



"YOU TALKIN' TO ME?" THE ITALIAN TAXI DRIVERS RHETORIC AS STRATEGY OF INSTITUTIONAL RESISTANCE

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### ABSTRACT

Trying to enlighten the actors, content and mode related to institutional resistance dynamics we focused on liberalization attempts of Italian taxi drivers' category, in order to bring out the different constitutive elements and to support our theoretical framing of institutional resistance strategies. Following previous literature on institutional change and deinstitutionalization we propose an analyses in which the rhetoric is the main mean of “institutional battle” and different actors and organizations struggle in order to disrupt previous institutional logics and taken-for-granted form of legitimacy. On the other side of the trenches we analyse the “maintenance protocol” of self-interested actors acting to support their institutional legitimacy.

Keywords: Institutional Resistance Rethoric

## **“You talkin' to me?”**

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**Keywords:** Institutional resistance – Power – Rhetorical strategy – Deinstitutionalization – Legitimacy – Italian taxi driver

#### **Introduction**

Even if the issue of power is not new in the organizational and institutional literature (e.g. Hickson et al. 1971; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978 and Pfeffer 1981) in the more recent new institutional debate is growing a renovate interest toward the dimension of power into institutional analysis (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2001; Lawrence et al., 2005; Lawrence et al., 2012; Phillips et al., 2004) and toward the issue of actors' resistance against both form of power relations from institutions towards actors and vice-versa (Fleming, 2007; Lawrence, 2008; Lawrence et al., 2012; Marti & Fernandez, 2013). Furthermore the importance to study the form of resistance can be traced back in Foucault: “in order to understand what power

relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations.” (Foucault, 1982, p.780).

At this growing interest towards unpacking the process of institutional resistance in order to gain a better understanding of actors, content and mode, only few authors, and only recently, have empirically addressed this topic (i.e. Martì & Fernandez, 2013). Moreover the issue is particularly wide, given that both power (Lawrence et al., 2001) and institutional resistance (Lawrence, 2008) can be framed in different forms generating a wider ideal matrix of possible topics to analyse.

Following our empirical case of observation we have chose to analyse the specific issue of form of institutional resistance against attempts of institutional agency, through episodic form of power, aiming to change the institutionalized category of Italian taxi driver. We have tried to specify the problem in order to gain a clearer understating of the issue and at the same time to chose an evident case of a successful story of resistance against attempts of institutional agency carried forward in form of “outsider-driven deinstitutionalization” (Maguire & Hardy, 2009).

Our empirical case is extremely wide and complex, even if apparently specific, in fact taxi drivers in Italy belong to a category highly institutionalized in terms of low vulnerability to social intervention (Jepperson, 1991) and shows an enduring pattern of successful acts of institutional resistance against attempts of deinstitutionalization from 2006 till today. Moreover some aspects of the case are of particular interest; in fact one of the central point of this struggle dealt with the depreciation of the taxi drivers’ licences in case of liberalization. This depreciation is linked to the illicit practice of buying and selling the license which is not permitted by law, given that regulation provides that licences are only attributed with public concourse for free, so it give us the opportunity to study Jepperson (1991) statement: “also

illegitimate element can become institutionalized” (p. 149) and its relation with attempts of deinstitutionalized an institution which embodies an illegitimate institutionalized practice.

We argue that from one hand the “attack” to institutionalized practices, in some case illicit (such as licences trade), can be framed as “outsider-driven deinstitutionalization” or “disruptive work” (Maguire & Hardy, 2009) of external actors or institutions, which aim to change the institutional logics that sustain the legitimacy of the practices.

On the other hand we state that the consequent resistance is opposed by self-interested actors, which aims in maintaining the status quo, and can be framed as a “defensive institutional work” (Maguire & Hardy, 2009) or “the work of actors to impose limit” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 173) to the process of deinstitutionalization.

Besides, adapting and expanding the work of Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) on emergence of new organizational forms, we argue that both these institutional “attack” and “resistance” can be “achieved primarily through the use of rhetoric” (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 37) The affected actors, depending on the positive or negative effect on their interests, can support or disrupt legitimacy of the institutionalized practices with the use of rhetoric as strategic use of the language that affects the criteria used to assess legitimacy (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005).

