

Lecce as an Invisible Salon: Power and Power elites in a Souther Italian City

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Abstract

The paper deals with the transformation of power at the local level, by making reference to Lecce, a middle city in the South of Italy (Salento), as a case study. The authors draw their empirical material from a wider sociological research on the same topic they have edited in 2014 (Cremonesini, Cristante, Longo 2014) and try to sketch how the crisis of traditional political parties has produced a renewed vitality of relational networks, yet by now unable to define a common strategy and to share common values and a common strategic project for city policies.

Keywords: power, elites, salons, relational networks, local government, South Italy

By way of introduction

What we present in this paper is the synthesis of a wider research on the topic of power in a Southern Italian middle city, Lecce¹. We have been studying Lecce since 2007. In the meantime, three volumes have been published, the first on the mayor's electoral campaign in 2007 [Cristante 2008]; the second on the somewhat loose relationship among the University of the Salento (located in Lecce), other city institutions and the city as a whole [Cristante, Longo 2010]; the third, whose content is partly discussed in this paper, on the way power is exercised and perceived in the city [Cremonesini, Cristante, Longo 2014]. The three studies have been conducted on a voluntary basis, by young social researchers (chiefly graduates and Ph.D. students) all sharing the same interest for social sciences and the city where they live, study or work.

In the third book our aim was to give a plausible sociological representation of power in a Southern Italian middle city which has specific features (a tourist town, often conceived in Italy as endowed with unique characteristics: safety, a perfectly preserved historic centre, lack of evident social contradictions) yet suffers from the same social and economic problems as the rest of the South of Italy.

In the investigation on power, researchers were left free to develop their research strategies, within a broadly defined methodological framework: 1. narrative interviews [Mason 2010] have been preferred to more standardized techniques; 2. our methodological approach to power is reputational [Abu-Laban 1965; French 1969, Moyser-Wagstaffe 1987], in the attempt to find out social representations and narratives rather than to detect an alleged objective picture of the

¹ We are aware that the topic of power elites is huge. For our limited purposes, we intend elites as a group having a privileged access to social resources [Kahn 2012]. In the case of power elites in Lecce, we have focused on power, symbolic and relational resources.

exercise of power and its distribution. What we aimed at was a coral narrative of power in Lecce, by listening to different categories of people and trying to single out the specific features of power in a small city as perceived by its citizenry.

Lecce and its socio-economic features in short

Lecce is a middle city in the South of Italy. It is located in the Apulia region, in the subregion known as Salento. According to the census conducted in 2011, Lecce has 89.916 inhabitants, 7,9% more than those counted in the census of 2001. The increase in population is not to be imputed to the birth rate, which, on the contrary, is falling: the natural growth is in fact negative and the population is consequently ageing. The increase in population is to be explained by making reference to the number of those (both Italians and foreigners) who move to Lecce. The town is able to attract human resources, even in a period of deep economic crisis when the phenomenon of youth emigration, both to the North of Italy or abroad, has increased. Regardless of the increasing number of the Leccesi who migrate, Lecce has still a positive net migration (3,906 in 2013; 1,062 in 2014 according to ISTAT).

Lecce is an ageing town. The mean age is 44, higher than the national average (42,8%) and the regional one (41.9). Even the old-age index is meaningful: in 2013 it was 191,4, which implies that there are about 2 over-64 people for each under-15. Moreover, Lecce is a town of singles: in 2010, 42.7% of its inhabitants were unmarried. Even this datum is higher than the national average (41%). As far as the composition of the population is concerned, the city seems to emphasize the individualizing trends so typical of contemporary Italy (fewer children, increasing number of singles, growing mean age etc.) [CENSIS 20011].

A plausible representation of the economic features of Lecce should qualify it as a service sector city. Particularly developed are commerce and tourism, thus configuring Lecce as a town for leisure. Lecce and Salento are by now successful brands which means that, in a period of deep economic crisis, the sector of tourism (including food and wine tourism) and the agri-food production and sales are holding up remarkably.

As has been stated above, Lecce perceives itself (and is perceived from the outside) as an exception in the South of Italy. It is an elegant, civilized place, a clean and safe city, formal and polite in human interactions. Yet, when it comes to some central topics, differences with other places in the South of Italy appear as irrelevant. In 2011 the middle per capita income was 13,413 euro, overlapping with the regional middle income (13,000 euro) but meaningfully lower than the national datum (17,300 euro). Unemployment rate (including female and youth unemployment) is compatible with consolidated trends in the South of Italy but significantly higher than unemployment at the national level [Cremonesini, Cristante, Longo 2014].

