table 2).<sup>10</sup> All the actors interviewed hold leading political or administrative positions within their organisations and can be described as elites (Cohen 1999). The interviews were carried out in person, transcribed, and lasted between one and two and a half hours. They follow a common grid with open questions about issues on the regional agenda, the problematisation of development and modes of action. The analysis of the interviews aimed to discern the categories of practice used by regional policymakers with respect to both the objectives of regional industrial policies and the ways through which resources should be

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<sup>6</sup> I am interested in analysing processes of change over time and continuities or discontinuities of socio-political phenomena, by studying how the past influences the present and how similar or dissimilar the past is from the present (Kreuzer 2010, 3).

<sup>7</sup> I consider contextual conditioning factors distinct from what – relying on a positivist lexicon - are usually classed as ‘boundary conditions’. In my understanding, the latter are characteristic of Southern European societies, which share common economic (dependent structure), institutional (lack of institutional capacity) and socio-political (heritage of clientelism) legacies. On the contrary, contextual conditioning factors can be defined as historical contingencies which can open the way to a variety of outcomes, in this specific case corresponding to the election of Vendola and the economic crisis of 2008.

<sup>8</sup> A policy tool can be qualified as a ‘technical and social instrument that organises specific social relations between public authorities and their beneficiaries according to the representations and meanings embedded in it’ (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2005, 13).

<sup>9</sup> Like other Southern Italian local economies, Apulia is characterised by a form of dualisation of the economic structure and employment notably in manufacturing, with local units of big transnational corporations employing a sizeable part of the workforce and an overrepresentation of micro-enterprises (with less than 10 employees). The latter account for 42% of the total number of companies in Apulia, with respect to a national average of 24%. Source: ISTAT Registro statistico delle imprese attive. Data retrieved, 19 May 2020. See graph 1.

<sup>10</sup> Access to the field was provided by a university researcher who acted as regional expert to the regional president in his first term, followed by snowball sampling. However, I also directly contacted some local representatives who were not embedded in the same personal and social networks, and were closer to Vendola’s predecessor.

allocated. Moreover, local press articles (n=200) were systematically coded<sup>11</sup> and a documentary analysis was made of the public statements of both the regional elected officials and socio-economic representatives. This variety of primary data allowed me to limit some methodological bias, notably in relation to the underrepresentation in the local press of some actors (policy advisors, experts and administrative officers). The coding of the press articles set out to systematise how regional elected officials referred to, named and built their social constituencies, with particular regard to socio-economic actors. Press articles were used to collect factual data and specify the contextual conditions under which industrial policies were implemented.

The argumentation is structured as follows. First, I detail the type of state-led industrialisation and the underlying clientelistic relations that characterised Southern Italian regions in the 1960s till the late 1980s. We will see that in the case of Apulia this heritage influenced the weak institutionalisation of the region as an arena for the representation of interests. Then I make an in-depth analysis of Vendola's terms of office with regard to the implementation of his programmatic agenda. This political sequence was tensioned between the endeavour to rethink the relationships between politics and society by introducing innovations in the forms of interest representation and building an autonomous bureaucracy on the one hand, and a strong tendency to introduce neo-managerial principles in order to increase the efficiency of the regional administration on the other. In times of economic crisis, I will argue that in order to match the ERDF spending imperative, local policymakers embraced a 'managerial drift' driven by a common representation of the efficient management of public resources. In the case study I will trace how a 'spending narrative' developed right from the start of Vendola's office and was progressively reinforced through time, in particular after the outbreak of the economic crisis. I will argue that the critique of clientelism corresponds to a cognitive mechanism (Tilly 2001)<sup>12</sup> which manifested in the diffusion of the spending narrative and finally leading to a managerial drift. In the article I will analyse how local policy actors progressively adhered to this collective representation that prioritised efficiency over democratic representation and distanced partisan politics.

## **1. From state-led industrialisation and the mass-clientele party to endogenous development and the building of a regional political capacity**

Southern Italian societies are a case of state-led industrialisation that played out during the *Trente Glorieuses*, inspired by theories of modernisation centred on manufacturing and big firms in particular (Perna 1994). Public intervention included direct investments by state-owned companies and incentives allocated by the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (Southern Development Fund) for the creation and/or relocation of industrial production sites principally in heavy industries. At that time, the local elected officials acted as policy brokers (Tarrow 1977) in order to seize upon national public resources for local distribution. Together with the powerful national party representatives, they can be considered the key actors in this pattern of state-led modernisation of the South (Dunford and Greco 2004). Clientelistic exchanges, existing in Southern Italian societies since the establishment of the modern state and involving local notables in particular (Graziano 1980), evolved during this historical period into a form of party clientelism that allowed in particular the CD to cement its power and nurture political consensus in these regions (Caciagli 2016, 166).

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<sup>11</sup> A local daily newspaper, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, was analysed by searching the online archives from 2000 to 2018 using two keywords 'Apulia' and 'industry' plus the name of the regional president in office and then selecting the articles where issues of local development were debated by local political officials and representatives of socio-economic interest organisations (unions and business associations).

