

# Strong interests, weak groups? The structure and strategies of interest groups in Italian transport policy

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## 1. Introduction

There is no word better than *fragmentation* to enable one to grasp the nature of Italian interest groups and their relations with the political system during the so-called First Republic. Following La Palombara's seminal study (1964), a large strand of literature depicted Italian policymaking as being driven by particularistic dynamics, linking parties to a highly fragmented community of interest representatives. In particular, the combination of a proportional electoral system and the external, Cold War, constraint on government coalitions allowed the Democrazia Cristiana and its allied parties to play a pivotal role, which led to party dominance over groups (Morlino 1991; Lanza and Lavdas 2000). Such a pattern is what Lanzalaco (1995) called *oligopolistic pluralism*, which refers to a peculiar system of representation in which interests are fragmented, but access to decision-making is regulated by selective and often collusive relationships. Such a finding, though solid and never seriously challenged, related to the whole political system without attention to sector specificities, being built on the analysis of particular sectors to make inferences concerning the functioning of the Italian political system overall.

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This article helps to fill this gap by focusing on interest groups in transport policy. It describes the structuration of the field, during the liberal and the Fascist eras, and its institutionalisation by action reflecting a distributive logic during the so-called First Republic. The attempts, in the 1990s and 2000s, to re-organise interest representation with the aim of achieving better integration is described in [Section 3](#). In [Section 2](#), the article provides an account of the changing relations between groups and the political system. The concluding remarks highlight the persistence of a fragmented field and, at the same time, the progressive erosion of the influence of both parties and groups over policies.

## **2. Interest groups in transport policy (1900–2010): a genealogy**

From a sectoral perspective, the structuration of interest groups has been heavily dependent on the evolution of the policy field in which they are placed. In turn, this may be related to institutional, business and technological issues, which are often independent of the political system. In other words, policies constitute *per se* a variable influencing the way in which actors organise themselves and behave (Lowi 1972; Radaelli, Dente, and Dossi 2012).

In line with this reasoning, this article interprets the structure of interest representation in the Italian transport field with reference to the evolution of policy. This can be framed by dividing the twentieth century into four phases, which take into account the emerging technological and institutional innovations that shaped the mix between direct state intervention and market regulation. This section is divided into two parts. The first analyses the legacy of transport policy by describing its structuration and evolution from 1900 to 1990. The second introduces the main institutional changes and their impact on group structure.

### **2.1 Structuration and institutionalisation**

The first period presents a clear-cut separation between the state and the market. On one side, the nationalisation of the railways placed this sub-system within the purview of the Department of Public Works along with the administration of main road infrastructures. The backbone of the private sector was rooted in the maritime field, where ship owners created Confitarma in 1903. In the same period, the Automobile Club d'Italia (ACI) was created by the merger of local car users' associations to promote private motoring at the very beginning of the life of the automotive industry.

A second phase, partially overlapping with the Fascist regime, was strongly influenced by technological innovation in road transport. Developments in the automotive industry rendered motor vehicles viable alternatives to rail infrastructure and services, both for passengers and for freight (Maggi 2009). In this period, municipal bus companies joined together to form Federtrasporti, while newcomer private entrepreneurs in the coach market set up Acast. In the freight market, road hauliers established Anita in 1944 and joined Confindustria. This move caused disagreement among the firms: many truckers in fact thought the affiliation to the main employers' peak association self-contradictory, as Confindustria's firms were their main commercial counterparts. For this reason, in 1949, Fiap was created as an independent hauliers' association. Confetra – a confederation of logistics, shipping and transport companies – was set up in 1946 and still today represents one of the most influential associations the policy field ([Table 1](#)).

The third phase started in the early 1960s and was influenced by the contradictory economic expansion of the country. In particular, transport policy was characterised by

Table 1. The structure of interests in Italian transport policy (1990–2010).