From a political point of view, Lecce is a right-wing city. This is particularly so in the case of local elections. Since 1948, mayors in Lecce have belonged to what we may broadly define right-wing coalitions, with a single exception, Stefano Salvemini, (elected in 1995 as a democrat). This accounts for a relative stability of political power, often granted by networks of interests, in which the inhabitants take part more as clients rather than citizens.

In sum, Lecce is both a peculiar and a typical southern city. It is a hedonistic city, whose demographical trends show a strong individualization. It is a city for leisure, especially the old (now gentrified) baroque historical centre, which has lost its traditional social and anthropological features and has converted itself in a place for tourism and recreational

activities. Yet the city suffers from social and economic problems which equate it to other Southern Italian cities, within a political framework which has remained substantially right-wing ever since the return of Italy to democracy after the Second World War.

Elites according to common people

As already stated above, this paper is a synthesis of a wider research on the topic of power in Lecce within a broadly reputational approach. In the following sections, we will summarize specific parts of the overall investigation, focusing on our subject matters. i.e. power in the city of Lecce. We intend to present different point of views, condensed in different narratives, all related to the topic of power. This section is about the way common people perceive power and elites. One of the tasks of our team was to investigate how common citizens perceived power and identified those who have power in Lecce. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty common citizens, i.e. those who do not hold city roles at the decision-making level [Muscogiuri, 2014: 210]. What emerges is the conception of power, power distribution and elites as expressed by well-informed citizens [Schutz 1947]².

Three main areas have been detected in which power in our middle southern city is exercised: politics, public administration, and economy (the building industry, economic enterprises and economic rent). Having decisional power in one of the former areas or belonging to the category of rentiers is perceived by common citizens as a pre-requisite to be included within the narrow circle of the city elites. What is remarkable is the summing-up power effect which, according to common citizens, may result from belonging to one of the above mentioned categories. Being a successful entrepreneur or a well established rentier may legitimize the access to political relevant positions, thus influencing administrative decisions. A relevant economic position of the family is, at any rate, conceived as the element that triggers the process. Prominent families hold the economic power. Their members have relevant professional roles. They may even not hold political offices, yet they have a great social relevance.

Citizens often refer to the current mayor of Lecce, Paolo Perrone, as an example of the strong interconnection among economic power, political power and the inclusion within the circle of everybody who is anybody: “In Lecce, power belongs to those families that take part in a consolidated system of social relations, and this usually implies participating in the economic power. I think, for example, that those who possess construction land, or important city firms, have more probability to exercise power as compared to common citizens. If I had to mention a pertinent example, I would say our current mayor is emblematic in this regard”. Meaningfully enough, all those who have been mentioned as holding an influential position within city elites by the interviewed citizens belong to strong families, with a consolidated economic position, involved in business activities³.

Remarkably, common citizens seem to intuitively agree with the more articulated analysis of the members of the city elites who, as privileged witnesses, are aware of the deep crisis of the

² Those who accepted to be interviewed may be ascribed to the Schutzian category of the well-informed citizens. Thus, although conceivable as common citizens, they have shown awareness of city dynamics.

³ Paolo Perrone is the most cited Lecce prominent, as he synthesizes in his person both political and economic power (the former deriving from the latter). The other relevant city personalities who have been referred to by the interviewees are all men, leading important city business in the agri-food sector (Antonio Quarta), in the field of construction (Brizio Montinari), bank and tourism (Giovanni Semeraro) and health (Gennaro Quarta Colosso).

local representative system and talk of a fragmented city power (see below, section 6). After Adriana Poli Bortone, Secretary of Agriculture in 1994 with Silvio Berlusconi, former mayor of the city and European Deputy, no figure of potentially long-standing, “pure” politician has emerged. Thus, power seems more fluid and, at the same time, more strongly connected to the city elites, e.g. to those who have been long able to construct networks of social relations, as well as economic and social capital, both conceived by common citizens as necessary preconditions for political power.

The case of Lecce, at least in the perception of common citizens, exemplifies a post-democratic structure of power (Crouch 2004). Whereas the political field could in the post-war Italian democracy promote social mobility through political careers, power seems now, at least in a peripheral local reality, strongly held by those who belong to the economic elites, regardless of their capacity to promote change, plan political strategies, try and solve the existing problems. This is not to be imputed to the sole change in the balance of power between the political and the economic system: it has also to do with a quiescent public opinion, constantly losing ground and by now unable to express new options and new personalities. Indeed, the missing character in the interviews with common citizens is the citizenry itself, probably unable to thematise itself as a political actor, and to develop democratic citizenship and active participation.

