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The long way to professional recognition: the project management in Italy

Abstract

Purpose – The professionalization of project management profession has developed differently according to the different environments in which it has been introduced. The objective in this work has been to examine an example of this professional project (Italy) with this research question: “what have been the professionalization strategies of project management professional associations within Italian field?”.

Design/methodology/approach – We develop a qualitative case study made up of semi-structured interviews and archival data.

Findings – Our analysis demonstrate how project management in Italy has embarked on a clear upward trajectory in terms of its occupational size, economic significance and institutional development. However, the development of project management in Italy considerably lags behind Anglo-Saxon countries. We also identify three main strategies through which this professionalization project is being accomplished: corporate engagement, expanding membership and institutional recognition.

Research limitations/implications – The study reviews the professionalization of project management in Italy. This is not a comparative study, but rather highlights Italian project management professionalization. Moreover, we expect significant findings could be reached with a comparable research across different national contexts.

Originality/value – This work constitutes the first detailed and comprehensive study in the field of project management within the Italian context.

Keywords: Project management; Professionalism; Professional Association

1. Introduction

There is a growing literature on the professionalization of project management (PM) and a consensus that amongst new knowledge-based occupations this group has made considerable progress towards professionalization (Hodgson & Muzio, 2011; Peter W G Morris, 2010; Muzio, Hodgson, Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, & Hall, 2011; Paton, Hodgson, & Muzio, 2013). For instance, the Project Management Institute (PMI) with 477,616 worldwide members (PMI, 2017) is one of the world's largest and most global professional associations. PM itself has developed a systematic and comprehensive body of knowledge (PMBOK) and a system of formal qualifications whilst in the UK the Association of Project Management (APM) has been recently awarded a Royal Charter, a high profile symbol of a professional status. So, PM in Anglo-Saxon countries at least has successfully developed many of the institutions traditionally associated with professionalism (Hodgson & Muzio, 2011). Importantly, there is also a sense in this literature that professionalization has been accomplished through new and novel strategies compared with those deployed by traditional professions, such as law and medicine. In particular, PM seems to be developing a new pattern of corporate professionalization (Kipping, Kirkpatrick, & Muzio, 2006; Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011; Thomas & Thomas, 2013) which engages very actively with large organizations which are the key users and employers of project managers, while traditional profession relied more on the state sanctioned monopolies.

Most research on PM draws on experiences in Anglo-Saxon contexts and on the UK in particular (Hodgson & Muzio, 2011; Peter W G Morris, Crawford, Hodgson, Shepherd, & Thomas, 2006). Whilst this makes sense given the particularly developed character of PM in these contexts, it also provides clear case for conducting research in other national contexts. Empirically, this is important as it could corroborate and qualify the UK story with insights from other countries. It is also important theoretically given the existence of fundamental differences between professionalization patterns in Anglo-Saxon and continental contexts. Whilst this is well documented in relation to established professions such as law, medicine or accountancy (Burrage & Torstendahl, 1990; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2007; Krause, 1996; Macdonald, 1995; Morgan & Quack, 2005; Muzio & Faulconbridge, 2013; Neal & Morgan, 2000) no studies have considered these debates with regards to the professionalization of new occupations such as PM. Against this gap in the literature, we undertake a case study of the professionalization of PM in a somewhat under-researched context: Italy. To do so we have used an extensive range of data, combining archival sources, secondary statistics and interviews with a range of actors active within the PM field. This has allowed us to reconstruct the historical development of the PM in Italy, focusing on its distinctive strategies and tactics and its relationships with a range of other stakeholders and to draw relevant comparisons with other jurisdictions.

Our case shows that PM developmental trajectories in Italy are not diametrically opposite to their corresponding areas in UK, but still these national professionalization projects display significant differences in methods and in particular in outcomes (Sabini, 2014). In particular, PM in Italy finds itself in a less developed state. This reflects the peculiarities of the Italian institutional context, where although the state is more supportive of the professional logic per se, there is also the lack of the necessary institutional and juridical frameworks to allow the consolidation of new professional projects (Sabini, 2013a). The paper will develop over five sections. We begin by analysing the literature on the PM professionalization. We then move to the detailed description of our methods. We follow this with an overview of the Italian PM field looking at strategies at micro and macro level. We then focus on the long term strategies and short term tactics deployed by project management in Italy before concluding with some considerations on the professionalization outside of Anglo-Saxon contexts.

2. New professionalism: same objectives, different strategies

Against a backdrop of growing scepticism toward the prospects of professionalization (Broadbent, Dietrich, & Roberts, 1997; Hanlon, 1999; Jaraush, 1990; Krause, 1996) a growing literature documents the relative successful example of PM (Hodgson, 2002; Hodgson & Muzio, 2011). Several authors (Hodgson, 2007; Hodgson & Muzio, 2011; Hodgson, Paton, & Muzio, 2015; Peter W G Morris et al., 2006; Paton et al., 2013; Zwerman, Haydt, & Williams, 2002) have documented how a professionalization project is at a play with this occupational remit. Some authors have also noted the success of professional associations in these areas in developing an official body of knowledge (Hodgson, 2007) and formal qualification process (Tonnquist, 2008), expanding their membership nationally and internationally (Thompson, 1992) and achieving state

recognition (Hodgson et al., 2015; Paton et al., 2013). This success is particularly noteworthy compared to the failure registered by similar occupations such as consultancy (McKenna, 2007), 'event management' in UK (Thomas & Thomas, 2013), para-medics (McCann, Granter, & Hyde, 2013), 'information technology' (Fincham, 2006) and tourism (Thomas & Thomas, 2014) and the de-professionalization of established professions such as teaching (Hyland, 1997), medicine (Domagalski, 2007) accountancy (Broadbent et al., 1997) and law (Epstein, 2014; Hanlon, 1999).