Phases	Main groups	Year	Membership (2012–13)	Domain
<b>i. (1900–1930)</b>	Confitarma	1903	230	Maritime
	ACI	1905	–	Automotive and sport
<b>ii. (1930–1960)</b>	Federtrasporti	1930s	Dissolved in 2000	Municipal companies
	Fenit	1930s	Dissolved in 2000	Regional railways (Ferrovie in concessione)
<b>iii. (1960–1990)</b>	Acast	1944	Dissolved in 2000	Coach lines
	Anita	1944	3500	Truckers
	Confetra	1946	16	Logistics and shipping companies
	Fiap	1949	8000	Truckers
	Fai	1963	20,000	Truckers
	Cna-Fita	1960s	35,000	Truckers
	Aiscat	1966	23	Motorways
	Assaeroporti	1967	38	Airports
	Enat	1975	Dissolved in 2000	Tourist coach lines
	Filt-Cgil	1979	157,335	Transport employees
	Fit-Cisl	1980	121,343	Transport employees
<b>iv. (1990–2010)</b>	Agens	1992	9	FSI group
	Federtrasporto	1993	11	Confindustria's transport associations
	Assaereo	1997	7	Alitalia group
	Anav	2000	591	Coach lines
	Asstra	2000	196	Municipal companies and local railways
	Assoferr	2000	40	Logistics
	Conftrasporto	2001	8	Truckers federations
	UIR	2003	24	Freight villages
	Fercargo	2009	12	Private railways

Note: FSI, Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane.

massive state intervention in the construction of motorways and airports. In the mid-1960s, these companies, in most cases already connected by Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale's (IRI) corporate governance, aggregated themselves, respectively, into Aiscat and Assaeroporti. The turbulent development of road infrastructure constituted a pre-condition for hauliers becoming the dominant player in the freight market to the detriment of the national railways. New hauliers entered the market: they were mostly microenterprises and self-employed, protected by a regulatory framework defending them from tariff competition. Such an arrangement was a deliberate government policy to maximise overall employment after the first economic slowdown in the mid-1960s (Interview Fiap). As a result, new independent hauliers' associations sprang up, such as Fai and Fita-Cna, to name the most relevant. As a way of coordinating policies in this branch, from 1974, hauliers' associations became stable members of the Comitato Centrale dell'Autotrasporto, a Department of Transport committee established to regulate the profession.

The uncontrolled (but intentional) expansion of the road sector had perverse effects on the national railways. From the late 1960s, Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane (FSI) started to lose market share, both in terms of passengers and in terms of freight. Nonetheless, despite other national monopolies starting to see a decline in turnover, the number of Italian railway employees grew continuously until the mid-1980s, when a first attempt to re-organise the railways was made. The new structure, formally more autonomous from

the Department of Transport, had perverse effects on labour costs, which rose dramatically for the rest of the decade (Regalia and Zanetti 2000).

The three phases of interest politics here analysed consolidated a threefold legacy. The liberal era affirmed massive direct intervention by the state in railways and local mobility. During the Fascist regime, a dualistic policy structuration emerged, with the clear-cut division of the road and rail sectors. Moreover, the new political setting which emerged in the aftermath of the World War II did not alter this pattern, but progressively added a distributive approach to both declining and emerging sectors. During the First Republic, Italian governments managed transport issues separately and often did so artificially to maintain overall employment levels, using direct intervention in the case of the over-staffed railways, or indirect policy tools to promote micro-business in freight haulage.

## 2.2 *Interest groups of the privatised and liberalised sectors*

The state fiscal crises of the early 1990s massively affected the transport field and this, in turn, created new interest groups, driving existing ones to re-organise themselves.

This new setting was strongly influenced by the advent of rail and air transport deregulation and local mobility regionalisation and marketisation (Table 2). As I will discuss in Section 3, policymakers in the field believed that re-organising interest representation strongly linked to Confindustria could contribute to the industrial revitalisation of privatised companies and provide the first step in coordinating transport policies towards modal integration. Other industries in the Confindustria network, such as motorway and airport associations, seem to have followed a legacy of strong relationships, coming from IRI's governance, which have proved to be resilient almost 20 years after the industries were privatised. In the freight market too, the cleavage dividing road hauliers from logistics operators is still entrenched and has been reinforced by pressures coming from private railway undertakings.