Elites according to the local media

One part of our research was devoted attention to the local media, the way they perceive local elites, as well as their involvement in local power. Her paper is based on semi-structured interviews to people working in the field of media, often in leadership positions. Although the interviews give manifold representations of power, the economic power is located by the interviewees at the top of a rough hierarchy of institutional fields. Politics is moreover intended as incapable of contrasting the influence of supranational institutions such as the BCE and the European Commission, interpreted as able to overarch policies at the national and the local level [Colonna 2014, 130]. Media workers tend to emphasize the crisis of politics, resulting in its incapacity to determine strategies, define solutions, produce public debate, thus confirming the perception of common citizens. A quotation drawn from the interview with the editor of one of the local newspapers is meaningful in this regard:

“Nowadays power lies with finance and with financial speculators. And I am not talking of small fry, but of big speculators. It's something cyclical: politics and finance historically passed power to each other. In one historical phase, politics control finance, in the following it passes power to finance, and it is finance which is now able to condition politics”

Such a conception has consequences on the way the interviewees represent power and elites at the local level. By making reference to the interview material, the paper singles out two different types of media workers' description of power in Lecce: the sceptical and the assertive. The sceptical tends either to deny that in our Southern middle city any meaningful form of power exists (“In Lecce there is no power: it's a city unable to express any power at all”) or to conceive power as insignificant (power is “a miserable, risible thing, a dish of lentils which are rotting while people are quarrelling over who should eat them” [ibidem]). On the contrary, the

assertive do state that power exists in Lecce, yet subordinate it to the social capital and social networking of those perceived as belonging to the local elites.

Power does exist in Lecce (...) it is the power of the elegant salons, [...] a strange kind of power, it has not a hierarchical or pyramidal structure, as in other places does. Yet there is power. A kind of power expressing itself in personal relationships, acquaintances, friendships. It's the power of reciprocal favours, stitch-ups, the power of "being friend of". (...) In a city like Lecce, where there is little involvement in associations, what is relevant is the power of personal relationships generating in the elegant salons of the city! And this holds not only at high but also at lower levels. A business or an enterprise, for example, works if its owner is well-known, and this too is a kind of power.

The common denominator of both the sceptical and the assertive is the relevance ascribed to relational networks. The difference is connected to the conception of power as a real capacity to influence and direct (the assertive) or as a system of shared interests, which are anyhow incapable of producing durable effects on city policies (the sceptical). Power is, moreover, conceived as diffuse and polycentric: small elites, changing social relations, common interests, provisional shared objectives are all qualifications of a small scale and fragmented power, never written in capitals. According to media workers, the local networks make it possible to reproduce "clots" of power being part of which is an indispensable prerequisite in order to make one's action socially effective. The Italian term for this phenomenon is *clientelismo*, a combination of patronage and favouritism able to consolidate social networks and confirm the supra-ordinate position of those who, in each "clot" of power, are in a leading position. Thus, although no leading group is able to condition city-life in all its aspects, being part of one or more networks is perceived as a necessary condition in order to achieve specific tasks and goals.

When it comes to those who actually exercise power in Lecce, the representation media workers convey overlaps with the one of common citizens. What we have defined as "clots" of power coagulate in social networks whose central positions are held by members of the local money-aristocracy, e.g. historically influential families, with relevant interests in the local economy. Power is thus both fragmented and linked to a number of familiar groups which can control specific social networks through both patronage and their prestige and economic influence. Other institutions (the Church, the local university, professional bodies), although endowed with a power of their own, seem either more interested in exercising their influence in favour of those who are excluded (its the case of the Church, at least in this historical phase), or closed in its internal questions and problems (the university) or unable by now, as they were in the past, to express an autonomous social identity and power (professional bodies). Even politics is subordinated to the networking logic, as it is unable to foster independent political personalities, linked as it is to pre-existing interests and relationship. All of this is metaphorically synthesized by media workers by making reference to the power of aristocratic salons as the physical places where social relations are defined, consolidated and common interests are mutually supported. Salons are informal, exclusive places, and by excluding those who are not part of relevant social networks, their relevance exemplifies a crisis of politics and representativeness, thus emphasizing one of the features of contemporary democracy, not only at the local level.