Thus, in a context where the professionalization of new occupations is not certain, PM may have succeeded where others had failed (Hodgson & Muzio, 2011). Importantly, this success seems to have been achieved on the basis of rather different strategies from those deployed by traditional professionalization projects (Larson, 1977; Macdonald, 1995; Witz, 1992).

Brunsson, Rasche, & Seidl (2012) highlight how professions that share a common knowledge base (such as PM) tend to adopt standards as a source of normative pressure. This is a professionalization strategy widely used by PM professional associations (i.e.: PMI, IPMA), which are increasingly relying on the development of their international certifications to outline the figure of a 'professional project manager'. Therefore, professionalization here rests on soft standards rather than legally sanctionable rules and regulations (Scott, 2008). In parallel with professional standards, the organizational international standards (e.g.: ISOs voluntary standards), "have been adopted by an increasing number of organizations across the world" (Heras-Saizarbitoria & Boiral, 2012, p. 47), becoming a way, for an organization to gain social legitimacy (Boiral, 2012).

From another angle some (Kipping et al., 2006; Muzio, Ackroyd, & Chanlat, 2007; Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011; Muzio, Kirkpatrick, & Kipping, 2011; Thomas & Thomas, 2013), consider PM strategies a clear example of a new form of corporate professionalism (Kipping et al., 2006). Most professionals work happen in large organizations and traditional focus of professional institutions on individual membership is increasingly obsolete. Accordingly, corporate professions seek to align their projects to the practices, structures and interests of the large organizations which dominate the field both as consumers of professional services and employers of professional workers. This confirms Dacin et al. (2002, p. 49) observation that "those professional occupations that have more recently emerged [...] structure themselves so as to accommodate corporate patterns" (Dacin et al., 2002, p. 49). More recently some (Hodgson et al., 2015) have noticed how, in the case of the APM professionalization despite some innovations still retains some of the features usually connected with traditional professional projects. Thus, new forms of competence based closure, which test for applied skills compliment a more formal qualification process centered around an official body of knowledge (the APM BOK). Despite an increasing emphasis on corporate membership and engagement, organizations do not enjoy voting rights and as such in terms of governance at least the overwhelming focus is still on individual membership. As such this professionalization project assumes a hybrid characteristic as it balances old and new together.

As such there is a lively debate with regards to the professionalization of PM but this has been largely carried out within the confines of a single national context: the UK. It is therefore important to study the development of PM in other national contexts to see to what extent this confirms or departs from the British story. In particular the literature as long recognized the distinction between an Anglo-Saxon and a Continental route to professionalization, with the latter being characterized by a much more prominent degree of state involvement and coordination (Burrage & Torstendahl, 1990; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2007; Krause, 1996; Macdonald, 1995; Neal & Morgan, 2000). As such, it seems particular pertinent to analyse the development of PM in a continental society, since the literature would lead us to expect a somewhat different trajectory. Accordingly, in this paper we seek to analyse the PM professionalization in Italy and to consider this in light of the existing UK based literature.

3. Methodology

3.1 *Overview*

To address our objectives we conducted a case study (Yin, 2009) of the professionalization of PM in Italy, focusing on the last 20 years, when this occupation experienced a major period of growth and development. We decided to focus on Italy as it represents an example of continental mode of professionalism which is quite distinct from the Anglo-Saxon contexts which so far have dominated the literature on both established and

new professions (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2015; Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Muzio & Faulconbridge, 2013). We have adopted a qualitative research design as this is better positioned to explore what is still an emerging phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Whilst focusing primarily on the actions and strategies of project management associations, we broadened our analytical focus to include the wider ecology of actors involved in the project management field. This is important because the development of the project management field including its professionalization, emerges from the daily interactions between these different actors, as it is through these interactions that, at an aggregate level, activities within a particular field are organized and legitimized (Scott, Ruef, Mendel, & Caronna, 2000). Following Scott, we define the field, as the methodological unit of analysis, as “a community of organizations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field” (Scott, 1995, p. 56). As such the project management field includes: individual professionals, employing organizations, project management associations, pressure groups, public entities, corporations, and the State (through its laws).

3.2 *Data sources*

This case study was built mixing two kind of data sources: archival data and semi-structured interviews. This followed a two-stage approach. In the first stage, an archive search against the word ‘project management’ & ‘Italian project management’ was performed on the main Italian newspapers (Corriere, Sole24Ore, LaRepubblica). We then searched for relevant material on the website of the PM professional associations and ‘lobbies’ (PMI, IPMA, ISIPM, CNEL, COLAP)¹. This produced the returns depicted in the Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

This first stage in our data collection helped us to reconstruct the historical development of this occupation in Italy and, more importantly, to identify key stakeholders involved in this. Indeed, newspaper articles and professional associations documents were used to identify key events, initiatives and decision makers within professional associations and other stakeholders involved in the project management field. This archival data have been stored and organized into NVivo10 in a chronological order. Moreover, to assess the impact that professional membership has on the Italian project management market we also conducted a search of open employment positions on a job search on a web engine (monster.com)², looking for the proportion of job advertise which ask for PM credentials.

In the second stage, we have conducted 20 semi-structured interviews, in time span from 2012 to 2015, with key actors involved in the professionalization of project management and identified in the previous stage. Respondents covered key position within a number of stakeholder organizations³ (professional associations [#15], corporations [#2], pressure groups [#3], technical entities [#1], universities [#2], nation-state [#1]). All interviewees (but one) were Italian nationals as our focus is on the Italian field. Details of the sample is in the presented in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

The relatively small size of the Italian project management field ensured that our data collection provided an exhaustive sample of the overall population. The interview followed a standard protocol (appendix A), lasted between 30 minutes, and one and half hour and were recorded, transcribed, anonymised and stored into NVivo10 for the subsequent analysis. The general interview outline present questions that tended to highlight the main duties and responsibilities of the interviewee, the strategic decisions that he/she recently faced in PM field, relationships with other actors in the field and issues and obstacles that he/she experienced during the development of PM professional project.