First, former monopolies such as FSI and Alitalia created their own associations – respectively, Agens and Assaereo – and immediately affiliated themselves to Confindustria's transport federation, Federtrasporto. In 2000, two associations of locally owned corporations merged into Asstra, while private bus corporations previously represented by Acast and Enat set up Anav. Aiscat and Assaereo continued to represent the interests of the motorway and airport corporations, but, in the aftermath of large-scale privatisations, the nature of most of their associates changed abruptly, as several private groups – such as Benetton and Gavio – gained significant shares in IRI and local government concessions.<sup>1</sup> In 2000, the *Unione degli Interporti Riuniti* (UIR) gave

Table 2. List of major institutional changes in transport policy.

Year	Institutional change
1990	• Institution of freight villages
1992	• Corporatisation of FSI
1997	• Regionalisation local public transport
	• Deregulation of EU's air traffic
1999	• Privatisation of IRI's Autostrade
2001	• Deregulation of the rail sector (freight and passenger traffic)
	• Contracting out of local services
2005	• Deregulation of road haulage

Note: EU, European Union; IRI, Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale.

representation to freight villages, i.e. those infrastructures allowing freight to shift across modal operators.<sup>2</sup>

In the last 20 years, Italian transport policy has undergone major institutional reforms affecting both property rights – with a significant retreat of the state from the road sector – and market regulation, as legal barriers to entering public service markets have been removed. Nonetheless, such transformations have not significantly affected desired policy outcomes.

### **3. Fragmentation and its resilience**

Section 2 described how the development of interest groups in transport policy followed the unbalanced pattern of Italian economic development: new modes of transport brought new associations, which in turn created an extremely fragmented policy field. Each branch, whether it was rail, road, maritime or air transport, constituted a *niche*, often protected from inter-modal competition by tariff and non-tariff constraints. At the end of the last century, almost 90% of both passengers and freight were in fact carried by road. This has progressively revealed several implications in terms of both sustainability and industrial policy. The first problem is related to the negative externalities, namely carbon emissions and traffic congestion, produced by private motorisation and road haulage. The second has instead to do with the underdeveloped structure of the Italian transport business. The uncontrolled proliferation of hauliers in the freight branch and the persistence of loss-making municipal companies and railways represented quite an intricate puzzle for policymakers, who saw incoming European integration as a threat. As a consequence, policy integration through inter-modality and industrialisation by competition became mantras obsessively repeated by left- and right-wing governments. This institutional change has been paralleled by the deep re-shaping of interest structures. Both within Confindustria and Confcommercio, interest groups tried to join up and federate among themselves. As will emerge, such attempts did not produce any significant results.

#### ***3.1 Federating to integrate policies: transport groups within Confindustria***

In the early 1990s, large-scale privatisations induced a significant re-organisation of interest-group structures. Confindustria modified its governance accepting the membership of former state monopolies, such as FSI, and put more emphasis on sectoral federations to counterbalance the role of territorial unions (Federtrasporto 2010). In particular, the FSI president and the chief of Federmeccanica acted as policy entrepreneurs within Confindustria: in 1992, they created Agens, an association representing the national railway company and its subsidiaries. In turn, Agens promoted the setting up of Federtrasporto, a coordination of all transport associations within the Confederation, with the explicit aim of promoting policy integration and fostering a business culture (*cultura d'impresa*) (Interviews Federtrasporto and Agens). Thus, Federtrasporto aggregated old groups such as Confitarma, ACI, Anita, Assaeroporti and Aiscat and new ones such as Anav, Assaereo and UIR. The interview with its director general confirmed that such a structure was intended to enable Italian firms in the field to compete in the European market. This would be possible only by private-oriented industrial relations and integrating different modes of transport. Federtrasporto has mainly an advocacy role, as it 'elaborates common lobby-strategies for its members' (Interview Federtrasporto),

both coordinating transport interests within Confindustria and producing analysis and reports often featuring in the daily newspaper, *il Sole 24 Ore*.