Lawyers and local elites

Media workers make reference to professional roles and professional bodies as constitutive elements of the fragmented structure of power in Lecce. Yet, their relevance is not autonomous, but subordinated to their relations with the city elites, in particular those families which seem to hold at least part of the local power. One of the topics investigated in our research is centred on the role of lawyers within the power structure of the city, defining at the same time the peculiar composition of the social field of legal professions. The empirical material, based on semi-structured interviews with eight Lecce lawyers, confirm what journalists and editors stated: professional roles are by now insufficient in order to get and maintain a stable place within city networks and elites.

As classical sociology has shown, the legal profession traditionally held a strategic position, halfway between the political and administrative system and the citizens [Parsons 1958]. Max Weber, [2004, 53] underlined the strong interconnection between legal profession and political careers, due to the capacity of lawyers to make recurs to technical competences relevant in public life and to use a rhetorical language, indispensable in the democratic, electoral playground. Sociological analysis has, moreover, conceived lawyers as mediators among economic, political and military interests, thus representing a connecting structure of the different elements taking part in power elites [Wright Mills 1956, 289]. In the South of Italy, the strategic location of lawyers has often assumed the character of patronage and favouritism, thus emphasizing their relevance within local politics.

Lawyers have represented until recently a crucial node between two important social areas: personal and institutional relationships. Professionally, they have personal relationships with their clients and institutional relationships with politics and the administration and they are, as such, social mediators par excellence [Salento, Spina 2014, 72]. When the relationship between legal professions and political power is successful, it activates a circular process of mutual strengthening: being a lawyer makes political careers easier, and being politically active makes legal profession more profitable.

What has emerged from the empirical material is that the strong interrelation among legal professions, politics and elites is by now less strong than it was in the past. This is due to a plurality of factors, the former being closely linked to the now loose interconnection between the professional role as lawyer and social mobility. Becoming a lawyer was, in fact, one of the occupational options for a skilled member of the lower classes. Since accessing the profession of lawyer was less selective than other legal professions (the judge, in particular) and it did not require a great initial capital, it represented an effective vehicle for ascending social mobility. This holds only partially in contemporary society: the role of work and professions (hence acquired qualities [Parsons 1991, 102-112] as a means to foster ascending mobility has greatly scaled down, and this is also the case with the profession of lawyer, at least in the city of Lecce. At any rate, the erosion of the middle class is a phenomenon affecting now Western countries as a whole, characterized by the ever stronger economic relevance of finance and assets and the decreasing centrality of work and income. This process not only affects manual workers but also white collar professions, including the lawyers' profession that has undergone a process of devaluation, connected to the increasing number of those who become lawyers.

When it comes to the specific topic of elites in Lecce, the above-sketched configuration implies a weaker connection between power and the profession. Being a lawyer does not entail,

per se, belonging to the city elites. On the contrary, being part of the city elites on ascriptive basis is a prerequisite for professional and economic success. By adopting Bourdieu's concept of field [Bourdieu 1995], it is possible to distinguish within the field of the professional lawyers, at least four main professional sub-groups:

A. Lawyers who have low incomes and enjoy little social prestige. Most of the lawyers of the Lecce Bars belong to this group.

B. Lawyers who have better incomes and a sufficient number of clients but deal with not particularly relevant juridical issues.

C. Lawyers with good incomes, well integrated within the city elites, often specialized in penal law.

D. Lawyers belonging to families with a long established tradition in the profession. They lead big law firms, often specialized in prestigious subjects, administrative law in particular. They are full members of local elites.

The above-sketched typology makes it evident that belonging to the profession of lawyers does no longer guarantee participation in local power and local elites. The interconnecting function that sociology used to ascribe the profession of lawyer seems no longer at work, at least in the local case we have investigated. This is reflected even in the representations of local power lawyers have given in the interviews, regardless of the professional sub-groups (A, B, C or D) where they belong. According to the interviewees, elites circles are no longer able to produce a stable kind of integration. Moreover, due to the long economic crisis that has been hitting the city, even the relevance of economic actors is decreasing, whereas strong political leaders are not in sight. What survives and gains strength is the local potentate, made up of a bunch of prominent families. Let us quote from an interview with a local lawyer:

“There are for sure dominant families in Lecce. This is a city where feudal logics are still effective. Wealth is concentrated in a few families. The richest families are those who are able to mobilize consensus, they decide who may be included. Power in Lecce is of a familistic type. If you are part of the relational relevant networks, you may lead a comfortable life. Otherwise it is much more difficult. In this social coalition, the weight of lawyers is irrelevant. There are some lawyers who take part in the elegant city salons, but – excluding individual exceptions – I do not think they have great relevance.”