<sup>12</sup> A cognitive mechanism concerns a collective and shared perception of a situation.

The persisting development divide with Northern regions has been analysed from different theoretical perspectives. Beyond cultural explanations, attention has also historically dwelt on the diffusion of clientelistic relations as a mode of integration between the centre and the periphery and a major obstacle to autonomous development (Trigilia 1992). If there have been cases of ‘virtuous clientelism’ (Piattoni 1997, 1998), which encouraged the delivery of collective goods for local development and the adaptation of regional economies, they can be deemed marginal. The allocation of public resources by national party leaders and local elected officials to satisfy the particularistic demands of different electorates and build consensus helped lock Southern local societies in the trap of dependency on public aid (Triglia 1992). This thesis on the endogenous socio-political causes of the underdevelopment of the South became particularly popular in the 1990s and challenged a long-lasting argument based on the scarcity of monetary resources devoted to the South notably put forward by SVIMEZ (Association for the Industrial Development of Southern Italy). Under this perspective, the problem of the underdevelopment of Southern Italy is framed as a problem of “*institutional reforms* (my italic) rather than a problem of economic policies. [...] The reform of institutions is seen above all as a way to steer socio-cultural change and an increase in autonomy of civil society without which it cannot be good politics” (Trigilia 1992, XVII).

The reforms introduced at the end of the 1990s were part of this perspective to break away from clientelism by enhancing the accountability and autonomous capacity of sub-national, regional and municipal governments. As for the regional scale, the process to decentralise the management of structural funds should be contextualised in this intellectual climate, which ended up advocating the reduction of the ‘pervasive’ character of (clientelistic) politics by defending regional policymaking from partisan and electoral pressures (La Spina 2011). As I will argue, this interpretation of the problem of the South’s underdevelopment coupled with the recognised incapacity of regional bureaucracies to engage structural funds (Leonardi 2014) went some way to legitimising managerial norms, hence limiting the politicisation of decision-making. This intellectual representation of the main causes of the failed development of the South was taken up and translated into specific guidelines by national ministries and in particular the DPS (Department for Development and Cohesion Policies) at the beginning of the 2000s. The DPS promoted different capacity-building activities with regional and local elected officials, administrative staff and socio-economic representatives in order to facilitate the decentralisation of functions (Di Quirico 2006).<sup>13</sup> These policies were aimed at increasing the institutional capacity of regional governments by strengthening the leadership of the regional elected officials in the public policymaking process, the autonomy and capacity of local bureaucracies, and the linkages with local socio-economic organised interests. Along with a change in the paradigm of regional development policies in the *Mezzogiorno*, they deployed a shift from the idea of unconditional state monetary incentives to a new territorial competitiveness paradigm emphasising endogenous and regional development strategies (Bull and Baudner 2004). The empowering of regional governments corresponded to a programme to modernise Italian bureaucracy whose aim was to drift away from a model based on the pervasive use of national public resources for electoral purposes. In the case of Apulia, the transformative programme of the DPS is entangled with a shift in the partisan history of the region.

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<sup>13</sup> Since the 2000–2006 programming period, regional councils have been entrusted with the direct management of European development funds, which cover the majority of financial resources devoted to local development and industrial policies.

## 2. The 'Apulian spring' as a political project of progressive change

Nichi Vendola aimed to embody a clear break from the past in terms of both development policies and the linkages between politicians and social groups. These two aspects were closely intertwined in his political manifesto, which can be deemed progressive insofar as it stressed redistributive goals and democratic participation,<sup>14</sup> even if its radical orientation was mixed with a third-way philosophy emphasising the growth potential of knowledge-based industries (Coates 2016).<sup>15</sup>

With respect to his predecessor Fitto, the new president strove to mark a clear shift in the public debate around development (see Table 2) by introducing new issues, principally around the critique of neoliberal globalisation, thus positioning his political offer around a new emerging transnational cleavage (Kriesi, Grande, Lachat, Dolezal, Bornschieer, and Frey 2008). As for the forms of democratic representation, he argued for a change in the heritage of clientelistic practices. With respect to the dominant narrative that saw institutional reforms as a way to fight immoral practices associated with clientelism, Vendola warned against the 'fetishism of decisionism' and insisted on the necessity to encourage new forms of democratic participation. Policymaking processes as well as innovations in the types of public policies were considered paramount in order to promote new forms of participation, citizenship and collective action.

