

PHD IN MANAGEMENT

XXV Cycle

**THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PROJECT
MANAGEMENT**

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACTORS, STRATEGIES AND PATHS THAT
LEAD TO THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF A NEW DISCIPLINE**

PhD Candidate:

Luca Sabini

Luiss Guido Carli
Department of Business and Management
Viale Romania, 32
00198 Rome, Italy
lsabini@luiss.it

Supervisors: **Professor Daniel Muzio** Newcastle University

Professor Paolo Boccardelli LUISS Guido Carli University

*ἄνευ γὰρ φίλων οὐδεὶς ἔλοιτ' ἂν ζῆν,
ἔχων τὰ λοιπὰ ἀγαθὰ πάντα*

(Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, book 08)

[Without friends no one would choose to live,
though he had all other goods]

*To my friends and my family,
in particular to Lucia that has always supported me.*

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INTRODUCTION

The constant changes in modern economy, especially over the last 20 years, and the continuous development of new technologies have contributed to modifying society and the way people work. As a result, several new kinds of services have been developed. Since this shift has taken place, professionals have developed different approaches to be able to supply these new services and therefore a wide range of experienced professional figures (Faulconbridge, 2012; Freidson, 1994) has emerged.

Examples of this phenomenon include: the development of ICT sector brought to the emergence of new ICT related figures, such as the *search engine marketing manager* (Sen, 2005) or the IT consultant (Fincham, 2006); the increased level of competition among big corporations lead to a growing need for *management consultancy services* (Fincham, 2006; Kirkpatrick, Kipping, Muzio, & Hinings, 2011); the ‘projectification’ (Case & Piñeiro, 2009; Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Maylor, Brady, Cooke-Davies, & Hodgson, 2006) of organizational life has increased the need for skilled *project managers*.

These new professional figures, when the number of new professionals joining is high, display a tendency to develop collective institutionalized groups that then develop into professional associations; in other words, they embark on what has been historically termed a *professional project* (Suddaby & Viale, 2011). However, these new forms of expertise, such as consultancy and advertising, seem to behave quite differently from the traditional professional groups, which appeared in the past such as law or engineering. These differences are related to the lack of training, qualifications, shared bodies of knowledge and regulations that are usually associated with traditional professions. This raises questions relative to the understanding of possible professionalization patterns that those groups would undertake (Alvesson, 1995; Blackler, 1995; Brint, 1994; Fincham, 1996; Knights, Murray, & Willmott, 1993; Reed, 1996; Scarbrough, 1996; Starbuck, 1992).

As mentioned above, times have changed and, according to the literature, the end of the ‘golden age’ of professionalism (Hanlon, 1999) has encouraged new occupations the pursuit of different professional projects. The fact that times have changed takes different forms. First of all, the new occupations have to deal with the pressure exerted by a variety of stakeholders, including established (traditional) professions, big corporations and the State. There are various reasons why those other players exert their pressure respect to new developing professions.

In Italy one element of tension comes, for instance, from the continuous ‘fight’ with established professions who strive to avoid the erosion of their social privileges, established and legitimized by years of institutional work (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Another point of friction is with big corporations that attempt to gain market benefits by acquiring control of a particular occupation, that in academic literature is analysed through the concept of ‘organizational closure’ (Muzio, Hodgson, Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, & Hall, 2011). Another factor to consider is related to the Italian political economy of the last 20 years. Up until about two decades ago, the State has granted monopoly rights to some professional groups (*Ordini*) since it was in the State's interest to regulate them (Burrage & Torstendahl, 1990); nowadays, due to the recent neo-liberal wave (triggered mainly by the European Union), those monopolies are no longer seen as desirable and the new professions have to develop within a hostile environment.

For a new occupation being hampered by multiple players with contrasting interests, it is important to consider the possibility that the development of new professional projects may not follow the same path as the old, traditional, professions. The involved institutions have proved to be incompatible with the professionalization claims put forward by new occupations (Broadbent, Dietrich, & Roberts, 1997; Reed, 1996). The political and economic changes, which have brought about a hostile attitude to defend exclusive and elite professional privileges (Paton, Hodgson, & Muzio, 2013), have made it necessary to modify the traditional professional strategies. This suggests that new occupations may take a different approach to the traditional idea of professionalization throughout their professionalization process. Commenting on Freidson (1970), Bunker said: “to survive in today's radically changed social and political environment, [...] it will be incumbent on professions to re-establish the rationale and justification for the privileges they enjoy” (Bunker, 1994, p. 1176).

Traditional professions in their original conception had the same organizational structure; over time, however, institutional pressure has moulded their structure forcing them to evolve. For this reason different professions have developed their projects according to slightly different paths. Using the distinction made by Reed (1996), it is possible to observe how expert occupations can be subdivided into three distinctive ideal categories: *collegiate professions*, *organizational professions* and *new expert occupations*. While ‘collegiate professions’ (such as lawyers) have had great success in maintaining a certain degree of independence when it comes to organizing and owning their means of productions, in the ‘organizational professions’ (such as medicine) the story was different. These organizations use professional skills that are not owned and controlled by their members, so basically they have lost some of their original autonomy. The third category comprises the ‘new expert occupations’, i.e. those new occupations (such as management consultancy) that are organized in a completely different way, with most regulatory powers left to the market. This last category includes many occupations that have developed relatively more recently than others and have therefore been less investigated in the literature on professions.

However, I will argue that a complete separation among these three types is neither possible nor appropriate. These typologies of expert occupations, often treated as separate and distinct categories, have actually a lot in common. By way of example, I can say that organizational and collegial professions share several features (as the empirical case analyzed in this thesis will demonstrate). In this work, I will suggest that these latter types

of expert occupations (the ‘new expert occupations’), which clearly feature those characteristics, call for greater attention from the academic research.

The focus of this thesis is on one of those new expert occupations: project management (hereinafter referred to as ‘PM’).

The choice to study PM derives from the fact that it is one of the most successful new expert occupations. PM is successfully carrying out its professionalization project. Indeed, it has been working very actively, through actions undertaken by its main stakeholders, in order to fulfill its own professionalization project. The literature clearly states that it is “important to study occupations whose activity and situation is theoretically interesting as well substantively important” (Muzio, Ackroyd, & Chanlat, 2007, p. 2). Looking at the nature of this discipline, it can be said that *projects* per se have been developed since ancient times (for example the construction of pyramids). However, it is only relatively recently (in the last 50 years) that PM has been recognized as a full-blown occupation (and this is even truer for PM in Italy). When compared to other traditional and institutionalized professions, such as medicine and law, PM as a profession has a very short and recent history. This means, by consequence, that there is much room for each stakeholder to exert its interests upon others actors.

I also believe the dynamic on which this profession is based to be quite interesting. Contrary to all the traditional professions, this occupation was created inside the big multinational corporations and has always had a clear international connotation. Therefore, it has not developed along different peculiar national tracks that subsequently converge to an international dimension. In fact, the opposite was the case. As Muzio et al. (2011) highlight when talking about the ‘born global’ professional associations, “the activities of such associations is distinctly different to their counterparts in architecture, medicine or law, which historically have held national remits” (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011, p. 459). The dynamics between the global and the local level are therefore another reason why I chose this specific occupation for the empirical part.

Whilst most research has been carried out in Anglo-Saxon contexts, this thesis will focus on the Italian context. This study is grounded in a specific national context in which different PM professional associations have developed different strategies, combining and drawing on different approaches to professionalization. I believe that this is important given the lack of work concerning Italian new expert occupations and the existence of different national approaches to professionalization, which distinguish continental societies, such as the Italian one, from their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. Thus analyzing the Italian context may be important when studying a new international professional project such as PM.

Looking at the stakeholders involved in the PM professional project within Italian context, a clear distinction has to be made, since compared to the traditional professions, a lot of new actors, who look after their own interests, have emerged even in the Italian context. Several different factors have changed in the context in which these professions were created. The birth of these professions was driven by the State as an instrument to protect citizens against ‘professionals’ experts who practiced that occupation. Historically professions have been created to standardize the quality level of professional service. Over time, they have always tried to defend themselves from different institutional contexts that no longer deemed them necessary as when they were established (Crompton, 1990). Step by step professions gained more and more power that gave them, over time, the possibility to ‘defend’ themselves against the pressure from new and different institutional environments, with variable levels of success in the different countries. Whenever any changes in the market jeopardized their social privileges, professions used their power to defend themselves (and their position) in order to keep things static and evolve just enough to preserve the social privileges that they had gained over

time. If, for instance, we take into account the previous categories highlighted by Muzio et al. (2007), we can see that while the lawyers were able to maintain their status as 'collegiate profession' (Johnson, 1972), doctors turned into an 'organizational profession' (Reed, 1996). Looking at the factors that have influenced 'traditional' professions as well as at the modern institutional context, it must be concluded that a substantial shift in the strategies of professionalization is necessary in order to develop a new professional project. Indeed, in this institutional context, it appears most unlikely that a new occupation could develop into a profession following a similar professional project to the one followed by the traditional professions.

This thesis adapts to a multi-actor framework, as following (Burrage, Jaraush, & Siegrist, 1990; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2007) professionalization is seen as the spatially and temporally contingent outcome of the negotiations between different actors, each with their own objectives, interests, resources, and capabilities. In the case of project management these include: (1) PM professional associations (Project Management Institute - PMI, International Project Management Association – IPMA, and Istituto Italiano di Project Management - ISIPM); (2) pressure groups (COLAP, CEPAS, CNEL)¹; (3) big corporations (ENI, IBM, HP, Thales-Alenia and Siemens); (4) universities; (5) technical entities (ISO at international level, CEN for Europe, UNI for Italy); (6) the Italian Public Administration; (7) the 'ordini' (the professional associations legally recognized and regulated by Italian law). In this work, an attempt is made to describe this story from the perspective of the above-mentioned players that are involved in this field). In particular, through them (and through their objectives, ideas, tactics and schemes), it is possible to retrace the development path of the PM discipline.

PM professional associations represent the key actor in this field. All interests and tensions oriented toward the professionalization of this occupation are originated by the PM professional associations: PMI, IPMA and ISIPM. These three associations are the catalyst of the vast majority of actions aimed at fulfilling the PM professional project in the Italian context. Even though the contribution given by all other actors involved in this field is important and relevant for this study, rather than being proactive they are only involved marginally and react to the actions taken by the PM professional associations. Professional associations implement several strategies in order to foster the interest of the occupation on one side and of their members, on the other, thus fulfilling their professional project. As evidence that this is a central topic, the analysis of professional groups as institutional agents is drawing an increasing degree of attention also in the research (Scott, 2008). Professional groups consist of people who share similar roles and responsibilities, and who are faced with the same kind of problems despite their being part of different organizations. This helps establish a code of conduct for the group and define the qualifications that the members of the profession ought to have.

This thesis has the aim to retrace the path of the PM professional project by analyzing the objectives, the strategies and the tactics that all these actors have implemented in Italy. The analysis is conducted at different levels. The 'political dimension' reflects the growing influence of this discipline within the economic environment, and here particular reference is made to the recent Italian reform of professions. Another aspect is the 'jurisdictional dimension'. In this context I shall examine the conflicts and the competition among different Italian PM professional associations as well as between them and the more traditional 'ordini', such as the *Ordine degli Ingegneri*. An element that will be taken into account relates to the transnational differences between Italy and other countries (mainly the Anglo-Saxon ones). The last aspect relates to the 'theoretical dimension'. Here, I shall analyze the professional project as a process of institutionalization of a new form of expertise.

¹ A complete explanation of those associations will be provided in methodology and findings chapters.

To sum up, all professions, both long-established ones (generally called ‘traditional professions’) and new ones, have soon developed (and are often still in the process of developing) a professional project. The professional project is specific to each profession and reflects the time in which the profession was born, under which circumstances and the actors involved in that particular context (can be also called stakeholders). In some cases the professional project has been successful, like in the case of ‘lawyers’ (Muzio, 2003); in other cases the project is still incomplete, like in the case of ‘accountants’ (Richardson, 1997), whereas in others it has only just started and is evolving very fast, like in the case of ‘project management’ in the Italian context.

Analyzing the Italian PM professional project is stimulating for different reasons: (1) *Time*, especially in the last decade, a debate concerning the reform of the professions has been taking place in Italy, sparked off in particular by a recent law (n.4/2013) that is seeking to make order in ‘non-regulated by law professions’ (such as PM); this is therefore a time of radical changes in this context; (2) *Topic*, the study of PM could be stimulating since the number of new members joining the profession is rapidly increasing and PM might adopt innovative methods to develop its professional project; (3) the Italian context is quite different from the Anglo-Saxon ones that are traditionally the most studied in literature (especially the way professions are conceived and regulated); (4) *Stakeholders*, they range from the single individuals (professionals who decide to join this discipline) to the collective (e.g.: public agencies, lobbies, big corporations, ...); Burrage (1990) maintains that new professions have to continuously negotiate with the various institutions in a given organizational field. The activities carried out by the actors of a professionalization project within a given field are mainly aimed at seeking legitimation for the practices that belong to that profession.

Those activities, aimed at seeking legitimation, could be included in the broad process of institutionalization: “every project of professionalization contains within it a reciprocal project of institutionalization” (Suddaby, 2013)². As matter of fact, professionalization can be seen as part of the process of institutionalization (Scott, 2008), and also it “... focuses on the process by which different occupations reach the status of a profession” (Abel & Lewis, 1988, p. 4). The status of profession, by a given occupation, is enabled through the acting of players belonging to that field in order to “institutionalize” the field itself.

The contribution to the neoinstitutional theory of this thesis has two goals: (1) help understand the dynamics that drive the work of institutional agents, (2) consider the professionalization as a subset of the broader process of institutionalization as maintained by Scott, Ruef, Mendel, & Caronna (2000).

Drawing on an extensive range of data, interviews and other archival sources, I tried to trace the development of this field and how, over time, the actors involved in this process have influenced this development. Based on Scott et al. (2000), I consider, professions and professionals as agents in the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions, with particular focus on the importance of studying contemporary patterns of professionalization within the new occupational fields.

These considerations have emerged as a result of the investigation carried out on the actors who populate this field. By taking into account the various objectives and interests, and by analyzing how various players have acted to pursue their specific interests, I have managed to reconstruct the path of the professional project implemented so far by this occupation.

The thesis is organized as follows.

² In a presentation within a seminar in Manchester Business School (November 2013).

First of all, I will provide a review of the literature to illustrate the theories regarding professions and professionalism. The aim is not to present the entire and detailed body of theories on the sociology of professions, but rather to focus on some particular aspects of this stream of research. I shall give an overview of the logic of the professions and of the professional project by analyzing the setting in which new occupations are developing. In the last part of this review, I shall consider recent theories on professionalism. The chapter thereafter concerns the methodology. It focuses on the description of the unit of analysis, that is the Italian PM field, and the approach used to analyze it. After the methodology, I shall introduce the findings. This part is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is about the history of PM and the context in which PM is developing its professionalization project. The second chapter contains a description and an analysis of strategies that PM professional associations have adopted. The third chapter of findings highlights the different philosophical conceptions that PM professional associations have with regard to the PM discipline. Finally, I shall present the discussions and my conclusions in which I shall make an analytical summary of the topics covered in this work and I shall try to draw some conclusions on different aspects, such as: the parallel between traditional and new professionalization projects, the peculiarities of the Italian context and the possibility to consider the project of professionalization as part of the institutionalization process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professions and professionalism have been studied from a great variety of perspectives. As a result, a lot of different definitions and theories have been developed (Torstendahl, 2005). This calls for a general clarification of what is included in these concepts. “The vast literature on professionalism reflects the complexity of this concept and shows that there are many different approaches to explore the concept” (Hilferty, 2008, p. 170).

In this chapter of the thesis, I shall focus first of all on the literature related to *knowledge economy*. As matter of fact, as a result of technological development and of innovations occurring in the modern economy, knowledge has gradually become more and more important (Metcalf & Ramlogan, 2005). For this reason, nowadays it is common to use the expression *knowledge economy* when referring to the importance that knowledge has acquired and to its application in the economy. Besides the concept of *knowledge economy*, the notion of *knowledge workers* (Horibe, 1999) is used when referring to those workers who rely mainly on knowledge to provide their services or to carry out their job. The need for this kind of workers translates directly into a growing manifestation of new knowledge based occupations or *expert occupation* (Salter, 1994).

Knowledge workers, unlike traditional jobs who relies mainly on physical skills, are “high level employees who apply theoretical and analytical knowledge, acquired through formal education” (Janz, Colquitt, & Noe, 1997, p. 878). This definition helps in clearing the principle that differentiates knowledge-based from non-knowledge-based work. The importance of this kind of workers is growing and “intellectual capabilities and mental skills are becoming ever more significant to wealth creation, replacing reliance on physical skills and the bureaucratic control of resources, and enabling creative and flexible responses to the uncertainties of the global economy” (Blackler, Crump, & McDonald, 1998, p. 69). Some examples of these types of expert occupations include: management consultants, information systems designers, public relations specialists, and so on (Muzio et al., 2007).

In this context, the expert labor thesis argued that the emergence of new forms of knowledge is at the root of fundamental changes in the social organization of skilled labor (Blackler, Reed, & Whitaker, 1993; Blackler, 1995; Brint, 1994; Reed, 1996; Starbuck, 1992; Wikstrom & Normann, 1994). This reflection on social changes in the organization of skilled labor and the proliferation of various types of expert occupations, whose basic component are intellectual skills, raises the question of the extent to which these professions can develop. The question is even more interesting if we take into account the fact that these new occupations emerged so rapidly that they were lacking the extended training, qualifications and modes of regulation associated with traditional professions. Consequently, one has to wonder: will the new emerging occupations fulfill different occupational strategies and organizational model compared to the past? The determinants that brought traditional professions to develop certain strategies are no longer valid. Is this enough to cause a radical paradigm shift in the professional project of new occupations? Or will new occupations just adapt the same strategies to the new context?

This thesis tries to address this kind of questions by way of an empirical analysis carried out in the Italian context, which focuses on one of these new expert occupations: project management.

Against this background, it is worth reflecting on how this type of occupations may (or may be forced to) follow different professionalization paths, compared to traditional professions. The strategies that drive those new occupations will be tailored to the contemporary structure of the economy and, for this reason, they will be influenced by the new players and by their objectives. In organizational and sociological theories there is no single and univocal definition of *professions* and *professionalism*. However, the sociology of the professions offers a possible classification: (1) theories that try to define professions based on a given set of characteristics, such as *structuralist* and *functionalist* approaches including the trait theory (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933); (2) theories that try to understand and demonstrate the dynamics that drive professions to gain and maintain power (Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977); (3) theories that try to analyze the professions based on their *professional project* (Hughes, 1971; Larson, 1977); (4) theories that focus on professionalism as a rhetoric or *discourse* (Grey, 1994). Some of those approaches have already been very well illustrated and analyzed by Macdonald (1995). Therefore, to the exception of the forth theory, they shall not be analyzed in depth in this thesis. In this literature review, I deliberately decided not to analyze the entire body of theories on the sociology of the professions. I have selected exclusively the theories which serve the purpose of this thesis, namely studying the peculiarities of occupational development in Italy.

The literature review investigates in this first step how traditional professions have developed. In doing so, I shall briefly illustrate the traditional characteristics of the professions.

I shall then move onto discussing professionalism, as an ideal-type, in relation to alternative occupational logics, such as managerialism and entrepreneurship (Freidson, 2001). Freidson, in particular, compares the logic of the professions to the logic of the free market (and perfect competition) as well as to the logic of organization (and standardization of production). Starting from his idea of *third logic*, it is possible to highlight the distinctive characteristics and the importance that the logic of the professions has compared to the other two.

Once the professional logic has been highlighted, I shall present some approaches to the study of professions, compared to other forms of knowledge-based work. In particular, I will follow the schematization developed by Reed (1996) which stresses: the importance of different knowledge bases in various professions; the power strategy adopted by different kinds of professions and the numerous organizational structure that they have

developed. The paragraph concludes with the consideration of the role of the State in influencing the development of different professions (Johnson, 1993).

In the third section, I will review the recent debates concerning the study of the professions, which may be relevant to our understanding of contemporary forms of expertise and their occupational development. These include debates around *professionalism as a discourse* (Grey, 1994), as well as the emerging work around *corporate professionalism* (Thomas & Thomas, 2013).

The final paragraph summarizes the main concepts emerged from the analyzed theories trying to recap the developments which have occurred in this discipline.

Meanings of ‘profession’ and ‘professionalism’

A brief clarification on the meaning of *profession* and *professionalism* is required in order to avoid misinterpretations in this literature review. A profession can be defined as “a paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification” (OED, 2013) whereas an occupation is defined as “a job or profession” (OED, 2013). According to those definitions, while a profession is necessarily also an occupation, the opposite is not always true. This means that an occupation could be or become a profession on condition that the requisite of “prolonged training and formal qualification” are implicated in the activity. Anyway, besides the vocabulary definition, the difference between a profession and an occupation are becoming increasingly narrow: “services that were once the exclusive preserve of licensed professionals are being delivered by specialized non-professionals who may or may not work under the nominal supervision of a professional” (Kritzer, 1999, p. 713). This means a shift in the activities that were once performed only by a professional (since those were reserved to that particular profession), to other non-professional workers.

Therefore an occupation can become a profession when it starts to control its own work and meets the conditions highlighted above by OED. Following this line of thought, I shall move a bit further and expand on the conditions that qualify as a profession. “professionalism may be said to exist when an organized occupation gains the power to determine who is qualified to perform a defined set of tasks, to prevent all others from performing that work, and to control the criteria by which to evaluate performance” (Freidson, 2001, p. 12). Freidson's definition perfectly fits the aim of this thesis, namely to analyze the actors, the strategies and the paths that lead to the professionalization of the PM discipline.

The logic of professions

The importance that professions have in the contemporary world is often underestimated, although the influence that they exert through institutional pressure plays a pivotal role in shaping modern markets and institutions (Scott, 2008). The analysis of how the markets work according to the organizational theory is driven mainly by two predominant logics: the idea of perfect competition and the idea of standardization and efficiency (Freidson, 2001).

Those concepts, which correspond to Weber's ideal types³, have been theorized in order to describe market dynamics and the reasons behind the actions of the main actors on those markets. Just like any other theoretical concept, they are abstract forms of reality starting from a simplifying assumption of it (Weber, 1978). For this reason, those concepts are suited to describing some instances of reality and fail to describe some others.

³ Thus so are abstract elements of a given phenomenon, but they are not intended to correspond to all of the characteristics of any one particular case.

The logic driving perfect competition on the markets relates to an environment in which everyone is free to buy and sell anything to everyone without any additional costs to get information about the purchased goods or services (Mas-Colell, Whinston, & Green, 1995, Chapter 10). The final price is always strictly correlated with the quality of the purchased goods and strikes a balance between demand and supply; this means there are no sunk costs. The logic of standardization and efficiency gives rise to a market in which the production and the distribution of goods are arranged by large organizations which also establish the qualifications that must be met in order to be employed in a given job. Those organizations try to standardize production (and increase efficiency) in order to provide reliable products at a reasonable price (Alchian & Demsetz, 1972; Ouchi, 1980; Williamson & Ouchi, 1981).

Once identified in theory, those two logics have been widely investigated and used to describe market dynamics and the endeavors made by market players to achieve economic success. The logic of perfect competition is linked with the importance of commercialism and takes into account the central role that markets play in modern economies. The logic of standardization and efficiency is linked with managerialism, and according to it organizations are considered to be the most important actor within the economic environment. In associations and somehow in contrast to those two logics, Freidson (1986) complements the logic of professionals by pointing out that in the modern economy workers have organized themselves in very well institutionalized associations. The idea behind the third logic, which is called professionalism, is related to the possibility that markets are also characterized by (Freidson, 2001, p. 1) “workers that have specialized knowledge that allows them to provide especially important services with the power to organize and control their own work”. As Faulconbridge & Muzio (2007) say echoing Freidson (1994): professionalism is, thus, recast as a particular work organization method where the occupation itself, “rather than consumers in an open market (entrepreneurship) or functionaries of a centrally planned and administered firm or state (managerialism)” (Freidson, 1994, p. 32) retain control over work, including “the social and economic methods of organizing and performing this work” (Freidson, 1970, pp. 185–186). Those professionals have a great power because ‘controlling their own work’ through their own occupational associations means that even if they are employed by the organizations, they still retain their autonomy and no one can control their job besides themselves.

The three logics summarized above are among the main logics regulating the markets. Most certainly, none of them is always true. However, while the first two (perfect competition and standardization and efficiency) are very well theorized and considered in academic studies, this is less the case for the professional logic.

Understanding the main characteristics of a profession

Thinking about the history of humankind, the origin of an occupation, as a set of particular tasks to accomplish a given job, is the result of the division of labor and the consequent specialization into different jobs that it originates (Trèpos, 1996). A single man could not perform all the actions to produce food, provide for clothing and so on; for this reason, in order to improve the efficiency in accomplishing a complex task, it was necessary to split up all the actions in such a way that everyone would be accountable for the part of the job that he/she performs (Ford, 1922). In this perspective, a given job could become an occupation because, due to its particular nature, it forced those who performed it to become experts in the required actions.