With our work we want to contribute to actual debate on institutional resistance with at least three contributions. First we have tried to frame the whole issue into the wide theoretical framework of new institutionalism, linking the literature on power and institutional resistance with the studies on institutional change and deinstitutionalization in order to develop a theoretical framework to analyse our empirical case. Second we have attempt to define a methodological approach which is strongly linked with the theoretical framework, in order to analyse the strategy and form of resistance in our empirical case, so we chose to adapt and expand the approach proposed by Suddaby and Greenwood (2005). Lastly we have tried to

give a contribution, with our empirical study, to the debate on institutional resistance and to the claim for a better understanding of its constitutive elements such as actors, content and mode.

### **New-Institutional Theory, Power and Institutional Resistance**

Following the definition of Huges (1936) we can define institutions as “enduring pattern of social practices” (Lawrence, 2008 p. 170) so institutions have an inherent chronological repetition or a reproduction pattern and when a deviation from the pattern happens there are mechanisms of control, socially constructed and repetitively activated, that oppose to deviation with “some set of rewards and sanctions” (Jepperson, 1991). The three pillars of institutions are made by cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that “provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2001 p. 48). The stability of institutionalized form is not a static concept but it depends on “ongoing reproductive process” (Jepperson, 1991) and “departures forms of action defined by [institutional] design tend to be counteracted” (Fararo and Skvoretz, 1986 p.224)

Recently one of the critic over New-Institutional Theory is exactly about the “staticity” of some foundational concepts such as the institutionalized organizations as myth and ceremony (Scott & Meyer, 1977), which explain the organizational structure as process of isomorphism with the myth of institutional environment in order to gain legitimacy, resources and stability fostering the survival chances. Also Di Maggio and Powell (1983) show that different processes of isomorphism, namely coercive, mimetic and normative, could emerge more or less strongly under specific conditions of resources’ centralization and dependency, goals ambiguity, technical uncertainty, professionalization and structuration. These foundational works about New-Institutional Theory have given the impression of a theory in which convergence and stability are the main issues, but recent researches have addressed the point

with different perspective showing the dynamical aspect of institutional change (Holm, 1995; Hoffman, 1999) these studies analyse how social and political issue can lead to institutional and organizational change. The role of agency and the importance of actors are more recently underlined by the studies on institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio, 1988; Beckert, 1999; Garud et al., 2002; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Misangyi et al., 2008) that can be viewed as “interested individuals” that drawing on pre-existing institutions acts in order to “structure new networks of relationships and sets of institutions” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004 p.691).

Another important stream of literature that highlights the role of actors and the effects of their actions on institutions (Lawrence et al., 2009) is about institutional work conceived as “ the purposive action of individuals and organization aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In this stream the role of actors and agency is emphasised and the main aim is to highlight “how action affects institutions” (Lawrence et al., 2009 p.1). As stated by Lawrence et al. (2009) it seems that two different points of view have prevailed depending on the historical period: in the early works there is a dominant role of institutions and less attention is given to agency and actors while in the more recent studies the importance of powerful actors, acting as institutional entrepreneurs, has increased. In the very recent years research on institutional work has flourished in different fields such as business (e.g. Gawer & Phillips, 2013), medical (e.g. Currie et al., 2012) and legal profession (e.g. Empson et al., 2013).

Also the issue of power in institutional field has recently emerged studying the institutionalization process with discourse analyses (Phillips et al., 2004), but we can trace the presence of power also in previous definition of institutions as in Jepperson (1991) when the author underlines the presence of control and sanction mechanism against departures from institutions, which involve some form of power in foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1977). But

the role of power emerges also in the definition of organizational field as “arenas of power relations” in Brint and Karabel (1991 p. 355).

The more recent works about power and institutions or institutional change (Phillips et al., 2004; Lawrence et al., 2001; Lawrence et al., 2005; Lawrence et al., 2012), but also the previous studies about power and organization (Clegg, 1989; Pfeffer, 1981) and about inter and intra organizational form of power relations (Hickson et al., 1971; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978), have showed that “incorporating power is critical to understand how institutions operate in society and their relationship with organizations.” (Lawrence 2008, p.171).

The issue of power and institution is then developed in more systematic, even if by author admission non-completely systematic way, in Lawrence (2008) where three main dimension of power-institutions relations are analysed: institutional control, institutional agency and institutional resistance. This work wants to highlight how “institutions and actors relate to each other in term of power relations” (Lawrence, 2008, p.171).