As for industrial policies targeting entrepreneurs, the ones that were promoted during his first term combined policy tools encouraging corporate investments in innovation and R&D with initiatives for social innovation, targeting youth in particular. In both cases, the policies also aimed to build new linkages with the policy beneficiaries, at odds with the exchange relationship typical of patronage politics. Specifically, a regional law<sup>16</sup> encouraging the creation of industrial districts was introduced, overcoming the historical resistance of business associations and companies. This law was particularly significant since it aimed to encourage collective forms of action and horizontal networks among entrepreneurs. Moreover, in the realm

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<sup>14</sup> Vendola's electoral campaign, as well as the primary elections of the centre-left, mobilised representatives of the local intelligentsia, mostly academics and grassroots militants from different associations (Catholic, *altermondialistes*, LGTB, etc.) (Chiarello, 2005). Some of these academics and civic association leaders were thereafter appointed as council members and/or acted as advisors of the regional president. His regional executive body (*giunta*) brought together different ideological perspectives, spanning from left-wing parties (*Rifondazione Comunista*) to social democrats (*Democratici di Sinistra* and *Margherita*).

<sup>15</sup> The social groups of the productive sphere were explicitly named and mobilised in his electoral campaign: 'Even the business bourgeoisie asks the public hand not only to give prebends without any clientelistic logic, but to draw the outline of new development and new social wealth (wealth of producers, consumers, but also quality of life and environment).' Extract from Vendola's 2005 regional electoral campaign, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 19 January 2005. As stated by Vendola's development assessor: 'We were aware that a part of this challenge also lay in convincing new social groups who traditionally placed themselves in an alternative position to the left, but who changed their leanings when it came to actual government work. Therefore, it was a "governing left" that was inclusive by definition, because it tended to promote a project of socially and sustainable modernisation by looking at all productive labour forces, not only salaried workers, but work in all its expressions. We weren't spokesmen for Confindustria (General Confederation of Italian Industry) but we kept their point of view as well' (interview A1).

<sup>16</sup> Regional law no. 23/2007 'Promozione e riconoscimento dei Distretti Produttivi' (Promotion and Recognition of Production Districts).



of active labour and social innovation, the regional government promoted different initiatives whose final aim was also to promote new forms of collective action and citizenship.<sup>17</sup>

The first months after his election, Vendola concentrated on building new institutions to establish links with civic society groups, first of all unions and local business associations. This led to the creation of a regional socio-economic concertation body bringing together representatives of the socio-economic and civic associations. This body was modelled on the experience of pre-existing forms of social concertation in other Italian regions. However, in the case of Apulia, it was a break from the past, in particular from the personal linkages nurtured between political representatives, administrative actors and representatives of collective associations and social groups (Maraffi 1985). While the social partners considered this socio-economic arena in a positive light with respect to previous practices (Graziano 2006), it did not fundamentally alter the lack of a local culture of concertation. Nevertheless, the socio-economic concertation body, along with the new policies introduced during Vendola's first term, aimed to rebuild the local state–society relations by encouraging forms of horizontal relations and collective action, at odds with the heritage of clientelistic practices.

### *The sedimentation of a spending and efficiency narrative*

The rebuilding of the relations between politics and society was also meant to be achieved by reinforcing the capacity and autonomy of the regional bureaucracy. The latter displayed some of the characteristics of Southern European bureaucracies (Sotiropoulos 2006), in particular weak institutionalisation, the pervasive role of parties and perceived administrative inefficiency. Some organisational changes were therefore introduced in order to increase the capacity of the regional administration to plan and allocate the European structural funds. The foremost aim of these modifications was to introduce a culture of programming and concertation and to make sweeping changes to the administrative machine (Giannelli and Profeti 2006).<sup>18</sup> In the case of Apulia, the administrative machine programming the European funds earmarked for the main industrial and local development policies was reorganised by creating separate, ad hoc institutions and rules (Giannelli and Profeti 2006). It was a common and deep belief among regional policy actors that there was a fundamental incapacity to spend public resources and that they were distributed without any kind of criteria to encourage certain types of investments. As stated by one of Vendola's close collaborators:

In the 2000s we tried to go against the previous model of administration in the region, which had no vision, little planning and programmatic capacity and very little ability to use the available resources, especially from Europe.<sup>19</sup>

Among the regional policymakers, a spending narrative started to set in around the necessity to increase the efficiency of the administration. A major political achievement explicitly claimed by Vendola's former economic development councillor was the simplification of bureaucratic procedures for companies to apply

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<sup>17</sup> These policies are better known under the 'Bollenti spiriti' (Burning Spirits) label which included policies for financing youth entrepreneurship initiatives, restructuring spaces for the creation of urban laboratories and cooperatives, etc. In this article, I do not focus on this set of policies, see Minervini (2012).

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in the 1980s and 1990s the regional administration was mainly forged around regional council offices (*assessorati*) which were highly fragmented and lacked programming capacity. The structure of the administration reproduced the internal divisions among the different factions (*correnti*) of the governing parties.