Due to the evolution of technology as well as to the inevitable changes in the society, a lot of different kinds of new jobs develop and become necessary within this new structure. Following the idea of the specialization in the division of labor, those changes foster the creation of new occupations according to those new activities. Suffice it to about how the continuous technology evolution (such as the advent of the digital era) led to the development of many different occupations (e.g. web developer, database administrator, community manager,

and so on); or about the *projectification* (Case & Piñeiro, 2009; Maylor et al., 2006; Midler, 1995) of organizational life, an issue which is closer to the subject under study in this thesis, which is leading to the growth of occupation related projects (one above all: project management).

Based on the definition of OED, quoted in the previous paragraph, some differences between an occupation and a profession start to emerge. On one side, the nature of the job performed in the professions is so specialized that is inaccessible to those lacking the required training and experience (Abbott, 1991). On the other side, a second difference may be deduced from the first: since the training and the experience required are so peculiar, professionals (through professional associations) are the only ones that can control and evaluate their own work (Freidson, 2001).

Starting from the first element, discretion is one of the aspects which make the difference between an occupation and a profession (Freidson, 2001). This concept is at the basis of the actions performed by professionals in their activities. Talking about the specialization and the division of labor, due to their restricted, circumstantial and detailed nature, some activities have a knowledge base which requires a different solution for every different situation. In any case that happens in the daily job of a professional, the tasks and their results are believed to be so indeterminate that attention should be paid to the variations happening in every individual case (Boreham, 1983). The activities that are carried out by a professional cannot be standardized⁴ because the change in the nature of the performance is never equal between one service and another. Every situation tends to be unique, even if the differences are minor (Friedmann, 1964).

Another element of difference that distinguishes a profession from an occupation pertains to who has the responsibility to control the work performed by a professional. This concept is also known as the ‘control over the production of the producers’ (Abel, 1988), intended as the aim of limiting the access to a certain field of practice. In order to explain these concepts, it is necessary to get a deeper understanding of the concept of the division of labor. Many researchers in the field of classical sociology, including Durkheim and Marx, have studied this topic coming to different conclusions. While Marx was against the commitment to a single specialization for the whole working life, Durkheim was a supporter of specialization.

Specialization and division of labor could also be read in the light of the three logics expressed by Freidson (2001). In this case, the entity who takes the control over the specialization of labor will determine the structure of the occupation. Table 1 highlights the characteristics of the three different logics. The proportion of different occupations is high in the logic of free market because customers will decide which kind of occupation they need. Conversely, this proportion is low in an occupational logic. The concept of the permanence of differentiation should also be considered. In an occupational logic-dominated market those occupations tend to be permanent, while in a free market they will change very easily. The predominant type of specialization in the free market is everyday specialization because the consumers are the ones who decide here and, consequently, everything is always changing, since the consumers decide (and the suppliers have to adjust to those changes). Conversely, in an occupational logic-dominated market specialization would be discretionary and in a bureaucracy-predominant market type it would be mechanical.

<i>Type of market</i>	<i>Port of entry</i>	<i>Requirements for entry</i>	<i>Typical career line</i>	<i>Predominant knowledge</i>
Free	Open	Consumer choice	Disorderly, irregular	Everyday

⁴ There is no doubt that different discretionary levels exist. This means that some tasks are simpler and can be easily standardized whilst some others are more complex and need a higher rate of discretion.

Bureaucratic	Personnel office	Formal job description varying by position	Regular, vertical within firm	Variable by position, but firm specific
Occupational	Practice institution	Training credential	Horizontal across firms	Discretionary, transferable

Table 1: Variation in labor market participation by type of market. (Freidson, 2001, p. 82)

Another element that characterizes a profession is that “the organized occupation creates the circumstances under which its members are free from control by those who employ them” (Freidson, 2001, p. 12). This means that an employer cannot hire a professional for his services; it is the profession itself that will decide the rules under which professional services can be dispensed.

In his book “The third logic”, Freidson (2001) states that one last important characteristic for professions are those claims, values and ideas that provide the rationale for the institution of professionalism, namely the *ideology*. The ideology that a profession has goes beyond the mere purpose of supplying services to those who require them (the clients). The claimed independence of a profession leads members to act according to certain values and ideas even against the client’s requirement, in order to pursue the pure ideology of that profession. That is very different from just supplying a service in compliance with a given contract. Surprisingly, there is no difference in this regard between in the ideology adopted by traditional professions and new occupations. The moment in which ethics is elaborated and the values (served by that discipline) clarified in the mind of young (and future) professionals is mainly related to those long training periods that all disciplines that are (or pretend to be) professions commonly share. Talking about professions, Freidson (2001, p. 123) states that “their service is to the differing substantive goals appropriate to their specialized disciplines” opposing to the idea of pure professional service supply to the client.

From this perspective, it clearly emerges how professionalism constitutes a further characteristic logic distinct from the market and from the standardization logic. This specific occupational logic reproduces the state of the modern economy where, due to the rise of the knowledge-based economy, new expert occupations are acquiring a growing level of importance. As showed in this paragraph, this logic brings with it a set of distinctive features that distinguish it from the other two logics (free market, and standardization and efficiency).

Critique on the main characteristics of the professions

Those exposed in the previous paragraph were some of the most relevant elements that some academic literature highlights as distinctive features of professional occupations. Nevertheless, some other authors see those elements as empty statements, without any real validity, which self-perpetuate the institution of a profession.

For example Alvesson (1993) is very critical respect to Freidson (2001) since he asserts that all ‘claims’ and ‘statements’ of the professionals (regarding their role and their mission for the collective good or superior morality which they declare to abide by) are only self-referential statements that aim to maintain the status of the professionals (and their social privileges, such as the possibility to operate under monopoly conditions). He explicitly declares that “professionals’ statements about themselves and, to some extent, researchers’ reproductions of such statements, can be understood as elements in their strategies for achieving and maintaining the status of a profession (Alvesson, 1993, p. 999). And also “certain knowledge, altruism, rationality and neutrality are seen as ideologies for justificatory purposes” (Brante, 1988). In this view, the main objective of a profession when implementing its strategies is the achievement of social closure and preventing other groups from performing the same jobs or tasks (Selander, 1989; quoting from Alvesson 1993).

In opposition to those critiques, Freidson (2001) sees social closure as a condition necessary to the proper execution of professional services. He criticizes those who use the terms “monopoly” and “social closure” with a negative connotation and not neutrally, just for deprecative purposes.

The literature is thus polarized between those who support distinctive professional characteristics as a tool to justify the different treatment that the ‘status’ of profession grants in modern and western economies, and those that claim that professional occupations should be on a par with the general category of *knowledge workers* (Alvesson, 1995). The critique is often extended, not only to the characteristics of a profession *per se*, but also to the role that professional associations play in pushing professional social privileges (Fores, Glover, & Lawrence, 1991, p. 97):

We are lulled into a sense of false scientificity: specialism, rationality, and scientific predictability allay the uncertainties of the human condition. But:

- applying knowledge is a highly incomplete account of what professionals do;
- there is no cut off point between professional jobs and other jobs; applying knowledge is an element in many occupations;
- the knowledge being applied does not for the most part partake of the Newtonian quality;
- close association with knowledge/science does not make human actors themselves scientific or rational;
- the focus on knowledge-rationality-predictability of outcomes distracts from the more important qualities of skill, creativity, judgment, and savoir faire, and the constructive response to the uncertain and un-programmable.

This last critique is a very strong assault on social privileges that professions build around their practices. Fores et al. (1991) hit out every reason for the professions to build any protectionist measure to ensure the social privileges that they usually experience.

After having highlighted how the growing importance of new expert occupations has generated a certain interest (and criticism) among academics, I will analyse the following paragraphs how the features of the professional logic are related to the modern contexts.

The setting for new occupations

In the large set of traditional professions and new occupations there are different dimensions and visions of professionalism. This difference comes from the different institutional fields and the different times in which traditional professions and new expert occupations have developed. In particular, an important issue to consider to gain a theoretical understanding of professionalism is that new knowledge based occupations (such as project management, management consultancy, etc...), rather than professionalizing in a ‘classical’ way, have adopted other occupational strategies and more entrepreneurial, managerial and informational configurations (Muzio, Kirkpatrick, & Kipping, 2011). Thus the landscape of expert occupations is fragmented, whilst in the past professionalism was seen as the only model for knowledge-intensive work. In Table 2, Reed (1996) identifies two additional forms of expertise besides the traditional independent and liberalist professionalism: *organizational professions* and *knowledge workers*. He also postulates that the latter, knowledge workers, may be more appealing and competitive in the current political economy (this will be further clarified in the paragraph on the role of the State).

Looking at the past, the birth of professions was driven by the nation-state as an instrument to protect citizens against professional experts who practiced that occupation. Historically, professions have been created to standardize the quality level of professional services. Since they were created, they have always tried to defend themselves from different institutional contexts that no longer consider the professions as necessary

as at the time when they were established (Evetts, 1998). Thus professionals have become central and prestigious participants in world society (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997).

The sociological study of professions began in the early twentieth century following a functionalist approach that used to consider professions as systems that contain within them a given set of different values and norms (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933); those studies evolved to a more structuralist approach that considers professions as entities, with a lot of studies trying to find the distinctive elements that distinguish one profession from the others (Millerson, 1964). At the same time, some studies highlight the processes through which an occupation achieves or claims to achieve a professional status (Caplow, 1954; Millerson, 1964; Wilensky, 1964), thus considering *professionalization as a process*.

In order to develop this chapter following an order, first of all I will take into account some important elements highlighted by Reed (1996) and presented in Table 2. This table summarizes the main cognitive, political and structural characteristics of three expert groups. In particular, the elements highlighted are: *knowledge base*, *power strategy* and *organizational form*.

Expert Groups	Knowledge Base	Power Strategy	Organizational Form	Occupational Types
Independent / liberal profession	abstract; codified; cosmopolitan; rational	monopolization	collegiate	doctors; architects; lawyers
Organizational profession	technical; tacit; local; political	credentialism	bureaucracy	managers; administrators; technicians
Knowledge workers	esoteric; non-substitutable; global; analytical	marketization	network	financial/business consultant; project/r&d engineers; computer/it analysts

Table 2: Expert Division of Labor in “Late Modernity” (Reed, 1996)

The knowledge base

According to Reed (1996), the distinction between the different kinds of professionalization strategies can be derived from the analysis of the different kinds of knowledge bases that constitute the core of that occupation. In particular, he points that different knowledge bases of by old and new professions can be divided into three groups (see Table 2): (1) abstract, codified, cosmopolitan, rational; (2) technical, tacit, local, political; (3) esoteric, non-substitutable, global, analytical. Each of these groups is associated with a different type of occupational form. The abstract and codified knowledge is linked mainly with independent professions; the technical and tacit knowledge with organizational professions; and knowledge workers are mainly associated with esoteric and non-substitutable knowledge.

In general, the capability of a given profession to survive in the economic and institutional context lies in what Fincham et al. (1994) call *blackboxing* their expertise, that is the compartmentalization of the key elements of expert knowledge base and the technical instrumentation in the way that knowledge becomes simplified and standardized in a more mobile and portable form. Each of these knowledge types can be linked with the typology of expert groups identified by Muzio et al. (2008): traditional or collegiate professions, organizational professions and new expert occupations. (Reed, 1996)

According to Reed (1996), traditional professions (as well as liberal/independent professions) have been the most effective at *blackboxing* their highly specialized knowledge. This attitude led the knowledge base of traditional professions to be considered as “codifiable and generic knowledge allied to complex tacit skills derivable from, but not reducible to, rational scientific knowledge acquired by protracted periods of study in higher education institutions” (Larson, 1990, p. 36). This complex balance between theoretical and abstract

knowledge, and practical knowledge is crucial to achieve the social and occupational closure pursued by professional associations (Abbott, 1988). As Reed clearly explains: “the basic power strategy of the liberal/independent professions has been one of monopolizing and policing abstract knowledge and related technical skills as they are applied to specific areas of work” (Reed, 1996, p. 584).

The difference compared to the kind of knowledge that constitutes the organizational professions relates, on the one hand, to the nature of knowledge that is more “organization-specific” or localized and, on the other hand, to the lack of the abstract codification and the generic application typical of the established professions (Child, 1982). An example of an organizational profession is HR managers who are required to know the procedures and to acknowledge the culture of the organization they work for. Conversely, lawyers, which are a good example of independent profession, are required to master the laws and the legal principles and techniques. The situation in organizational professions led them to “lacking the special legitimacy that is supplied by the connection of abstraction with general values” (Abbott, 1988, p. 103). This different kind of knowledge is understandable if we take into account the fact that, having their roots in the bureaucracy, the cognitive and technical capacities of the organizational professions are limited and constrained by the organizational strategies in which they are embedded.

The third type of expert group holds a slightly different knowledge base. This group is less concerned with formal occupational structures and more focused on cognitive and technical skills which can provide political advantages in a wide range of task domains (Blackler et al., 1993; Fincham et al., 1994). The key characteristic and “the pattern that characterizes knowledge workers is an ‘esoteric and intangible’ knowledge base” (Fincham, 1996, p. 19). This kind of knowledge is very fluid and strongly dependent on the situation. For these reasons, this kind of knowledge is also very difficult to standardize and incorporate within a formalized routine (Hinings, Brown, & Greenwood, 1991; Reich, 1991). In this way, professionals who choose this occupation pursue a strategy that is inherently resistant to incursions of organizations that try to rationalize and control them. For this reason, this occupation is particularly suited to sectors (i.e. R&D, information services, project management, etc.) where great importance is attached to uniqueness, innovation and expertise directed to the future value (Machlup, 1980; Starbuck, 1992). This kind of knowledge pushes knowledge workers far from bureaucratic and “administrative structures typically associated with both the liberal and organizational professions” (Reed, 1996, p. 586).

Power Strategy

Some academic work underpin the idea that professions are not special types of occupations, but rather forms of occupational control (Johnson, 1972, 1993). In his studies, Johnson, analyses the power asymmetry which characterizes the relationship between producer and consumer in certain professional contexts. The distance and the uncertainty in this relation increases when the skills and the activities of a given occupational group become more and more structured; an element of structural uncertainty or *indeterminacy* (Jamous & Pelloile, 1970) penetrates the producer/consumer relationship. The knowledge of those who supply the *professional* service is so distant from the one of consumers that this creates some *indeterminacy* and this gives them a great power. Indeed, the greater this indeterminacy, the greater the social distance separating the consumer from the producer. “Power relations will determine if this uncertainty and occupational distance is reduced to the producers’ or to the consumers’ advantage” (Johnson, 1972 borrowed from Muzio, 2003, p. 27). The political and technical resources available to professionals give them the possibility to manage this situation of relational asymmetry to their own benefit; in this way, they can have the control over their own work defining the nature of the tasks and regulating their execution (such as the decisions on service planning, and performance and delivery thereof).

Ravetz (1971) emphasizes how, according to him, the quality of professional services is gathered. The authority to determine the quality of a service lies exclusively with the professionals (in terms of knowledge, technical ability and tacit skills) and for this reason they have the right to decide. As underlined in previous paragraph, the professions are recognized as possessing a right to self-governance, covering also the criteria for admission to the profession, training and accreditation, knowledge creation and management, the policing and discipline of professional behavior, the provision and enforcement of codes of conduct and the regulation of occupational and organizational practices (Muzio, 2003).

To summarize the vision of Johnson (1972), it is possible to say that basically he considers professionalism as a particular method of controlling work. Going back to the concept of 'ideology' in the professions highlighted by Freidson (2001), it can be argued that the ideology of professionalism, which lies behind the idea of pursuing the public interest, is fully autonomous and independent from external regulation.

Besides Johnson, the analysis of the professions though the lens of power is carried out by many other researchers (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961; Berlant, 1975; Freidson, 1970; McKinlay, 1973; Rueschemeyer, 1973) who basically reject all professional traits because they consider them just ideological. Those authors gave rise in the mid-seventies to the "power approach" to the study of professions. However, rather than being a generic method to study professions, this approach has taken the connotation of a single characteristic on which profession can be analyzed (Freidson, 1983; Hall, 1983; Macdonald, 1995).

The development in this area of research depends on how the 'power' it is considered. If power is considered only as an attribute that occupation may possess or not, then any development will be limited. Conversely, if power is conceived as a continuous process of interaction between the profession and the market (alliances, formulation of strategies, involvement of different social classes) the developments in this theoretical framework can be more and more fruitful (Muzio, 2003).

According to the literature review presented above, some authors favor the vision of power as interaction. Johnson (1972) identifies the professions and the market as two facing elements: one (the professions) is compact and well organized and the other (the market) is a highly heterogeneous, disorganized and atomized. The achievement of a given occupational structure is determined only by the different balance of power in the society at a particular point in time. It is the distribution of power in the society "which ultimately determines the way in which the producers of goods have related to their customers and clients" (Johnson, 1972, p. 37). For example, the professions which developed in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are inevitably influenced by the aristocratic elite who it was in power at the time. For their part, the professions which develop nowadays will certainly be influenced by the presence of large globalized corporations that dominate the market. This view of power is thus clearly influenced by a conception that considers power as an interaction of actors. Considering all the studies that adopt this conception or view with regard to power, at least three different conclusions may be drawn (Muzio, 2003, p. 48): (1) the prioritization of dysfunctional aspects (such as monopoly) over the ideology and superior morality; the mood has definitely changed from one of professional celebration to one of condemnation, as warnings against *the tyranny of expertise* (Chafetz, 1996) and professional self-interest have started to replace the apologetic celebration of professionals as *honored servants of public need* (Freidson, 1986). (2) Occupational outcomes as negotiated and dependent on *power relations* (Johnson, 1972). (3) The debate on de-professionalization (that directly derives from the second point); if professionalism rests on the professional power and ability to impose their rules and to fight with everything which reduces or mediates occupational asymmetry.

In conclusion, we can say that depicting main difference in power strategies it is possible to find how the basic power strategy for independent professions has been to monopolize and police abstract knowledge. Conversely, organizational professions base their power strategies upon credentialism (counting on diplomas, professional licenses or academic degrees and other formal certifications), while knowledge workers are more oriented towards technological skills that easily guarantee them several political advantages (in a wide range of task domains, Fincham et al., 1994, pp. 265–280).

Organizational Forms - Different development strategies

The great institutional power gained by traditional professions gave them the possibility to ‘defend’ themselves against the pressure from new and different institutional environments (with different levels of success in each country) as long as (external) changes and (internal) evolution were taking place. Indeed, old professions are all traditionally organized in the same way. However, due to different kinds of organizational pressure brought to bear over time, they have developed following slightly different occupational development projects.

As a result of the institutional changes and the increasing pressure exerted by the various actors involved, each profession has responded by evolving in a different way. Taking into account a distinction made by Muzio et al. (2008), the ideal categories of expert occupations can be divided into three distinctive types: collegiate professions, organizational professions and new expert occupations⁵. While “collegiate professions” (such as lawyers) had some success in maintaining a certain degree of independence in organizing and owing their means of production (Johnson, 1972), in the “organizational professions” (such as medicine) the story was different (Reed, 1996). In the first case, the collegiate professions develop into a “hybrid organizational form consisting of selected elements of collegiality and hierarchy” (Freidson, 1986, p. 56); in the second case, the organizational professions have been tightened into bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1979): organizations use professional skills that are not owned and controlled by members of the profession itself, so basically they lost some of their original autonomy (Ackroyd, 1996). Lazega (2001) strongly underlines the difference between the characteristics of a collegial profession and the ones of bureaucracy. For example, he distinguishes between professional partnerships, where profit and losses are shared among persons who are ideally equal, and traditional bureaucracy, where the power is hierarchically distributed.

The ‘new expert occupations’ are those new occupations (such as consultancy) that are organized in a completely different way, with most regulatory powers left to the market. Their typical organizational form is a network of relations that they build in the market where they work.

The role of the State

To analyze the role of the State it is necessary to take into account that in different periods, different nations have dealt with this topic in different ways. Each one of the three presented forms is connected with distinctive political economies. The collegial profession, for example, was originated in the 19th century in a nation-state in which the laissez-faire doctrine was predominant and advocated for a small State and a free market. The organizational profession emerged in the period of the welfare state dominated by large and conglomerate corporations. The new professions are conceived in a context of globalization, technological revolution and political trend towards de-regulation.

However, even the nation-states face the influence of international organizations pressurizing to adopt shared measures for the regulation of profession (Evetts, 2003). State may play a slightly different role in different nation, but in broad terms it follows the same guidelines. In this thesis, I refer to to main guidelines of western

⁵ Or as Reed (1996) distinguishes three different organizational forms in which they manifest: *collegiate*, *bureaucracy* and *network*.

countries (mainly Europe and the United States). What has been done in the early '90s, with the distinction between the *Anglo-Saxon* and the *Continental* modes of professionalism (Collins, 1990, p. 98), is now obsolete (Evetts, 2010).

For the last 30 years, the State has been pushing towards the logic of the free market. Based on the principles of neo-classical economics, namely the importance of fostering competition, promoting cost-effectiveness and allowing consumers' choice, the dominant logic has been the one of deregulation (Freidson, 2001). This logic does not only affect the economy but also a wide range of institutions, including the professions (Johnson, 1993).

The influence of the deregulation policy has created a hostile environment for the professions that (as explained in the previous paragraph) follow a different logic. In this "hostile" environment, the profession that were already established have tried to preserve their integrity using all the institutional power that they have developed (Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin, & Waring, 2012; Lok & de Rond, 2013). In practice, this led to little deregulation for established professions: "markets in professional services may have been reconstructed; they have not been freed. The state has been rolled back, only to be reconstructed in another, equally pervasive form" (Johnson, 1993, p. 140).

This is not the case for emergent professions that could not grow in such a hostile environment and evolved following different professionalization strategies and tactics (Muzio et al., 2007).

The difference in the type of expert labor presented in Table 2 ("knowledge base", "power strategy" and "organizational form") exists since the nation-state and the economic environment have started changing and "professions are identified with a particular phase of state development." (Evetts, 1998). The different characteristics of market, State and economy and the development of the so-called knowledge society have meant that the new occupations organize themselves following new forms and innovative strategies compared to the occupations of the past.

The so-called "traditional professions" (such as medicine or law) are the kind of occupations whose content is characterized primarily by intellectual capital developed mainly in the beginning of the 19th century. Those professions have developed through different strategies and professional tactics used to achieve and institutionalize their practices. However, nowadays those tactics are no longer viable or desirable for new expert occupations; those occupations are unable and/or unwilling to professionalize following traditional ways. In conclusion, "the main points we have to make here are two: that, currently, neither the roles that new occupations play in relation to the capitalist organizations that are their main clients, nor the broader institutional context in which they were formed, favor or foster traditional professional modes of organization" (Muzio et al., 2007, p. 6).

Understanding the new concept of professionalism (professionalism as a discourse)

Retracing the theories highlighted in this chapter, classical sociological interpretations of professionalism have considered it as a system of normative values (structuralist and functionalist approaches) or as a system of power. Those interpretations have been superseded in Freidson's *third logic* (2001) that raises the issue of how the logic of professions is not adequately taken into account in academic research.

Parallel to Freidson's *third logic*, another interpretation of professionalism has been developed more recently. Inspired by the rise of new expert occupations and by the shift of professions in organizational settings, some academics (Anderson-Gough, Grey, & Robson, 1998; Evetts, 1998, 2003, 2010; Fournier, 1999; Grey, 1994;

Hilferty, 2008) have shifted the attention from the analysis of the characteristics and the strategies of professionalism, to professionalism as a set of discursive claims. Indeed, starting from the '90s, the term *professionalism* has been used with many slightly different meanings and in different contexts. Firstly practitioners and then academic researchers have started to use it in a discursive way.

Different 'meanings' and different 'contexts' relate, on one side, to the circumstances in which the term is used (being professional as a way to induce employees to work more or better) and, on the other side, the multitude of occupations labeled with this term (basically all knowledge-based occupations).

The meaning of the term professionalism was a bit distorted, and this "label" became an umbrella term for all those characteristics which originally belonged to traditional professions, such as long educational training, need for experience and ambiguity of produced results (which are so difficult to evaluate). For this reason, "there is extensive agreement about the appeal of the idea of profession and professionalism and its increased use in all work contexts" (Evetts, 2003, p. 396). The label 'profession' and 'professional' is attached to different kinds of knowledge-based occupations which, even if they are not considered professions in a traditional way, receive this label because they feature those characteristics. In the academic literature that considers professionalism as a discourse, there is extensive agreement about the idea of profession and professionalism and its increased use in all work contexts (Svensson, 2001).