The opinion of the interviewed lawyers, moreover, expresses the idea according to which city elite circles are more linked to consumption habits and life-styles rather than to local power and its exercise. More than of a power elite, one may think of a dominating coalition, by now less and less connected with civic responsibility and the public spirit which should, at least ideally, be linked to power. In the last decade, social privileged circles, in which the lawyers of group C and D participated, have gradually lost their interest in city policies. Legal professions are, hence, losing ground, both for the objective weakness of their present-day social prestige and for a decreasing involvement in the public life of those who still belong to the higher levels of the city community.

The Elites according to those who belong to the elites

A last relevant aspect was the self-perception of those who belong to the city elites: how do they represent power, its role and its connection with relational networks. The analysis is based on ten narrative interviews to privileged witnesses (politicians, entrepreneurs, professionals) in the attempt to give a representation of power from within. One first remark is relevant: power is conceived as a form of coercion, yet it is chiefly understood as being at the service of the citizenry. This is not to be intended as a naïve conception of power: those who have had institutional roles in the sample, are in fact strongly aware that by exercising power one has to take into account the needs of the target community and their consensus, e.g. the necessary recognition of the effects of political action. Politicians who have been interviewed tend, moreover, to emphasize the limits of their power, conditioned by both the counterbalance system of administration and the necessity of popular consensus. The entrepreneurs, on the contrary, propose a conception of power as the individualistic capacity to control and manage processes. According to them, power is a charismatic quality and it is thanks to charisma that the planned objectives may be achieved [Lotteria 2014, 284].

Regardless of the differences in the conception of power, the interviewees seem to concord regarding the decline of the city leading class. Whereas the old ruling class was able to propose a project and achieve goals, the new elites lack integration and planning potentials. As the Italian sociologist Franco Ferrarotti once wrote, they are representatives of a kind of “a lifeless power, justified, with a sophistic argument, as a power which rejects a global rational project in favour of fragmented and incoherent actions: a power with no plan” (Ferrarotti 2004, 9).

The crisis of politics at the national level has had consequences at the local one. The interviewees tell us of a dramatic change: once, the hegemonic class was held together by a common project, aiming at the cultural and economic development of the city, regardless of the political conflict among left-wing and right-wing parties. Outstanding personalities emerged in various fields: politics, business, legal professions, all sharing a common project for the city. As a local politician says in his interview: “The city was governed by well-intentioned people. They would find an agreement for the well-being of the city”. Big estate-owners, who had governed the city until the Second World War, have now given way to a new middle class, of heterogeneous origins, but sharing the same cultural level, life-styles, ideals, which converged in a new form of city power, strongly linked to Italian traditional political parties. Now, the solidity of the old local leading class seems to have faded away leaving in its place an individualistic kind of power, often disjoined from specific social groups and hence devoid of an overall plan. A lack of leadership which is the output of the decline of politics and the role of the middle class.

In this flexible situation, the family remains one of the few reference points. Belonging to strong family groups still guarantees participation in the local power. As one of the interviewees puts it:

“Ties are of two kinds: pre-existing family ties and friendships. Powerful families in Lecce do not choose friends on, as it were, a sentimental or emotional basis but on the basis of specific interests. People are selected in so far as they are relationally interesting: it is appropriate to get to know them. ... Mutual compatibility ... would be secondary. What does count is that the new friend may be useful for family business.”

Being part of powerful families is, moreover, conceived as a springboard for political and economic success. Wealthy and powerful city families use informal social occasions (parties, salons, relations) in order to establish new social ties, thus consolidating their status and widen their relational networks. Power is now conceived as the occasional output of relational networks and is therefore, as compared to the recent past, the output of the planless management of the ordinary. Individual personalities, wealthy families, social networks and a growing indifference for the public well-being are the main characteristics of the new power: a kind of *habitus* that, according to one of the interviewees, is rooted in masonry-like culture. The relevance of masonry in Lecce is well known, [Punzi 2014, 369-424] this does not imply that power elites are necessarily connected to masonic lodges, yet the culture of favour, of strategic friendship and social links is the heritage of a patronage system that, in a period of deep crisis of traditional parties, has been successfully reintroduced in the city public dimension. The acquiescent role of citizenship which, with rare exceptions, seems indifferent to power strategies and disinterested in the public debate, makes the cleavage between power and traditional democratic procedures even stronger.