<sup>19</sup> Interview A9.



for public incentives financed by European regional development funds (ERDF). This was realised mainly by outsourcing the ERDF management and programming to an agency:

We “*Bersanised*”<sup>20</sup> *Puglia Sviluppo*. We made it an autonomous agency that was no longer just a satellite of *Invitalia* [the national agency] by working with high-quality regional officers, like X, a civil servant, in the French sense. We introduced some changes to the procedures, by switching from the mechanism of public calls to the “counter” mechanism [...] Public calls had fixed bureaucratic times for presenting the applications, and this had the effect of discouraging companies, whereas the “counter” mechanism aimed to adapt to the markets’ needs for flexibility [...] We introduced this innovation and you know what? We spent everything! For years, and we still do. The main issue was: could you manage to spend everything? Because if not, the European funds would be disengaged... and we succeeded in spending everything.<sup>21</sup>

Overall, Vendola’s first term was characterised by the programmatic mobilisation of the electorates and local entrepreneurs. This was at odds with the particularistic practices of distributing divisible benefits to clients and marked by a strong vision aimed at steering a change both in the regional development model and in the ways local state–society relations were organised. However, as we will see hereafter, the scope of his new agenda for the Apulia region was limited and highly influenced by the changing economic context at the national and European scale. Moreover, the objective of building a capable and autonomous regional bureaucracy conflated with the efficiency narrative, sparking a managerial drift of regional politics centred around the imperative to spend the European funds.

### 3. The limits to political action in times of global crisis

In 2010 Vendola was re-elected to the regional council with a large majority.<sup>22</sup> It was a time of economic crisis. The first half of the mandate overlapped with the technical government led by Mario Monti, which embraced an agenda oriented towards reducing public spending (Gualmini and Schmidt 2014).<sup>23</sup> *Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà* (Left, Ecology and Freedom) positioned itself clearly as the left-wing alternative and put forward Vendola as a national leader.<sup>24</sup> Beyond this fierce opposition to austerity policies at the national level, at the regional scale, the regional government had to deal with the multiplication of big companies’ redundancy plans and the difficulties of SMEs, mainly in terms of liquidity. The objective to humanise

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<sup>20</sup> From the name of Pier Luigi Bersani, former Minister of Economic Development (Prodi government II), who introduced a law decree in 2006 aimed at liberalising monopolies and simplifying administrative procedures, in particular for corporate subsidies and bureaucratic procedures.

<sup>21</sup> Interview A5.

<sup>22</sup> Vendola ran with a new national party founded in 2009, *Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà* (Left, Ecology and Freedom). It should be noted that the centre-right parties were split into two alternative lists, with the candidate of the *Popolo della Libertà* (People of Freedom) representing both *Forza Italia* (Go, Italy!) and *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance) on one hand, and on the other an alternative centre-right candidate, Adriana Poli Bortone, a powerful politician, former member of the Apulia *Alleanza Nazionale* and mayor of Lecce, who presented her own list (*Io Sud* – I the South). For an analysis of the regional vote see Gelli (2010).

<sup>23</sup> During the years of the crisis, the state co-financing of development policies targeting Southern regions was reduced by around 24% (Pellegrini 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Vendola would run for the primaries as a candidate for the presidency of the centre-left coalitions in 2012.

globalisation in opposition to the neo-liberal doxa was still identified as a core policy belief of Vendola's programmatic action but this led to a rather different allocation of public resources:

we place the people's welfare at the heart of the agenda and implement our policies around the people. This, and in particular the humanism of labour, is the principle that drove the first regional council (*giunta*) [...] The Apulia region does not believe in the neo-liberal thought claiming that passive labour policies are considered a hindrance to development. Not at all. How do people live while waiting for the investments to produce the expected effects? How do they survive if the factories close down? You need to protect them!<sup>25</sup>

The regional public policies mainly targeted local productive and social groups suffering from the consequences of the global crisis as they had been or risked being expelled from the labour market. The so-called 'anti-crisis package' included a variety of passive and active labour policy measures. As for the investment policies directed towards companies, there were no major innovations in terms of new policy tools: however, local development policy instruments were used more and more to protect employment and deal with the effects of the economic crisis. While emphasis was still placed on innovation, the main issue appears to have been guaranteeing the monetary flow to sustain companies' investments. During the long years of the crisis, the regional council made intensive use of policy tools that were directed towards financing industrial projects in innovation and R&D:

In these years, programme contracts (*contratti di programma*) have been used to maintain employment in large companies. We should not be afraid to say this, a social operation has been performed. When you protect 9,000 jobs, you give the money to Bosch, to Getrag, but you also defend jobs, it is an operation of social support that has value in itself.<sup>26</sup>

The change in the international and national economic situation played a part in revealing the limits of the regional political capacity to implement forward-looking investment policies and govern the contradictions of globalisation (Beramendi et al. 2015). More widely, the crisis helped amplify the spending narrative: the capacity to promptly allocate monetary resources to entrepreneurs became a pressing objective for the regional government.

### *A blocked process of political change and the managerial drift of territorial politics*

Under this perspective, *Puglia Sviluppo*, the operational arm of the regional administration managing entrepreneurs' applications for European funds, became a key actor in the implementation of regional policies and presented itself as a cornerstone in the regional capacity to cope with the crisis. Specific mechanisms were put in place in order to speed up bureaucratic processes:

instead of participating in six calls, an entity presents a single application and that one application, that tool puts them in a position to intercept all these resources.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Interview A9.