Evetts (2003, p. 396) underlines how the term professionalism "is used in mission statements and organizational aims and objectives to motivate employees". The use of this term in this way has effects on a micro level. The reference to professionalism, in this case is solely motivated by disciplinary mechanisms (Fournier, 1999) or by the so-called professionalism 'imposed from above' (Evetts, 2003, p. 409). This implies imposed values and a false ideology to promote an appropriate work conduct. "The mobilization of the discursive resources of professionalism potentially allows for control at a distance through the construction of 'appropriate' work identities and conducts" (Fournier, 1999, p. 281). In particular Fournier (1999) tries to picture how the logic of professionalism is used in order to obtain discipline. This logic of discipline is evoked predominantly when employees' behavior cannot be regulated through direct control. In this case, professing the 'appropriate' forms of conduct that employees should comply with "allows for control at a distance by inscribing the disciplinary logic of professionalism within the person of the employees so labeled" (Fournier, 1999, p. 290). In conclusion, when the concept of 'being a professional' is approached from a discursive perspective, the "predominant usage is concerned with appropriate forms of behavior, or ways of conducting oneself, rather than with the issue of accreditation to practice or the possession of 'technical' skills" (Grey, 1998, p. 569).

In this discourse, Hilferty (2008) identifies three predominant dimensions around which coercive power of management can build professions *imposed from above* (Evetts, 2003): *structure*, *agency*, and *culture*. The term *structure* means the context of action; "structural contexts shape what is possible and create particular expectations about how organizations will operate" (Hilferty, 2008, p. 166). The *agency* is the capacity of agents to overcome and/or recreate the structural constraints that limit their options. The term *culture* relates to the nature and to the relative strength of the professional agency, which is affected by the cultural context in which the management works (Helsby, 1999).

Corporate professionalism

Before concluding the literary review, it worth making a little analysis on a relative recent aspect relative to Reed's (1996) professional categories: the organizational profession. A very recent development in this field of research is considering the influence that big corporations have on the development of new expert

occupations (Paton et al., 2013). As a matter of fact, if we considered how large is the share of knowledge workers who are employed by large organizations, it is easy to understand how the destiny of those occupations is going to be deeply linked with the interest of those organizations. Those considerations are at the basis of the so-called *corporate professionalization* (Kipping, Kirkpatrick, & Muzio, 2006; Muzio et al., 2007; Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011).

This stream of research starts from the idea that “traditional professionalization, emphasizing monopolistic closure, restricted practices and self-regulation, is seen to be unattractive and, moreover, unachievable for new expert labor” (Paton et al., 2013, p. 227). This consideration relies on different factors: (1) the inability of many modern expert occupations to establish an explicit and exclusive knowledge base (Alvesson, 1993; Reed, 1996); (2) the increased dominance of large corporations as purchasers of the services provided by new expert occupations (Muzio et al., 2007); (3) the opposition to the traditional professionalism of the political economy in recent decades (Hanlon, 1999).

However, this new stream of research, called *corporate professionalization* (Thomas & Thomas, 2013), is not in contrast with the literature analyzed above. Indeed, it tends to mix the different elements that have emerged from other discussions. Studying some of those new expert occupations (such as project management, management consultancy and executive recruitment), Muzio et al., (2011) identify several common features with the traditional professionalization process (see Table 3). The modification respect to traditional process of professionalization is due to the corporate influence on values and practices of new professions. Moreover, the practical implications relate to the reduction of occupational independence and its adjustment to the interests of corporations.

	Old “collegial professionalization”	New “corporate professionalization”
knowledge-base	Reliance on an abstract body of knowledge	Co-production of knowledge with industry, situated knowledge, focus on competences
Market	Statutory closure via Royal Charter	Market closure via corporate practices (‘embedding professional membership’ in tendering and procurement processes)
Legitimacy	Legitimized by public benefit	Legitimized by market value
Composition of association	Individual membership Single-tier membership structure	Individual and organizational membership Multi-level membership structure
Relation to state	Licensed/regulated by state	Not licensed/regulated, state acts as (significant) stakeholder/consumer of services
Relation with clients and employers	Arm’s length	Close engagement
Jurisdictions	National	International

Table 3: Key characteristics of ‘corporate professionalization’ compared to more “traditional’ models” (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011, p. 457)

Moreover, it is possible to argue that the professionalization of new occupations cannot be framed simply by using the default schema of professionalization (be it the one used by the collegiate profession or by the organizational profession). The characteristics of today's economy push an occupation to go beyond the traditional professional schemas, combining different arrangements of professionalization and helping to create new ones. These hybrid schemes combine some features of the old ones with new features dictated by the need to survive in a market which is profoundly different from the one in which the traditional professions have developed. In this market, new occupations are often born in the womb of big multinational corporations and, therefore, they are influenced by those corporations; “businesses influence the values and practices of

new professions” (Thomas & Thomas, 2013, p. 9). According to Paton et al. (2013), it is possible to conclude that corporate professionalization is achievable, but it comes with a price tag, namely “the privileging of corporate interests and the attenuation of democratic and collegial principles associated with traditional professionalism” (Paton et al., 2013, p. 228). This has a twofold consequence: it will lead to success in terms of membership and influence on one side, but will have a detrimental effect on professional discretion and freedom to follow professional ethics.

Wrapping up

In this chapter, I have tried to analyze some aspects of professions and professionalism, looking at the relation between the professions and the new forms of expert work. At the beginning of this review, I had to introduce the concepts of *knowledge economy* and *knowledge workers*, since these elements were (and still are) at the basis of the proliferation of many new kinds of jobs. Just from the consideration of professional nature’s type of knowledge workers seems evident that it is worth studying new occupations both from the academics’ and from the practitioners’ perspective.

The approach to analyzing this kind of research topic has evolved considerably over the years; starting from the theories on the sociology of professions that tried to define the professions based on a given set of characteristics (adopting structuralist and functionalist approaches), to those which focused on understanding the internal dynamics that drive the professions. Subsequently, researchers dedicated their analysis to the study of the professional project that ‘stands behind the actions of its main actors’ (Grey, 1994) and, more recently, they have started to analyze the rhetoric of professionalism as a discourse.

In this literature review, I did not delve into all the theories derived from the sociology of profession, but instead I focused initially on the logic behind occupations. The so-called *third logic* of Freidson (2001), that is opposed to that of the free market and of the bureaucratic organizations, can be useful to understand the reasons behind certain actions and tactics of (both traditional and new expert) occupations. From now on, I shall concentrate mostly on new expert occupations. These new occupations have been studied in order to find the main differences with the traditional occupations. The main differences identified in academic theories have been included following Reed’s (1996) classification. The differences have been classified into four categories: knowledge base, power strategy, organizational forms, and role of the State (see Table 2).

After having pointed out the differences between traditional and new expert occupations, I will turn to more recent streams of research. The recent theories that will be analyzed take into account the development of professionalism as a *discourse*. In the literature it is shown that the term *profession* is beginning to be used in a broader sense and with very different meanings. Besides demonstrating that the term profession is used more broadly, the analysis of professionalism as a discourse point out the influence that large organizations have on the market in general and on professions in particular. The analyze will then expand on the so-called *corporate professionalism* (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011; Sturdy, Wylie, & Wright, 2013; Thomas & Thomas, 2013), a research stream that considers the influence of big corporation on new professions and the professionalization path that derives from it. This consideration relates to the massive presence of large corporations that influence the ways in which professions are formed (Kirkpatrick et al., 2011). This will come out more clearly in the empirical part, which takes into account PM which is a good example since it developed inside organizations that need to manage large projects in order to carry out their activities. The organization itself requires skilled professional figures to execute its projects due to the strategic importance that they have (the details provided later on will provide further clarification on this).

The issue that I shall address in the next chapter is, therefore, how things stand with respect to a new profession or a new expert occupation, such as PM. In particular, the research question that originate from this literature review attain to the all those aspects that have already been highlighted in this review and which concern a profession that is successfully implementing its professional project within the Italian context. The research question is then articulated in three aspects: (1) which are the actors involved in the PM professionalization project in the Italian context, and what are the features of this field? (2) What are the strategies that drive those actors? (3) What are the differences between the Italian context and other national contexts?

METHODOLOGY

The used methodology is a qualitative case study made up of semi structured interviews and archival data (retrieved through websites, journals and newspapers).

This research focuses on the field of project management in Italy. To assess the model, the path and the strategies of professionalization of this new occupation, the work analyzes the Italian project management field looking at the relationships among the main institutional actors: individuals, professional associations, pressure groups, public entities, corporations, and the State (through its laws). Those actors are important because, while performing everyday actions to realize their own interests, they engage in processes of ‘institutional work’ (Lawrence et al., 2009) that, at aggregate level, concur to organize and legitimate activities within a particular field (Scott et al., 2000).

Thus the field, as the methodological unit of analysis, is considered as “a community of organizations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field” (Scott, 1995, p. 56).

This way of examining this subject gives the possibility to answer to my research problem on different levels because it identifies: (1) the actors involved at practical level in the development of the professional project; (2) the role they play and the strategies that they fulfill; (3) the dynamics involved in this field and the possible peculiarities with other studies.

In the academic literature, the study of the actors involved in the institutional environment has been addressed in broad terms by some neoinstitutional researchers (Clemens, 1993; Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Holm, 1995). The stream of institutional entrepreneurship (Di Maggio, 1988; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009) takes into account how the single actors can solely shape the field in which they operate; and institutional work

analyzes how the interactions among many individuals shape the institutions in their environment (Lawrence et al., 2009), namely “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

In a more contextualized stream of research, the study of field dynamics is analyzed in the remarkable work of Abbott (1988) with the idea that jurisdictional conflict between different professions led to the development of a profession. He states that the attempt of one profession to monopolize abstract knowledge led to the conflict that determined its professional development. As Abbott (1988, p. 20) states: “the interplay of jurisdictional links between professions determines the history of the individual professions themselves”. However, in his considerations Abbott neglects all other stakeholders that are actively involved in developing a professional project. Commenting on Abbott’s studies, Muzio (2003, p. 44) claims that professions (and occupations) “should not be studied in isolation as individual projects but as parts of an interdependent system, where occupational conflict and change propagates itself through a series of osmotic processes from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and from profession to profession”.

In aid to this lack of actor specifications, Burrage & Jaraush, K. and Siegrist (1990), formalize the actors involved in the development of a professional field. According to Burrage & al. (1990) there are mainly 4 responsible actors: the profession itself, the State, the consumers and the universities. On top of those identified by Burrage & al. (1990), Evetts (2010) mentions also the ‘employing organizations’ among those responsible for the development of a professional project.

The work that I carried out to study this field is based on the idea that this field develops and evolves through the relations and the struggles between the actors playing in this scenario. Thus taking inspiration from the idea that the dynamic of a field is the result of a large set of interactions and conflicts, I developed a three steps methodology: (1) mapping the field to understand which are the actors; (2) understand the role they fulfill; (3) understand dynamics and the possible differences compared to other similar fields of study.

Moving forward in this analysis, I shall attempt to demonstrate how the reality of the field in question is even more complex and includes an even larger set of actors than those indicated in the above-mentioned studies.

Before giving a detailed description of the three-step methodology I developed, I will provide the theoretical justification underpinning this procedure. The case study is designed to focus on the field actors and on their interactions. This integrates semi-structured interviews with respondents from the various players mentioned above with the analysis of archival sources and other published sources. The best way to address the matter at hand is a qualitative case study. This suits this research mainly for three reasons (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989; Langley, 1999; Yin, 2009): (1) in the very beginning of a research project, when the theory development is in its early stages, case studies can be very useful. This consideration is particularly relevant when key themes and categories still have to be empirically isolated (Yin, 2009); (2) investigating the Italian PM field through a case study can be very useful in order to elaborate a theory on the strategies of new professions; (3) the best way to examine a large set of discursive activities is through an in-depth analysis of the relationships between its main actors (Hardy & Maguire, 2010; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004; Zilber, 2002). For these reasons, I chose to develop a case study based on the analysis of the Italian PM field.

The data discussed in this thesis provide an accurate and up-to-date representation of the current situation of the Italian PM field, thus giving the possibility to outline the strategies and the tactics of the actors involved in this field and, more generally, to produce a more realistic and informed assessment of the processes of professional change.

In this sense, the material gathered through the interviews, the focus groups and the archival data represents an important and needed update in terms of accuracy, comprehensiveness and reliability in order to understand a field which is significantly different from those investigated in the literature as “much of the literature tends to focus on single key actors operating in a field” (Micelotta & Washington, 2013, p. 1160). This kind of data can also be used to draw a comparison and highlight transnational differences between different countries (i.e. Italy & the UK).

The field as a methodological unit of analysis

The unit of analysis on which the research question of this thesis has been tested is the Italian PM field. According to Di Maggio & Powell (1983) a field is a cluster of actors that, at aggregate level, establish an area of institutional life. Those actors (or organizations as in Scott’s terminology) can include: suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, public administration, universities, and other organizations that provide similar services or products. Following this idea, since a field is defined by the actors that take part in it (and their mutual relationships), it appears clear that the best way to analyze the structure of a field is an empirical investigation.

In broader terms, the concept of field can include more than a well-defined list of constituents. As a matter of fact, according to the early researcher on neo-institutional theory the field includes exclusively actors belonging to an institutional sphere (Fligstein, 1990) or environment (Di Maggio & Powell, 1991; Orru, Biggart, & Hamilton, 1991). This vision was overcome when the focus shifted to the actions performed by the agents (Bourdieu, 1993). Instead of looking at all the actors that can be part of the organizational field, researchers can focus on the set of actions that actors undertake (within the economic, cultural and political environment), contributing to the creation of a field that takes the form of a structured network of social relations.

This thesis shall attempt to clarify the processes guiding the behavior of field members. The focus on the field as a unit of analysis is strengthened by Wooten and Hoffman: “focusing on this level of analysis researcher could better understand the decision making processes among distinct organizations that, while having dissimilar goals, felt necessary and advantageous to interact with one another to accomplish a given task.” (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008, p. 131)

Hence, the focus of this analysis is not on emphasizing the outcome produced by the field, but rather on conceptualizing the field as a mechanisms of relationships created by its actors (Davis & Marquis, 2005; Hoffman & Ventresca, 2002). As Wooten & Hoffman (2008, p. 143) state: “field-level research is ready to make the transition from testing the core of ideas of new institutional theory paradigms to investigating fields as sites where problems of organizing are debated among disparate actors”. This is important because it gives the possibility to investigate how actors work out solutions to their problems within the field.

Mapping the field

In this first step, I have endeavored to answer the question of the how the field is composed by identifying the actors that play in the PM field in Italy. A thorough understanding of the field and the identification of all the main actors involved has been reached only after some explorative analysis. It actually took some work to be able to define it in a comprehensive manner. The first activity I carried out has been mapping the PM associations using a pilot interview.

First of all, I carried out some simple desk research followed by a pilot interview with a member of a lobby in charge of the coordination of professional associations which are not formally regulated by the Italian law

(COLAP - Coordinamento Libere Associazioni Professionali). This pilot interview has revealed an unexpected side of the Italian PM field since I came across a number of new actors which actively shape and influence this field.

As matter of fact, the scenario that appears in Figure 1 relies partially on the literature review and partially on the analysis and on the pilot interview. As I highlighted also in other work (Sabini, 2013a) some actors, such as professional associations, State and universities are identified by Burrage & Jaraush, K. and Siegrist (1990), big corporations by Evetts (2010) and pressure groups by Micelotta & Washington (2013). Other actors described in Figure 1 are the result of an iterative process based on the 3 steps of my methodology (pilot interview, archival data analysis and interviews). Since only an investigation of the field can bring to light those actors, they have to be considered specific for the Italian field.

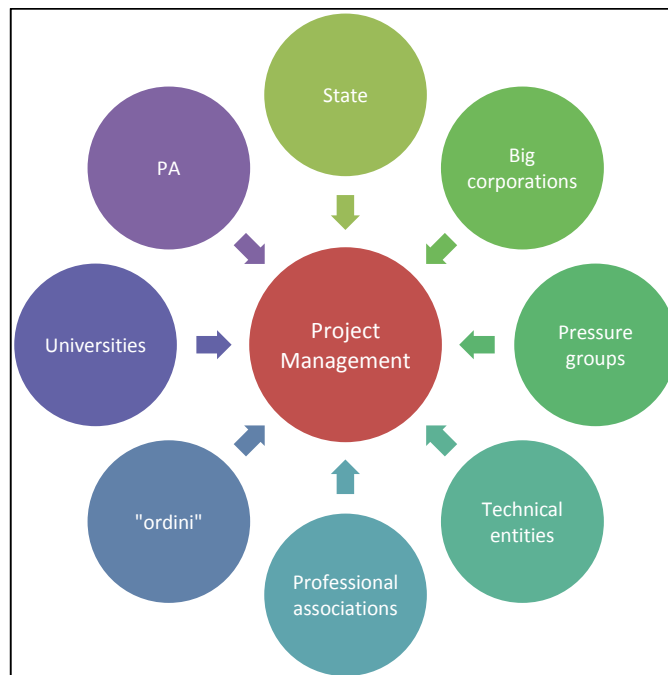


Figure 1: Main actors in the field of project management in Italy

The pilot interview, and the others that followed, were conducted according to a semi-structured method in order to encourage the respondents to actively provide information (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This method is useful in this case because it helps in pushing people to consider topics that perhaps they had never given any thought to. The interviews followed a written outline lasted about 45 minutes and were digitally recorded, transcribed and anonymized. In the next section, I will explain how the coding categories were defined and structured in an iterative way around the broad theme of professionalization.

Field mapping led to define the situation illustrated in Figure 1 in which some new actors are included besides those already identified in the literature (Abbott, 1991; Burrage et al., 1990; Evetts, 1998).

Some of those unexpected actors are public administration (PA) and what I refer to as ‘pressure groups’. PA is an interesting actor because it represents almost fifty percent of the Italian GDP and, therefore, it runs a huge amount of projects. For this reason, PA can be an important employer for project managers and can play a crucial role in implementing PM practices. The second group includes those associations, such as COLAP (Coordinamento Libere Associazioni Professionali), CNEL (Consiglio Nazionale Economia e Lavoro) and CEPAS (Certificazione delle Professionalità e della Formazione) that serve the interests of the occupations

that they represent. Their main activities include building close relationships with national legislative bodies and with technical entities.

To sum up, Figure 1 shows the structure of the PM field based on the information acquired during a one-year investigation. In a nutshell, I discovered that the Italian PM discipline is influenced by 8 different categories of actors: professional associations (PMI, IPMA, and ISIPM), technical entities (UNI, ISO), pressure groups (CNEL, COLAP, and CEPAS), big corporations, the State (through its legislative bodies), the public administration (including regional entities and municipalities), universities (e.g. master’s degrees and other courses) and law-regulated professions (Italian “ordini”, e.g. the association of engineers).

Role played by actors

Once the actors that play in this field have been identified, in order to investigate the second part of research question it is necessary to understand which is the role played in the field by each one of them. In order to do this, I have analyzed archival data and conducted a series of unstructured interviews. The data retrieved from archival analysis are summarized in Table 4.

The data show that for each one of the 8 identified categories may include more than one actor. For example, there are several professional associations (PMI, IPMA, ISPM), universities (I decided to analyze in depth the four universities that I consider the most representative: LUISS University, Bocconi University, Roma Tre University, Politecnico di Milano, University of Padova, Verona University), different relevant technical entities (UNI and ISO) and several corporations (I had the chance to get in contact with the professional corporate development managers of: ENI, IBM, HP, Thales-Alenia and Siemens).

Document source	Document type	# of occurrences	Year
PMI (PMI-RC, PMI-NC, PMI-SIC)	• Newsletter	4 (PMI-SIC)	2010-2009
	• Project Management Journal	1	2006
IPMA	• International Journal of Project Management	2	1989-2006
ISIPM	• Social media discussion group (LinkedIn)	4	2011-2013
Pressure groups (CEPAS, COLAP, CNEL, FCD)	• Public documents	-	2012-2013
	• Focus group	3	2012-2013
Technical entities (UNI, ISO, ACCREDIA)	• Technical norms (UNI 11506: 2013, ISO 21500: 2012)	2	2012-2013
	• Press releases (UeC)	1	2012
	• ACCREDIA Observatory	1	2013
Corporations	• Internal schema of PM	5	2013
Italian Government	• Law n.4 (14/01/2013)	1	2013
Universities	• Masters in PM	6	2012-2013

Table 4: Empirical data structure (archival data)

As will be more clear at the end of the chapter (see Table 5), I have conducted at least one interview supported by archival data (press releases, journals, newsletters, social media discussions, and either from the State or from technical entities) for each category of actor. Both the interview and archival data were coded using the coding list in Table 4, which will be better explained in the following paragraph.

The archival data analysis led to clarify the objectives and role of each actor identified in the first step; the data helped to understand the story of the field. For example, some important differences in the PM governance of the PM professional associations emerged from this step. While the PMI has a centralized approach to governance, the IPMA adopts a federated approach. This preliminary understanding helps in the clarification of the strategy that those associations adopt in this field. Also the recent law n.4 (of 14th January 2013: “Disposizioni in materia di professioni non organizzate”⁶) reveals, at least to some extent, the objectives and the vision of the State.

Strategies & tactics

The third step of data collection concerns the clarification of the strategies implemented by each actor in the Italian PM field. This step is designed to interpret the actions of various actors and it is based on semi-structured interviews with the key players within various organizations (mainly executives and/or members of the board). I will briefly explain the criteria that led to the construction of this sample (and the reasons behind the chosen sample) and then I will explain the process that led to the composition of the codes used to classify the concepts emerged during the interviews.

It is worth providing a brief explanation on how the respondents were carefully chosen. As anticipated in the beginning of the paragraph, the resulting purposive sample is composed by people employed by the organizations involved in this field. To build my sample I decided to look for all the people that could be actively involved in this field. In order to select the most interesting respondents who were likely to be able to provide high quality information, I chose people in charge of strategic daily decisions in the PM field, such as presidents or executives and members of the board. For example, I chose the current or, if not possible, the former president or vice-president of all the Italian project management associations. When it came to technical entities, I tried to get in touch with the people who are directly involved in or interact with PM associations. All the details of the interviews are summarized in the following Table 5.

As already mentioned, the interviews were semi-structured thus means that they were driven by a written outline with key large scope and with some broad, open questions. Those questions were asked during the interview and were not necessarily asked in the same written order. This with the aim to foster the production of free narrative by the people interviewed and prompt the interviewees to speak freely. The outline of the questionnaire was adapted to the respondent’s position and the type of the organization he or she worked for; for this reason, I elaborated several questionnaires suited to all the interviewees. It goes without saying that the questions asked to a lobby deputy manager (e.g. the UNI president) cannot be the same as those asked to a representative of a PM professional association. The questionnaire may differ even for people belonging to the same organization: the president of a PM professional association will be addressed more questions concerning his or her vision of PM (thus wide-ranging and theoretical questions) while the questions asked to a member of the board of the same PM professional association responsible for organizing events will be grounded in his or her daily activities and practical actions within the association.

⁶ Provisions on unregulated professions

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

Table 5: Empirical data structure (interviews and focus group)

The second part concerns the archival data and the interview data coding process following an iterative approach. In order to identify the codes that conceptualize elements emerged from data I derived them starting from the academic literature and then I refined those according to what the narrative from the data was telling.

The following list has the objective to link each of the coding list categories (Table 6) with the article that has inspired that category:

- ‘building the profession’ and ‘examples of professionalization’ from ‘knowledge and occupational closure’ (Paton et al., 2013) and ‘occupational closure’ (Muzio & Hodgson, n.d.).
- ‘relations with other entities’ is an adaptation from ‘corporate management’ (Paton et al., 2013) and ‘stakeholder focus’ (Muzio & Hodgson, n.d.).
- ‘professional Ethics’ from Abbott (1990) and Evetts (2003).
- ‘transnational differences’ is an adaptation from ‘geographic scope’ (Muzio & Hodgson, n.d.).
- ‘regulation of practice’ adaptation from ‘jurisdictions’ and ‘legitimizing claims’ (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011).
- ‘EU-international standards’ from Heras-Saizarbitoria & Boiral (2012).
- ‘role of local institutions’ from Kritzer (1999).
- ‘political debate’ from Johnson (1993).
- ‘association Vs. professionalization’ from ‘professional associationism’ (Muzio, 2003).

Therefore, those categories can be considered to be methodologically rigorous.

Moreover, the analysis of the investigated field has involved several actors and several political, economic and social elements. This first consideration clearly demonstrates that the nature of this field is deeply heterogeneous and that categories identified in the first step were not sufficient to develop a proper coding schema. This need to enlarge the categories comes from the fact that this type of analysis is conducted in the PM field which is slightly different (and newer) compared to those to which the codes to be applied were used. The reasons are mainly two: (1) the PM field in Italy is particularly varied and heterogeneous compared the Anglo-Saxons countries; it includes actors that have a different nature if we compare them to national

government, associations and corporations (see Figure 1), and (2) it has never been investigated through the lens I am proposing (namely by way of a case study based on interviews and archival data).

As previously said, the process that led me to develop the final coding list followed an iterative process and included several steps. The codes derived from the literature covered only partially the ideas that had emerged from the interview. For this reason, the first draft coding list was subsequently expanded to reflect the reality of the analyzed field.