Power is here analysed as relational phenomenon and not as a thing that can be possessed or “keep in reserve” by someone (Lawrence, 2008) so we can see power as a “property of relationships such that the beliefs or behaviors of an actor are affected by another actor or system” (Lawrence, 2008, p.174).

The forms through which power emerges in institutional discourse can be two: “episodic” as “relatively discrete strategic acts of mobilization initiated by self-interested actors” (Lawrence et al., 2001, p. 629) and “systemic” that can be defined as “works through routine, ongoing practices to advantage particular groups without those groups necessarily establishing or maintaining those practices” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 174).

These two forms of power are inherently linked with two of the previous cited dimensions of power-institutions relation. On one hand institutional control, as the effect of institutions over the beliefs and behaviours of actors, is sustained by systemic form of power, on the other



hand institutional agency, defined as the work of actor “aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215) is fostered by discrete act of resources mobilization to support or attack institutions (Lawrence, 2008).

Both these two dimensions of the relationship between power and institutions, institutional control as form of systemic power of institutions over actors, and institutional agency as form of episodic power of actors over institutions, can lead to form of “institutional resistance” defined as “the work of actors to impose limit both on institutional agency and institutional control” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 173).

In this study we chose to focus specifically only on one of the two institutional resistance dynamics, in particular on the institutional resistance that actors oppose to institutional agency. The specific case of liberalization of the taxi drivers’ category can be viewed as a case of institutional agency toward which forms of institutional resistance emerge. Different actors such as politicians, journalists and part of the public opinion, which can be framed as institutional entrepreneurs, in the recent years have tried to attack the institution of taxi drivers’ category causing response of the taxi drivers, as self-interest actors interested in maintaining the institutions, in terms of episodes of institutional resistance against agency.

### **Institutional Agency, Power and Resisting Institutional Agency**

The importance of agency in institutional theory is not new and terms such “institutional entrepreneur” (DiMaggio, 1988; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) can be traced back into the concept of institutional leadership (Selznick, 1957). So in what can be thought as “old institutionalisms”, even if the distinction between “old” and “new” is debated (Selznick, 1996), the role of agency is central and, as said before, in the first phase is quite underestimated in “new” institutional studies (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Then the calls for a reconsideration of agency starting from Perrow (1985), which underline the importance to reconsider the power relation, and DiMaggio (1988), which specifically address the issue of interest and agency in institutional theory, is followed by a flourishing of studies about institutional entrepreneurship, social movement and more recently institutional work, incorporating interest and agency in the institutional perspective (Lawrence et al., 2009).

In the framework of Lawrence (2008) institutional agency is describe as the “work of actors to create, transform or disrupt institutions” (p.181) and the link with power is central given that the actors have to be enough powerful to “leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing one” (Maguire et al., 2004, p. 657). The power is manifested in episodic form through “relatively discrete strategic acts of mobilization initiated by self-interested actors” (Lawrence et al., 2001, p. 629) that engage in the institutional context in order to support or attack forms of discourse or practice; two are the main forms of power identified by Lawrence (2008) in relation with institutional agency: influence and force.

The author frame influence as the “ability of one actor to persuade another actor to do something they would not otherwise do” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 183) and enumerate some tactics that an institutional entrepreneur can use to obtain influence, such as moral suasion, negotiation and rational persuasion, and also following Fligstein (1997) the social skills needed to be effective such as “agenda setting”, “brokering”, “framing action” and so on.

The other form of emergent power in institutional agency is force, as the action of “directly overcoming another action or behaviour” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 183). The authors both take into consideration physical force, underling that is constrained to a small set of socially accepted agencies, such as police and military forces or prison, and also the so called “bureaucratic force”, for instance the firing of an employee or the expulsion of bad students from universities.

Both types of institutional agency power can lead to form of institutional resistance as means to impose limit to institutional agency and to defy the aims of institutional agents (Lawrence, 2008), this perspective can be also framed as a “maintenance protocol” (Fleming and Spicer, 2014, p. 270) of actors interested in maintaining the institutions status quo against the changing proposed by institutional entrepreneurs.