3.3 *Data analysis*

The coding followed a deductive approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), as we derived the conceptual elements of codes from the academic literature (Hodgson & Paton, 2015; Hodgson et al., 2015; Kritzer, 1999;

¹ Respectively: Project Management Institute, International Project Management Association, Italian Institute of Project Management, Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro, Coordinamento Libere Associazioni Professionali)

² “The world's largest resume database and online job search” (TheSearchEngineList.com, 2010)

³ Often they hold more than one position, e.g.: practitioner and member of university or board member of professional association and practitioners within big corporation)

Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011; Paton et al., 2013; see appendix B). The two authors separately coded transcripts and compared all of their code tables to discuss and resolve any discrepancies. To accommodate any discrepancy or disagreement between the authors we always referred to literature on the topic analysed. The coded data led us to isolate different professionalization tactics and to generalize them into three main strategies: ‘corporate engagement’ (using codes ‘training & certification’, ‘engagement with clients and employers’, ‘regulation of practice’ and ‘relations with other entities’), ‘expanding memberships’ (using codes ‘building the profession’, ‘training & certification’, and ‘affiliate recruitment’) and ‘pursuing institutional recognition’ (using codes ‘building the profession’ and ‘relations with other entities’). Moreover, we summarized methodological steps in appendix C.

4. Italian PM today

As the title ‘project management’ is not legally protected and moreover it refers to the activities of a number of different occupational roles, it is difficult to have reliable figures on size of this occupation in Italy. Yet some indications are provided by proxies such as trends in the diffusion of PM qualifications (Table 3) which shows an exponential acceleration in the number of qualified project managers over the last years as well as by the increasing attention played by Italian universities to PM as a discipline.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

This growing economic and labour market significance of PM as an activity has been met by a process of professionalization. Today there are three PM professional associations in Italy: IPMA Italy, PMI and ISIPM. IPMA Italy, which has about 1000 members, was founded in 1986 as a section of Italian Association of Industrial Plant Engineering (ANIMP), is linked with the implementation and management of complex projects in the plant engineering, the industrial products and the infrastructure field. Its focus is predominantly on large MNCs operating both in Italy and abroad. PMI, which has more than 2000 members among its three Italian chapters (PMI-NIC, PMI-RC, PMI-SIC), is a US based professional association with a strong international orientation. Local chapters are strongly integrated in global structures and depend on headquarters for their strategic direction. ISIPM with over 2000 members was born as a R.E.P.⁴ of PMI. Subsequently it developed into a distinctively ‘Italian’ professional association in competition with the local branches of PMI, and as such it stresses a more individualist and less bureaucratic approach to practice. As a main trait of its distinctiveness, ISIPM promote “professional practices already recognized worldwide (PMP, IPMA, Prince2) in order to sponsor an entry level approach to Project Management” (Calabrese & Mastroberardino, 2015, p. 68). It also has a particular focus, unlike its peers, on ICTs and on the Public Administration. Indeed, ISIPM board is equally split between public and private sector members. As we will discuss ISIPM’s professionalization project is the most oriented towards the institutions of the Italian state.

Some significant differences separate the governance structure of these associations. PMI has a centralized corporate model, in which each local has to report its activities to the headquarters; IPMA is part of a loosely associated network of national associations and enjoys high levels of independence; ISIPM is a completely independent and locally focused organization. Table 4 provides an overview of key events pertaining to the development of the PM profession in Italy whilst Table 5 provides an overview of Italy’s PM associations today and matches it with the situation in the UK, which is the market leader in this sector.

[Insert Table 4 and Table 5 about here]

The Arras People Project Management Benchmark Survey states a community size of between 69,000 and 77,000 PM in UK, with almost 25,000 of these in professional membership (either in the APM which is IPMA’s sister organization, or in one of the UK’s PMI chapters). This is more than 5 times the total of all Italian professional associations (summing up from Table 5). Table 6 provides an effective comparison of the development of the two professional projects by comparing the volume of PM jobs publicized in each market and the percentage of these requiring professional qualifications. As we can see not only is the UK project management sector considerably bigger than the Italian one, but it is also significantly much more professionalised with the great majority of open positions requiring some form of professional qualifications. This contrasts with the situation in Italy where none of the 367 jobs requires professional qualifications. As such whilst project management in Italy has grown substantially and is displaying increasing signs of

⁴ Registered Education Provider: thus can carry on teaching programs and certifications issued by PMI.

professionalization (the emergence of professional associations, the development of professional qualifications, the creation of PM degree courses) it considerably lags behind its UK counterparts.

[Insert Table 6 about here]

5. The professionalization of project management in Italy

The strategies adopted by PM in Italy do not depart significantly from those outlined for other jurisdictions (Hodgson et al., 2015; Paton et al, 2013) or for other types of expert occupations (Muzio et al, 2011). These include a pursuit of professional closure through formal credentials, the development of new membership propositions which include corporate members, and a struggle for jurisdiction with other (more established) professions. However, our case study, reflecting the highly centralised and directive nature of the Italian State, reveals a much more active engagement with the state apparatus. This reflects how professional status in Italy is still tied to the endorsement if not sanction of the State. Our case study also reveals some significant strategic differences between our associations and their respective strategies.