After having identified the new categories, I went back to study the literature in order to appropriately fit the new categories into a new analysis of the theory. The final result of this process has been the coding schema in Table 6. This table summarizes the categories of concepts that have emerged from the interviews. As it can be seen, two distinct sets of categories have been developed: one for practitioners and one for other stakeholders like regulators, policy makers and pressure groups. This is due to the heterogeneity of the analyzed sample; the PM field does not only include practitioners working with professional associations or corporations, but also members of the political sphere. I have actually been able to ascertain that the second category of interviewees used a ‘language code’ which was completely different from the practitioners thus requiring different categories to analyze the data.

#	CODING LIST FOR PRACTITIONERS	#	CODING LIST FOR PRESSURE GROUPS
1	Governance	1	Objective, Mission
2	Relations with other Entities	2	Role of local institutions
3	Building the profession	3	Political Debate
4	Professional Ethics	4	EU-International Standards
5	Training & Certification	5	Association Vs. Professionalization
6	Affiliate Recruitment	6	Examples of professionalization
7	Transnational Differences		
8	Engagement with clients and employers		
9	Regulation of practice		
10	Meaning of Profession		

Table 6: Coding list used to categorize the elements emerged from the interviews (from practitioners & members of pressure groups).

The code presented here are, as said, the result of an iterative process. Some information emerged from the interviews or from the archival data analysis was initially not classifiable into codes. From the very beginning, the list has been updated in two ways: with new codes (to include concepts that emerged after the first reading) or changing existing codes that were used too restrictively (in order to include a broader meaning). The meaning of each code will be better clarified in the following chapter.

Another example of the iterative process is the development of the “professional strategies” code (Evetts, 2010; Fincham, 2006; Muzio et al., 2007) that during the process of data coding was divided into: “governance”, “Objective, Mission”, “engagement with clients and employers”, “training and certifications” and “affiliate recruitment”. Reading the interviews and the archival material, it became quite clear that this category needed to be divided into subcategories in order to accurately classify the information gathered.

It is also possible to notice that the categories developed for the professional associations can be aggregated into two main dimensions (see Figure 2). The difference between those two aggregated dimensions lies in the nature of the concepts. Those whose underlying concept relates to a physical activity fall under the dimension

‘association activities’ whereas those whose underlying concepts are more philosophical fall under the ‘association logics’ dimension.

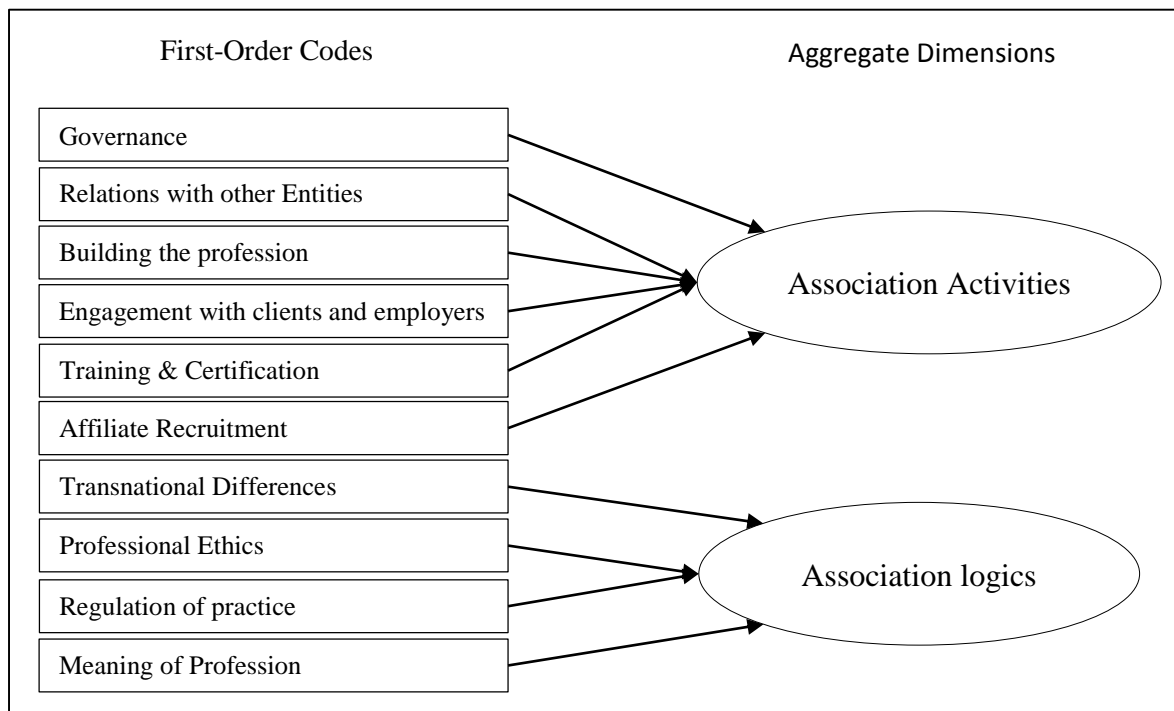


Figure 2: Professional association coding list / Data structure

These interviews help clarify the strategies and the tactics of each actor identified in the field. For example, some important differences in the relations with corporate clients emerged from this step. While the international professional associations (PMI and IPMA) organize their events in close collaboration with big corporations, the Italian association (ISIPM) is much more in touch with pressure groups (e.g. COLAP).

This was just an example to show how recognizing actions that associations implement, reveal the differences in the strategies that each actor adopts.

Conclusive consideration on methodology

Moreover, thinking about the actor-based framework of Burrage & al. (1990), it is necessary to consider that different fields in different countries are characterized by a different balance of power and by different actors involved. For those reasons the outcomes and the routes to professionalization will differ. To strength the importance to investigate a given field it is worth reading the quotation of (Burrage et al., 1990, p. 218): “if one could identify the interests, resources and strategies of each of these actors in a number of professions, in a number of countries and how their interaction has changed over time we would be able to advance general propositions about professionalization and be on our way to a general theory of the professions”.

As Muzio, Brock, & Suddaby (2013, p. 700) state about new occupations: “they act and are acted upon by a myriad of social, economic, technological, political, and legal forces”. The many actors and interests involved originate a number of mechanisms and actions that cause changes that are far from being clear (Morgan & Quack, 2005). Going deeper into the field of Italian PM, I shall try to go into those mechanisms and actions. This way to proceed is also useful to answer the question raised by Muzio, Brock, & Suddaby (2013) on the failure of dominant professional paradigms to describe how a majority of new professional occupations (such as management consultants, project managers, HRM specialists) develop their professional project. Somehow, those new occupations are very strongly related with big corporations that employ many people in those

positions. Indeed, “those professional occupations that have more recently emerged [...] structure themselves so as to accommodate corporate patterns” (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002, p. 49).

Hence, it must be recognized that corporations are becoming a key site and vehicle for professionalization projects (Suddaby, Greenwood, & Cooper, 2007) and, as experienced in this analysis, new expert occupations strategies are very much related (and even constrained) to “organizational strategies, tactics, systems and methods” (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011, p. 458).

In my view, PM is interesting because it one of those new occupations that have developed mainly within organizational boundaries and structures (Reed, 1996). These occupations try to implement their plans taking into account in their decisions the interests of large corporations.

HISTORY / CONTEXT

To frame the field of PM properly, it is necessary first of all to understand what all actors mean for project management. Is there a shared understanding of the meaning of this term?

This chapter will try to clarify this question looking at the data collected from the different sources with the intention to provide a multidimensional explanation. Definitions provided by the associations will be the starting point of this chapter that will go in depth into this analysis looking at the historical development of this discipline worldwide and then narrow the focus on the national level. The focus will then shift to PM professional associations at national level. This will help the understanding of the main difference between the strategies that they have developed.

What is Project Management?

Before analyzing in depth project management as a discipline and its meaning that was established by the different professional associations, it is worth to briefly look at the concept of project. As in the definition of the PMBOK (2008), a project is “a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result”. Since this is one of the first definitions, it is very basic and easy to understand and therefore it has become the most used and shared definition of a project. The elements that underlie this definition are: the temporary nature of a project (it has a beginning and an end) and the uniqueness of the provided product/service.

In this paragraph, to present PM as a discipline, I shall consider projects and their management in their institutional context. When considered in this wider meaning PM is called by researchers called ‘the third wave’ (Morris, Pinto, & Soderlund, 2011). This is an evolution of the first wave (focused on the study of

normative tools and techniques to support project development) and of the second (that considers contingency factors and sees projects as a temporary organization). In this meaning the focus is on: (1) the theoretical foundations and the history of project management, (2) the awareness of the context and (3) projects as complex organizations involving cross-firm relationship.

Therefore, the discipline of project management includes all those tools that could aid who executes the project and is in charge of the planning, the decision making, and the control of the multitude of activities involved, especially those going on simultaneously. The definitions of project elaborated by the two main PM professional associations in the world differentiate slightly.

Below I report the two definitions as they appear in the two main books published by those associations that are considered as the “bible” of PM. The first is from the PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) published by PMI:

“Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements. Project management is accomplished through the application and integration of the project management processes of initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing” (PMBOK, 2008)

The following is from the ICB3 (IPMA Competence Baseline 3):

“To be professional, the discipline of Project Management has to have rigorous standards and guidelines to define the work of project management personnel. These requirements are defined by collecting, processing and standardizing the accepted and applied competence in project management” (IPMA, 2006).

These two definitions are slightly different since in the first case (PMI), the approach to this discipline is more oriented towards clear concepts (“...application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques ...”), while in the second case (IPMA), the definition is more oriented towards the competence of who implements the project (“to be professional ... to have rigorous standards and guidelines”).

A useful example to clarify the difference between those two definitions of PM can be taken from the AMA's (American Management Association) handbook of PM where this discipline is described. The word discipline itself can have different meanings (see Webster's dictionary for example) and it can be defined as follows: (1) the rules used to maintain control, or (2) a branch of learning supported by mental, moral, or physical training. For this reason “project management, therefore, is a discipline (made by concepts to be considered, explanation 1 as for PMI definition) which requires discipline (made by competence to be learned, explanation 2 as for IPMA definition)” (Dinsmore & Cabanis-Brewin, 2006, p. 5).

Project Management in the word

To trace a brief history of this discipline, one should bear in mind that “Project Management is a social construct” (Morris, 2011, p. 15). This statement is the beginning of the introduction by Peter Morris on the history of PM in the Oxford Handbook of Project Management (Morris, Pinto, & Söderlund, 2011). This means that, being socially constructed, the understanding of the elements that it involves has changed over the years and it is still changing. The actors playing in the field contribute to its development and to the development of the paths that this discipline follows.

In this paragraph, I shall present a brief history of PM as a discipline and as an occupation. The paragraph is divided into a section devoted to the early history of PM and its salient moments, and a section on the recent history presenting the latest contemporary developments.

Early history

In retracing the history of the PM occupation, the first important issue that arises concerns its actual starting point. Setting the beginning of this occupation is difficult because it is hard to identify the actual boundaries and practices that this occupation require.

Drawing a parallel with the well-established and developed the medical profession, it is possible to note that even if “the Egyptians were skilled in medicine more than any other art” (Homer, n.d.), it is around the second half of eightieth century that the modern medicine developed as a modern profession with the spreading of the experimental method and the drafting of the very first document on pathological anatomy “*De sedibus et causis morborum per anatomen indagatis*” (Morgagni, 1779).

Along the same line of thought, if we consider PM in its widest possible meaning, ancient projects (such as Giza Pyramid project, Athens Parthenon, and all the big ancient masterwork) should be considered as project driven because they were based on the management of scope, materials, budgets and workforce in order to create deliverables in a given time range. In its modern meaning, it possible to see the first seeds of the PM discipline in the project implemented by Taylor (1914). In his work Taylor applies the scientific reasoning to labor stating that it can be investigated and improved by focusing on its elementary parts; for this reason, his work can be considered as the forerunner of modern PM tools (i.e.: the work-breakdown structure and resource allocation). Besides those preliminary seeds, PM has grown thanks also to the work of Henry Gantt. He has started to codify PM tools, first and foremost the famous Gantt chart which after a century is still in use; with those tools he started to give some examples of the first elements of the body of knowledge of this discipline (Gantt, 1919).

During and right after the World War II, in reaction to the need for more coordination due to the large deployment of troops (which can be seen as a large project due to the number of people involved, the amount of budget spent and the crucial importance of the outcome), the PM tools started to be employed by the armies (especially in United States). In this period the PM practices were seen by the private sector as a time-consuming and superfluous management technique on top of the traditional management techniques (Kerzner, 2013).

In this scenario, some important improvements to PM practices have been made by those actors. One important example can be the development of the PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique) diagram by the management consulting corporation Booz Allen Hamilton as part of the United States Navy's missile submarine program (Malcolm, Roseboom, Clark, & Fazar, 1959); or the design of the CPM (Critical Path Method) within a joint venture between DuPont Corporation and Remington Rand Corporation to run their plant maintenance projects (Kelley & Walker, 1989).

In late 1960s, PM slowly turned from a mere discretionary aspect of management to a must, especially in large corporations where the complexity of the operations could no longer be handled with traditional management logics. As the large corporations started to adopt PM practices, they began to take essence in its modern forms. The common structure of the various models that have been developed in those years required one single responsible (the project manager) that had to put together all the different skills and expertise of different people, all the resources and link all different departments or units through proper communication in order to deliver a successful project.

Recent history

The recent history of PM starts thirty/forty years ago. The main achievement in this period has been the combination, the codification and the standardization of all the techniques that were developed mainly for planning and controlling complex projects. Those techniques were at first disseminated to professional associations (mostly in the engineering, construction and military sector) and then were collected into unified bodies of knowledge (Calabrese & Di Nauta, 2013).

In 1967 marks one of the milestones of the PM modern history with the creation of the International Project Management Association (IMPA) which, at that time, was called IMSA (International Management Systems Association). Another milestone was the creation of the PMI (Project Management Institute) few years later, in the USA in 1969. From these two important dates onwards, the importance of the PM discipline, as a bundle of techniques and tools that project managers have to master, has grown exponentially. At the moment, about 700 thousand professional skill certificates have been delivered all over the world (PMBOK, 2008).

Another important hint to the spreading of PM in recent history is coming from information systems sector. The support offered by information systems to the development of this discipline starting from the ‘90s has been considerable. All the software programs that were developed starting from this period by the main software house (MS Projects and Excel by Microsoft, ERP by Oracle, HP and SAP are only some examples) have made available to the general public the tools and techniques that were developed in the previous 50 years, massively spreading the acknowledgement of PM. With the consolidation of the internet infrastructures, the development of web-based collaboration has made it possible for every kind of team (high or low proximity) involved in every kind of project (large and complex or small and simple) to start an even wider collaboration on projects.

The rapid rise in the number of new chapters outside the United States (see Table 7) shows how the interest to discuss this discipline within an association got off the ground from the early ‘90s, with more and more new chapters opening all over the world.

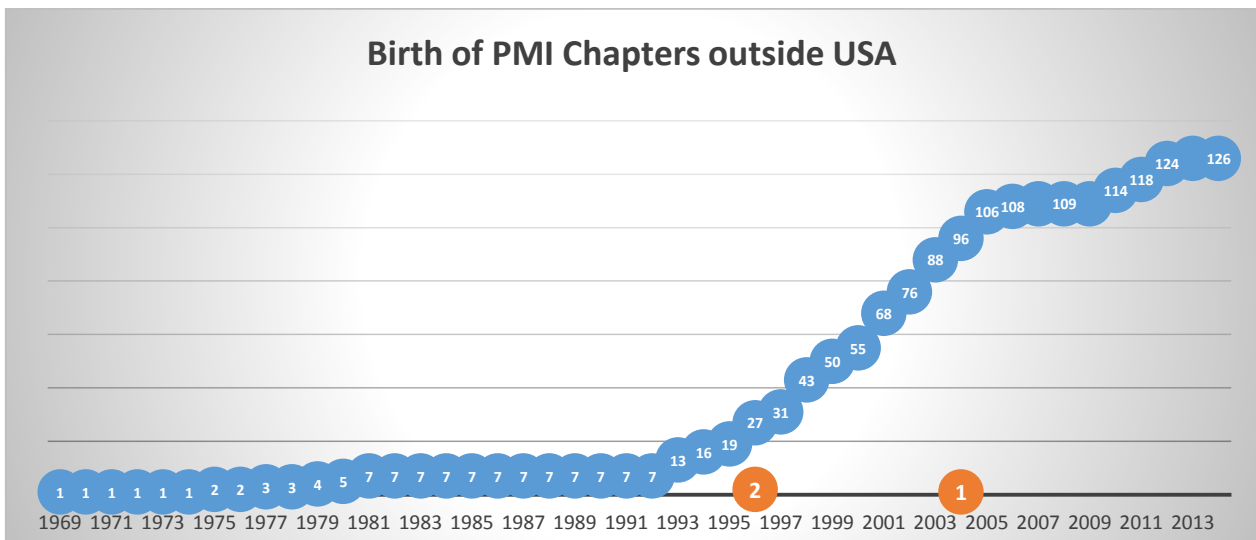


Table 7: Creation of PMI chapters outside the USA, including the three Italian chapters (two in ‘96 - ‘97, and one in ‘05) (PMI©)

Analyzing the trend in the amount of delivered certification, it is possible to see that this rise is even sharper in the last ten/fifteen years. In Figure 3 is presented the number of certifications issued by PMI and IPMA from 2000 to 2008. The trend analyzed in those recent years shows how there is a growing interest by professionals in obtaining a PM certification.

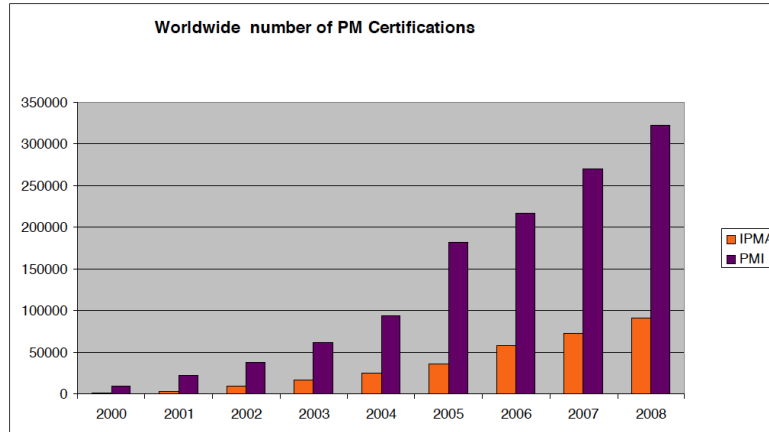


Figure 3: Worldwide dissemination of PMI and IMPA certifications, 2000-2008 (Source: Group Demos, 2010)

Those trends can be better understood if linked with the structure of modern organizations and the way they work. Indeed, looking at the modern organizations, and especially at internal structure of big corporations, it is possible to see that PM as a discipline and as an occupation has spread to almost every aspect of organizational life; this phenomenon is also called ‘projectification’ (Case & Piñeiro, 2009; Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). Several corporations, in order to gain efficiency, decided to shift from the traditional paradigm of process-driven to project-driven work organization.

This implies a sharp growth in the number of projects and, consequently, more attention to the way projects are handled (and therefore to Project Management). In this scenario PM professional associations gain more importance since their mission is precisely to “develop products and services that enhance performance throughout the global PPPM (project, programme and portfolio management) community” (IPMA) or to “make project management indispensable for business results” (PMI).

Below, in Figure 4 and Table 8, is presented the trend in the number of members respectively from 1969 to 2008 and from 2008 to 2013.

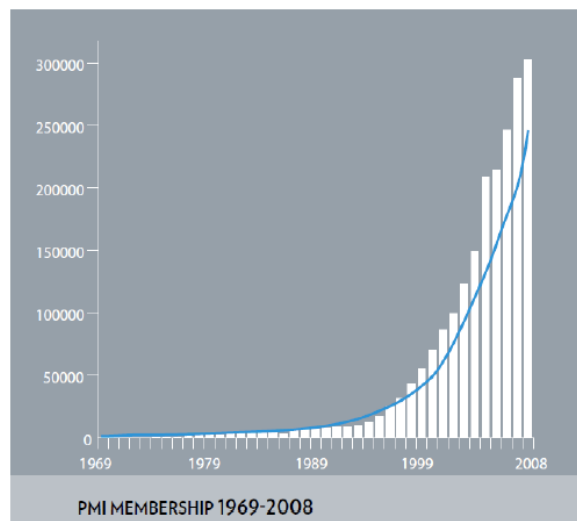


Figure 4: Worldwide PMI membership, 1969-2008 (Source: Group Demos, 2010)

Looking at the recent history of PM from another perspective, the results remain the same. They do not change even if we look at the statistics concerning professional associations’ membership. For example PMI members have almost doubled in the last 5 years and membership has been steadily growing since 2008 (Table 8).

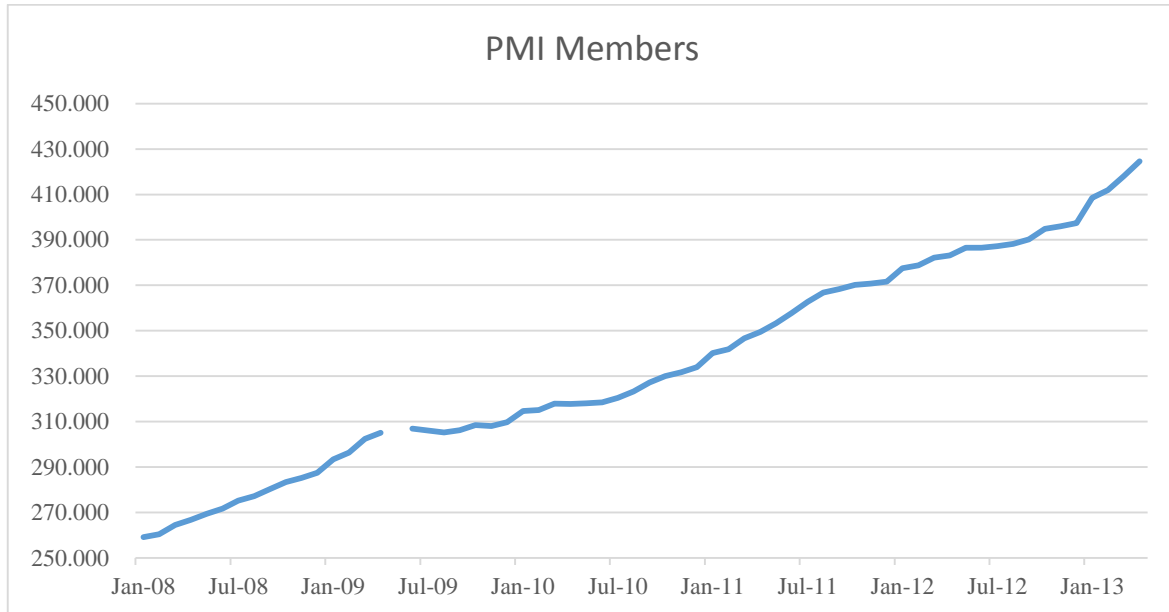


Table 8: Numbers of PMI individual members 2008-2013 (PMI©)

At the same time also IPMA membership has risen sharply. Since this association has a federative structure (it is basically a federation of 55 member associations from different countries), I would suggest looking at one of its more representative member associations: APM. In the UK, the APM (that was founded in 1972 as part of the IPMA network) was the fastest growing of all the UK’s professional institutions from 1990 to 2000 (Morris, 2011, p. 31) (see Table 9) and in 2008 applied to become a ‘chartered professional association’ to reach the same level as traditional professions, such as engineering and medicine.

Moreover, in 2000, the PMI professional association has organized the first biannual research conference related to academic research: IRNOP (International Research Network on Organizing by Project); EURAM (European Academy of Management) found project management to be its most popular track at its annual conferences.

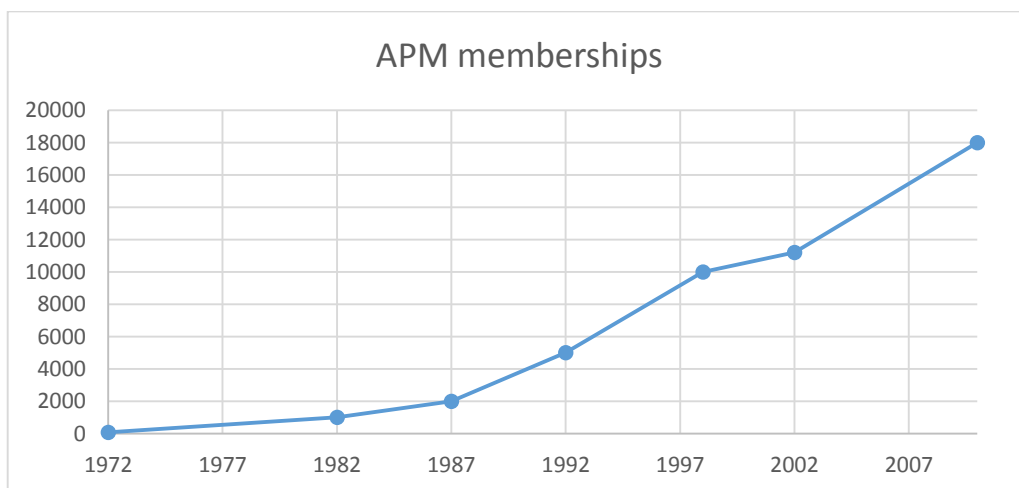


Table 9: Growth of APM membership 1972-2010 (APM, 2010)

Looking also at academic production from the side of the journals, we can see that while before 2008 there were only two academic journals dedicated exclusively to the PM discipline, after that date the academic journals specialized in this area became six⁷.