<sup>26</sup> Interview A4.

<sup>27</sup> Interview A6.

This is how the director of the agency formulated the principles underpinning the role of the agency in the implementation of the regional agenda:

today it is more appropriate for an instrument like this [i.e., *contratti di programma*] to be centralised or managed “locally” because proximity is an element that needs to be re-evaluated. Is it not more appropriate for companies to have an interlocutor who is here—in Via delle Dalie [i.e., the HQ of *Puglia Sviluppo*]  
—where they can come in to ask for a clarification, talk about something, get an analysis, get some support, or am I wrong? [...] And I have to say the entrepreneurs appreciate this a lot, because when the company is given the precise range in which it has to move, it’s what the business people need, they need clarity. When you have clarity, the “entrepreneurs” I mean, they do what they are told, but you have to be precise and specific about it, to avoid dispersing in hundreds of directions.<sup>28</sup>

The director emphasised the fact that the agency relied on independent experts for the allocation of the European resources, applying objective criteria with which entrepreneurs had to comply in order to gain access to the funds. The criteria were meant to reduce any kind of political discretion in the implementation phase, and to prevent the particularistic allocation of resources. The modernisation of regional administration and its agencies, in first place *Puglia Sviluppo*, was pursued as a way to break away from past practices. We can notice that ‘clientelism’ is a category that is rarely explicitly used by the regional actors. ‘Bad management’ or ‘prebends’ are associated with corruption and illegal practices and the tendency to prefer ‘*investimenti a pioggia*’, namely highly fragmented aids to companies granted to satisfy particular interests. It can be argued that in order to put aside this perceived immoral heritage (Briquet 2009), which stands out as a common and long-lasting social representation also reinforced by the DPS, the regional actors encouraged a neo-managerial drift, even though Vendola’s political legitimacy was built on the idea and practice of participatory democracy and the mobilisation of citizens.

During Vendola’s two terms, the spending and simplification imperative developed inside a restricted circle of both political—in particular the councillor for regional development—and bureaucratic actors, linked primarily to the ERDF and *Puglia Sviluppo*, becoming even more paramount under Vendola’s successor, Michele Emiliano. This managerial drift departed from the initial ambitions put forward by Vendola to rebuild the relations between politics and society in the region through new forms of democratic participation and representation of interests. From this viewpoint, the willingness to break away from the legacy of clientelistic practices in a context of economic crisis and shortage of corporate financial resources helped trigger a managerial drift mechanism. The impact of this causal mechanism can be observed in the restructuring of forms of state–society relationships.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. The changing local state–society relationship: from ‘clientele’ to ‘customers’

How has the legacy of clientelistic relations in Apulia transformed in the regionalisation process? My analysis has shown that the allocation of ERDF-financed public incentives to companies is embedded in state–society relations that are very different to the mass clientelistic party relations of the First Republic.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> As stated by Somers, ‘the causal power of unobservable does not depend on the rationality or truth of any given theory but upon practical evidence of its causal impact on the relationships in which it is embedded’ (1998, 24).

The latter involved relations between national party leaders, local elected officials and representatives of social groups. In this context, the party leaders were the most powerful actors and nurtured personal linkages with their clientele, as stated by this union leader, who shows some nostalgia for the state–society relations of the First Republic:

Thirty years ago, if you got on an aeroplane to go to Rome, you knew everyone who travelled with you, whether they were in the government or opposition, deputies or senators. Now ... sometimes you travel with half of the government and you don't even know one of them! Back then, in order to build political forces like the DC (Christian Democrats), PSI (Italian Socialist Party) and the communist party, politicians had to work hard in the social strata ... they had to earn those votes, in the sense that they had to bring the votes back to those classes, to those people.<sup>30</sup>

The regionalisation of local development policies has played a part in institutionalising horizontal relations between local government actors and social groups. In this new regional configuration, the regional agency officials entrusted with the management of European resources emerge as the most powerful actors, whereas elected officials are pushed aside in the policymaking process. Experts have gained a new centrality as brokers between the elected officials and the beneficiaries of public incentives. By encapsulating the process to apply for incentives and taking it away from partisan influence and other 'bad' practices of the past, in order to achieve an efficient, transparent and objective allocation of public resources, ultimately the regional elected officials have lost their connection with social constituencies and this raises important issues concerning the parties' loss of legitimacy (Mair 2013).