Table 7 illustrates the core strategies and tactics identified in our case study (with the assigned coding reference), we explore these in more detail below.

[Insert Table 7 about here]

5.1 *Corporate engagement*

In line with what documented elsewhere (Hodgson et al., 2015; Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011; Paton et al., 2013), our case study suggests the emergence of a new form of corporate professionalism. In particular, PM professional associations in Italy are increasingly treating corporations not only as clients or employers but increasingly as potential members (specifically PMI and IPMA case).

As a result of such schemes Italian PM professional association and corporations are closely intertwined, which makes it possible for corporations to influence the policies of professional associations, such as IPMA's DELTA certification scheme which will be more fully discussed below. A sign of this corporate involvement emerges from the composition of the boards of our professional associations, whereby PMI includes 15 corporate members out of a total of 27 and IPMA 9 out of 23. Other examples of such collaborations include the organization of joint events where common priorities, concerns and policies are discussed. However, the most pertinent example of corporate engagement, is provided by the development of a series of strategic partnerships between professional associations and leading corporations. Thus, PMI has flagship partnerships (highlighted on its website) with "Alcatel/Lucent, Engineering, Computer Associates, EDS, ENI Corporate, Ericsson, HP, IBM, PA, SAS and Saipem" (PMI-RC website). The relationship with Saipem S.p.A. (ENI group) is particularly emblematic as it shows how associations and corporations are cooperating on the development of joint qualifications, certifications and best practices. In this case Saipem used knowledge competences defined by PMI (PMBOK, 2013) to structure its own internal assessment tools: "Saipem, has been inspired by PMI knowledge areas and the professor who taught the course was one of the teachers who, within ENI Corporate University, gives courses of consolidation for the role of the Project Manager in ENI and the preparatory course for PMI- certification" (Saipem - ICT PM Manager, workshop at Milano Polytechnic - Oct. 9th 2013).

Perhaps the most active and successful association in pursuing corporate partnerships has been IPMA, which has developed a partnership with Siemens, to develop an internal PM certification scheme for its worldwide subsidiaries. The result is the recently launched IPMA DELTA certification scheme whereby: "for the first time, the entire organisation – including individuals and projects – can be certified for organisational competence in managing projects" (IPMA Italy website). The scheme allows organizations to award professional qualifications internally and embeds IPMA qualification within the organization's career structures and promotion processes. The following quote captures the size and scale of this initiative: "to meet the requirements of Siemens, IPMA corporate has taken charge to coordinate all IPMA's countries involved, giving them instructions. In this way Siemens' employees (in Italy) will be certified by IPMA Italy according to instructions and directives and unification agreements that IPMA International reached with the Siemens corporate" (interview - IPMA1). This program gives IPMA Italy an important influence over Siemens' employees PM knowledge and practice.

One exception to this tendency is ISIPM who, due to its status as a cultural association, cannot, under Italian law, operate a corporate membership scheme: *“we are a cultural association, we don’t have any industrial group or any political parties; we operate solely as a no profit and cultural association”* (interview - ISIPM2). Furthermore, as it will emerge more clearly in the following sections, this association has traditionally focused on SMEs and public sector organizations; thus, as recognized by one of its board members: *“we carefully consider ‘small’ project managers, those who works primarily in Italian SMEs”* (interview - ISIPM2). These two categories represent the majority of Italian businesses⁵, which explains why this association has been less concerned with actively pursuing multinational corporations.

5.2 *Expanding membership*

On the other end of the spectrum, our professional associations have sought to grow their individual membership by targeting in particular junior professionals, university graduates and even high school students. This has usually involved attempts to capture members even before they entered the profession by engaging closely with universities and if possible embedding PM qualifications within degree programmes. Examples of these include the various partnerships developed by our professional associations with some of Italy’s leading universities such as the Milan Polytechnic and LUISS in Rome, whereby university programmes are accredited by the professional associations, feature substantial inputs from high profile members of the PMI or IPMA and count towards the acquisition of professional certifications. A good instance of this strategy is the partnership between PMI, IPMA and LUISS, where students *“can take both basic IPMA [LEVEL D] and PMI [CAPM®] certifications”* (interview - PMI1) as part of its ‘Master in Project Management’. This partnership with higher educational institutes is very fruitful since they *“make everyone happy: students, since many of them later become associations’ members, and university, since it provides a way to distinguish from other universities”* (interview - ISIPM2). This quote suggests how bundling together certification’s costs and university’s fees benefits both professional associations, as it allows them to increase with a relatively small effort their membership, and universities, as it offers them a competitive advantage in an increasingly crowded market for postgraduate education. Summarizing, it is possible to say that the coupling formal qualifications (i.e.: master degrees) with professional certifications renders both sides more appealing.

In a recent extension of this strategy the Rome chapter of PMI signed an agreement with the municipality of Pomezia (Roma) to deliver a project management course in a high school (‘Istituto Copernico’). Whilst high school students can’t apply for a CAPM® (as a secondary degree or high school diploma is a prerequisite), this initiative represents an attempt to promote PM to new audiences and potentially develop a stream of future members. Similar efforts have been directed towards attracting newly practicing project managers. To this effect, a *“key uni”* (IPMA website) of IPMA is entirely dedicated to young professionals and provides a *“platform for young project management professionals and students up to the age of 35”* (IPMA website). This part of the association is very active (using informal meetings, social networks and blogging) and seeks to make the association more appealing for newly graduated recruits who are looking at this profession for the first time.