Project Management in Italy: professional associations

In order to understand the Italian context it is necessary to give a look at how the Italian professional associations were conceived; especially the strategies will make more sense if the economic and historical context in which they were conceived is considered. As noted in one of the interviews:

“The DNA of these PM professional associations is strongly dependent on the womb that has conceived them” (ISIPM 2)

One of the first and most striking differences pertains to the governance structure of the different associations. PMI has a centralized corporate model, in which each country has to report its activities to the headquarters; IPMA is regionalized, it is a network in which the associations of each country are independent; ISIPM is completely independent and has its own structure that does not need to report to or relate with a headquarter. Those differences, which emerge just from the analysis of archival data (mainly websites and public documents), relate just to the structure of those association. I will not dwell too much upon these differences as they are reported in public documents and I'd rather focus on their practical repercussions.

The following paragraph presents, in addition to professional associations with international relevance, such as PMI and IPMA, a different kind of PM professional association which operates only at the local level: ISIPM (Italian Institute of Project Management).

IPMA Italy

IPMA Italy was formed inside the Italian Association of Industrial Plant Engineering (ANIMP). In Milan on July 20th 1986, ANIMP created a section with the aim of organizing the knowledge and the know-how acquired by ANIMP member associations through their projects. This section of ANIMP became the Italian Section of Project Management that later joined the federation of IPMA under the name of IPMA Italy (2012); nowadays, it has reached 1000 active individual members. The role of this association is to collect and disseminate all the experience gained in the field for decades by its international member companies, in the implementation and management of complex projects in the plant engineering, the industrial and the infrastructure field. The context in which this association has been conceived is related mainly to big industrial corporations strongly linked with the plant engineering, the industrial and the infrastructure field (operating both in Italy and abroad).

In the year 2000, IPMA international (www.ipma.ch) – which is the main office of IPMA in the world and consists of 45 national associations, with more than 60,000 members, representing all geographical areas – appointed ANIMP as the Italian representative within the IPMA federation. Consequently, ANIMP delegated to IPMA Italy the responsibility to carry out all PM-related activities.

The close relationship between IPMA Italy and IPMA International are highlighted by the significant contribution given by the entire Board of Directors of IPMA Italy to the success of the IPMA World Congress hosted in Rome in 2008. Another important element to highlight the close relationship between the Italian

⁷ International Journal of Project Management [1983], Project Management Journal [1984], International Journal of Managing Projects in Business [2008], International Journal of Project Organisation and Management [2008], International Journal of Information Technology Project Management [2010], Journal of Project, Program & Portfolio Management [2010].

associations and the main office is the presence of several members of the Steering Committee of IPMA Italy in the institutional bodies of IPMA international.

The governance structure of IPMA is different from the one of PMI because the latter has a centralized structure which can be better represented through a network of many different associations in several countries. The members of this organization are both individuals and corporations (that can enroll some of their employees). The thoughts expressed by the president of IPMA international speak for themselves:

“The association of each nation is totally independent, the central IPMA has no members [...], and basically all IPMA members are national members. When someone (an individual or a corporation) manifest to IPMA international the willingness to join us, we (as IPMA international) answer, if he comes from a country that has an association, to contact his home country association; if not (his home country doesn't have yet an association) we suggest other solutions. For what concerns the certification instead we are open to one and the other, the PMI has a greater number of certificates because it is physically present in a greater number of countries” (IPMA 1).

To understand how certifications are perceived it is worth looking at the vision of IPMA Italy:

“To be the reference point for the dissemination of the culture of the Project Management and the ‘working by projects’ by strengthening the skills of the project managers and PM Processes to improve the ability of organizations in implementing strategies and ensuring competitive advantage” (IPMA Italy website⁸).

The vision of IPMA (both Italy and International) is implemented through a more adaptive approach to PM that has to suit different contexts. IPMA takes into account the business sector, the market, the technology, the geographical region and the different cultures in order to adapt PM to the different circumstances. This appears clear just by looking at the federated governance structure. This implies some degree of independence for the different member countries that do not have tight links with headquarter and can, for example, develop PM programs with corporations that operate in their own region.

One last consideration (that will be better explained and discussed later) regards the way in which the ‘womb’ in which the association was conceived (big and complex projects in the plant engineering, industrial and infrastructure field) has influenced its vision of a professional project. The association that hosts IPMA Italy (ANIMP) is strongly related with the world of engineering and this has certainly had some degree of influence on the way the association sees the PM professional project. This had to be taken into account especially when comparing it to other professional associations.

PMI Italian Chapters

The PMI is structured slightly differently from IPMA, in the sense that its three chapters are three distinct professional associations with their own members and activities. Those chapters, unlike for IPMA, are tightly linked to headquarter that is based near Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, USA, and have several duties to perform. The chapters are in charge of reporting and always wait for the approval of the headquarter. It is the PMI headquarter that actually give indications on how the chapters should work and on the rules that regulate them. Looking at PMI chapters, it is possible to note that the constraints posed by the PMI headquarter are quite strong. The chapter has to comply with a lot of different rules, starting from the statute, which has to be

⁸ Essere il punto di riferimento per la diffusione della cultura del Project Management e del “lavorare per progetti” attraverso il rafforzamento delle competenze dei Project Manager e dei Processi di Project Management che migliorano le capacità delle organizzazioni di realizzare le strategie, assicurandosi vantaggio competitivo.

accepted by headquarter, to the position rotation rules, which set how frequently the president and the board have to change. Here the president of PMI-RC (Rome Chapter) states:

“It is a corporate model in the sense that we have a statute borrowed from the United States, we have annual goals and we have to push them forward, we have an obligation to attend leadership meetings twice a year, we have a European mentor who schedule meetings once every 15 days where he tries to put together all the leaders of the various chapter. There are different geographical groups, we're east, than together with Greece, France, Spain [...] we (as a group) try to pursue same goals and we do this through several leadership meetings [...] the last one was in Marseille in early May and we have exchanged experiences” (PMI 1).

She also adds:

“The statute is recommended (by headquarter), we have than to register it in USA. I remember once I had to redo the statute, I proceed by immediately asking to the European mentor to send me something as example. He suggest to look at our international data base [...] than I draw a new one in compliance with Italian law, they (the headquarter) sent us back with some minor revisions. It reflects, however, exactly what is written in the USA statute” (A.M.F).

Following the same structure, even PM certifications are designed through a centralized and unified model. This association proposes a PM discipline that is the same all over the world, and the differences between countries are only due to the fact that one specific aspect of this discipline is stressed. The PMI view of PM is a tool to improve project performance in order to support the business activity, as they also underline in their motto:

“Making project management indispensable for business results” (PMI website)

For this reason, the strategy adopted by PMI is an aggressive one, creating a body of knowledge and standardizing the assessment based on the understanding of the elements highlighted in the body of knowledge, rather than on competence or know-how, like IPMA.

I shall now analyze the three chapters one by one: Rome Chapter - RC, Northern Italy Chapter - NIC, Southern Italy Chapter – SIC.

The inception of the PMI Rome Chapter – PMI-RC was similar to the one of IPMA Italy. This association was established in September 1997 by some professional (around 35) working for ENI's department in charge of guidance, procurement, staff recruitment and training, and knowledge management, also known as ENI Corporate University. This is the institutional point of contact between the ENI network and the Italian academia and its aim is to disseminate ENI corporate culture. After leaving ENI, this association has become “a non-profit organization with the aim of promoting the discipline of Project Management within the Italian technical and economic context” (from the second article of the statute).

Slightly different story for the Northern Italy Chapter, PMI-NIC, which was founded in 1996. The PMI Northern Italy Chapter is the oldest Italian Chapter with the largest number of members. This chapter set up by a group of people (“pioneers” as they like to call themselves) from the corporate, academic and professional world. It was characterized by people coming from diverse and heterogeneous experiences, embedded within large organizations. Moreover this chapter perceives itself as:

“The main point of reference for all those who are interested in issues of project management in our country” (PMI-NIC).

Some words have to be spent also on the history of PMI-SIC. This chapter was established quite late compared to the other Italian PMI chapters and due to its dimension (in terms of members, see Table 12), it has participated marginally in the Italian field; its contribution is indeed less relevant. Its origins are associated with the presence of a few great corporations in the South of Italy, such as IBM, Olivetti, and Finmeccanica. However, their limited number explains the small dimensions of this chapter.

ISIPM (Istituto Italiano di Project Management)

ISIPM has fascinating history. This PM association was created in 2005 as a R.E.P.⁹ of PMI and as a reaction to the way the PM discipline is conceived by PMI. ISIPM is an important example since its creation is a direct consequence of the Italian social and economic peculiarities.

This association started as a direct response to the numerous Italian stakeholders in the field that were not (or not completely) satisfied by international professional associations such as PMI and IPMA. Its aim is to give an answer to the Italian regional and local PM needs that the other internationally oriented associations were not able to meet.

This association was created in a similar way as the PMI-NIC, since it has involved a group of Italian experts in project management. Those experts set up an association in the PM field with particular reference to ICTs in the Public Administration. Here it comes the fascinating part of the story: as its members claim, this association has the peculiarity to be a ‘cultural’ association and not a ‘professional’ one. As said, this association was born because the former president of the PMI-SIC decided to set up a new association with the purpose of focusing more on “Italian” project management issues. The founder and former president was basically complaining about how PMI devote very little attention to problems linked with projects in the Italian field, which according to him, need more focus on new approaches such as the “agile” project management. Also the strategies (as it is highlighted in the following chapter) will substantially differ from the other two professional associations, since those are more focused on the public sphere (the State, PA, local governments and public agencies).

The thought is slightly different for ISIPM that instead is an independent association. Here there is absolutely no duties nor responsibilities towards other entities. In this case, it is the will of the founders (and of all those involved in the conception of this association) that shapes the governance structure of this association. As the former president of ISIPM said:

“We were born with notary constitutive deed, who else has contributed? [...] Assuming that we do not have any industrial groups behind us, we are just an association of persons. We do not have any link with any political party, we are a non-profit, just ‘true’ cultural association” (PMI 1).

Thus rules and strategies of ISIPM are decided democratically within the board of directors without any external influence. The following Table 10 is intended to summarize some of the features that have been presented in the previous paragraphs:

⁹ Registered Education Provider: thus can carry on teaching programs and certifications issued by PMI.

Features	Environments' conception	Area of action	Type of international link
PMI	Italian big corporation in Oil & Gas (e.g.: ENI)	Interested in all markets	Very strong with headquarter
IPMA	Italian plant engineering (e.g.: ANIMP)	Mainly big corporations	Good relationship with other partners
ISIPM	Reaction from PMI	Mainly public sphere (PA & local governments)	Basically null

Table 10: Summary of the main features that distinguish the three professional associations in the Italian field.

The Italian field: which professional project for PM associations?

The trend in the adoption of PM as a discipline, in the Italian field, is in line with the average global trend, confirming the sharp rise in the number of certifications delivered by professional associations. However, before going in depth in the analysis of PM adoption in Italy, some preliminary considerations need to be done.

In order to understand the idiosyncrasies of the Italian context, it is necessary to consider the structure and the setting of the Italian economy. For a discipline that develops, at least in the beginning of its diffusion, mainly within big corporations, it is hard to be implemented on a large scale in the Italian economy which is characterized by small and medium enterprises. Moreover, other considerations to take into account concern the origins of the international associations. In '70s PMI was mostly widespread in the US and in Canada, while IPMA, founded in Switzerland, was widespread in Europe. To prove this consideration, it is possible to see that the Italian branch of IPMA was founded 21 years later than the international one (1965 Vs 1986), while the first Italian chapter of PMI was founded 27 years later (1969 Vs 1996).

This could be the main reason why in Italy the trend that PM experienced in the world happened with a delay of a few years compared to Anglo-Saxon countries, but not much later than average of all European countries (see Table 11).

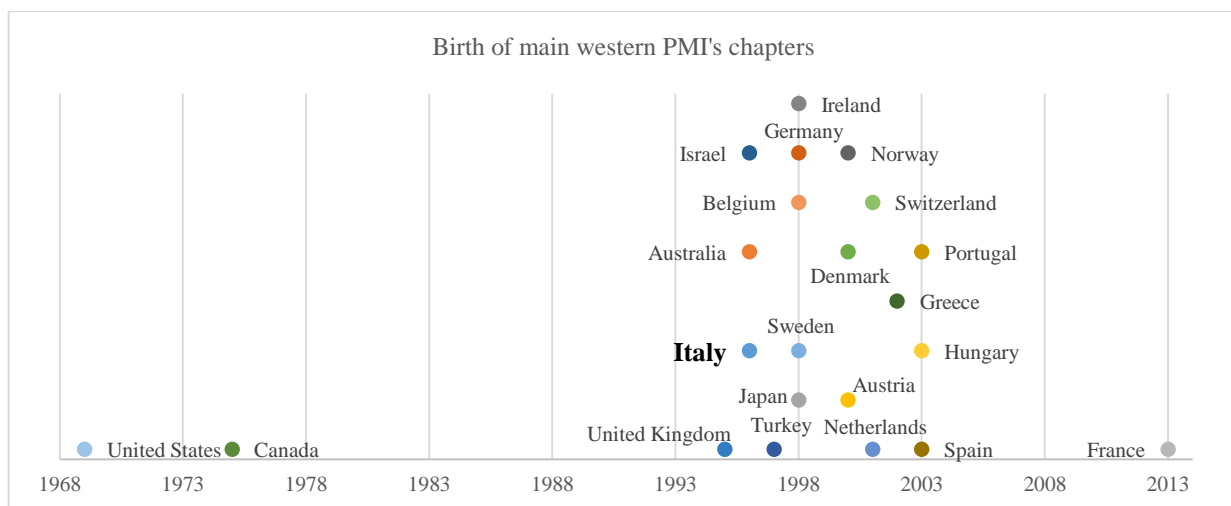


Table 11: Creation of main western PMI's chapters

This consideration appears even clearer if we compare the foundation of Italian chapters with the international ones (Table 12). They generally came quite later, at least 20 years later (looking at IPMA).

Name	Year of foundation		members in 2013
	International	Italy chapter	
IPMA	1965	1986*/2012**	1.000
PMI-NIC		1996	1.464
PMI-RC	1969	1997	610
PMI-SIC		2004	152
ISIPM		2005	1.630

Table 12: Summary of Italian professional associations (*ANIPM PM Section/**IPMA Italy)

Looking at the statistics on the diffusion of PM certifications in Italy, from 1987 to mid-2013 (Table 13), it is possible to observe a similar trend compared to those presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4. A difference with the previous statistics lies in the certifications issued by the Italian professional associations; besides PMI and IPMA there is the presence of certifications issued by ISIPM (for the sake of completeness also PRINCE2 certifications are reported).

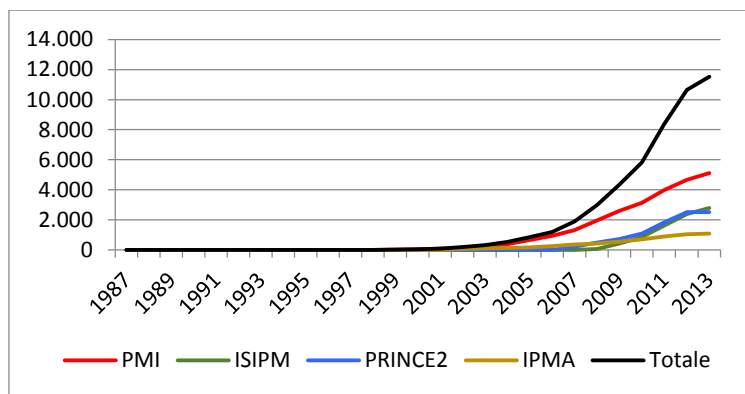


Table 13: The dissemination of project management certifications in Italy, 1987-June 2013 (Calabrese & Di Nauta, 2013)

Universities and higher education

Another element through which it is interesting to look at the PM development trends are the Universities. PM-related teaching and research at university level has risen sharply in last few years, as this domain becomes broader and more recognized.

The Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) has listed on its website the number of courses, departments and universities teaching PM as a main topic (see Table 14). Academics have become more aware of projects as special and interesting organizational phenomena. In the table it is highlighted the growing number of Italian universities that have a course on or related to PM. Unfortunately, the data are not available over an extended period of time, but nonetheless it is still possible to identify a positive trend with a physiological growth in the number of courses and departments (that host these courses) in which are growing faster than the number of universities. In the last 10 years, especially business schools and technology departments have started taking this discipline seriously, approaching it either from a social science or from a technological perspective.

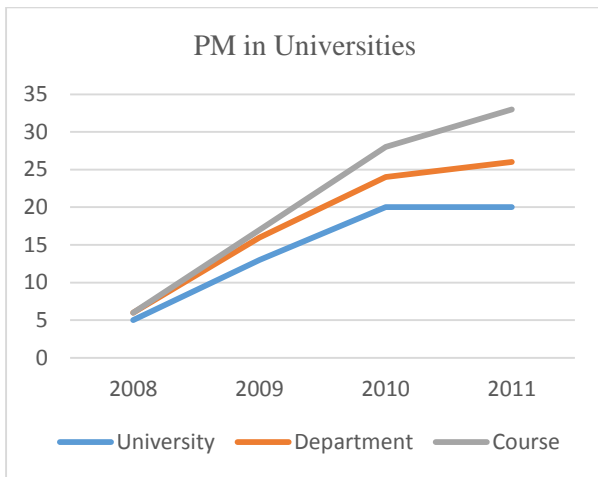


Table 14: Growth in number of Italian Universities (blue), Departments (orange) and Courses (grey) with a topic on PM (MIUR, 2013)

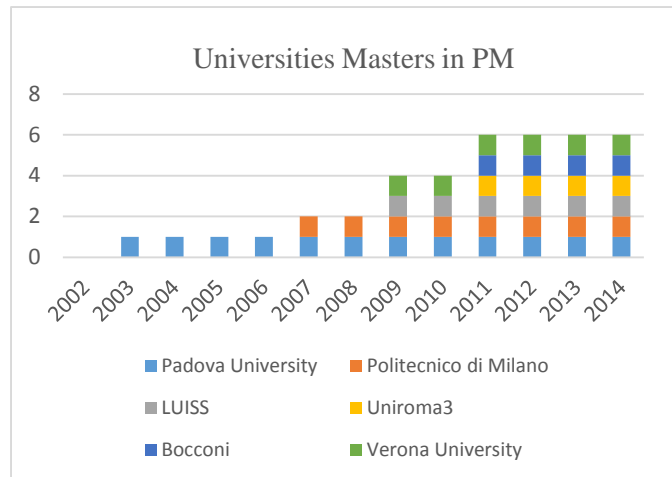


Table 15: Universities Masters in PM

Giving a look at higher education institutions (Table 15), and in particular at M.Sc. (Masters of Science), it is possible to draw the same conclusion which was previously highlighted. Before going into these data, some clarification is needed. The number of executive masters (those that are attended by practitioners in order to improve their career opportunities) offered in Italy by a number of different institutions has grown so much that it is difficult to describe all the offers available on the market. For this reason, I chose to narrow the analysis down to Universities (Table 15). The Universities that offer a M.Sc. completely focused on PM have increased in last ten years. It would be interesting to understand how the content of the PM courses is structured. This is important to understand the role of professional associations in the university sector.

Looking at the content of these masters, it is possible to note how the presence of the PM professional associations is very strong only in one M.Sc. This means that the content of the courses is in line with their position, and often the courses are directly taught by representative of the professional associations (mainly from PMI-RC and IPMA Italy). This consideration is important because if Universities abide by the PM principles dictated by the professional associations and teach them in their courses, this can be a great catalyst for the professional development of this occupation.

Technical entities

On the side of the technical entities, whose activity is symptomatic of the situation in the field (and for this reason worth to be considered), there are some important movements towards the legitimation of PM. The Italian Organization for Standardization (UNI) recently implemented a technical standard (UNI ISO21500:2012) on the role of a project manager. This UNI standard will have an important impact in Italy, even if it is just the Italian version of the international standard ISO 21500 (thus is basically a translation of and international norm into Italian language). The abstract (ISO, 2012) of the norm states:

“This International Standard provides a high-level description of the concepts and processes that are considered to form sound practice in project management. This International Standard places projects in the context of programs and project portfolios. It does not provide detailed guidance on the management of programs and project portfolios. Topics pertaining to general management disciplines are addressed only as they relate to project management”.

These norms are particularly important since they give a strong power to PM professional associations in being legitimized to deliver globally-recognized certifications (Tonchia & Nonino, 2013). For example this is the

kind of (legal) legitimation that the Italian Public Administration would need in order to hire a given professional, for instance a project manager, who is not already well-established in the field.

Further evidence

Another way of assessing the increasing popularity of this field in Italy is to look at the Italian newspapers. Table 16 sums up the articles published from 1990 to 2005 by three major Italian newspapers (“Il Corriere della Sera”, “Il Sole24Ore”, and “La Repubblica”). An increasing number of articles contain the keyword ‘project management’ in the title or at least in the body of the text. This steady increase is even clearer in the following Table 17. Hence, the attention devoted to this topic by the Italian press is indicative of how the consideration of PM is growing especially as far as the readers’ interest in this topic is concerned.

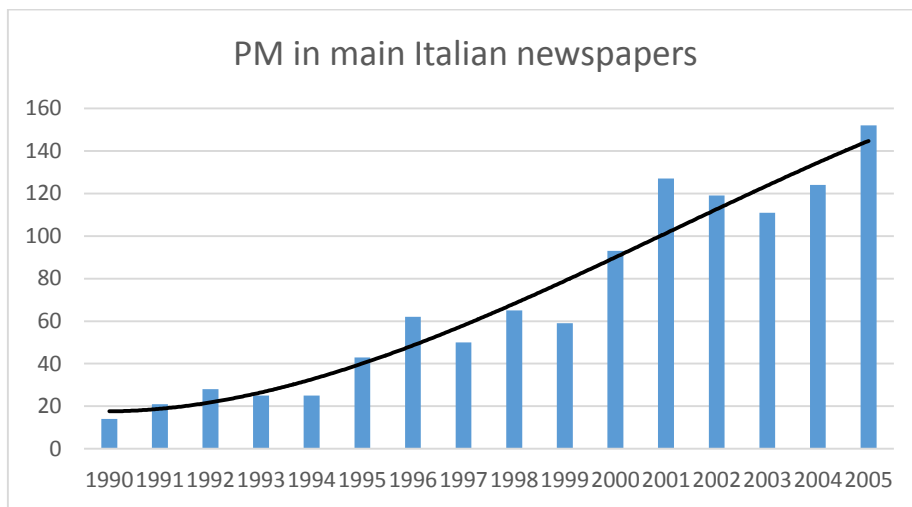


Table 16: The occurrences of “project management” in Italian newspapers (*Il Corriere della Sera*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, and *La Repubblica*)

Strikingly, if we extrapolate the data referring to *Il Sole 24 Ore*, which is one of the most significant Italian economic newspapers, this growth is even steeper. This newspaper is relevant since it analyzes mainly the Italian context (the legal and economic sector, and Italian companies operating in Italy and abroad), thus the articles presented represent a very good sample for this research. Moreover, this specific picture of the Italian context demonstrates beyond doubt that the attention to the topic of PM is steadily increasing.

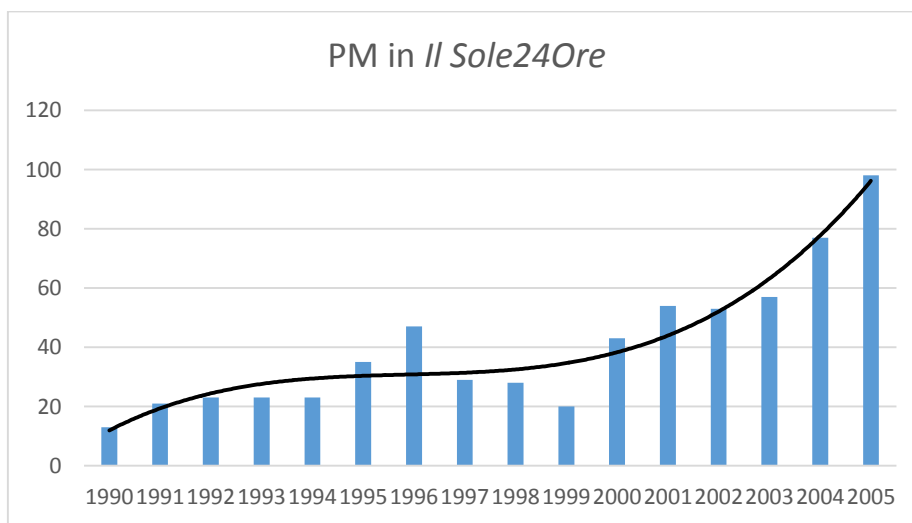


Table 17: The occurrences of “project management” in *Il Sole24Ore* newspaper (1990-2005)

Closing remarks

PM is as old as humankind and even ancient history features the development of different areas of expertise and their application to various project activities. PM has existed for over fifty years, but perhaps not on a global scale and the history of PM shows that it is a dynamic, ever changing field which evolves in creative and innovative ways to meet the demand of its context. There is nothing static about it. (Chiu, 2010)

Taylor, Gantt, and others helped make project management a distinct business function that requires study and discipline. In the decades leading up to World War II, marketing approaches, industrial psychology, and human relations began to take hold as integral parts of project management.