As said before institutional agency is the work of actors to create, transform, maintain or disrupt institutions and it is manifested through form of episodic power, both in form of influence or force (Lawrence, 2008), and more recently Lawrence et al. (2012) underline that “linking episodic to systemic forms of power to institutionalize change, entails the legitimation of new systems through the skilled use of language by key actors, thereby creating the necessary supportive frames for them to be understood and accepted” (p.137). The previous statement highlights the importance of the “skilled use of language” in the institutionalization phase that followed the transforming or disruptive actions initiated with episodic form of power. Also Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) underline the importance of the use of language in the legitimation of profound institutional change such as the emergence of new organization form. Their study highlights the rhetorical strategies used by actors to legitimize the emergence of Multidisciplinary Practises organization, a new organizational form that put into discussion the “ancient regime” of separations of accounting and legal professional practices in the U.S.

Following the approach of Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) we focus on the use of rhetorical strategies as means of practicing institutional agency and of resisting to it analysing the specific case of Italian taxi drivers’ liberalization. From the analysis of the case it is clear that the struggle about the issue is based on attempts of deinstitutionalization of taxi drivers’ category from actors that behave as institutional entrepreneurs and forms of resistance from taxi drivers that act as self-interest actors willing to preserve the institution and to avoid the

delegitimization of their institutionalized practices. We decide to study both these dynamics through the analysis of the rhetorical use of the language following Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) and adapting their approach to our empirical case.

### **Deinstitutionalization, Delegitimation and Rhetorical Strategies as form of Institutional Resistance.**

The issue of deinstitutionalization as the purposive “work done by actors to disrupt institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 238) is still not well developed in new institutional literature and only few studies has directly addressed it (Ahmadjian & Robinson, 2001; Scott, 2001; Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Becker, 2014) before those studies the main work on deinstitutionalization is done by Oliver (1992) but, in this latter case, the deinstitutionalization is not considered as a voluntary and purposive action but as “the process by which the legitimacy of an established or institutionalized organizational practice erodes or discontinues.” (Oliver, 1992, p. 564).

This definition of deinstitutionalization as disruption of institutionalized practice calls into question the issue of legitimation as one of the central point of the institutionalization process. Even if Jepperson (1991) states that “the problem is that legitimacy may be a facilitator of institutionalization or also an outcome but also illegitimate element can become institutionalized” (p. 149), underling that legitimacy can not be the only driver of institutionalization, the focus of early institutional works is about legitimacy and taken-for-grantedness of the institutionalized organizational practices and about legitimacy as a means to foster the chance of organizational survival (e.g. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Zucker, 1987). As Suchman (1995) notes the attention toward the issue of legitimation dating back to foundational works such as Parson (1960) and Weber (1978) and more recently is developed following two different approaches the strategic and the

institutional. The strategic approach is defined as the case in which “organization instrumentally manipulate and deploy evocative symbol in order to garner societal support” (Suchman, 1995, p. 572) and refers principally to the works of Pfeffer (1981), Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) and Pfeffer and Salancik (2003). The institutional approach to legitimacy as said before follow a more detached and less voluntary logic (e.g. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Zucker, 1987) and can be viewed as a “sector-wide” external cultural pressure that “transcend any single organization’s purposive control” (Suchman, 1995, p. 572).

The main accomplishment of Suchman’s work (1995) is to frame in a clear and systematic way the different definitions and approaches toward legitimacy in previous literature achieving a clear representation of legitimacy typologies along three conceptual distinctions: the behavioural dynamics; the focus and the temporal textures. The first one underlines that different behavioural approaches to legitimacy lead to different legitimacy forms and following the previous literature the author decline three different legitimacy forms: *pragmatic*, as resulting from self-interested calculations of the most immediate audiences of organizations, *moral*, as arising from a positive normative evaluation of organizations’ activities not in terms of personal benefits but as “the right things to do”, and *cognitive* (Suchman, 1995). This latter deserves a more in-depth analysis given that the empirical case of this study inherently relays on a taken-for-granted practices such as the taxi drivers’ licences trade.

Cognitive legitimacy is shaped along two different concepts: comprehensibility and taken-for-grantedness. The first concept entails the idea that the actors has to making sense of their experiences of social world, which is a “chaotic cognitive environment” (Suchman, 1995, p.582), into a more clear and understandable structure or following Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) they need an “institutional logic” as “organizing principles” that shape ways of

viewing and interpreting the world” (p.38). The legitimacy attainable through comprehensibility needs that an account meets both the larger belief system and the experienced reality of the audience (Suchman, 1995).