A further initiative in relation to membership growth focuses on new forms of ‘peer to peer’ recruitment. This strategy, which is being pursued in particular by ISIPM and to a lesser extent PMI, consists in leveraging the personal and professional contacts of existing members who occupy key roles and positions within the business world. Thus, for instance, ISIPM has identified and co-opted *“40 people, with different backgrounds, to ‘spread the word’ of PM”* (interview - ISIPM1) and attract others to join. This strategy recognises the importance of social capital within the world of PM and seeks to use well connected individuals as champions of the cause. As such it has an evangelical feeling, as committed individuals seek to convert their contacts to the merits of professionalization: *“we call it ‘the enlarged board’, but it really is a strongly engaged group of people that serve the cause on all Italian territory from the most southern strip up to the north”* (interview - ISIPM2). Emphasising the significance of a full national presence, this tactic underlines the importance of developing close relationships with all kind of prospective members. In this context, ISIPM also stresses how PM should be actively promoted in all sections of Italian society: *“the Italian army has no project managers, it is a huge gap! Or let’s consider Italian health sector, does it exist any project manager? No! It is hard to sell a PM-BOK to a doctor, but we are trying!”* (interview - ISIPM2). PMI is pursuing a similar tactic of evangelization by seeking to make PM into a skill that anyone should possess: *“our objective is to act in a*

⁵ Micro businesses (with fewer than 10 employees) account for 95.1% of Italian active companies (ISTAT 2011).

manner that are not 'techy' people speaking to each other, but it is to include all the people that somehow are related to general management activities" (interview - PMI2).

5.3 Institutional recognition

In our case study associations also placed considerable effort in developing relationships with core institutions within the Italian state, as a mean of legitimizing their activities. Again, this is not surprising, as the literature on the varieties of professionalism reveals how, in continental societies like Italy, professionalization projects are more likely to be coordinated from above by the visible hand of the state, than to emerge spontaneously from below (Evetts, 2011; Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2007). After all in Italy professions are formally constituted and regulated by the state as 'Ordini', which are legally recognized entities with "the power to regulate themselves and to represent the entire professional group" (Olgiati & Pocar, 1988, p. 340). 'Ordini' enjoy many social privileges such as: occupational closure (the ability to regulate their membership), clearly delimited and legally protected jurisdictions, and high levels income and status. As such gaining recognition as an 'ordine' has been a key objective for Italian occupations (Deiana & Paneforte, 2010). However, the Italian state has in recent years not been keen on creating new 'Ordini', which has left new knowledge base occupations like PM to operate in a normative vacuum (Deiana & Paneforte, 2010).

In the absence of a realistic prospect of gaining the status of an Ordine, PM associations have supported and tried to exploit recent legislation (law 4/2013) designed to provide a regulatory framework for new professions. This reform offers a number of possibilities for official recognition. One of these options arises from the possibility of being enrolled into a public register issued by Ministry of Economic Development (MiSE). This register lists all "*relevant professional associations related to new occupations*" (interview - UNI2). Being included in the register⁶ confers a degree of legitimacy and institutional approval (although the benefits are not entirely clear), insofar in the words of a state official it "*distinguish the trustworthy professional associations from the un-trustworthy ones*" (interview - UNI2); as such being included is an appealing objective for new professions in particular. In our case, given that the other professional associations have an international orientation, ISIPM has pursued this strategy most explicitly and, indeed, was included in the MiSE lists in December 2013.

Another development following law 4/2013 has been the attempt to develop a technical standard to regulate the work and responsibilities of project managers. This has been developed by UNI (Italian National Committee for Unification and Standardization), which is the Italian organization for standards (the national counterpart of ISO at the international level). The regulation of project manager's work and responsibilities by UNI's, through a technical standard, could be the foundation of a national certification scheme for Italian project managers. This could have significant implications for international professional associations which already operate their own certification standards (i.e.: PMI's PMP or IPMA level D). In this case these associations have to work in order to retroactively reconcile their own standards with UNI's (risking otherwise to undermine the relevance of their certifications). Thus, UNI's new technical standard could delegitimize certain professional associations and their certifications or force them to make some disruptive changes to their standards and practices. This, as previously discussed, is also connected with the institutional literature looking at how professional occupations are increasingly relying on the development of international certifications (Boiral, 2012; Heras-Saizarbitoria & Boiral, 2012).

An example in delegitimizing international certifications would be UNI's plans to require both oral and written examinations which would exclude the existing certifications of PMI and IPMA which rely exclusively on multiple choice tests. Thus, in the past 2 years there have been animated discussions through a series of work groups led by UNI around the details of its new project management standard (UNI project U83000780). Due to the significance of the potential outcomes, these discussions have seen the active participations of all PM associations: "*the debate has been gigantic and at the end with the exclusion of PM professional associations [PMI, IPMA and ISIPM] all other participant [corporations] left UNI table after few rounds of discussion*" (UNI4). Thus, PMI has involved itself very much in this process regularly reporting the details of the negotiations to its members through weekly webinars as a way to raise awareness of the issues at stake, ISIPM had one of its former board members directing the discussion, and IPMA sent its certifications' director to

⁶ Main requisites for inclusion in MiSE register are: private nature of the association, transparent rules and promote continuous training.

participate to the debate. Moreover, these discussions have witnessed a high degree of conflict, with various associations lobbying for different outcomes and approaches. Thus, PMI has lobbied for exclusively written examinations, whilst ISIPM and IPMA have been more open to the idea of adding an oral component to the qualification process.

The last tactic, we identified, relates to the public administration, which in Italy is accountable for around 14% of GDP (Unioncamere, 2009). Across the world this has been a very significant market for project management (see the UK public administration and the PRINCE2 certification⁷) but in Italy, despite the economic significance of the public sector, this has not been so. The lack of formal professional recognition for PM has precluded the Italian public administration from employing project managers or procuring their services. Indeed, in one high profile case featuring the mayor of Salerno, an invoice for PM services, which are not recognized by Italian law, led to a conviction for “*abuse of office in the handling of a local incinerator project*” (Financial Times 26/05/2015). So, in this context, the ability of PM to target public sector market has been severely restricted. This is clearly recognised by one of our respondents: “*we realize that project managers’ difficulties in public services are huge, since it isn’t formally recognized (by law) as a career. The formal recognition of PM as a profession becomes an essential battle for the future in Public Administration*” (PMI1).