To conclude, I would like to raise an issue about the forms of representation of interests which this managerial relational pattern embodies. The agency and their experts provide 'proximity support' to entrepreneurs. 'Via delle Dalie', the headquarters of *Puglia Sviluppo*, is the front office of the regional services for local, in particular small or independent entrepreneurs. The 'technical support' provided by the agency can take the form of a meeting with a project manager or with the director of *Puglia Sviluppo*. These meetings aim to help potential candidates to fill in the necessary forms, meet the criteria expected to take part in the calls and have a chance to get public money. The executive director of *Puglia Sviluppo* is a manager who has a direct relationship with the regional president and other elected officials but who is also at the same time accessible to anyone needing support for their business ideas and projects. He is a key mediator of societal interests, 'listening' to the questions of entrepreneurs asking for regional aid and showing that the agency—and indirectly the regional council—is taking care of their claims.<sup>31</sup> These relationships cannot be deemed clientelistic, since the public aid is granted following impartial criteria. However, the practices of listening to and providing assistance to single entrepreneurs do replicate some dimensions of the political culture of clientelism, even if the beneficiaries of public aids are not considered clientele so much as customers. It can be noted that the way the assistance to entrepreneurs is organised in one-to-one meetings, and the way the policies are built, in the form of individual grants to companies, discourages forms of collective action or the aggregation of entrepreneurs' claims. Indeed, the allocation of resources to companies privileges individual grants over the financing of collective projects or the promotion of forms of collaboration and concertation. Even though the granting of public aids for financing industrial projects is

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<sup>30</sup> Interview A12.

<sup>31</sup> The practice of listening to and taking care of entrepreneurs' demands reproduces some dimensions of what in the case of Marseille Mattina has qualified as 'symbolic clientelism' by elected officials (2007).

subject to meeting specific innovation, employment and sustainability criteria, the projects presented are formulated by each company, thus avoiding a collective debate about the regional development objectives.

The lack of forms of aggregation of interests is also exemplified by the socio-economic concertation body created in 2005 which was meant to allow the aggregation of socio-economic actors' interests. Indeed, this group progressively lost its initial imprint as an arena of social dialogue, becoming a highly depoliticised, consensus-building and technocratic arena, reserved for both regional administration and socio-economic organisation 'experts', principally trade union representatives. Finally, besides the technical support granted to local entrepreneurs, *Puglia Sviluppo* staff, in particular the director and the president (a regional council politician), are also engaged in constant grassroots campaigning, organising events in collaboration with local representatives and territorial business associations, in order to present the range of tools and opportunities that are available for entrepreneurs. *Puglia Sviluppo* staff, and the executive director in particular, play the role of brokers by assuring a connection between the regional government and regional elected officials and the local territories and their social groups.

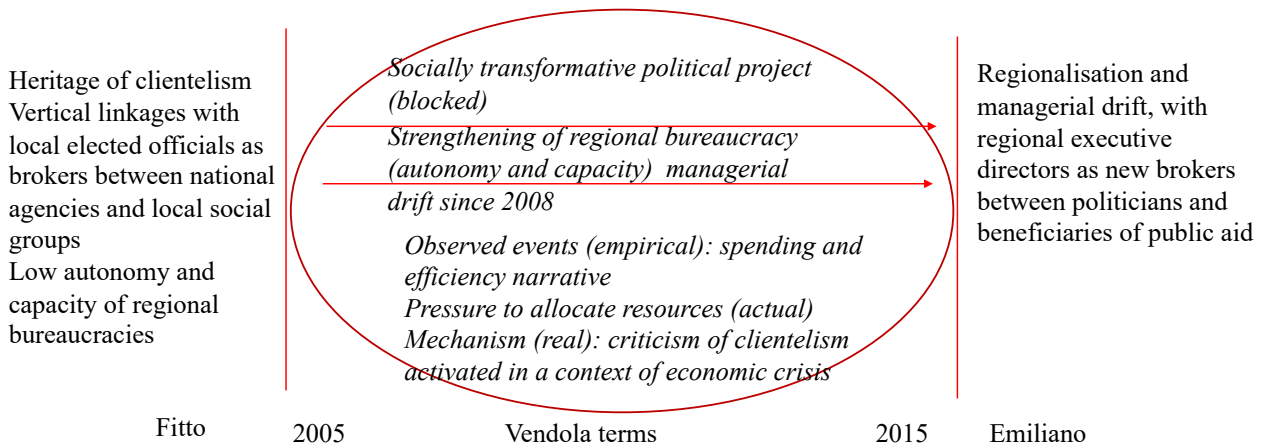
## 5. Conclusions

The aim of this article has been to explain how local state–society relations have evolved over time in Southern Italy, a typical example of the clientelistic mode of political interest intermediation in the past. The contemporary analysis of clientelistic relationships at the sub-national scale has concentrated mostly on the municipal level, where these practices are reproduced even if outside the traditional mediation of partisan organisation (Brancaccio 2018). In this article I have analysed how these relationships have been transformed at the regional scale, which has become an institutionalised arena for the political representation of interests. While I studied the case of Apulia, the process of change analysed and its causal explanation can be extended to other cases in Southern Italy which share common institutional, economic and political legacies, namely an administrative dependency on the centre, an economy dependent on manufacturing and a diffusion of clientelistic practices. The case study has shown that the erosion of clientelism and the rise of the regional government's administrative capacity in allocating funds has led to a managerial drift despite the fact that the promotion of new forms of participation in the framework of a progressive development agenda was at the heart of Vendola's political project. His political enterprise was directed towards building collective forms of political identification, also through the promotion of new public policies emphasising collective action and citizenships. Despite clearly departing from a form of clientelistic mobilisation, it ended up institutionalising linkages with entrepreneurs guided by NPM beliefs.