Despite these attempts, the federation's policy seems so far to have been unsuccessful. In this regard, officers of Assaeroporti evaluated the experience of Federtrasporto as not vital for their activities, as the federation is 'more a projection of Agens and thus of the railways' (Interview Assaeroporti); cooperation with this group sometimes occurred – a case in point has been procurement regulation – but rarely concerns transportation issues. Even the Anav president, Nicola Biscotti, confirmed Federtrasporto as a *longa manus* of railway interests and, coherently, decided to leave the federation.

The conflict between Anav and Agens/Federtrasporto reflects the business competition between the railway sector and coach enterprises. The regionalisation of transport policy, which started in 1997, did not alter this harsh relationship between the two branches, which had instead escalated by 2010, when a dramatic cut in annual state subsidies for local mobility exacerbated a latent conflict in this policy area (Di Giulio 2011). Coach companies have always feared FSI's expansion into national coach routes and urban mobility. For this reason, together with Asstra, they opposed the possible integration of collective agreements regulating, respectively, railways and local transport employees. In contrast, this solution was championed by Agens and the trade unions: such harmonisation entails labour cost increases mostly for local service companies. Anav and Asstra understood this and formalised an alliance in 2010, as an explicit act of aggression by the railways as a way to ease their expansion in the local mobility market. Thus far, the two collective agreements remain separate: the agreement regarding railway employees was updated in 2012, while the agreement concerning local mobility services is still a source of conflict between employers' associations and unions.

Besides the conflict between rail and coach services, the relationship between Confindustria's transport associations, Aiscat and Assaeroporti, seems thus far to be a very close one, as they have in common the same president. To better understand the connections between the two areas, corporate networks among the main players should be singled out. As stated in [Section 2](#), the main motorways and airports were part of IRI's corporate structure, but, upon privatisation and flotation on the stock exchange, these corporations fell into the hands of private stockholders, who gained corporate control over them. The cases of Atlantia (Autorstrade per l'Italia), Gavio (Autostrada Torino-Milano; dei Fiori; Torino-Piacenza) and Gemina (Aeroporti di Roma) are particularly significant; other important infrastructures, though listed, are still publicly run, as in the case of Sea (Aeroporti di Linate e Malpensa). Despite this apparently pluralistic scenario, this branch has continued to be characterised by strong corporate ties: the Atlantia and Gavio groups, for instance, signed a shareholder agreement in 2006 for the control of Impregilo, probably the most important Italian corporation in the construction field, while in 2014 Gemina became part of Atlantia. This latter operation is partly telling of the president's leading role in the two main associations in the field. He was in fact on the board of Gemina and its subsidiary Aeroporti di Roma before the merger with Atlantia and, at the same time, vice-president of Unicredit, which was Gemina's financial advisor for the entire operation.

Attempts to federate transport interests within Confindustria thus had poor results. Even an Agens director admitted scarce effectiveness in this sense. In his opinion, the idea of promoting policy integration by group coordination was good and would be still valid, but it 'lost its strength after both the leaders of the entire project died in 1996' (Interview Agens). To sum up, what emerges are mostly clusters of separate interest niches, which may be in conflict, as in the rail-coach case, or constitute a collusive network, as the road

branch seems to illustrate. More generally, fragmentation, understood as a genetic feature characterising Italian transport policy, has not been removed by Confindustria's policies.

### ***3.2 Rivals under the same umbrella: truckers and private cargo railways join Confcommercio***

Attempts to coordinate and federate groups also occurred outside Confindustria's associations, namely in the freight market. The scenario of employer associations in this area is quite dis-homogeneous. While Confetra has provided effective coordination among many groups of logistics and shipping companies since 1946, road hauliers' associations are traditionally inclined to form separate groups, which provide both representation and services for their members. For road hauliers, the liberalisation of the European Union's (EU) market constituted a serious challenge, as the limited business structure of their associates put them at a serious disadvantage in the face of competition from foreign hauliers. In 2000, groups such as Fiap and Fai created Confrasperto, a federation of hauliers also accepting logistics operators. It aimed to compete with Confetra and Anita, on the one hand, and hauliers' associations interested in keeping the micro-dimension of the business structure, such as Fita-Cna, on the other.