Project management, in its modern form, began to take root only a few decades ago. Starting in the early 1960s, businesses and other organizations began to see the benefit of organizing work around projects. This project-centric view of the organization evolved further as organizations began to understand the critical need for their employees to communicate and collaborate while integrating their work across multiple departments and professions and, in some cases, whole industries.

Table 18 presents in chronological order the milestones which have marked the development of the PM field and which are relevant for the Italian context.

Date	Event
1965	Birth of IMSA (International Management Systems Association), that is the former name of IPMA
1969	Birth of PMI (Project Management Institute)
1967	IMSA change its name to INTERNET
July 1986	Birth of Project Management Section from the ANIPM association
1994	INTERNET change the name to IPMA (International Project Management Association)
1996	Birth of PMI-NIC (Northern Italy Chapter)
September 1997	Birth of PMI-RC (Rome Chapter) from a side of ENI Corporate University
July 2001	ISO 15188:2001. Project management guidelines for terminology standardization
June 2003	ISO 10006:2003 Quality management systems - Guidelines for quality management in projects
June 2004	Birth of PMI-SIC (South Italy Chapter)
September 2005	European Directive 2005/36/CE: Recognition of professional qualifications
October 2005	Birth of ISIPM (Istituto Italiano di Project Management)
August 2006	Italian Government issue the law n.248/06 (art.2): Urgent measures to guarantee competition in the professional services sector. PMI obtain ISO 17024:2002, this give the possibility to be a standard for organizations that offer certifications to professionals worldwide (which means that personnel certifying bodies meet a certain set of standards)
December 2006	2007 Constitution of Project Committee ISO PC236 to develop the ISO 21500 (issued in 2012)
October 2007	UNI ISO 15188:2007. Project management guidelines for terminology standardization ¹⁰
2012	Birth of IPMA-Italy from the ANIPM Project Management Section
September 2012	ISO 21500: "Guidance on project management". Standard for good practice on project management
January 2013	Italian Government issue the law n.4/2013: Provisions on professions not regulated by law
September 2013	UNI 11506:2013. Professional activities not regulated by law. Definition of knowledge, skills and competences requirements for professionals figures ICT sector.
February 2014	MiSE ¹¹ draw the list with non-regulated by law professional associations.

¹⁰ The standard specifies guidelines to define the steps and procedures to be followed in the projects to standardize terminology, as well as those of harmonization and uniformity, both within and outside the scope of international standardization.

¹¹ Ministero dello sviluppo economico/Ministry of Economic Development

Table 18: Chronology of key events relevant within the Italian field.

The purpose of this chapter has been to show the professionalization project implemented by the actors in the field. I have tried to give as much evidence as possible for the process of professionalization of this discipline in this field. Understanding of who the key players are and how they work is a necessary step to understand their strategies and their role in the field. The next chapter shall further explore this topic.

STRATEGIES

In this chapter I shall focus on the activities implemented by professional associations trying to clarify the different areas and the different aims for which they are conceived. Those activities have the effect of producing a dense network of relationships among associations themselves and other stakeholders. Through the analysis of the strategies that PM professional associations put in place, and through the identification of the differences in the way their strategies are applied, I shall try to illustrate the professionalization path of this discipline.

To understand the way professional associations act in the Italian field, a member of COLAP board (closely involved with Italian parliamentary activities) says:

“[Professionals] begin to fragment, than they regroup in other groups: they call them associations, they call them circles, they call them symposia [...], any collective form that helps them to support each other [...], they make a micro grid. The actions they do when associating again is pushing their interests in front of government, but before that they wait to become quantitatively more significant and then practice their ability to lobby. This pressure is implemented on all the institutional system which could be in a wider meaning not only the government, but can be extended to companies etc. [...] They become a complex system which carry multiple interests when they become a system they try to be as numerous as possible (trying to increase the members of the association) and then focus on a target to where transfer that pressure in order to reach their objective” (COLAP 1).

It has been said that “the professional association is as the professional association does: its manifest and latent social functions, not the structure designed to put these functions into effect, are its social excuse for being” (Merton, 1958, p. 50). Despite the truthfulness of this old quotation, while on one side I fully agree with the importance of its (social) functions, on the other I do not share the entire message. The structure of a professional association is a relevant characteristic. Professional associations can be closely controlled from a central office (as in the PMI model) or may allow considerable autonomy to local branches of the associations

(as in the IPMA model), and this characteristic will radically change the strategies and the way the association functions.

In the following paragraphs, I will try to identify and compare the main characteristics of the Italian professional associations. The aim is to shed some light on the idiosyncrasies and the characteristics of the Italian PM professional associations

The aim of this chapter is to understand the tactics and the strategies implemented by the various actors as a way to describe the PM professionalization paths in Italy. The structure of this chapter is settled in order to develop a story of how and if this professional project is emerging. To present this process I decided to use some of categories already employed in literature, from similar field analysis, to discuss the findings, namely credentialism (Brown, 2001), stakeholder focus (Muzio & Hodgson, n.d.), and PM philosophical conceptions of the associations.

Credentialism & Closure

Credentialism is related to the emphasis on credentials (diploma, professional license or academic degree and other formal certifications) when assessing the right of entry into a given profession or occupation. I think that the best way to start this paragraph it is to recall from the literature review what Reed (1996) said about knowledge workers and new professions: “knowledge workers [...] are less concerned with the formal occupational and organizational credentialism and more focused on the extensively specialized cognitive and technical skills that will give them the political advantage” (Reed, 1996, p. 585).

The general belief of Reed (1996) is still true but, for the sake of completeness, it is necessary to note that PM, as part of the new knowledge occupations, embraces a set of certifications and training paths that can be compared to the ‘credentials’ that strongly characterize traditional professions.

Hence, this paragraph is aimed at analyzing the natural effect caused by the stress put on credentials, i.e. occupational closure. This concept is linked with the idea of regulating the access to a particular occupation by building barriers and thus recreating the typical advantages of monopolistic conditions. This is a very typical step made in any classical professionalization processes.

In the case of PM, some attempts are made to go in this direction but it is interesting to note that those attempts are implemented in a slightly different way compared to the traditional professions. Quoting from the literature review “traditional professionalization, emphasizing monopolistic closure, restricted practices and self-regulation, is seen to be unattractive and, moreover, unachievable for new expert labor” (Paton et al., 2013, p. 227). This paragraph is therefore oriented to the understanding of how those associations build their system of credentials through their training and certifications schemes. This is basically an attempt to regulate the production of professionals themselves (Abel, 1988), in this way professionals can “control the supply side of their particular market, establishing who is qualified to enter the profession as well as the credentials, skills and competences they should possess” (Muzio & Hodgson, n.d.). The analysis of those topics led me to conclude that while the three associations have a shared vision of the ‘training’, they have opposing (and somewhat complementary) ideas on ‘certifications’. Hence, the system of credentials does not consist of only one actor, but of a more or less loosely coordinated network of actors which have very similar objectives: building a body of knowledge.

PM professional associations at the international level (PMI and IPMA) have both built their bodies of knowledge (the famous PMBOK and the ICB respectively). The body of knowledge is the most important (and

also classic) tool that associations have to pursue an occupational closure strategy; it helps in drawing a perimeter around activities reserved to that particular profession.

In this case, as seen in the previous chapters, since PM is among the new knowledge-based occupations it is possible to notice new features of ‘closure’. Those features such as organizational membership, client engagement, competence-based closure and internationalization (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011, p. 444) are typical of the new professions.

Besides looking at online public declarations (e.g. on the IPMA website¹²), it is interesting to analyze actions actually undertaken. From those actions, it is possible to understand the true conception that associations have concerning the way training should be carried out. Looking at how training programs are organized in Italian context it is possible to conclude that there is no fundamental distinction (between IPMA and PMI) in the conception of how the training should be carried out:

“We already do a master together IPMA-PMI and we never had any problems, at least in the master in Roma this thing is working [...] at LUISS, we do a master where students can take both basic IPMA and PMI certifications” (PMI 1).

The two international associations (PMI and IPMA) thus share their views of training and concur to the organization of master degree programs. Practitioners from both associations (very often the President) teach in these master programs collaborating with the organizing structure on the side of training. This is a smart way to proceed since there are high economies of scale generated by training new potential members with shared teaching efforts.

Certifications are a whole different story because the two associations are quite divided in this regard. The discussion on the findings coming from the analysis of the certifications sees the PMI philosophy opposing the IPMA one. ISIPM has its own certifications but are less relevant to the matter at hand in this thesis¹³. Those certifications are very different in nature and the main differences relate to how PM should be evaluated. A quotation from an interview with a member of the PMI-RC board shall clarify these different conceptions:

“It is possible to say, in general, that the main difference is that while the certification of PMI is based on methodological aspects and processes of PM, the IPMA one is based on skills and, technical and contextual behavioral aspects” (PMI 3).

The difference between how those two associations assess and certify PM lies in the evaluation of PM competences (in the view of IPMA) and in PM knowledge (in the view of PMI). The basic PMI certification is:

“A large set of questions that starts from a list of tasks on which the PMBOK and other important books have been associated. [...] Basically there is a body of knowledge on which you can find all the tasks that a project manager should know and be able to perform. Those are situational questions not only mnemonic” (PMI 1).

¹² “A key challenge facing PM practitioners is to make sure that all PM learning and training efforts and costs actually obtain the intended benefits. We face this challenge, whether the purpose of the learning is the individual career development, the increased success of a project, or the improvement of the performance of the sponsoring organizations” (IPMA international website).

¹³ “We have created the so-called basic certification of ISIPM that is grounded on a small book of 150 pages in tabs, there are four areas of knowledge, are 42 cards, then 42 concepts divided into four groups of knowledge. The candidate can study alone or following a three days accredited course” (PL.G. ISIPM)

This extract demonstrates that PMI prefers a more traditional assessment of knowledge (multiple choice exams and essays) compared to IPMA. As a matter of fact, the original view of IPMA is stigmatized by its former international Italian President through an example that highlights the difference with PMI:

“The reason why I considered more appealing IPMA reside in the fact that the market, once will acknowledge better the PM discipline, might consider better the IPMA competence certification because it is precisely a certificate of professional competence! The other (PMI) is only partially... Without making any argumentation I can just ask the following question: if you have to be operated, would you go to a in an operating room where the surgeon knows everything by heart from just reading the text of anatomy, but it is the first time that operates, or would you prefer someone who has already demonstrated its ability to operate?” (IPMA 1).

Since IPMA is oriented to the professional competences, it sees the experience as an important element for success in the management of projects. And he also adds:

“For me an important role is played by knowing the processes and methodologies, it is a *sine qua non* condition! Anyway it is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for me... it is decisive and crucial for me the experience and the previous involvement in other projects which it makes a huge difference between project success/failure” (IPMA 1).

The message that the former international IPMA President suggests relates to the prominence of PM know-how on mere PM knowledge. Moreover, even if the conceptions of those two certifications are different, the associations themselves recognize that this difference does not constitute a problem and does not generate conflicts. In the vision of some practitioners, this difference can be considered as a resource because those certifications complement one another.

From the experience in analyzing this field, I have understood that these two interpretations on how PM is conceived within international certifications is a good example of competence-based closure. Both professional associations (PMI and IPMA), through the clear definition of what their certification is about, are trying to carve out a set of activities that can be exclusively reserved to their own certification. This is very close to a classic concept of professionalism (the occupational closure attained through bodies of knowledge), but used in an innovative way (since this closure is based on competence assessment through a certification).

The complementarity and the interchangeability between the two typologies of certifications are well demonstrated by a member of PMI. In his view, considering the certifications from a very simple point of view, people who have one or the other entry level certification will have anyway the fundamental PM knowledge that allow them to be project managers.

“Let’s say, that the base, the content, the basic concepts of the skills needed to be a project manager that could be IPMA or PMI, in my point of view, they are the same! As it is natural to be [...] PM can be done in many different ways but the important things are always the same. You cannot say that if you take PMI certification you need to know a PERT diagram while instead if you take IPMA certification you don’t need to know it” (PMI 3).

To sum up in the Italian culture it is considered very important, even if not mandatory, to have some credentials (such as certifications or diplomas) in order to be considered suitable for a given job or position. The same goes for the PM discipline and practitioners are well aware of this. As a matter of fact, being conscious of that, they very often chose to take PM certifications not to improve or to evaluate their PM competences and skills, but just to meet the job requirements and gain the necessary legitimacy to get the job advancement they were looking for. This is clearly one of the main objectives of occupational closure that “seeks to maximize rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligible” (Parkin, 1974, p. 3).

In this case the activities intended to serve as occupational closure that seeks to maximize rewards by restricting access do not result in a normative requirement but rather in the delegitimization of those professionals that do not possess the ‘right’ credentials. Hence, professionalism offers considerable advantages to particular groups as it provides guarantees to have a high degree of discretion over the work and puts them in a position of power when interacting with the potential employers. According to the former international president of IPMA, the pressure on traditional credentials (e.g. a university degree) in Italy is stronger than abroad. He makes a comparison between the Italian and the international context that shows how these differences are perceived by someone who knows both contexts:

“Abroad is different! Someone is recognized as ‘project manager’ independently from any IPMA, PMI or whatever certification [...]. I won’t care how someone has acquired skills, what level of study [...] whether acquired on the job, or through training course, or a specific type of degree and/or a specialization, it’s important that one proves to have those skills and that meet highest certification levels and proves to have the needed experience because he actually had used with success project management practices! It does not matter how he acquired them” (IPMA 1).

Members’ recruitment

In this section, I will highlight the different strategies (recruitment process, organization of events and provision of services) that PM professional associations have implemented in order to deal with individual members.

The new members' recruitment process follows mainly two directives: on the one hand, the associations ‘hunt’ for new members among professionals who already are project managers, but they are not aware of that or have not yet decided to obtain a certification and join a professional association; on the other hand, the ‘hunting’ process is aimed at attracting young professional (or students) towards PM as a discipline and as a professional career.

These two strategies are being pursued by all the three associations in different ways and with different results.

For example, PMI and IPMA very often organize events with international guests that attest to the success of their PM practices. These events are either reserved to members only or open to everybody. An interview with the president of PMI-RC explains why some events are reserved only to members:

“There are some moments of reflection related only on the chapter, including how organize the work of the volunteers, the financial policy of the chapter, how do marketing events. Those events are issued only for members. Those practical experiences (belonging to each chapter) could be pooled with other chapters and then if something interesting comes up I can contact, for example Sweden chapters, and we can collaborate on the shared experience” (PMI 1).

As seen in the previous chapter, ISIPM is employing a strategy of ‘evangelism’ instead. So, even though the importance of public events is not underestimated, this association is less oriented to the organization of public events.

In my opinion both international professional associations (in particular, IPMA) adopt a similar approach to attract young talents to the PM career and to increase the chances that they might join the association at a later stage. I find a substantial strategies’ convergence of the two international professional associations (with a particular stress on this aspect by IPMA).

The objective of this strategy leads to two consequences, one of which directly ensues from the other. On the one hand, the increased propaganda among young PM practitioners and students increases the chances of

growth of the association (in terms of membership); on the other hand, this also means that the political pressure that the association may exercise (due to the increased representation base) is larger.

As seen above, there are substantial similarities between the strategies adopted by the two international associations, both of which are often involved (individually or jointly) in the (entire or partial) development of master's degree programs within universities.

Conversely, the Italian association, ISIPM, pursues a slightly different strategy. It is oriented not only to a young but also to a very young audience (high schools and colleges):

“We disseminate the word, we do workshops in high schools for free [...] We are trying to contact student unions [...], we are trying, for example, to implement a pilot project with last year high school students” (ISIPM 2).

The activity of ISIPM with regard to the training of young students led to slightly different findings. A consideration that needs to be done regards the fact that ISIPM provides training to people who need a PMI or an IPMA certificate. The ISIPM strategy looks more like a crusade, in which they share their beliefs with all the people that get in contact with the association because they act out of passion. Here an extract of the interview with the former president:

“We are certifying (with PMI certificate) hundreds of college students! Among the two thousand certificates that we are attaining in last two and half years I think 20%-30% are college students! We already have agreements acts with several universities, because there are some universities that are discussing about post-graduate PM Masters and much more” (ISIPM 2).

IPMA has a different approach to ‘young’ individual members. IPMA has indeed created a subsection of the professional association that is entirely dedicated to young members: the IPMA Young Crew. This subsection was conceived with the intention of creating a network of young members and thus making the association more desirable since its aim is to be closer to the needs and interests of young members.

Essentially, the IPMA Young Crew is a professional association within the broader IPMA Italy professional association; on some level, it serves the same purpose as IPMA. Being managed by young practitioners and addressed mainly to them, the IPMA Young Crew makes use of modern strategies to collect and provide services to new members, such as the use of blogs and *aperitivo*¹⁴. Being partially separated from IPMA Italy, the Young Crew could be an interesting element to study more in depth since it is very representative of how young professionals see the professionalization project.

Engagement with corporate stakeholders

In the analysis of the process of professionalization a relevant aspects relates to how the associations focus on their stakeholders. This paragraph has the aim of going back over the story of the relationship between the associations and their stakeholders. However, since this category is quite wide (and may include different stakeholders such as individuals, big corporations, the State and public entities), in this paragraph I shall analyze mainly corporate members. In particular, in this section I will present the different strategies that, based on my personal observations, PM professional associations implement to deal with big corporations.

¹⁴ In Italy ‘aperitivo’, literally aperitif, it is the name for the ritual of going out for a pre-dinner drink that in the last years has become very common among young people, either students or young professionals.

This paragraph focuses on the concept of corporate professionalization (Kipping et al., 2006; Muzio et al., 2007; Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011) that I already highlighted in the literature review.

This new way of implementing the professionalization project does not only rely on individuals, but also on corporations and it perfectly matches the PM professional association strategies. The inability of many modern expert occupations to establish an explicit and exclusive knowledge base (Alvesson, 1993; Reed, 1996) is not good enough a reason to side with big corporations. As seen in the previous paragraph, contrary to other modern expert occupations such as management consulting (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011), PM has successfully built its own bodies of knowledge. In this case the determinant that drives the professionalization project towards big corporations lies in the increased dominance of large corporations as purchasers of the services provided by new expert occupations (Muzio et al., 2007).

Those kinds of strategies are implemented mainly through different actions which range from the organization of events in collaboration with big corporations to the implementation of programs within their functions and department to attract corporate members. These three sets of actions are often mixed together in the strategies of the professional associations and therefore it is difficult to separate each single feature. For the purpose of this analysis, it is important to consider that corporations are, on the one side, clients and recipients of PM practices sponsored by professional associations and, on the other side, members of the associations (this is specifically the case of PMI and IPMA):

“we have corporate membership, those are institutions or companies that pay a certain fee and may also register a number of its members as member of the association” (PMI 3).

The corporate client is involved in the dynamics of the professional project in a totally different way compared to traditional professions. With this favorable position it is very simple for an organization to impact on the trajectories of professional strategies.

The relationship between those kinds of stakeholders and the professional associations is a combination of traditional and corporate characteristics, but since corporations are both clients (as employers of project managers) and members of the associations, the power is shifted more towards safeguarding corporate interests. An example showing how Siemens is constantly in contact with IPMA in order to present their internal restructuring plans (towards a more project-oriented pattern) is very interesting to understand this process:

“With Siemens we are in close contact they came several times to present their project in our (IPMA) world congresses. They come to show the progresses they are making in reengineering their organization. The head of the board of Monaco, which is in charge of this project, come to the last event; therefore there are the very top managers that are interested in this process. Anyway we are also in relationship with Finmeccanica, however we are expanding and now we are in relationship also with the Thales group and some others. Mostly corporations that we are speaking with are from those of realities” (IPMA 1).

As seen in the previous paragraph IPMA and PMI follow more or less the same strategies: they organize events in which corporations are invited to speak about their situation and present their achievements. For example, in a recent event organized by IPMA, the ICT Project Manager of Saipem S.p.A. (part of ENI group) gave evidence on how this corporation has always been very close to PMI (furthermore ENI has been one of the founders of the PMI Rome Chapter).

“Saipem, in building its certification schema, has been inspired by PMI knowledge areas and also the professor who taught the course was one of the teachers who, within ENI Corporate University (ECU), take

courses of consolidation for the role of the Project Manager in ENI and the preparatory course for PMI-certification” (Saipem - ICT Project Management Manager).

This explains very clearly how the activities of professional association and corporations are closely intertwined, which makes it possible for corporations to influence the policies of professional associations.

IPMA too has developed programs with big corporations. Below, I have reported an example of how Siemens (a corporation with branches all over the world) discussed with IPMA in order to have standardized internal certifications that can apply in all their subsidiaries:

“Siemens, at this point, in deciding to implement an IPMA certification schema, in addition to the internal one, cannot discuss it with IPMA in Italy, in Austria, in France, in Spain, in Germany and so on... that would have meant the development of different certifications in each country, that is not what Siemens was looking for. In order to meet the requirements of Siemens, IPMA corporate has taken charge to coordinate all IPMA's countries involved, giving them the instructions. In this way Siemens employee (in Italy) will be certified by IPMA Italy according to the instructions and directives and unification agreements that IPMA International reached with the Siemens' world” (IPMA 1).

The last quotation demonstrates the huge influence that SIEMENS as a corporation has in shaping the professionalization project not just of the Italian IPMA, but also of all other national IPMAs (in the countries where the corporations has its subsidiaries).

ISIPM follows a different approach and does not look at big corporations as a primary focus. Even if the members of ISIPM come from big corporations, they are more interested, as we will see in the next paragraph, in talking to state agencies and to all those public entities that are related with the public sphere.

In short, it is important to consider the nature of PM. This discipline includes a set of collective activities that are very often (if not always) developed within organizations that range from multinationals, to SMEs, to public organizations (ministries, local governments, and agencies). Hence, thinking about the intrinsic nature of this discipline I expect to find a pattern of professionalization which is closely linked to big corporations.

Why do corporations wish to be involved in the activities of professional associations?

PM professional associations seek to include big corporations in their events and among their members, but from the corporations' point of view, why is it desirable to be involved in the PM associations' activities and pay their employees to get PM certifications and become members of the above-mentioned organizations?

Corporations give three main set of reasons: attest the excellence of their internal resources, standardize and map internal competences, and award their best employees with PM certifications. As I will show throughout all the quotations, the professional associations have built suitable tools to meet each one of those needs.

The first reason implies a twofold intention. Demonstrating the internal employees' excellence has both an internal and an external aim. In the case of Thales Alenia Space (that is a joint venture between Thales 67% and Finmeccanica 33%, in the aerospace sector) the implementation of an internal PM certification program (starting from the IPMA model) has been developed.

“From an organizational point of view it would be short-sighted don't certify its project managers just to have scarce resources! [...] It is clear that the organization has the greatest interest in having the resources that are somehow excellent and certification is a path to acknowledge the excellence of those resources, we want to somehow give external recognition of this excellence” (PMI 3).

Furthermore, the interview continues with the explanation of how the internal PM certification program has been implemented in Thales Alenia Space:

“The Thales plan is, however, a certification program both internally and externally oriented. The path that the employee follow in IPMA-Thales joint program requires an initial Thales examination (in order to access to this program), then an IPMA examination to verify written skills. Then the candidate will be evaluated on what has written, he can get either IPMA and Thales certifications or just one of them (they are independent)” (PMI 3).

The second reason is the standardization and mapping of internal employee competences. This standardization can be imposed by the headquarter as it happens in Hewlett Packard (HP), according to the next interview quotation. HP recognizes the importance to rely on the employees’ competence level in all their branches and subsidiaries:

“HP employees are certified because the HP considers this certification a way to have a standardized view of the (corporate) world [...] Taking the certification will help the organization to understand at which hierarchy level you should be” (PMI 2).

This trend also appears to be growing fast since the number of large organizations that use this method to encourage their employees to take a PM certification is increasing.

The third reason is to reward the best employees by giving them the possibility to take PM certifications, allowing them to study and paying for the certification itself. Examples for this can be found at HP as well as at Engineering (that is a professional service firm that provides independent engineering expertise).