This outcome was triggered by the common belief generated among regional policymakers, elected officials, administrative elites and representatives of socio-economic associations that it was necessary to better allocate funds by isolating the policymaking process from political and notably partisan influences. The criticism against clientelism and in favour of reforms aimed at increasing public administration efficiency found particularly fertile ground in Apulia, even though the regional president advocated against the risk of rationalisation as a response to the governability challenges. The economic crisis along with the reduction of national transfers to regional governments exacerbated the perceived pressure to allocate and spend resources to meet the demands of local entrepreneurs, big companies and unions in the aftermath of the industrial crisis. From this perspective, the economic crisis was a crucial factor conditioning and limiting the scope and ambitions of Vendola's project, in particular concerning the promotion of new forms of representation and collective action, which at the same time encouraged a managerial drift. The process of Europeanisation can be considered an alternative explanation for the managerial drift, which might also apply beyond the case of the Southern Italian regions. However, in my understanding these are not two

mutually exclusive explanations, they intersect. My case study suggests that managerialism led by Europeanisation was encouraged by the shared understanding of the necessity to increase the capacity and efficiency of local administrations, linked to institutionalist thinking on the causes of the blocked development of the South. Here is a representation of the blocked processes of political change that played out in the two terms of Vendola’s administration:

**Figure 2 The sequence of political change in Apulia (2005–2015)**



**Source:** author’s elaboration

In conclusion, I would like to raise some issues about the legacy of clientelistic practices in Southern Italian societies. As stated by Caciagli, clientelism does not only correspond to a political strategy but can also be conceptualised as a political culture, and it is therefore a phenomenon that can be reproduced in different institutional, economic and social contextual conditions (2006). The fragmentation of public resources and the way relations are organised between representatives of *Puglia Sviluppo* and entrepreneurs do not rule out the hypothesis of the reproduction of cultural frames that value particularistic interests over collective ones. Indeed, the current mode of regulation for the allocation of public resources organised around individual grants to companies discourages aggregate forms of interest representation and collective action.

If clientelism has negative effects on forms of democratic representation and on the functioning of political institutions, it should be acknowledged that it also enabled the political integration of low-educated and poor citizens (Chubb 1982) and local entrepreneurs. In other words, it was a form of political socialisation. Despite this, it is still a form of domination (Auyero 1999) preventing social change. However, the Apulian case study illustrates that in the end the representation of clientelism as a form of pathology for both democracy and development helped erode democratic linkages with social groups. Reforms aimed at enhancing the institutional and especially administrative capacity of regional governments have been presented as a possible way to solve the underdevelopment problem in the *Mezzogiorno* (Polverari 2020) and different efforts have been made in this direction (Terraciano and Graziano 2016). Building a capable and autonomous bureaucracy is part of the institutional thinking on development. My case study shows that, if guided by the efficiency narrative alone, administrative reforms can undermine forms of both collective representation of interests and building of political and social collective identities. This article thus



contributes to the debates about bureaucratic reforms in Europe (Pollitt, Bouckaert, 2017), by showing the centrality of historical and institutional contexts in order to understand the mechanism through which NPM has spread and emphasizing the risks for the quality of democracy entailed by the diffusion of managerialism as a source of legitimacy of political power.

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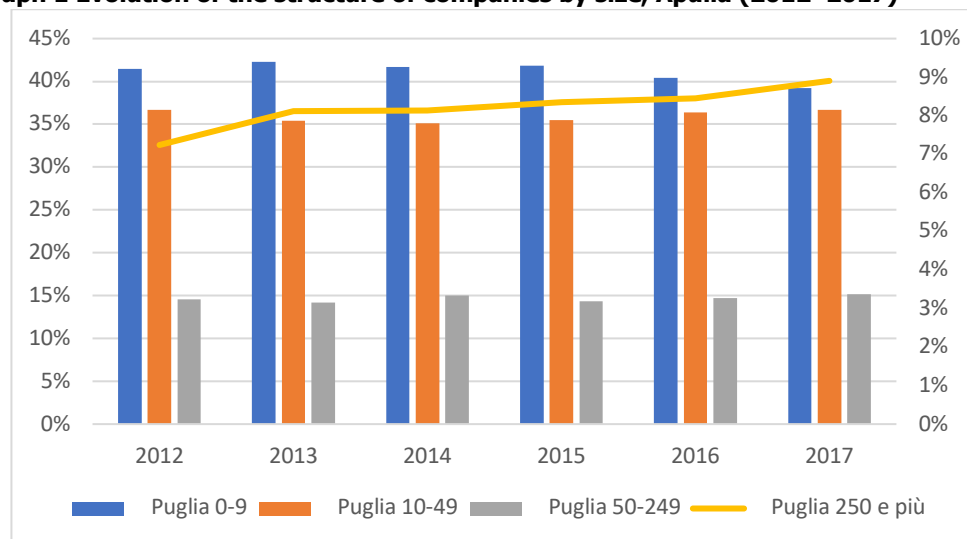
**Table 1 – Regional agendas: development problematisation, policy objectives and policy tools (2000–2020)**