Final remarks

The analysis of the different dimensions of local power led us to construct a sociological description of the typical way in which power is perceived and socially represented in an Italian middle town. According to our analysis, the Lecce model may be interpreted using the metaphor of the salons, in its triple articulation (see below). In order to construct our model, it was necessary to define the elements which make it possible. These elements are conditions which enable the model, as they qualify the typical mentality of Lecce, and the social representation of the local power. Those characteristics are somewhat randomly reported below, as premises of our model.

1) *Lecce is a service city*: its mentality is conditioned by the presence of white collars employees and professionals, both numerically relevant in the city. This has, as one of its outputs, a bureaucratic mentality, evident in city behaviours and language. The bureaucratic mentality separates the city from its province, characterized by rural elements and the remains of the industrializing processes, imposed by the national industrial policies to the South of Italy during the 20th century.

2) *Mentality in Lecce is basically law-oriented*: contrasts and conflicts are generally solved by taking legal actions. This aspect of the Lecce mentality is coherent with its bureaucratic vocation, consisting of a formal respect of the juridical rule, actually intended to circumvent it. One of the consequences of this feature is the limited relevance of collective actions and the prevalence of an individualistic or familistic conception of contrasts and conflicts.

3) *There is an evident continuity in the political choices of the citizenry*: as has been written above, with the sole exception of Stefano Salvemini, elected in 1995, the city has always elected right-wing mayors. This holds, with rare exceptions, also for regional and national elections.

4) *This continuity may depend on specific features of the right-wing oriented city elites*: right-wing oriented city elites are able to construct relational networks, by reproducing power micro-relations, thus rooting deeply in the social fabric of the city. This has to do with a prevailing conservative mentality whose fundamental features are: a) *respect for the authority of leading figures*, expressed in a sort of *natural populism*, based on a paternalistic conception

of authority; b) respect for and dependence on the traditional authority, intended as a set of values, beliefs, institutions and hierarchies; c) *particularism*; the leader is both the one who assumes its political responsibility and may promote the interests of the specific city networks which recognize him as a leader; d) *conformism*, which implies that even social change is understood as continuity of the traditions; e) *exaltation of success and those who are successful*: this feature is not to be intended as the typically bourgeois appreciation of the entrepreneur-spirit, but as a social success deriving from rent, often linked to the belonging to noble families, landlords and holders of social privileges. At any rate, success is often intended as separated from the ethic of work, an emulation of aristocratic behaviours, and conspicuous consumption.

5) *Lecce is a provincial, geographically peripheral city*, yet it represents itself as a rich, elegant, cultured city, an exception in the South of Italy. The geographical and cultural distance from the rest of Italy and its marginality as referred to global fluxes are perceived, in the local context, as a voluntary estrangement from modernity and its pace. Lecce is characterized by what could be called an *elegant provincialism*, visible outdoors, in the baroque streets and conceived as an exchange value in social encounters. Social encounters are dramatized, made up as they are of interactional rituals. Interactional rituals are, on their turn, based on the endless interplay between stage and the backstage.

6) *Lecce is a city that conceals conflicts* either minimizing problems or removing them. Even when problems are collectively recognized, their solutions are either imputed to the individuals and their familiar networks, are converted into juridical controversies or are delegated to the benevolence of the politician of the moment.

7) *Lecce represents itself as an unusual civilized, a well-mannered South, thus removing its typically southern problems*. This perceived peculiarity may result in disregarding its social, economic and environmental problems which Lecce shares with the rest of Southern Italy.

8) *Lecce is a city of secret and intransparent social relations*. This is not only to be connected to the great number of Mason Lodges in the city, but also to the opacity of everyday practices which makes even mundane relations unclear and ambiguous.

The combination of the above mentioned elements led us to propose a model, based on three fields of collective interaction: the visible salon, the limited access salon and the invisible salon. The wording we have chosen is symbolical, yet it is intended to describe actual places where relevant social interactions occur. What we call the "visible salon" is to be broadly located in the historical centre of the city. The perfectly kept baroque city seems a democratic place, where people meet, regardless of their social status or professional role. In the smooth atmosphere of the old town, common citizens may meet important city personalities, the mayor is likely to nod back to everybody he meets, professors may come across their students. The 'visible salon' conveys an image of apparent democracy and equality, within an aesthetic and recreational framework.

'Limited access salons' are more exclusive: they are informal gatherings, often taking place in private houses, where prominent people are used to meet. In the rituals characterizing social interaction in the city elegant salons, prominent people share the same social knowledge (for example about local politics), the same social relations, the same 'culture'. New social figures are invited (for example tourism entrepreneurs, leaders of creative companies etc.) in order both to judge their skills and competences and their compatibility with the local anthropological model. We talk of salons in the plural because of the increasing differentiation of the local elites, which

implies the diversification of gathering places, although a certain degree of social medley is welcome.