Since its inception, Confrasperto has been affiliated to Confcommercio, the national organisation of retailers, and its president is currently vice-president of the whole confederation and very active in advocating the re-launch of the sector with a more integrated vision (Confcommercio 2014). Nevertheless, the hauliers' interest in integrating the freight production chain seems to be a rhetorical question, as their president recently argued in Confrasperto's house organ: 'such a policy should be realised through the industrial growth of hauliers, to the detriment of shipment corporations and intermediaries, and not the other way round' (Confrasperto 2013). The conflicts among logistics companies and hauliers, though stemming from the late 1940s, were exacerbated in 2005 when industries were required to pay hauliers a fixed charge to cover their safety standards. Such a rule, advocated by Fiap and Fai when the Confrasperto president was under-secretary for transport in the Berlusconi government, caused a deep rift between hauliers, on the one hand, and Confetra and Confindustria on the other, who are now pressuring the new transport minister, Maurizio Lupi, to find a new arrangement.

The freight sector has recently undergone further cross-cutting cleavage as a result of rail liberalisation. Since 2000, private railway undertakings have progressively entered the national market. Despite modal shares in the freight sector, so far no significant change towards a more rail-oriented structure has been seen; private operators have gained market share lost by Trenitalia and today move around 25% of goods yearly transported within the national rail infrastructure. It is no surprise then, that Fercargo's secretary had no hesitation in identifying hauliers' associations – and not the FSI – as the most powerful rivals of his organisation (Interview Fercargo). In fact, Fercargo's policy aims to obtain state subsidies to promote freight transportation by rail. This, in turn, is openly at odds with the annual share of the transport budget that goes to subsidise hauliers providing discounts for motorway tolls and other kinds of refund (Apolloni 2010). Nonetheless, Fercargo's associative policies seem to follow a different logic as, in 2011, it joined Confcommercio rather than Confrasperto. The rationale behind this operation was complex. On the one hand, private railways probably saw Confindustria as hostile, due to the presence of a single large corporation, such as FSI, which proved not to be interested – at least in the perceptions of private operators – in re-launching freight on rail. On the other hand, for Fercargo, the cooperation with Confcommercio was pursued only 'to extend its



capacity to have access to institutional venues', since the lack of lobbying regulation constituted a hurdle for a new association (Interview Fercargo).

To sum up, business group federation within Confindustria and Confcommercio seems to underpin particularistic logics of action. For former monopolies such as the FSI, despite the initial aim of integrating different modal operators, it represented the opportunity to promote and legitimate its new market-oriented policy. On the other hand, both hauliers and private railways joined Confcommercio only to maximise their influence and their access to decisional arenas without any systemic approach.

#### **4. Groups and the political system**

This section explores the relations between transport groups and the political system and how they have been re-shaped by decentralisation, privatisation and liberalisation. In general terms, it is possible to argue that the mix of external institutional constraints – namely EU's market integration – and the financial crisis of the state, have changed the nature of transport policy from being mainly distributive to being more regulative. Therefore, questions arise regarding the impact of such transformation on groups' relations with the political system. Are parties still the dominant actor in this policy domain? If not, who are the main groups' counterparts and how do they interact? Moreover, have groups increased their influence or not? Interviews conducted on a sample of transport business associations and trade unions, together with document analysis, show that groups' interactions with political and bureaucratic actors have momentum and are decisively oriented to the national executive and the administrative system.

As described in [Section 2](#), transport interests aggregate themselves by stratification: no modal integration is incentivised. Local mobility constitutes the most striking example, since the national railways and private and public operators are still today represented by the three different organisations. Moreover, in some branches, such as the freight market, distributive policies encouraging self-employment have fostered the proliferation of groups. Indeed, since 1974, hauliers' associations have been stably represented in the ministerial office charged with regulating the sector. Moving from services to infrastructure, the picture is slightly different: due to the presence of natural and legal monopolies such as railways, motorways and airports, there were traditionally few associations in this branch and they were generally fully representative of each branch. Nonetheless, network industries have also suffered from a lack of integration, which has been understood to be a by-product of a poorly institutionalised policy network (Tebaldi 1999); from 1926, the entire road and rail branches were regulated by two different departments, finally merging in 2001.