However, the reforms suggested above and in particular the development of a technical standard for the regulation of PM is beginning to open up the public administration sector. ISIPM, the most nationally focused of our three associations, has already begun to position itself for such opportunities. As discussed its board is equally drawn from the private and public sector and this association has over the years worked hard at developing key relationships and initiatives within this sector. The active engagement of ISIPM is shown in the activities of its board members: “*we try to approach public executives in the offices of the sector which we are interested and we try to meet them one by one!*” (ISIPM2). The following quote from an ISIPM official also conveys rather explicitly this active engagement with the public sector: “*I have already personally spoken with MIUR⁸ members of the board from two different areas, introducing ourselves, our services and the potential they could get from those services*” (ISIPM2).

However not all associations have engaged with these tactics. Whilst ISIPM has focused its professional project on the institutions of the Italian state and invested in the opportunities arising from the regulation and recognition of project management in Italy, IPMA, perhaps in light of its international and private sector focus, has been much less active: “*In UK thousands of people are being certified in public administration per year, that market over there is relevant! In Italy it isn’t the case, the time is not ready for that. The core business are big power plants*” (IPMA1).

In a nutshell, as far as the strategies of PM professional associations are concerned we can conclude: (1) ISIPM is mainly focused on exploiting recent regulatory developments to achieve institutional recognition from the Italian state, as indicated by its success in being included in the MiSE list of new professional associations and its attempts to lobby UNI with regards to the development of an Italian technical standard for project management work. (2) PMI's strategy is market-oriented and it is designed to exploit every opportunity that the market can offer, including in the public sector. Here, unlike the case of ISIPM, the focus is on the state as a consumer rather than as a regulator and in particular on the potential of the Public Administration to become, like in other countries (i.e.: UK) an important source of project management work. (3) IPMA is focused on multinational corporations and big transnational projects. In this context, its strategy is to consolidate its position within big corporations, with internal PM programs. As such they are less concerned with the public administration or the SME sector.

6. Conclusion

This paper focused on the developmental trajectories of the PM profession in Italy. As such, it is one of the first detailed and comprehensive studies PM outside of an Anglo-Saxon context. In doing so, the study tries to

⁷ See www.gov.uk best Management Practice portfolio: PProjects IN Controlled Environments (PRINCE2®)

⁸ MIUR is the Ministry for Education and Research

provide empirical evidence of how this new occupation is developing and to what extent its experiences and strategies conform or depart from those deployed by its counterparts in Anglo-Saxons countries.

Our analysis shows how PM in Italy has embarked on clear upward trajectory in terms of its occupational size, economic significance and institutional development (Sabini, 2013b; Sabini & Muzio, 2012). As such, like in the UK (Paton et al., 2013) a professionalization project is clearly at play. However, in relative terms, the development of PM in Italy lags considerably behind its UK counterpart. We identify 3 strategies through which this professionalization project is being accomplished. These are corporate engagement, expanding membership and institutional recognition. Whilst, looking at UK literature (Hodgson et al., 2015; Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011; Paton et al., 2013), it seems that a lot of overlaps exists (e.g.: 'corporate engagement'), the associations in Italy display a much more active engagement with the institutions of the state and the prospects of PM are intimately tied to the regulation of new forms of knowledge work by the Italian state. We also report some relevant differences between our 3 different professional associations, with these differences reflecting, amongst other things, the international versus the local orientation of the association in question.

Ultimately, our analysis shows how PM is less professionalized in Italy in light of what researches in UK have shown (Hodgson, 2002; Paton et al., 2013). This may reflect the lack of a clear normative framework which can support and legitimize the operations of new professions relative to the established 'Ordini'. As such, given the lack of political support for the creation of new 'Ordini', the professionalization of PM largely depends on the development of new forms of state recognition and legitimization following the introduction of law 4/2013 on new professions (see the attempts by UNI to develop a local PM standard or MiSE's initiative to register new professional associations). In line with the varieties of professionalism literature (Burrage & Torstendahl, 1990; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2007), this suggests how, even in today's globalized world, in certain national contexts professional projects are highly dependent on the support and sanction of the state (see the law 4/2103).

Perhaps, the main contribution of this study is in highlighting the somewhat paradoxical situation whereby, in the UK, where the state is more sceptical of the merits of professionalism (Hanlon, 1999; Muzio and Ackroyd, 2005) but less involved in the regulation of economic activity, new professions are able to flourish through market based strategies (Muzio et al, 2011); conversely in Italy, where support for professionalism is higher, development has been hampered by the orientation of the Italian State towards traditional conceptions of professionalism ('Ordini') and by the more limited opportunities for development without the support of the state.

Moreover, different sides of this stream of research can be further explored (i.e.: a comparative element could be added to the analysis). Significant findings could be reached with a comparable research across different national contexts. A systematic comparative approach, could help in building an empirical classification to distinguish and evaluate different development of PM professional projects. In particular, it would be interesting to understand how those principles are inextricably linked with historical contingencies and context idiosyncrasies (as such actors playing in the field and the set of their relationships).