We have defined the third field as the 'invisible salon': it is what is left of the old very exclusive gathering and decisional places of the local elites. i.e. aristocratic families and economic and political potentates. The nature of the invisible salon is difficult to circumscribe: common citizens make reference to it. Some identify it with the old city aristocracy; some connect it with local Masonry. In a phase of dismemberment of the unity of local power, the invisible salon is no longer the place where decisions are made, it is rather a symbolic place, whose capacity to influence power strategy is difficult to assess. Maybe the invisible salon is now collapsing, or is being absorbed by the differentiated 'limited access salons', less exclusive places where power is exercised without a comprehensive and general strategy.

The new configuration of power in Lecce may be interpreted as the output of a combination of factors. The end of the great "mass parties" (especially the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party), which had characterized the so called First Republic, has had, as one of its effects, a de-politicization and personalization of Italian politics. At the local level, mass parties could guarantee a certain degree of social mobility, since power was no longer held only by members of the old aristocratic families. As our empirical material shows, what we are experimenting now in Lecce is an unusual combination of persistent old-fashioned features (the respect for order and tradition, the paternalistic approach to power, for example) and new dynamics which are dissolving old decisional places. If the metaphor of the salon is effective, we may say that the 'invisible salon' (that is a somewhat centralized aristocratic kind of local power) is giving way to a plurality (often planless) of 'limited access salons', the symbol of a social dynamism which is devoid of a politically oriented strategy. Thus, the invisibility of the 'invisible salon' may be, perhaps, interpreted as a loss of its centrality in the power mechanism of the city: invisibility is hence synonym for loss of prestige and even dissolution.

Post Scriptum. Last news from Smallville

Our research was completed in 2014. Since then, things have happened which we need to summarize in order to understand the evolution of power in the city of Lecce. The first event is immediately connected to the question of power. The economic newspaper *Sole 24 Ore* draws up a liking classification of Italian mayors. The poll was conducted by Ipr Marketing, "Governance Pool"⁴ according to the following research strategies: a sample of citizens were asked whether in the last election they had voted for the incumbent mayor. Those who had answered yes, were further requested whether they would vote for him/her again. The Lecce sample has reportedly confirmed great appreciation for the mayor Paolo Perrone as for the latest years of his second mandate (2012-2017)⁵.

The narratives we have gathered, regardless of the social categories of the citizens in the sample, make often reference to Paolo Perrone as one of the most influential persons in the city. This confirms two phenomena: 1. the reputation of the incumbent mayor, identified by Lecce citizens both as a member of one of the most important families in Lecce and the most relevant politician in the city, whose policies are coherent with the Lecce right-wing tradition;

4 Cfr. <http://www.iprmarketing.it/ipr-per-il-sole-24-ore-governance-poll-il-consenso-a-tutti-i-sindaci-vince-perrone-lecce-secondo-brugnarovenezia-terzo-ricci-pesaro-leggi-la-classifica/>

5 http://www.ilsole24ore.com/pdf2010/Editrice/ILSOLE24ORE/ILSOLE24ORE/Online/_Oggetti_Correlati/Documenti/Notizie/2016/01/governance-poll-graduatoria-sindaci.pdf

2. the capacity of the Perrone to convert reputation into fame, due to the constant presence of the mayor in the “social rituals” and events of the city, as well as for his being approachable by anyone. Thus, the incumbent mayor is in an intersection area of communicative, political, and social dynamics in the city.

The crowning of Paolo Perrone as one of the most appreciated mayors in Italy may sound surprising if one thinks that in 2014 Lecce was one of the defeated Italian candidates for the title of European Capital of Culture 2019. Notwithstanding a great publicity campaign and a preparatory work handled by a foreigner project manager, Lecce proposed to the EU jury a modest project, called “Eutopia”, which should have fostered participation and a new vision for the future of the city. During the preparatory work, anyway, citizens were hardly able to understand the connection between “Eutopia” and what is typical of Lecce and its region. In the meantime, specific aspects of the project were oddly named (“democratopia”, “profitopia”, “esperientopia”, etc.)⁶, with no connections with real problems and topics. Moreover, the project staff was unable to absorb suggestions coming from civil society. In the final phase, the town administration, encouraged by the relevance Lecce has recently assumed as a tourist destination, showed optimism. The competition was eventually won by Matera (another city in the South of Italy), whereas Lecce did not obtain a single vote from the EU jury.