	<b>Fitto centre-right (2000–2005)</b>	<b>Vendola I centre-left (2005–2010)</b>	<b>Vendola II centre-left (2010– 2015)</b>
<b>Social constituencies / targets of public policies</b>	Public employees Local SME entrepreneurs in traditional industries Real estate developers and city-builders - > Lower middle classes	Youth Women High-qualified and low-qualified workers and entrepreneurs in innovative (ICT, advanced manufacturing) and traditional industries	Youth Women Unemployed and workers in traditional industries (manufacturing) Workers in creative industries (socio-cultural professions)
<b>Problematisation of development</b>	Company-focused growth	Combination of different types of well-being (social quality, sustainability and human development)	Growth and work sustainability, green economy
<b>Development paradigms</b>	Innovation and knowledge economy Modernisation of the administration Liberalism	Innovation and knowledge economy Capability approach Alternative to neo-liberalism and neo-liberal globalisation Compromise of left-wing progressivism and third way	Social protection Knowledge economy Alternative to neo-liberalism and austerity Compromise of left-wing progressivism and third way
<b>Development priorities</b>	Bureaucratic rationalisation Material environment of companies (infrastructures) Support for companies' investments	Humanisation of globalisation and steering a change in development and state–society relations by promoting democratic participation Support for corporate investments	Protection of people from effects of globalisation and economic crisis Protection and creation of new employment Support for companies' investments
<b>Policy tools</b>	Company subsidies and incentives for encouraging investments 'Regional 488'; CdP ( <i>contratti di programma</i> – programming contracts)	Funds and incentives for innovation and R&D (CdP; PIA – <i>Programmi integrati agevolazioni piccole imprese</i> – Integrated facilitation programmes for small businesses) Cooperation funds and incentives (industrial and technological districts) Funds for entrepreneurship, social empowerment and youth education ( <i>Bollenti Spiriti, Ritorno al Futuro</i> ) Social clause in public tenders	Replication of existing policy tools Incentives to encourage employability (welfare to work), passive and active labour policies, notably for women Social policies against poverty ( <i>Piano sociale contro la povertà</i> )

**Source:** author's elaboration from analysis of the administrative acts and policy documents available at <http://www.sistema.puglia.it/> *Determinazioni dirigenziali / Servizio Competitività dei Sistemi Produttivi (since 2006)* and coding of local press articles.

**Table 2 – List of interviews**

Label	Date	Role and career
A1	01/10/2019	University researcher, economist, former consultant of regional agency for technology and innovation
A2	01/10/2019	University professor, former economic advisor to the regional president (2005–2009)
A3	18/11/2019	President of a regional observatory on economic and financial affairs, former general director of Confindustria Puglia and regional president advisor (2000–2004)
A4	19/11/2019	CNA (Confederazione nazionale dell'artigianato e della piccola impresa – National Confederation of the Craft Sector and SMEs) consultant, former general director of the Apulia CNA, former director of the local Chamber of Commerce (Bari)
A5	21/11/2019	Member of Apulia PD (Partito Democratico, Democratic Party) and former regional councillor for economic development (2005–2009)
A6	27/01/2020	General director of Confindustria Puglia
A7	28/01/2020	General director of <i>Puglia Sviluppo</i> (since 2001), regional agency for the management of EU structural funds for companies
A8	30/01/2020	President of the regional agency for technology and innovation
A9	31/01/2020	Regional employment minister and president of the regional task force on employment, Ufficio Presidenza Regione Puglia (Apulia Regional Presidency Office), former general secretary of Apulia CGIL (General Confederation of Labour)
A10	06/02/2020	CGIL (General Confederation of Labour) member of the regional socio-economic committee on European development funds (since 2006)
A11	06/02/2020	Union delegate in charge of the manufacturing department, CGIL Puglia, member of the regional task force on employment
A12	11/02/2020	General secretary, FIOM (Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici, Italian Federation of Metalworkers) – CGIL (General Confederation of Labour) Puglia

**Graph 1 Evolution of the structure of companies by size, Apulia (2012–2017)**

**Source:** author's elaboration, ISTAT, *Conti economici territoriali, historical series*, 23 November 2012.

Data extracted 19 May 2020.

[http://dati.istat.it/OECDStat\\_Metadata/ShowMetadata.ashx?Dataset=DICA\\_ASIAUE1P&Coords=%5bD2%5d.%5bAENTEMPDA%5d&ShowOnWeb=true&Lang=it](http://dati.istat.it/OECDStat_Metadata/ShowMetadata.ashx?Dataset=DICA_ASIAUE1P&Coords=%5bD2%5d.%5bAENTEMPDA%5d&ShowOnWeb=true&Lang=it)