The idea of take-for-granted legitimacy dates back to Zucker (1983) idea of “exteriority and objectivity” creating the conditions so that “for things to be otherwise is literally unthinkable” (p. 25). Also Jepperson (1991) deals with the concept of take-for-grantedness delineating it as different from comprehension, because an actor can or can not understand an institution but still take it for granted, from conscious awareness, because again an actor can take-for-granted something because it’s not perceived but also vice-versa, and from evaluation “one may subject a pattern to positive, negative, or no evaluation, and in each case (differently) take it for granted” (Jepperson, 1991, p. 147).

The institutional legitimacy is strictly linked with the processes of institutional change: “institutional change is the result of shifts in the underlying logic by which legitimacy is assessed” (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 35) and as Maguire and Hardy (2009) highlight the deinstitutionalization as the process through which discourse, or text, that cause the practices become illegitimate, as result of the negotiation of meaning. Moreover the authors investigate the specific situation of out-sider driven deinstitutionalization, which they define following Oliver (1992, p.567) as “direct assault on the validity of a long-standing tradition or established activity”.

Also the cognitive dimension of legitimacy, in particular the taken-for-grantedness and its overthrow, has an important part in the process of deinstitutionalization in fact “deinstitutionalization occurs when such legitimacy and “taken-for-grantedness” are called into question” and at the same time there is the need of a intentional work as part of the process: “some form of purposive “disruptive” institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) is necessary to undermine these meanings.” (Maguire & Hardy, 2009, p. 150)

In this study diverging from Maguire and Hardy (2009) instead of analysing the whole discourse around the taxi driver category, we follow Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) approach aiming to understand the rhetorical strategies used to create a shift in institutional logic defined as the "guidelines for practical action" (Rao, Monin, and Durand, 2003: 795) that permit to "encode the criteria of legitimacy by which role identities, strategic behaviors, organizational forms, and relationships between organizations are constructed and sustained" (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 38).

The choice of focusing on rhetoric is based both on the empirical case where is quite straightforward the aim of actors in attacking and defending the legitimacy of taxi drivers' practices through different genres of speech and on theoretical perspective of contemporary rhetoric analyses. As Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) state: "opposing actors in a context of social change adopt genres of speech and writing that subconsciously reflect and deliberately manipulate the values and ideology of a particular discourse community (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995)" (p. 40).

On one hand the institutional change can be reached through an institutional work which lead to changes in institutional logic in order to delegitimise the actual "status quo" and this can be "achieved primarily through the use of rhetoric" (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 37); on the other hand we can find "the work of actors to impose limit" (Lawrence, 2008, p. 173) to the process of deinstitutionalization as "defensive institutional work" (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). We argue that defensive institutional work as "a conscious and strategic response to disruptive work" (Maguire & Hardy, 2009, p. 169) can be viewed as a form of institutional resistance used by actors interested in maintaining the status quo and in our specific case as the rhetorical strategy employed by taxi drivers.

Following this perspective we are interest in studying a successful case of resistance, against attempts of deinstitutionalization, as in the case of liberalization of taxi drivers' category.

## **Italian taxi driver case**

Starting with a general definition of the context we can start from the commonly accepted definition of the constitutive elements of taxi service. The first element is the material carrier used during the service, the taxicab, which is a type of vehicle for hire with a driver, used by a single passenger or small group of passengers, often for a non-shared ride. A taxicab conveys passengers between locations of their choice; this differs from other modes of public transport where, the service provider, not the passenger, determines the pick-up and drop-off locations. The driver parked in the parking lot, reached by user call through different equipment such as radiotaxi, specific smartphone app or phone calls, acquires the user's request, then picks it up at the condition that it must be within the municipality (or the district) and transports it to the required destination. In Italy the taxi service is regulated by the law: “Legge Quadro Taxi - Legge 15 gennaio 1992, n.21”.

The license for the exercise of the taxi service and the authorization for the exercise of the rental service with driver are issued by municipalities, through the notice of public competition to individuals who have ownership or availability leased vehicle or vessel, which can handle them in either individual or group. The license and authorization refers to a single vehicle. The license for the exercise of the taxi service and the authorization for the exercise of the rental service with driver are transferred, at the request of the holder, designating a specific subject, as long as entered in the register referred to in Article 6 and in satisfies the requirements, when the owner himself is in one of the following conditions:

- a) is the holder of a license or authorization for five years; b) has reached sixty years of age;
- c) has become permanently incapacitated or unfit for service due to illness, injury or permanent withdrawal of the driving license.