It is not easy to keep both events together (Perrone success in the liking poll and the crushing defeat in the EU competition). We may add that in the recent classification of quality of life in Italian provinces, Lecce is down in the chart (92 position)⁷. A wider perspective (from the city to the province) is anyway necessary in order to introduce two relevant affairs which have affected the worries of Lecce citizens. The first is the spreading of the bacterium *Xylella fastidiosa*, infecting most of the olive trees in Salento; the second the construction of the gas pipeline known as Tap (Trans Adriatic Pipeline, <https://www.tap-ag.it/>) in the countryside of Melendugno, a town 18 km away from Lecce.

It is not easy to summarize the phenomenon of xylella: the incubation of the bacterium (probably introduced by imported Caribbean plants) has lasted several years, during which no measures have been taken. When the epidemic became undeniable (summer 2014), in order to face the emergency a commissioner was appointed, the General of the Italian Forest Rangers Giuseppe Silletti. Farmers and environmental activists protested against the decision to cut down the ill trees. Eventually, Italian judges impounded whole agriculture areas (2015), blocking the cutting of the infected trees. The situation is still not well defined at the end of 2016: the EU is asking for adequate measures to block the epidemic, including cutting down infected trees. Region Apulia tries to negotiate, and foster a long-term coexistence with the bacterium.

Small landowners have shown hostility against the institutions, and have denounced the vagueness of the emergency rhetoric. Some people, including personalities well-known at the local or national level⁸, have hinted at a possible connection between the epidemic and the attempt to change the local ecosystem, by replacing olive trees with more profitable types of cultivation. The hostility against emergency policies has produced “suspect theories”, some doubting that the xylella actually exists, some maintaining that it was introduced by multinationals. What is clear is that the emergency has produced a difficult interaction between

6 <http://www.lecce2019.it/2019/utopie.php>

7 http://www.ilsole24ore.com/speciali/qvita_2016_dati/infografiche.shtml

8 Among those, the front man of the band Sud Sound System Nando Popu and the actress and director Sabina Guzzanti.

citizenry and scientists: no scientific certainty has been produced so far and when scientific indeterminacy was assumed as reason enough to cut infected trees down (including hundred-year-old trees), protest and discontent grew. When judges decided to investigate on the matter, discontent and bewilderment grew even more among the population.

Even the question of the gas pipeline is not completely clear. The gas pipeline should supply with gas countries who do not want to depend on Russian gas. Starting in Azerbaijan, developing through Central Europe and Turkey, turning to the Balkans, the pipeline should reach the Salento coast where it would be connected to the Snam network, and, after crossing Italy, supply countries in the North of Europe. This major work is considered strategic by the EU and has been so far supported by the Italian governments. The point of view of Tap, a consortium of multinationals including no Italian firm⁹, is quite understandable in the official internet site¹⁰. As a matter of fact, many different viewpoints are available in the public arena. The Apulia Region maintains that the project should be redefined, by finding a new end point for the pipeline (an attitude shared by the incumbent governor of Apulia – Michele Emiliano – and former governor- Nichi Vendola). The Municipality of Melendugno calls the whole project into question, not only in reference to technical irregularities, but chiefly as far as its strategical value is concerned, underlining that the gas pipeline will not supply Italy, but other European countries. After comparing documents about other similar projects all over the world, the “No Tap” Committee has detected inappropriate relations between economic lobbies and political power, whose final output is to guarantee the Tap consortium from investment risks, blaming national institutions or local populations in case of technical failures¹¹. The affair is much more complex and entangled than we may here summarize: anyway, hundreds of files are freely available on-line (first of all the entry “Tap” on Wikipedia).

All the above-mentioned facts show an increasing marginality of power in the small city of Lecce, probably perceived as such by its citizenry. Power is ever more based on global interrelations, international factors, events uncontrollable on the local level. This implies that the traditional forms of power control, based on social relations established and confirmed in the city salons, are by now no longer able to politically understand the territory and its future, thus producing increasing uncertainties and instability.

9 “TAP has its headquarters at Baar, Switzerland, and offices in all the countries crossed by the pipeline (Greece, Albania, Italy) . Main stockholders are [Snam](#) (20%), the British [BP](#) (20%) [SOCAR](#) (20%), [Fluxys](#) (19%), [Enagás](#) (16%), [Axp](#) (5%).” Cfr. https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gasdotto_Trans-Adriatico

10 <https://www.tap-ag.it/>

11 <http://notransadriaticpiperline.blogspot.it/>

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