What clearly emerges from interviews is that direct transport lobbying is mostly concentrated at the national level, as only 2 groups out of 10 interviewed – namely Anav and Filt-Cgil – declared that they devoted a significant part of their activity to peripheral levels, due to their interest in local mobility. Moreover, associations seem to spend most of their time dealing with bureaucratic counterparts; direct contacts with political actors are also frequent, but mainly concern members of the Cabinet. The role of parties in policymaking is rarely recognised and a couple of interviewees had difficulty in pinpointing party spokespersons for transport. In some cases, such a lack of political direction has been expressly addressed as the main hurdle in implementing successful policy changes. As one of Filt-Cgil's directors put it: 'Politics and not employers is our real concern. We do recognise the need to promote industrial policy through large re-organisations, but as long as political parties have no credible long-term strategy, unions



are forced to adopt a conservative, though not always useful approach' (Interview Filt-Cgil). Similar remarks have been made by Assaeroporti spokespersons. When asked which issues they had mostly been focussing on in 2012, they replied: 'It's impossible! There is no issue to which we are permanently committed. Issues come and go continually; every day there is something new because they [politicians] always invent new rules which, in turn, bring about further problems and conflicts ...' (Interview Assaeroporti).

With reference to indirect lobbying, almost all groups declared a preference for traditional channels, such as the press. In this regard, it is useful to remember that associations affiliated to Confindustria benefit from a special relationship with *il Sole 24 Ore*, which has always devoted more attention to them than have other national newspapers. Among the associations, Federtrasporto and Assaeroporti dedicated particular attention to collecting data on transport trends, which are usually featured in *il Sole 24 Ore*, while air transport statistics constitute the official data normally used by the Department for Transport in its yearbook on the sector.

Anav's strategy is slightly different. Once it left Federtrasporto, the coach association started to collaborate with Milan's Politecnico to promote the financial viability of coach transport as an alternative solution to over-subsidised rail services (Interview Anav). The strategies of Fiap and Fercargo are completely different. The historic truckers' association externalised to Conftrasporto most of its indirect lobbying activities, while private railways are less inclined to find column inches in newspapers and – as its general director revealed – are more inclined to explore the potentialities of social media.

Another pattern of lobbying which emerges concerns corporate channels of interest representation. This feature has to do with the existence of direct pressure activities carried out by corporations due to their having enough financial and organisational skills to provide their institutional relations in-house (Coen 1997; Hart 2004; Germano 2009; Mattina 2010, 2013) or by contract lobbying (Lorenzi 2014). It goes without saying that, in the case of transport, such dynamics are essential, since network industries are always characterised by the presence of large corporations. As an Assaeroporti spokesperson said, 'We pursue only those interests our associates have in common' (Interview Assaeroporti). Each airport company therefore takes measures by itself to defend its domain – which may naturally be at variance with other airport infrastructures. In the case of publicly owned companies, corporate lobbying benefits from institutional instruments provided by corporate governance. National and local executives have, in fact, the opportunity to appoint directors and thus establish a channel of interest representation going far beyond formal venues of direct lobbying, such as parliamentary hearings and so forth (Citroni et al. 2014). The interview with Agen's director revealed how corporate lobbying may sometimes be at odds with the association's daily activities, as 'the railways people took their time in allowing us to do our work in bargaining with the unions' (Interview Agens), and in some cases, they kept pressure actions in-house as they did with media relations.

## **5. Policy change as its own cause: concluding remarks**

As discussed in the Sections 2.1, 3.1 and 3.2, the structure of interests in Italian transport policy has been extremely fragmented and un-integrated across modal branches, due to the under-institutionalised nature of the policy field (Tebaldi 1999). After the major institutional changes of the early 1990s, significant efforts were made to integrate employers' associations. These attempts aimed to ease inter-modal integration and help companies to get ready for incoming competition.