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Tables and figures

Table 1: Empirical data structure (archival data)

Document source	#	Year
Professional association's newsletters	1,504	2003 - 2015
Public documents	11	-
Newspaper articles	1,593	1990-2013
Journal papers	25	1988-2013
Social media discussions	15	2011 - 2015

Table 2: Empirical data structure (interviews and focus group)

Entity	Name	Role in the association
Professional associations	PMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President of PMI-RC • Director of professional development (PMI-RC) • Public Relations (PMI-RC) • President of PMI-SIC • Vice-President of PMI-NC
	IPMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President of IPMA (international) • IPMA Vice President (international) • Certification Management of IPMA (Italy) • Board member & Academic (LUISS & Bocconi University) • Chairman IPMA Young Crew Italy
	ISIPM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former president • Board Member
Pressure groups	CEPAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President
	COLAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President • Board Member
	FCD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group
Technical entities	UNI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President

Table 3: Basic certifications of PM in Italy, 2009-2014 (ASSIREP website, 2015), ISIPM from ISPM, IPMA D from IPMA and CAPM from PMI.

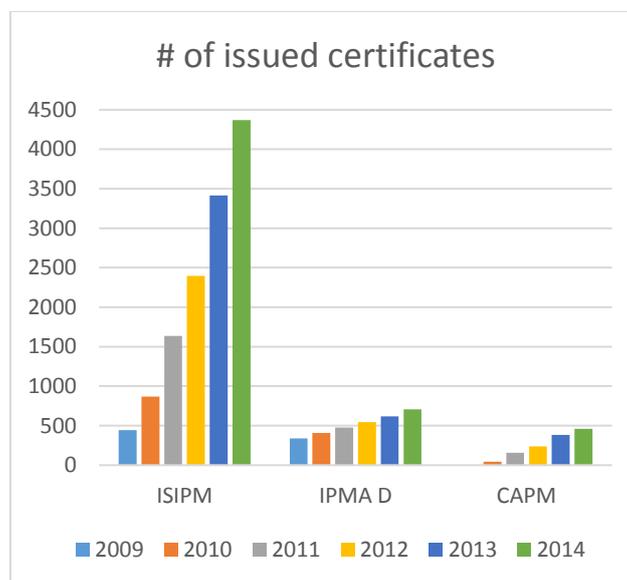


Table 4: Key events in Italian field.

Date	Event
1965	Birth of IMSA (International Management Systems Association), that is the former name of IPMA
1969	Birth of PMI (Project Management Institute)
1967	IMSA change its name to INTERNET
July 1986	Birth of Project Management Section from the ANIPM association
1994	INTERNET change the name to IPMA (International Project Management Association)
1996	Birth of PMI-NIC (Northern Italy Chapter)
September 1997	Birth of PMI-RC (Rome Chapter) from a side of ENI Corporate University
July 2001	ISO 15188:2001. Project management guidelines for terminology standardization
June 2003	ISO 10006:2003 Quality management systems - Guidelines for quality management in projects
June 2004	Birth of PMI-SIC (South Italy Chapter)
September 2005	European Directive 2005/36/CE: Recognition of professional qualifications
October 2005	Birth of ISIPM (Istituto Italiano di Project Management)
August 2006	Italian Government issue the law n.248/06 (art.2): Urgent measures to guarantee competition in the professional services sector.
December 2006	PMI obtain ISO 17024:2002, this give the possibility to be a standard for organizations that offer certifications to professionals worldwide
2007	Constitution of Project Committee ISO PC236 to develop the ISO 21500 (issued in 2012)
October 2007	UNI ISO 15188:2007. Project management guidelines for terminology standardization ⁹
2012	Birth of IPMA-Italy from the ANIPM Project Management Section
September 2012	ISO 21500: "Guidance on project management". Standard for good practice on project management
January 2013	Italian Government issue the law n.4/2013: Provisions on professions not regulated by law
September 2013	UNI 11506:2013. Professional activities not regulated by law. Definition of knowledge, skills and competences requirements for professionals figures ICT sector.

⁹ The standard specifies guidelines to define the steps and procedures to be followed in the projects to standardize terminology, as well as those of harmonization and uniformity, both within and outside the scope of international standardization.

February 2014 MiSE¹⁰ draw the list with non-regulated by law professional associations.
 September 2015 UNI issue a first draft for “good project management practice in public administration” technical standard.
 October 2015 UNI project U83000780. End public enquiry: “evaluation of a project manager” in accordance to art.7 law n.4/2013.

Table 5: Summary of Italian professional associations (* ANIPM PM Section/**IPMA Italy)

Name	Year of foundation		members in 2014	
	UK (APM)	Italy chapter	UK	Italy chapter
IPMA	1972	1986*/2012**	21,650	1,000
PMI-NIC	1995	1996	3,000	1,464
PMI-RC	(London chapter)	1997	(all 8 chapters)	610
PMI-SIC		2004		152
ISIPM	-	2005	-	1,630

Table 6: Search on monster.com (IT & UK) the 26/05/2015 for advert with keyword “project management”

	Monster:	
	IT	UK
Total jobs advert	367	+1000
Total adverts requiring PM certification	0%	85%