In the last fifteen years there were some attempts to change this law but without success. The most important attempts were the “Decreto Bersani” in 2006, the “Decreto Legge 138/2011, also known as “La manovra di Ferragosto” and the “Decreto Legge 24 gennaio 2012, n. 1”.

All these attempts of liberalization made by government has at the same time created an interest towards this issue and other actors have entered in the debate: journalists, politicians, members of other professions sharing the same worries of being liberalized, customers of the service and also in general a part of the public opinion interested in the debate. This debate has created the condition of creating two “factions”, even if exist minor intermediate positions, one that is favourable to the liberalization and the other, composed principally, but not exclusively, of taxi drivers, which is contrary. In this sense the discourse about the issue becomes a struggle among different actors with different interests.

From on hand some actors are interested for different reasons, such as more competition, lower prices and better service, in supporting the claim for the liberalization; on the other hand there is the interest in maintaining the institutionalized practices, which are considered fundamental by the members of taxi driver category.

Here a brief note, which we will expand in the future development of this paper, is needed; we have decided to talk of taxi drivers’ “category” because in Italy the taxi driver, even if it can be viewed as a profession, in the public debate is considered like a sort of “guild” and almost always called, in Italian, “categoria”. Obviously a deeper explanation of this choice is necessary and can be also interesting in order to gain a better understanding of the context.

What emerges from the empirical observation is that the first group of actors, favourable to the liberalization, not only support it but also engage in a voluntary “disruptive work” (Maguire & Hardy, 2009) of the institutionalized practice of the taxi driver category, through their discourses. For this reason the institutional “attack” can be framed as an attempt of deinstitutionalization, besides the discourses of actors aim to get “shifts in the underlying

logic by which legitimacy is assessed” (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 35).

On the other side of the “trenches” the taxi drivers’ category react with opposed discourses aiming in maintaining the legitimacy of their institutionalized practices. For this reason we have defined their work as a sort of “maintenance protocol” (Fleming and Spicer, 2014, p. 270) or better a institutional resistance against attempts of institutional agency (Lawrence, 2008).

From our first analyses of this empirical case what also emerges is that, after more than eight years of debate and struggle, as matter of fact an effective liberalization of taxi driver category has not happened yet; so we can say that the institutional resistance strategy of taxi drivers’ category can be viewed as a successful story worthy of being studied.

### **Methodology and data collection**

In our effort to explaining and unpacking the phenomenon of institutional resistance we have choose to focus on a specific case of institutional resistance, the successful strategy used by taxi drivers’ category, and, as explained in the theoretical part, we have adopted and extended the approach proposed by Suddaby and Greenwood (2005).

Our data consist of the transcripts from journal articles, reported interviews, users’ comments, posts on online forum, and blogs, published on the most influential online sources that analyse the discussion about the liberalization of Italian taxi drivers’ category.

The transcripts contain the essential arguments, used by actors to “attack” the institutionalized practices and to “resist” the attempts of deinstitutionalization, developed in the last eight years. Thanks to this data source we can explore the use of rhetorical strategies coding different aspects of the rhetoric. In particular following Sudday and Greenwood (2005) we have outlined which is the main form of persuasive appeals, or as called in classic rhetoric “pistesis”, and which theorization of change they refers or counteract. In addition referring to

Suchman (1995) we have coded which types of legitimacy are attacked and which types are defended.

From the previous sources we have collected around 300 text segments, but at the moment we have analysed only 120, so the reported insights are partial and further analyses are in progress in order to strengthen our arguments. Also the collection is still in progress given that our aim is to analyse, as completely as possible, all the available texts about this debate.

The first coding can be introduced following Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* (2007) that describes the three different rhetorical appeals: Ethos, Pathos and Logos. The writers and speakers can use them to make their arguments more convincing and to support their ideas and beliefs. But not every appeal is appropriate for every kind of argument. More in details Ethos, called also ethical appeals, means convincing by the character of the author. It refers to the trustworthiness or credibility of the speaker.

Arguments based on Pathos encourage readers to make a decision based on emotions like anger, pity or fear. It is also called emotional appeals because the perceptions are used to enhance an argument. An appeal to Pathos causes an audience not just to respond emotionally but to identify with the speaker's point of view. The aim of this strategy is to feel what the speaker feels. Discourses based on Logos involve claims and evidence that establish your skill in reasoning. Giving reasons is the heart of the argumentation, and cannot be emphasized enough, it is the reason that this technique is called logical.