“There are more and more Italian companies investing in certifications, Engineering four years ago had zero PMI now it has 240 certified. In Italy corporations are realizing more and more that investing in skills is not a mere cost but can have revenues in long-term [...]: ‘I’ll give you the time and I pay the certification as a prize’. The corporation decides to don’t give a pay rise but pay for the time spent to study! Paradoxically, in talent retention it worth more to pay a certification than a pay rise! In US companies pay increases are forgotten after a month whereas you don’t ever forget of these formal rewarding” (PMI 2).

The State and the public sphere

An extended section is devoted to the role of the State in Italy in order to fully understand this multifaceted phenomenon. In this paragraph I shall present the Italian context on one side and the associations' strategies to approach this context on the other. The two sections that follow present the context in which the Italian State and the public administration play.

Critical insights in the Italian context: State activities & strategies

The history of the Italian field is deeply marked by a lengthy debate between legally recognized professions (“*Ordini*”) and non-regulated professions. The second category is not state-sanctioned whereas the first one is. Looking at the Italian context, there are two enduring and distinctive characteristics that have been highlighted by Micelotta & Washington (2013) in their work on the system of Italian legal profession: (1) there is a strong distinction between regulated and non-regulated professions (in the way they are regulated and in the social benefits they have); (2) when it comes to professions in Italy, some very conservative institutionalized practices still apply.

The first point relates to the formal division between regulated and non-regulated by law professions. Those two categories have different rights and degrees of autonomy. The *Ordini*, i.e. the core professions (e.g. law, medicine, and engineering), are legally recognized in Italy since 19th century. In order to become a doctor, an engineer, etc. and exercise this profession, people are required to join the regional branch of a state-sanctioned professional association, i.e. of the *Ordine*. An *Ordine* can be defined as “a public entity, indissolubly professional and institutional, territorially diffused, compulsory, formally distinct, and (relatively) autonomous, enjoying the power to regulate itself and to represent the entire professional group” (Olgiati & Pocar, 1988, p. 340).

The second point refers to the extremely conservative context that professions experience in Italy (at least compared to Anglo-Saxon models of professionalism). A member of COLAP explains that this protectionist behavior is anchored even in the Italian constitution:

“The article 33 of Italian constitution¹⁵ (issued in 1947), express something interesting, that in other countries doesn't exist. The state intervenes very much, for example in deciding to protect citizens from a bad lawyer!” (COLAP 2)

Other examples relate to the possibility for the regulated professional associations, i.e. the *Ordini*, to decide the maximum and minimum fees that professionals have to apply. Moreover, “professional codes of conduct specifically prohibit the use of contingency fees, the negotiation of compensation, the advertising of professional services, and the creation of multidisciplinary practices” (Micelotta & Washington, 2013, p. 1143). The presence of these deep-seated practices has contributed to a general sentiment that competition is far from being achieved in the Italian professional service sector (Pammolli, Cambini, & Giannaccari, 2007; Sterlacchini, 2002).

A comprehensive and exhaustive picture of the regulatory framework may not leave out the European Union. The European Directive 2005/36/EC (recognition of professional qualifications) demanded an immediate

¹⁵ Article 33: “L'arte e la scienza sono libere e libero ne è l'insegnamento. La Repubblica detta le norme generali sull'istruzione ed istituisce scuole statali per tutti gli ordini e gradi. Enti e privati hanno il diritto di istituire scuole ed istituti di educazione, senza oneri per lo Stato. La legge, nel fissare i diritti e gli obblighi delle scuole non statali che chiedono la parità, deve assicurare ad esse piena libertà e ai loro alunni un trattamento scolastico equipollente a quello degli alunni di scuole statali. E' prescritto un esame di Stato per l'ammissione ai vari ordini e gradi di scuole o per la conclusione di essi e per l'abilitazione all'esercizio professionale. Le istituzioni di alta cultura, università ed accademie, hanno il diritto di darsi ordinamenti autonomi nei limiti stabiliti dalle leggi dello Stato”.

reform of professions aimed at promoting competition and liberalizing professional services. However, those EU recommendations have gone too far to be effective (Micelotta & Washington, 2013).

This long battle between *ordini* and non-regulated professions has continued over the years through a decade of reform and counter-reforms. The subsequent reforms have followed in continual oscillations parallel with government oscillations (Deiana & Paneforte, 2010). To make the situation even more complex there are some differences even within the non-regulated professions. Some believe that professional associations should be like certification entities that just provide the qualification or the title to act in that particular profession (acting as a certification body, or following a model comparable to the *ordini*) (as in the view of COLAP); some others believe that there is the need for an independent third party that would supply certifications in order to avoid conflicts of interests (as in the view of CEPAS).

In Italian field, the *ordini* have strongly opposed the State's willingness to liberalize the professions merely for pragmatic reasons. The *Ordini* have tried to keep their position as it originates a high income for their members (since they basically operate in a monopoly), and allows them to continue their certification activities. One member of COLAP expresses his opinion about a recent law that was discussed in the Italian Parliament some months ago:

“A very absurd thing was an increase in the number of activities reserved to some type of counselor. As an example lawyers became the exclusive profession that could give legal advices” (COLAP 2).

He also adds:

“I think that in Italy there are already too many *ordini* [legally regulated professions] we have the world record! We [as a COLAP] will oppose with all our strength to the creation of new one, we won't let it happen. I repeat that was happening [the attempt to create new *ordini*] six months ago, not 10 years ago!” (COLAP 2).

The liberal principles and a competitive culture are severely lacking in Italy and the Italian State has always had a clear position in favor of the *ordini*. This trend has continued until the European Union has pressured every EU Member State to comply with the same rules. In 2006 the Italian Government issued a decree (law n.248/06, see Table 18) that “required all professions without distinction to comply with the EU guidelines and modify their codes of conduct to promote competition in professional markets” (Micelotta & Washington, 2013, p. 1143). This law was intended to disrupt the institutionalized practices, such as the ‘fixed fee’ used to determine the professional fees or the ban on advertising professional services.

After six years another important law has been passed in this field: law n.4/2013 (provisions on professions not regulated by law). This law basically ‘regulates’ the non-regulated professions. Could seem a joke, but in Italian field, where everything is ruled by law, PA to hire a given professional it need that that the profession for which the professional is needed, it is somehow recognized by law (thus avoiding legal prosecutions). This law gives the possibility for the PA to acknowledge the PM discipline and to decide to employ ‘proper’ project managers to develop its projects. This consideration is very important since the PA in Italy contributes to the GDP more than in other western countries, at least 14%, and represents 15% of total employment (Unioncamere, 2009).

This legitimation made by law is very important in Italy since PM is recognized as a discipline and as an occupation. However, there are still some tensions on the final objectives of this process, in particular on whether PM (and all other new occupations) should be structured like the *ordini* or not. So, it remains to be

seen if the actors in the field will push towards a structure based on associationism different from the *ordini* or if they will actually retain restrictive and monopolistic logics.

In this section, I shall present my observations concerning the different strategies that PM professional associations implement to deal with the public sphere (intended as the State itself and the various local government agencies). The three professional associations that I am looking at differ on some fundamental aspects. Those differences lie both in their conception of PM as discipline and in the adopted strategies.

Taking into account IPMA Italy, the data did not reveal a particular interest in this aspect. The interviews with IPMA representatives and the analyzed archival data show that this professional association has little interest in dealing with the public sphere. For its nature, IPMA looks mainly at big corporations and their needs; its interest for other entities remains limited.

PMI and its Italian chapters have a different approach. From the PMI Rome Chapter emerges that they recognize the problems that the PA and the Italian Public Agencies are experiencing since there is no formal recognition of the career path:

“We realize that the project managers’ difficulties in public services are huge, since it is not formally recognized (by law) as a career. The formal recognition of PM as a profession becomes an essential battle for the future in PA” (PMI 1).

The recognition of this ‘problem’, intended as a need for more lobbying in the Italian public sector, is not followed by a PMI strategy or actions with this aim. Despite the fact that PMI-RC recognizes that these stakeholders need more assistance, there is no interest in starting a ‘crusade’ with this aim (which is the case for ISIPM). The centralized nature of PMI means that if there are no directives that comes from above (e.g. the headquarter), the chapter will not begin any isolated battle. In the view of the president of PMI-RC, the Public Administration is like any other sector and if there is a critical mass of people pushing in a given direction, the chapter will commence the battle to defend PM interests, otherwise it will not. What follows is an extract of the interview with the president of the PMI-RC concerning their strategy with regard to the State and the PA:

“We are beginning to work on it (public sector) but for us it is important, and to me personally, that I need to have the entire chapter behind me! Since it’s not my battle, I’m not moving until I have a wide support. If so, the day that I will leave my place as a president this battle will be lost! I believe that this thing (fighting for public sector) should mature in the mind of the people... We have already done two events in which we open ourselves to the outside, we wait for responses, people will let us know via email if they liked those events. In December we did a completely weird event where we talked about PM in environments such as film, television, theater and things like that [...] but I need the mandate to bring forward some battles, the president could bring some battles only if there is an entire chapter behind, on this topic I am quite rigid!” (PMI 1).

This quotation shows PMI's conception of PM, which is seen more as a competence than as a profession. PMI basically tries to sell as many certifications as possible; so if there is a market that is ready to accept PM, PMI will conquer it following different and multiple strategies, but it prefers to avoid penetrating in a market that is not ready yet, with huge potential risks:

“We are not very convinced that PM is a profession! [...] The PM is a professional and managerial competence, thus if I bring forward the profession I can’t carry forward the ‘managerial competence’, we are still discussing this” (PMI 1).

The situation is different for the Italian professional association. ISIPM is blatantly oriented towards the State and the public entities. According to the interviews, there is a clear and strong will to bring PM within the public sector. In the eyes of ISIPM, the State and the PA do not only include the legislative bodies but also other public stakeholders such as other professional associations (e.g. accountants, surveyors). Believing in the importance of applying PM practices to all projects, the members of ISIPM try to persuade everyone they can reach (in a sort of ‘crusade’, to follow the same example used above). This extract expresses these concepts very clearly:

“Our approaches are not coming from formal and blatant presentations to a Ministry, we try to approach the executives in the offices of the sector which we are interested, we try to meet them one by one! We do this kind of meeting, more or less, twice a week, I spend 50% of my time for the association (ISIPM) and the other 50% on my private activity. I have already spoken personally with MIUR¹⁶ members of the board from two different areas, presenting ourselves to them in the same way we have presented to you” (ISIPM 2).

Public administration and Local government actions

The Italian PA and the local governments are lagging behind in the adoption of project management tools and techniques; this is the conclusion I draw when I compare them to examples drawn from the academic literature pertaining to the Anglo-Saxon countries. In this case, Italy is experiencing the same tension that Anglo-Saxon countries experienced around 20 years ago.

The tension that PA experience is generated by the will to try out the new tools and techniques that emerge from the market (such as PM in the last 30 years), on the one hand, and the need to keep continuity with the past, on the other, a phenomenon which has been well described in the Anglo-Saxon literature since the early '90s. Agranoff highlighted that “[PA] departments have found that, if they maintain more traditional line program structures, they must then integrate by attacking problems through the use of lateral organizational linkages, such as task forces, standing teams, and project management” (Agranoff, 1991, p. 539). This tension has settled down in favor of the adoption of new tools and techniques in more liberal countries where the PA is not subject to so many restrictions imposed by law (Cats-Baril & Thompson, 1995). In the countries, where the PA is ‘freer’, it is mostly dominated by a methodological pragmatism (Shields, 1998) and the decision-makers are free to use the tools they believe are most useful to implement the relevant projects in the most successful way.

Therefore, the biggest difference that seems to emerge from this analysis concerns the differential requirements that Italian PA and local governments have in order to “accept” (and therefore employ) a new occupation. A member of the PMI-RC states that:

“Within the PA, people don’t even know what a GANTT is! They [people in PA] don’t know what a project manager is and they call him RUP (*Responsabile Unico del Procedimento*)¹⁷!” (PMI 1).

Those requirements are mainly related to legal recognition. A very explicative example is provided in the following interview in which an ISIPM member speaks about a lawsuit filed against the mayor of a big Italian city for employing project managers:

“[the mayor] takes two engineers and sends them to do the course to certify them as project manager [...] he is such an enlightened mayor! These gentlemen [one of the two engineers] see the light and come back and say ‘hey I want to be a project manager’! So [the mayor], assigns them a little project called the city

¹⁶ MIUR is the Ministry for Education and Research

¹⁷ RUP is the Italian legitimate by law role that can carry on and lead engineering and construction projects.

incinerator. Because of this incinerator is several miles away from the city he gives to engineers a refund of two hundred euro a month for the shift in the car. In a directive (this was the mistake of the mayor), he writes a fax in which engineer X was appointed as PM (project manager) of the incinerator and will have an extraordinary compensation of 300€. A jealous colleague make an anonymous complaint to a public prosecutor, the prosecutor sees that the engineer was appointed as PM (project manager) as he [the prosecutor] that in Italy is called PM (*Pubblico Ministero*), he arraign both [the mayor and the engineer] for name misappropriation, (that they used a fake title to pass some money to the engineer). [...] The solution has been the clarification that the mayor wants to appoint the engineer as a RUP and not as a PM, swapping the word as a mistake” (ISIPM 2).

This above-mentioned example clarifies how in Italy the PA and local governments are locked in a system that forces them to rely exclusively on legally institutionalized figures. Those actors are constrained by this system and if they do not comply with the requirements (as in the case explained in the extract of the interview) they run the risk of being involved in legal prosecution (which is quite long in Italy). This situation is highlighted in another very good quotation from another interview with a member of another association complaining about the problems encountered when trying to be recognized by the PA:

“Italy has a public legislation that rules all public contract [those between any public unit with another entity, either public or private], that PA and local government must follow. To employ professionals, you need that those professionals are framed into the law of general public contracts. In the case of a private organization it is totally different because you can put the people you want. It is totally different in England, where there is a more general civil code” (PMI 1).

As a matter of fact, the sole accepted figure is the *Responsabile Unico del Procedimento* (hereinafter ‘RUP’), recognized by the law it was introduced in Italy with the law n.241/1990. This figure is of considerable importance in the design and realization of architectural or civil engineering projects. Pursuant to this law, the PA and all local governments have to appoint a RUP for each project within their competence through an organizational unit inside the public entity. This law specifies that there is only one of this figure for each project. Although duties of this figure overlap with those of a project manager, they are not the same. For this reason the professional associations are fighting for the recognition of PM figure by public contract law:

“Something could change if this term (project manager) would be recognized at least from a Ministry, as an existing role [...] in this case we (as ISIPM) might ask for a formal recognition within the national labor contracts and be considered also by unions, since today’s Italian project managers have no union coverage” (ISIPM 2).

Regulative bargain and standards

Other important categories of actors to which the associations’ strategies are targeted include those entities that are in charge of making standards or recognize in public records the boundaries of the discipline. The first category includes law-makers in charge of technical legislation at different levels: UNI (*Ente Nazionale Italiano di Unificazione*¹⁸) at Italian level, CEN (*European Committee for Standardization*) at European level, and ISO (*International Organization for Standardization*) at international level. Concerning the role of technical entities, the President of CEPAS says:

“Voluntary and technical standards, UNI in the Italian case, or CEN or ISO, are made by experts of the field; from quality sector, when it comes to quality; from environment, when it comes to environment; basically all that people representative of and interested in that given sector, all the stakeholders!” (CEPAS 1).

¹⁸ Italian National Committee for Unification and Standardization.

The second category includes those public entities (such as COLAP & Ministry of Economic Development, MiSE¹⁹) that make a selection of professional associations of non-regulated professions (law n.4/2013) or that assess the quality of the certificates issued by those associations (ACCREDIA²⁰). When speaking about COLAP's main mission, one of its members says:

“The only goal of COLAP is to push the parliament in order to make a law that regulate properly, without betraying the principles of professional associations, the non-regulated profession (such as PM). If some particular professional association within COLAP has the objective to transform itself to the same model of regulated profession (such as lawyers of engineers) is out of our world! It is cheating us!” (COLAP 2)

The idea that the State and the international technical entities are actors on which PM professional associations can exert their pressure is another important element to be considered in this analysis. Looking at the literature, it is interesting to consider how if owners of particular knowledge “can form themselves into a group, which can then begin to standardize and control the dissemination of the knowledge base and dominate the market in knowledge-based services, they will then be in a position to enter into a regulative bargain with the state” (Cooper, Lowe, Puxty, Robson, & Willmott, 1988, p. 8). This is a quite classical concept in the sociology of professions and it explains how the State can use professions to control the market; “the regulative bargain remains at the basis of the state/profession relationship but the profession is used as a channel for state action, especially controls” (Macdonald, 1995, p. 115).

Traditional professions, which were normally designed inside this idea of ‘regulative bargain’, sought this kind of alliance with the State and pursue their strategies according to this idea. Observing the Italian field of PM, I wonder: are new expert occupations still seeking a regulative bargain as traditional professions?

Looking at what has been said in the previous paragraph about the neoliberal wave that the Italian State (pushed by the European Union²¹) is experiencing in matter of profession, the answer to my previous question should to be negative: there should be no space for new expert occupations in seeking regulative bargaining.

However, the facts are quite different. In this regard, the three analyzed PM professional associations differ very much from each other. The ways these associations consider the Italian State are different. Part of the PM professional associations’ strategies is trying to embed their principles within international standards or international public entities. Through the leverage on those actors, the associations can increase their popularity and can thus seek legitimation within a broader context. This could be read as a new way to seek a regulative bargain since it is not exerted on the State (as it was the case for traditional professions) but on higher entities (such as ISO) that have replaced the State in making rules for those kinds of activities. In the literature, it is commonly accepted that standardization “constitutes a mechanism of coordination and an instrument of regulation comparable with other instruments, such as public regulations, markets and hierarchies or formal organizations” (Heras-Saizarbitoria & Boiral, 2012, p. 48). PMI corporate and IPMA international leveraged on ISO to get the technical standard ISO 21500 (“Guidance on project management”). The ISO 21500 (inspired by the principles of PMI & IPMA) is used as an extra ‘weapon’ in their arsenal to promote the adoption of their certifications. Those international PM professional associations pursue external and international legitimacy (leveraging on ISO) as a method for obtaining legitimacy in their own country. As example PMI

¹⁹ The Ministry of Economic Development is developing a list of professional associations allowed to determine the quality of a given non-regulated profession.

²⁰ See methodology chapter for further details

²¹ See the law n.248 (art.2) issued by the Italian Government in 2006: “Urgent measures to guarantee competition in the professional services sector”.

considers UNI only as a way to increase legitimation of PM, a leverage to exploit in case it will issue a technical law on PM²²:

“Our association [PMI-RC] is an association of a personal nature. We need a nationwide standard before being totally legitimized. Shortly is expected to come the ISO 21 500 that represent a sort of hat that bringing together the two key standards of PMI and IPMA. When a clear international standard is done we can start thinking to implement also an Italian national standard on PM” (PMI 1)

The relation that PMI have regard COLAP is quite distant from the one of ISIPM, where exists a tighter connection:

“Respect to CoLAP we have not done anything yet (in regards to PMI enrolment at CoLAP list). We do not consider PM as a profession yet. CoLAP carries on the profession discourse, while we [as PMI] believe that it is at the same time a managerial competence and a profession. If I support one idea I cannot support at same time also the other. There is still an open debate on this topic” (PMI 1).

On the same line, as seen before for international PM professional associations, also ISIPM tries to have a strong leverage. However, instead of seeking international recognition to be legitimized in Italy, ISIPM interacts directly with domestic stakeholders. The actors on which ISIPM lobbies are different compared to PMI and IPMA, but the reasons that move the associations are the same: exploit the legitimation of their PM practices gained on those particular actors in the Italian field. ISIPM has not enough power to influence the ISO standards, but it benefits from them anyway:

“I want to say that the ISO 21500 (which is called ‘guidance on project management’) will be issued very shortly; an ISO standard it will then soon be adopted also in the Italian culture! We look forward to have the possibility to use ISO to leverage Italian local government and other public actors!” (ISIPM 2).

The influence that ISIPM can have on the national actors is different. In this case the Italian association has the necessary power to lobby for its interest with COLAP and start the path to be included in the MiSE list:

“We hope that thanks to CoLAP, that is a collector of associations of not regulated professions, and with CNEL, under whose scrutiny we have already passed, we will finally gain the necessary recognition that we deserve” (ISIPM 2).

Also:

“We wish we could be proud to be the first PM professional association that can be recognized ad national level! We've got it in the name of the association [...] it also matters what you do, not what you say” (ISIPM 2).

And in conclusion:

“We do not think to the ‘*ordine*’, we think at a public recognized professional registry where only those who deserve it will be inscribed! As a matter of fact our register, to be transparent, has all the applicant posted on web” (ISIPM 2).

At the time of the interview, the MiSE lists (of non-regulated professional associations) had not been issued yet. This list was drafted in February 2014 and the ISIPM (through a spinoff that is called ASSIREP²³) has been included.

²² It is important to consider that some interviews have been taken before September 2012 that means before the ISO 21500 (“Guidance on project management Standard for good practice on project management) was implemented.

²³ Associazione Italiana dei Responsabili ed Esperti di Gestione Progetto/ Italian Association of Experts in Project Management

In short, it is possible to conclude that, while the output of the first category of actors (UNI, CEN & ISO) are mainly influenced by practitioners and are a consequence of long debates among all stakeholders (in this case the PM discipline), the outputs of the second category (MiSE, COLAP & ACCREDIA) are politically built (e.g.: debates and lobbying) and become effective as a result of national laws or decrees.

Determining whether they are targeting the first or the second type of actors (or both) will prove the kind of strategy that PM professional associations are adopting. As I have tried to show, the Italian association (ISIPM) is strongly oriented towards national public actors claiming their supremacy in this sector. Answering to the question about which PM professional association took part in the process to be recognized by MiSE and thus by the law, the former president of ISIPM says:

“Who else has competed to become an association recognized by MiSE? To be sincere, I'm not interested! Who else is competing to become PM professional association? I do not know, but after all as more we are the better it is” (ISIPM 2).

He seems to be bothered by this kind of questions, and speaking about the possibility that the other PM professional associations may apply to be included in the MiSE list, he adds:

“[...] I do not think that IPMA and PMI can apply for being enrolled in the MiSE registry. PMI has some chapter but I don't do not think it can apply because the requirement is to be an Italian association, I do not think the chapters have legal status. IPMA Italy, instead, is a section of ANIMP so I do not think that there is even a legal and registered name for IPMA Italy. Beside legal matters it is also necessary to have a four year foundation, which is not the case of IPMA Italy! Being an ANIMP section, I think that as a section it does not even have the tax code” (ISIPM 2).

There is a strong contrast between the two quotations. In the first suggests that an inclusion of other associations is desirable for ISIPM (“after all, the more, the better”), while the second quotation implies a certain degree of satisfaction for the impossibility of others associations to be included in the MiSE list. Moreover, the second quotation seems to suggest that this type of strategy is reserved only to the Italian PM professional association, since the compliance requirements are tailored to professional associations registered in Italy.

According to PMI, the State is an important client, not a regulator to call upon in order to pursue one's own professional interests. This market-oriented idea is very clear from the two following quotations:

“One of our recent days we are trying to invite a well-known politician to speak to projects and project management. The culture is spreading and I think it is useful to be prepared in time for an event like this. In the foreseeable future it could be that, to implement a public project, a project manager is requested!” (PMI 3).

And also:

“We want to be well known! The more we are able to let us know, the more people will come to us. I'm noticing that there is a growing interest on PM in general and on PMI in particular. I saw that this knowledge begins to spread around and new people approach the association” (PMI 1).

This is a more business-oriented vision compared to ISIPM that considers the State as a controller that dictates the rules of the game. A different view of the State implies a different strategy. As described above, since PMI considers the State only as a ‘potential’ client, it is waiting for it to become an ‘actual’ client before entering the market. Conversely, the Italian association (ISIPM) is seeking something very close to the classical idea of *regulative bargain* proposed before. When the State is considered as a regulator in charge of ruling the market, it must be taken into account by the associations while developing their strategies.

IPMA is not very much involved in the relationship with the State either as a possible client or as a regulator. A possible explanation could be found in the fact that IPMA is very well linked with big corporations. Big corporations (such as multinationals) are very often present in different countries. As a consequence of that, the influence of each single state on IPMA’s work is less relevant, while international associations (such as ISO), that make international widely accepted rules, are gaining importance.

Critical summary of the relationship between the Italian PM professional associations

The situation is very unstable and dynamic since the three PM professional associations put a lot of effort into trying to plead for their objectives that sometimes overlap and sometimes conflict.