¹⁰ Ministero dello sviluppo economico/Ministry of Economic Development

Table 7: Summary of the core strategies

Strategy	Tactic	Quotation
Corporate engagement	Corporate memberships	<p>“For the first time, the entire organisation – including individuals and projects – can be certified for organisational competence in managing projects” (IPMA Italy website).</p> <p>“We have corporate membership, those are institutions or companies that pay a certain fee and may also register a number of its members as member of the association” (PMI3).</p>
	Development of joint initiatives	<p>“Saipem, in building its certification schema, has been inspired by PMI knowledge areas and also the professor who taught the course was one of the teachers who, within ENI Corporate University (ECU), take courses of consolidation for the role of the Project Manager in ENI and the preparatory course for PMI- certification” (Saipem - ICT Project Management Manager, Polytechnic di Milano - Oct. 9th 3013).</p> <p>“We are in close contact [with corporations] they came several times to present their project in our world congresses” (IPMA1).</p> <p>“In order to meet the requirements of Siemens, IPMA corporate has taken charge to coordinate all IPMA’s countries involved, giving them the instructions. In this way Siemens employee (in Italy) will be certified by IPMA Italy according to the instructions and directives and unification agreements that IPMA International reached with the Siemens’ world” (IPMA1).</p>
	Other forms of engagement	<p>“One of our distinctive traits has been to take into account ‘less considered project managers’, those who works within SMEs, universities, sectors abandoned by PM international professional associations. IT, not considered for many years, public administration, educational institutes” (ISIPM2).</p>
Expanding memberships	Partnership with universities	<p>“We already do a master together IPMA-PMI and we never had any problems, at least in the master in Roma this thing is working [...] at LUISS, we do a master where students can take both basic IPMA and PMI certifications” (PMI1)</p> <p>“We are certifying (PMP) hundreds of college students! Among the two thousand certificates that we are attaining in last two and half years I think 20%-30% are college students! We already have agreements acts with several universities, because there are some universities that are discussing about post-graduate PM Masters and much more” (ISIPM2).</p> <p>“Who attends the module [within a M.Sc.] have to pass the exam and take also the PM certification. I am personally involved in this module, and in my experience this makes everyone happy: students, since many of them later become [ISIPM] associations’ members, and university, since it provides a way to distinguish from other universities” (ISIPM2).</p>
	Attracting young professionals	<p>“[Young Crew] it is a platform for young project management professionals and students up to the age of 35” (IPMA website).</p>
	P2P recruitment	<p>“Our objective is to act in a manner that are not ‘techy’ people speaking to each others, but it is to include all the people that somehow are related to general management activities (PMI2)</p> <p>“The mission of the ISIPM is concretized in 40 people, with different backgrounds, to ‘spread the word’ of PM” (ISIPM1).</p>
Pursuing institutional recognition	Enrolment in public registers	<p>“With COLAP? [...] we haven’t enrolled yet, the PMI on this topic is lacking behind. We are not fully convinced that PM has to be ‘regulated’ as a profession, as COLAP instead is pushing (PMI1)</p> <p>“Thanks to COLAP, [...], and together with CNEL, under whose scrutiny we have already passed, we will finally gain the necessary recognition that we deserve” (ISIPM2).</p>
	Coupling professional certification to technical standards	<p>“UNI technical standard that is going to be issued, on the role of project manager seems too tight on Italian context, with requirements that are not contemplated in other contexts (i.e.: UK and USA). This undermine project managers’ work that seeks in PMI certifications a way to apply for jobs abroad” (PMI webinar 2).</p> <p>“I am extremely worried about the risk that all PMI certified project managers have to retake another certification (the UNI enacted one), thus we will do our best to avoid that this happen” (PMI webinar 4).</p>
	Public administration focus	<p>“We realize that project managers’ difficulties in public services are huge, since it is not formally recognized (by law) as a career. The formal recognition of PM as a profession becomes an essential battle for the future in PA” (PMI1).</p> <p>“In UK thousands of people are being certified in public administration per year, that market over there is relevant! In Italy it isn’t the case, the time is not ready for that. The core business are big power plants” (IPMA1).</p> <p>“Our approaches are not coming from formal and blatant presentations to a Ministry, we try to approach the executives in the offices of the sector which we are interested, we try to meet them one by one! We do this kind of meeting, more or less, twice a week, I spend 50% of my time for the association (ISIPM) and the other 50% on my private activity. I have already spoken personally with MIUR members of the board from two different areas, presenting ourselves to them in the same way we have presented to you” (ISIPM2).</p>

Appendix A – Interview protocol

1. Can you briefly describe the story of the professional association?
 - a. When it has been founded? why it has been created? how many members are part of this association? do you consider a large, medium, small association?
2. Which kind of people are members of this association?
 - a. What are the advantages/disadvantages to become member of the association?
 - b. Are there different typologies of membership?
3. Which kind of initiatives are issued by the association for its members?
 - a. Which ones? How often?
 - b. Most project managers works in large corporations, are there different activities to target this kind of professionals?
4. What is the reason to take [name of certification]?
 - a. Main objective? Advantages? What is assessed with [name of certification]? Who is managing the examination process?
5. What are the connections with other project management professional associations?
 - a. Are there any advantages for [name of association]?
 - b. Which way the connection is maintained?
 - c. Are there any difference in the way the PM profession is considered (by other PM professional associations)?
6. What are the main objectives and strategies of [name of association]?
7. What is “professionism” in the view of [name of association]?
 - a. Is there a difference in objectives with the more established professions?
8. Project management in Italy can be considered as the same of the more established professions?

Appendix B - Codes derived from the literature

Coding list used to categorize the elements emerged from the interviews (from practitioners & members of pressure groups).

#	CODING LIST FOR PRACTITIONERS
1	Relations with other Entities adaptation from ‘corporate management’ (Paton et al., 2013) and ‘stakeholder focus’ (Hodgson et al., 2015).
2	Building the profession adaptation from (Hodgson & Paton, 2015)
3	Training & Certification adaptation from (Paton et al., 2013)
4	Affiliate Recruitment adaptation from (Kritzer, 1999)
5	Transnational Differences adaptation from ‘geographic scope’ (Hodgson et al., 2015).
6	Engagement with clients and employers adaptation from (Hodgson et al., 2015)
7	Regulation of practice adaptation from ‘jurisdictions’ and ‘legitimizing claims’ (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011).

Appendix C – Step by step methodological process