None of the desired outcomes seem to have been reached and, what is more, groups seem to have lost directional capacity in policies they traditionally controlled, as in the case of freight transport. Here, road hauliers continuously dominated the field from the 1960s, but as the market opened up in 2005, no clear dominant coalition was formed and policies in this branch sometimes favoured hauliers and others logistics operators. In terms of their connections with the political system, as said earlier, these associations are stably represented and audited by the Department of Transport. Moreover, hauliers' associations' peak officers have often been appointed as under-secretaries for transport. What may seem a perfect case of capture reveals in recent times some elements of change. In the last Berlusconi government, for instance, this role was assigned to the influential Fai and Conftrasporto president, and for hauliers, this meant the opportunity to influence the re-introduction of safety standards tariffs, which have been claimed to protect small businesses from foreign competitors. Nonetheless, a re-shuffle within Berlusconi's cabinet led to the president in charge being replaced by another one, who came from logistics and had leading roles in Confetra. The alternation of opposite interests within the same coalition government can be interpreted as both the loosening of solid relationships among groups and parties<sup>3</sup> and, in this specific case, as a symptom of hauliers' diminishing influence over decision-making after decades of control.

In branches formerly regulated by monopolies and state-owned enterprises, the role of groups in lobbying has been limited by direct connections between these companies and their regulators. New comers such as Agens tried to unite new and old associations in promoting policy coordination within Federtrasporto, but such a programme failed, due to a lack of leadership and the resilience of pre-existing ties. These ties are represented by the connections between motorways and airport associations and are firmly underpinned by corporate structures deriving from the IRI era and they endure to this day.

More than 20 years of policy ineffectiveness may lead one to think that nothing has really happened and that the current situation merely reproduces previous equilibria among actors. The picture is instead more complicated, as the transport field has undergone profound change on both operational and institutional levels. During the First Republic, the railways were run by a loss-making state department, the freight market was dominated by over-subsidised micro-companies and motorways and airports were part of IRI's corporate governance. Nowadays, the scenario is dramatically different. The national railways have been revitalised and they pursue an aggressive strategy of expansion in local transport, which small companies, either public or private, are trying to resist. The freight sector is still dominated by road hauliers: they continue to be successful in getting subsidies from the Government, but this does not seem to be enough to cope with foreign competitors: their success at the institutional level is thus subject to a process of erosion which started in the operational field. On the other hand, motorways and airport businesses, once privatised, became a core part of national capitalism, along with the main financial institutions.

To sum up, significant changes are happening, underpinned by technological<sup>4</sup> and financial driving forces. Nonetheless, despite initial expectations regarding the role of interest groups in this field, their role still mainly relates to collective bargaining and technical standardisation, and generally groups have a marginal position in policymaking. Interest politics has continued to reproduce old cleavages and niches: in some cases, weak actors have become stronger (FSI) and strong players weaker (hauliers), while others are stably influential (Aiscat). In this sense, the idea of oligopolistic pluralism can thus be fruitfully applied to sectoral analysis. The case of transport policy has revealed that the role of groups may be marginal in a sector where the interests of large corporations, either

public or private, are strong and often able to bypass the intermediation of employers' associations. Groups are thus weak and, above all, fail to re-focus their entire policy towards better integration. Political parties, too, seem to have lost most of their influence in actual decision-making, as groups clearly identified executives and bureaucracies as key counterparts. This finding may also be interpreted with reference to the changing nature of the policy: if political parties during the First Republic largely maintained pre-existing transport policy and layered it with distributive interventions, the increasingly regulatory nature of this domain necessarily undermined parties' centrality in resource allocation. Changes have occurred but, using Wildavsky's words (1979, 63), they have done so as 'their own cause'.

## Notes

1. For a detailed analysis of the motorways privatisation, see Ragazzi (2008) and D'Antoni (2014).
2. In 1990, law no. 240 explicitly introduced a new regulatory setting defining the juridical form of freight villages and allocated significant public funding to incentivise their start up.
3. This, in turn, may be related to the exchange dynamics which happen in each government coalition (Almagisti et al. 2014).
4. The role of technology in changing transport policy has recently been discussed by Tebaldi (2011). For a more general interpretation of this topic, see Prontera (2013).

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