Our first analysis highlighted that the majority of the speech of taxi drivers, used to protect themselves from the attack, are based on the Logos strategy. Basically their speeches are based on the fact they spent a big amount of money (in average 200-300 thousand euro) to buy license, a car, insurance and so they have the right to be recognized their position. The minority part of the speeches are based on Pathos appeals, and highlighted the fact that the taxi drivers supported same sacrifices to get license and they did them for their offspring and

family. On the other hand the major part of the “attacks” are based on Logical argumentations especially on the benefits of the liberalization in terms of disruption of the category’s benefits lead to more competition, better service and lower price. We find also more case of use of Pathos, especially based on the anger of unsatisfied customers that expressed their complaints and supporting liberalization especially on the basis of their emotional state. Also some cases of Ethos argumentation can be traced in text in which studies or opinions of politicians are used as mean to support the positions.

The second point of our study is based on analysis of text segments following the five recurrent theorizations of change (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005): ontological, historical, teleological, cosmological, and value-based theorization.

The former theory explains the five theorizations. Ontological rhetoric is based on premises about what can or cannot co-exist; Historical theorizations appeal to history and tradition, also is used to counteract radical change and to promote evolutionary or path-dependent change; Teleological persuasion focus on a “divine purpose” or “final cause; Cosmological describes the natural process of evolution or consequence of some phenomena; Value-based relies on an emphasis of values. Value-based rhetoric appeals to normative authority drawn from wider belief systems, outside the particular contest, to legitimate an adopted position.

Remarking the previous call for taking these results with caution, what emerges form the first analyses is that resistance is based principally on both ontological and historical theorizations.

The last coding part refers to the three types of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) called into question: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive.

Pragmatic legitimacy rests on the self-interested calculations of an organization's most immediate audiences. Moral legitimacy reflects a positive normative evaluation of the organization and its activities (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Parsons, 1960). The Cognitive legitimacy is based on comprehensibility and taken-for-grantedness.

Again from our first round of analyses some interesting insight emerges. In particular even if the taxi drivers' category can rely on a long term take-for-grantedness of its practices, just to give an example we can think about the trade of licences which is done transparently even if illicit, a great part of the attacks are toward the pragmatic legitimacy and also the resistance is done supporting the pragmatic legitimacy of the taxi drivers' practices.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The objective of this study is to enlighten the issue of institutional resistance and in order to cope with this task we have developed a theoretical framework that clarify the connections between different topics of previous new institutional literature.

We decided to focus only on one of the possible cases of institutional resistance, in particular the case of resisting institutional agency that takes place in the form of a voluntary "work done by actors to disrupt institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 238) that aims to deinstitutionalize previously institutionalized practices. So one of the main accomplishments is to have framed the issue delineating the institutional "attack" in terms of "outsider-driven deinstitutionalization" (Maguire & Hardy, 2009) through which actors try to modify the institutional logic and delegitimize the institutionalized practice using rhetorical form of "attack". On the "defensive" side of the tranches we have framed the institutional resistance as the "conscious and strategic response to disruptive work" (Maguire & Hardy, 2009, p. 169) and again we have analysed it in terms or rhetorical strategy, trying to highlight a successfully mode to employ rhetoric as strategy of institutional resistance with the analyses of our empirical case. Through the first analyses of the data we have start to pattern the "attack" and "resistance" strategies in terms of the rhetoric used in the discourses and which types of legitimacy are attacked or supported.

To conclude we have to say that at the moment our study suffers of some limitations in terms

of data collection and analyses, so we have already scheduled further researches in order to strengthen it: first the extension of data collection, in order to cover as completely as possible, all the available texts about this debate; second to come out with the data analysis in order to have the more realistic picture as possible of the empirical case and lastly we have planned another step of our study consisting in a series of interviews with the Taxi Drivers that operate in three Italian cities: Padua, Bologna and Naples in order to compare the results, which come from our text segments analysis, and the speeches directly documented by the resisting actors.

Despite the previous limitations this study can already give, especially with its effort to create the theoretical framework and its connections with the methodological approach, some interesting insights for the debate on institutional resistance.

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