The prospects that come up are manifold, every actor is very busy trying to take advantage of them and not be left behind; for this reason, those different profiles led to the creation of complex dynamics of:

- *cooperation*, in order to develop the PM professional profile that is accepted from all the employers;
- *coexistence*, in order to encompass different sectors in the same regional area;
- *competition*, in order to issue more certifications and attract more associates within the association;

Those associations use different tactics that, in some cases (ISIPM), seem to reward proselytism which have put down (local) roots in the country and evangelism typical of social movements. There are some perceptible tensions between ISIPM and PMI whereas there is apparently no ongoing conflict between PMI and IPMA (at least in Italy because, as highlighted above, I have observed a different situation in UK). PMI is much more corporate-oriented and centralized, and its main focus is on commercial activities. It is run following the American rules (such as a standardized statute and the rotation of board duties) and certain practices that are typical for Italian associations are forbidden (see Table 19). It is important to notice that PMI is against the CoLAP project since it does not consider PM as a profession, but as a cross-cutting competence that many different professional profiles ought to have. Despite its being strongly linked to the US ‘holding’, an Italian branch of PMI, from a part of a corporation (ENI), does exist. This suggests that all the Italian chapters of PM professional associations are linked to the context of some big organization (ENI for PMI-RC) or some other large association (ANIMP for IPMA).

The following table summarizes the relationship among the associations involved in the field:

Features	IPMA	ISIPM	PMI
Governance	• Federated	• Independent	• Centralized ²⁴
Certification	• Competence driven	• Mix of PMI & IPMA	• Knowledge driven
Orientation	• Professionally driven	• Evangelism	• Commercially orientated
Strategy	• Adaptation to national conditions	• Pushing on Italian law regulators	• Promotion Global Standards
Reference points	• National Institutions, and Market	• Public Administration	• Primarily Market
Relation to corporate clients	• Tight link	• Almost inexistent	• Tight link

Table 19: Differences in models between international professional associations (PMI, ISIPM and IPMA)

In a nutshell, as far as the strategies of PM professional associations are concerned I can say that: (1) ISIPM is mainly focused on exerting pressure on the State and on the public administration to obtain the legal recognition of PM as a profession; the objectives of this professional association are well summarized by the

²⁴ Formal job assignment among the members of board in PMI (president, membership director, etc...), while in IPMA there is no job specification/description.

following, fitting metaphor: “those are undefined territory very important to earn” (ISIPM 2). This will make the association quite powerful in terms of the influence that it could gain in Italy. (2) PMI's strategy is completely market-oriented and it is designed to take every possible opportunity that the market can offer. PMI is less proactive as it tends to wait for the right occasion to deploy (PA, masters, programs within big corporations). The potential, in terms of new members and certificates which would come from the public administration if it were to recognize PM as a profession, would be enormous. (3) IPMA is extremely focused on big corporations and big projects. They were very reluctant to answer questions regarding the PA or small corporations. They mainly focus on clients that need to manage very complex and large projects. Even the ‘young crew’ is oriented towards big corporations. IPMA is basically consolidating these positions within big corporations, where internal PM programs, formerly implemented with PMI, no longer reach the desired level.

THE DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF PM

In this last chapter, I shall present the more philosophical side of PM. I will look in particular at the theoretical conception that the three key actors have with regard to this field. To fully understand the strategies that associations implement, the questions I will try to answer relate to the philosophical conception that associations have of PM: is it just a managerial skill or could it be a profession? Can it be taught or learned only on the job through years of experience? If both options are viable, which one prevails? Should project managers be independent from the organizations they work with or should they be regular employees? Is PM different in different countries? If so, which are the differences? Does a PM code of ethics exist and what does it entail?

Answering all these questions is not an easy task, since when prompted with targeted questions, practitioners hardly ever provide a straight answer. This is probably due to two reasons: either they do not want to reveal their point of view or they don't have a clear point of view on that topic (therefore the answers are often vague).

Intrinsic meaning of Project Management

The meaning that practitioners in this field attach to PM is one of the first elements that should be clarified when addressing this subject. My aim was to discover the intimate perception of PM that people working in this field on a daily basis have in Italy, beyond any formal definition (drawn either from books or from slogans).

The primary aim of this set of generic questions was not to grasp the meaning of PM *per se*, according to the practitioners interviewed. They were mostly aimed at capturing the different visions that emerge among different professional associations. Starting from those differences, I was able to trace back the reason behind the actions performed by professional associations. As I will show, some of those differences in strategies have already emerged from the analyses made in the previous chapters.

A way to approach the problem could be by looking at a contribution from a member of PMI-RC on his wide understanding of PM:

“PM does not mean to be good only from a technical point of view! Be a good project manager means be a good communicator, be good in the relational aspect, be good in the perception of the value of the project, and you have to be good even in the project fail [...] because if you fail and you were good in managing the communications that means you have done the best! Everything possible to save it! If you are good just in the technical side and the project fail, the responsibility is yours! That’s the difference!” (PMI 2).

The vision of PM that emerges from this brief quotation attests to the respondent's complete faith in project management techniques (in this case, he suggests the ones adopted by PMI), even if those techniques bring to the failure of a project. The failure of the project can be justified if the PM technique has been correctly applied. In that case, one might say: ‘the project management was a success but the project failed’. In this view, project managers are free from responsibility in case of failure as long as they have applied all PM techniques.

Another interesting consideration that another member of PMI-RC provides relates to the possibility to use the same PM techniques in different contexts. He points out that, in order to be professional, project managers should be independent from the context of the project which they develop, but actually they are not; there are huge differences between aerospace and IT project managers, that is why he considers PM as a cross-cutting competence that every manager should have:

“The project manager is most definitely a set of skills, which is basically what IPMA (and in part also PMI) says. It is a set of skills and expertise, rather than a profession, since the profession of project or program manager may be different and vary very much from context to context [...], in a context such as the aerospace in which Thales-Alenia is, this type of expertise is highly developed, it is very structured! We have some processes in a corporate system of references that requires to all professionals to take external PM certifications. There are other areas in which the project manager's role is much less structured [...], project manager it is just someone who manages the assets and the project but maybe without following strict rules or complaining to a well-structured system of references. Between the two there could be huge difference! What is important to understand is that developing and managing a project in a non-structured environment is not necessary easier than in a well-structured one. You don’t have the support of all those processes and methods established in common PM techniques, and also the support from the management is less strong in unstructured contexts” (PMI 3).

The last two quotations led me to wonder whether PM is a just a competence or a profession. According to the first practitioner, PM should be considered as a profession, while for the second practitioner it is absolutely unquestionable that, being specific to each context, it looks more like a managerial competence.

There is no single solution to this question. Both opinions can be true and, perhaps it is too early to draw a conclusion since PM is still under development. Some practitioners like the one in the following quotation, are aware of that and try to make a synthesis of their experience:

“From a certain point of view I consider PM as a profession, from another it can be considered as a profession that has some flexibility that makes it closer to a skill! Taking as example a project manager who builds satellites, he tomorrow can eventually change job and became someone that develops projects for the Venice Biennale or organize other kinds of events because it has the skills to do both the things! But he is not like a doctor specialized in orthopedics that have to do a heart transplant, what really matters is knowing how to organize activities to achieve a result! The nature of those activities that have to be organized by the project manager in order to successfully deliver a project shouldn’t influence his job! While the medical profession this difference matters! None, I suppose, would undergo heart surgery by an orthopedic surgeon? In the case of the project manager, why not?” (PMI 3).

Analyzing the meaning of PM according to ISIPM is quite interesting. To a certain extent, their definition seems quite naïve. They think that PM should be a philosophy of life and everyone should master the basics of this discipline. The passion that emerges from this passage is enormous:

“we want this discipline belong to public domain, we've been doing several seminars to accountants, association of appraisers of Milan, the surveyors of Avellino [...] there has never been anyone in those wastelands” (ISIPM 2).

This vision, with different degrees of strength, is shared from all practitioners belonging to the different professional associations in the Italian PM field, but they do not put in practice any action coming from this vision.

At this point, to have a broader picture, it is necessary to go over the debates and the definition of PM and look at the level of awareness that associations have, while implementing their strategies. There is a general awareness, among all the associations, that all actors should cooperate in order to defend the interest of the PM discipline. None of the associations alone has the necessary strength to carry on this battle; every association benefits from the actions carried out by all the others, it is recognized by practitioners that some important synergies exists. This is underpinned by the fact that several respondents have (or have had) connections with more than one professional associations. Those kinds of connections are very common and this led me to think that, besides the division and differences that the associations formally claim to have, it is in their mutual interest to preserve them. This happens because the Italian²⁵ PM professional associations have different targets in terms of: markets (IPMA takes big engineering plants, ISIPM talks with public agencies and regional government, and PMI takes all the rest²⁶), and specialization areas of PM knowledge (as seen before PMI looks at PM knowledge, IPMA looks at PM competence and ISIPM uses both). This consideration is supported by the following extract from an interview:

(speaking about IPMA) “Their objective is always the same: disseminate methodologies and knowledge of PM. Maybe joining forces we can do something more interesting for members of either organization than if we work separately. Very often we have common members in both professional associations, so in the end what you can be achieved together can be a bit better in quality respect to results from separate efforts that one organization or the other can make. Thus the direction, rather than working separately, we often join forces and try to converge towards a common goal! At least in Italy I see that there is this trend... IPMA and PMI have always had a positive relationship, and I think next year we might already consolidate some important initiative” (PMI 3).

An interesting way to explain how to transform the activities carried out by the stakeholders into opportunities to lay down the foundations for a profession is clear in this quotation:

“We are investing on quality and networking. For example, we want to transform our events in a way that headhunters are interested to come seeking possible candidates, where you come not just because obliged from certification duties, but because you are interested in knowing and get known from key people in your network” (PMI 2).

Perceived cultural differences

There is a substantial agreement also on that the specific features of the Italian field present compared to other countries; those national specificities are due to different cultures. One should not forget that PM was born and

²⁵ The example of PM in the UK is just the opposite since the two predominant associations (PMI and APM, that is IPMA-UK) are fighting to decide who should be the first to obtain by the Royal Charter (that is a symbolic recognition of legitimacy).

²⁶ This distinction does not have to be taken strictu sensu, it is just a broad distinction to give a general idea.

developed mainly in Anglo-Saxon countries and then it has been ‘exported’ (in this case to Italy) and this requires some adjustments to the culture of each country.

The following quotation draws a comparison between the USA and Italy. The practitioner points out the different conceptions of PM in those two countries:

“It is the grounding cultural approach according to which Italians are more creative, more ‘free’, more independent, more autonomous that makes the difference. This in the average is true, the Anglo-Saxon are more respectful of the rules. This difference is reflected also in the figure of project manager that in Italy is conceived in a more descriptive, more creative, more personal way. The fact that you have a Body of Knowledge (BOK) specifying how a project manager has to be it has a different impact on different cultures” (ISIPM 1).

Similar differences, regarding how a different culture may require some adjustment in the PM discipline, have been highlighted by a member of PMI. The emphasis in this case is on the comparison between the PM quality level in Italy and in the USA. He states that it is not because the PM practices are not fully applied that the level is lower in Italy than the USA. The quality should simply be evaluated based on different criteria.

“If you think that project management in Italy is not as well developed as in the United States or England you are wrong! Sometimes in Italy it’s not as coded as in Anglo-Saxon countries because (in Italy) we do not have a particular propensity to structure and tightly organize PM. However, I think, in average, we have the expertise typical of entrepreneurs and creative skills who also are considerably important PM. I think there are some excellency, such as Roberto Mori, former president of IPMA, which is a famous example. He is recognized also abroad since the skills that are cultivated and developed by Italian project managers are even above to international standards” (PMI 3).

The first quotation underlines the different attitude towards rules and professional autonomy that seems to be quite different from Anglo-Saxon countries. While professional autonomy and independence is an important topic for Italian project managers, they are less inclined to strictly follow the rules. The second quotation emphasizes the loose propensity to tightly structure a project and the entrepreneurial attitude that Italians have when managing a project. Those elements are contradictory since the entrepreneurial nature does not match very well with the tightness of the rules imposed in the PM discipline.

The type of university degree is also a factor that matters when considering a career in PM. Even if the trend is changing, what emerges from the interviews is that, until recently in Italy, the type of degree was crucial in order to start a career in project management:

(Talking about the university degrees composition abroad) “It can be that there are little more engineers, but it is not very significant. Only in Italy there is this strong prevalence! Indeed, as I was saying, Italy is well known in the world for having the vast majority of project managers from engineering field. The great majority of members are from industrial plant [...] only recently are emerging some other trends such as information technology, services, construction and so on. Abroad is quite different, here (in Italy) project managers are almost all engineers!” (IPMA 1).

The consideration that follows from this quotation relates to the early stage of PM in Italy, where mainly big engineering corporations were the recipients of PM services. This has affected the Italian field that only in recent times is opening also to others sectors and allowing also people who do not have a degree in engineering to start a career in PM.

The professional ethics issues are also a matter of concern for practitioners (at least for the members of PMI-RC). It can be noted that for the member of the associations, it is mainly important to guarantee the success of their projects. This view goes beyond the mere application of the PM practices as a duty according to the

project requirements. They truly believe that, if correctly implemented, PM practices will keep project managers from being accused of personal incompetency in case the project fails. The following quotation contains another interesting element concerning the inefficient way in which Italian projects are conducted²⁷.

“For us [intended as PMI] believe that it is important to do things [PM activities] well, and moreover it is imperative to develop those activities in an ethical way. This belief is coming from the Anglo-Saxon culture. In Italian context this stress upon the rules and ethics is not completely accepted. In Italy who makes money is the one who gets things done in a bad way (i.e. try to win public contracts and then modified them). The standard way to implement public projects is to develop things even if you know that they are useless! As PMI, what we want to do is take advantage of this new cultural moment to try to work with anyone ‘really’ interested! We do not earn any money for the effort that we make in the professional association and this is a proof that we really believe in our professional ethics” (PMI 2).

²⁷ Since it is slightly out of the topic of this thesis it will not be further analysed, but it is worth to mention since it could represent a distinctive feature of Italian context.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has taken into account the project of professionalization of a new discipline. It is the first detailed and comprehensive study in the field of PM within the Italian context. This occupation is an interesting case to study since “unlike many comparable occupations, project management globally has pursued and promoted professional status” (Hodgson & Muzio, 2011, p. 115). In doing this, the study tries to provide empirical evidence on how this new occupation is developing and is carrying on its professionalization project and to what extent the Italian PM field differs from the traditional professions of the past. The development of PM in Italy is following a new pattern of professionalization with distinctive characteristics. For this reason, in order to analyze the development of the PM professional project, I have looked mainly at the three main PM professional associations that are active in this field: PMI, IPMA, and ISIPM.

Setting the Italian field as a unit of analysis, I resorted to different archival data to demonstrate how, around the discipline of PM, there is a growing interest. In the first section, I have presented the history of the development of the PM professionalization project. The history of PM and its growing importance in Italy have demonstrated the existence of a professionalization project, based on a range of indicators. I have given as much evidence as possible to substantiate the existence of a process of professionalization of this discipline: the growing number of new chapters (see Table 7, p.36); the increased worldwide use of PM professional associations’ certifications (see Table 3, p.20); the increase of PMI members who have doubled between 2008 and 2013 (see Table 8, p.38), just as IPMA members have doubled between 1997 and 2007 (see Table 9, p.38); the growing number of Italian certifications awarded by PMI, IPMA Italy and ISIPM between 2006 and 2013 (see Table 13, p.44); the growing number of Universities, Departments, Courses and M.Sc. that are focused on PM (see Table 14 and Table 15, p.45); the number of articles related to PM published in the main Italian newspapers (see Table 16, p.46). Once the existence of a professionalization process was established, I drew a comparison between the two main existing professional strategies. The strategies focus, on the one hand, on

the struggle to compete in the private (big corporations and SMEs) and public (State, local government, and public administration) sectors, and, on the other hand, on the national (Italian context) and international level.

The second section is a description including an analysis of the strategies that PM professional associations have adopted. Studying the relations between these three associations serves two purposes; first, it highlights the set of relationships that those have with other stakeholders; second, it gives a picture of how this discipline has developed. From this picture, it is possible to identify different typologies of strategies. In particular, it appears clear how PM professional associations combine professionalization strategies of new and traditional professions. According to the literature, PM, as a new discipline, should express the typical characteristics of a new expert occupation. However, interestingly enough, contrary to what one would expect, it expresses a combination of the strategies of traditional and new professional associations. This topic is considered and analyzed better in the following section.

This conclusive chapter makes an analytical summary of the topics addressed in this work and tries to draw a conclusion on different aspects such as the parallel between traditional and new professionalization projects and the peculiarities of the Italian context. In order to better structure this discussion, I have divided this chapter into four sections.

In the first section, I will draw some considerations on which kind of profession is PM. I will show that the empirical part of this thesis does not fully support the professional categories identified by Reed (1996) and I will explain how and why. In the second section, I will take into account the wider theme of professionalism as part of the process of institutional change. I will argue that the set of activities that professionals put in practice have a strong effect on the organizational field within which they are situated, and therefore on their process of institutionalization. In the third section, I will draw some considerations on the Italian context pertaining to the way the Italian political economy has evolved in the last 20 years and to the effect that those change had on the professionalization project of new professions. In the last section, I will highlight the shortcomings of this study and the possible directions for further research.

Project management as a new profession?

The following theoretical considerations come from the comparison between the analysis of the characteristics of the professions (with the main distinction between *collegiate professions*, *organizational professions* and *new expert occupations*), done in the literature review (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011; Reed, 1996), and the subsequent empirical examination of the PM field within the Italian context.

As it belongs to the group of new expert occupations (Muzio et al., 2007; Salter, 1994), PM shares some of the characteristics that are attributed to the category of knowledge workers (Horibe, 1999). Looking at the second part, it is possible to understand that the kind of knowledge base they have built and use (highly contextual to the organization), the adopted power strategy (organizational colonization), and the chosen organizational form (PM exists within large organizations) are just some of the characteristics that Reed (1996) has described in his work. As a matter of fact, the “colonization practices appear to be the direct results of the increased tendency of professional services to be delivered by large complex organizations” (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2001, p. 950).

The unexpected finding that emerged from this field was the presence of a mix of several characteristics found in different Reed’s (1996) typologies of professions such as a kind of knowledge that is situated and embedded in specific organizational processes, procedures, and frameworks. On the possibility to consider this form of professionalism as a new way to professionalize, it is possible to say that I found elements of continuity (with

traditional forms of professionalism) as well as of change. To strengthen the conclusions on the possible hybrid professionalization pattern, I made a parallel with the work on another new expert occupation: management consultant. Muzio et al. (2011) consider how “in parallel with the investment in new forms of competence-based closure, which remain the highest accolade in this area, today the IBC has also been pursuing a more traditional path centered around the development of an official body of knowledge (the MCBOK) and formal qualifications such as the Certificate and the Diploma in Management Consultancy” (Muzio, Hodgson, et al., 2011, p. 451). Considering how the concept of professionalization is changing, it helps to consider that there is a shift towards a new organization of professions which are not necessarily organized as in the classical way, but become structured through new paradigms. On this line of thought, it is not shocking that the central actors in this study (PM professional associations) have adopted original strategies to improve the prestige of PM professionals and to obtain recognition as a profession.

Looking at the three categories identified by Reed (1996) and their characteristics, and comparing them with the characteristics that come up from the field analysis, it is possible to say that PM cannot be attributed with absolute certainty to one of these three categories. Many PM characteristics are close to those of expert occupations, for example the power strategies entail predominantly ‘marketization’ (see PMI) because the associations are trying to massively spread their certifications in every possible context; also the knowledge base is similar to new expert occupations because it is ‘global’ (consider for example all IPMA and PMI events) and ‘esoteric’ (all the bodies of knowledge assert that PM practice is essential to carry out a successful project). Those characteristics can be clearly associated with the ‘new’ way expert professions professionalize.

The typical power strategy of organizational professions is ‘credentialism’; this topic (as I have demonstrated in the section about the strategies) is a paramount for all the three PM professional associations. PM actually embraces a set of certifications and training paths that can be compared to the ‘credentials’ that strongly characterize traditional professions. Credentials put in practice by PM professional associations are a bit different from the more traditional ones used by traditional organizational professions (that were linked to a given path of studies and the ability to pass a state exam). However, the purpose of the new credentials is still the same as the ‘traditional’ credentials, namely occupational closure. Recalling from the findings chapter, the set of credentials used by PM professional associations are: bodies of knowledge, training programs and certifications. It is interesting to note that, while the first and second sets of credentials are in common with the professionalization pattern of traditional profession, the third set is slightly different. Relying on a system of stratified certification, that envisage different levels of competence for project managers according to their different levels of expertise, is simply a new way to organize the schema of credentials. However, the characteristics that have emerged in this paragraph are more linked with the ‘old’ professionalization pattern followed by expert professions.

In the light of these considerations, when the characteristics of PM are matched with the characteristics of expert occupations (collegiate professions, organizational professions, and new expert occupations) there is no clear separation, and a clear-cut classification into one of these categories is not possible. Although there is some degree of differentiation between these three expert occupation models (especially between collegiate professions and organizational professions compared to new expert occupations), PM is so hybrid that trying to put it in one single group would be useless.

On the side of the acquired organizational form (in terms of organization in which professionals work and promote the professional principles), it is possible to notice that both network and bureaucracy are considered

by PM professionals²⁸. PM professional associations are at the same time strongly linked with big organizations (from whose womb this occupation was born) and with a network of professionals that belong to different organizations but share similar roles and responsibilities and face the same professional problems.

Based on these considerations it is impossible not to agree with the idea that “professionalism is changing and being changed as professionals now work in large-scale organizational work-places and sometimes in international professional firms” (Evetts, 2011, p. 407). To conclude with Julia Evetts’ words, it is possible to say that “professionalism is no longer a distinctive ‘third’ logic since the exercise of professionalism is now organizationally defined and includes the logics of the organization and the market: managerialism and commercialism” (Evetts, 2011, p. 407).

Professionalism as institutional process

As mentioned in the literary review, ‘professionalism’ has been studied in a large variety of ways. There are: theories that define professions based on their characteristics, such as *structuralist* and *functionalist* approaches (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933); theories that try to understand dynamics that drive professions (Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977); theories that analyze professions based on their *professional project* (Hughes, 1971; Larson, 1977); theories that focus on professionalism as a rhetoric or *discourse* (Grey, 1994).

Moving away from this context, it is possible to consider a slightly different meaning of ‘professionalism’. In a more sociological way, it is possible to see it as a ‘specific way of organizing work’ (Johnson, 1972) and to the amount that a professional association tries to “exercise a significant degree of control over its own work” and “improve the status of the occupation” (Hodgson & Muzio, 2011, p. 109). In the literature, it is also undisputed that professionals and professional service firms are among the most active actors in this kind of activities (Brint, 1994); through these activities, they build, develop and disrupt the main economic institutions (i.e.: markets, organizational forms, and business practices). This set of activities could also be included in the ‘professional project’ (Suddaby & Viale, 2011). The spirit of a ‘professional project’ could be embedded in a set of actions with the endeavor “to translate a scarce set of cultural and technical resources into a secure and institutionalized system of social and financial rewards” (Larson, 1977, p. xvii). This theoretical paragraph has the aim to draw a parallel between professions and institutions, in this case the PM discipline (with its professionalization strategies) and the organizations, in the form of private and public actors (that are the institutional environment in which PM is developing its professional project).

The theoretical consideration coming at the end of this analysis concerns the activities performed by professionals as part of an institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The possibility that all the activities performed by PM professional associations can be considered as a part of a larger institutionalization process is open to debate: professions have clearly emerged as agents of institutional change (Hwang & Powell, 2005; Scott, 2008). Another work highlights how “professionals are the preeminent crafters of institutions, facilitating and regulating a broad range of human activities” (Muzio et al., 2013, p. 706). The consideration on the possible causes that drive institutional changes are quite clear in the neo-institutional theory: the “third source of isomorphic organizational change is normative and stems primarily from professionalization” (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983, p. 156). On the same line, Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca (2009) highlighted the importance of ‘institutional actors’ as a way to influence a given institutional field from the inside. Those institutional actors, as I have also suggest in previous works (Sabini & Muzio, 2012; Sabini,

²⁸ To be complete even some trace of collegiate model of professionalism could be observed, as such associationism in Italian field is quite well developed and in some cases adopt logic of closure similar to those of collegiate professions.

2013b), can be professionals grouped into professional associations with their strategies and their tactics; indeed “the dynamic of professionalization offers an endogenous explanation of institutional change, [and it] is implicit in much of the professions literature” (Suddaby & Viale, 2011, p. 425). The opinion of Suddaby & Viale (2011) is that field-level organizational change can be considered as a complex social process “comprised of an ecology of multiple, often overlapping ‘projects’ of both professionalization and institutionalization” (Suddaby & Viale, 2011, p. 426).

In the literature there are a number of different examples on the relationship between professions and institutions. Scott, Ruef, Mendel, & Caronna (2000) analyze the erosion of professional institutions in the US healthcare system and their replacement by a much more fragmented amalgam of government and corporate controls. Singh & Jayanti (2013), with the example of how pharmaceutical corporations try to control professional workers, underline how big corporations try to take control over the professions favoring their interests. In these examples the ongoing relation between professional associations and other entities made possible a continuous creation of new occupations, of institutionalization of new practices, and redefinition of “relational patterns and power hierarchies within a broader area of activity” (Muzio et al., 2013, p. 707). Those two theoretical examples were meant to introduce and illustrate the example that I found in my case.

An example of the institutionalization of new practices can be the way in which PM has influenced the society by influencing the way organizations conduct their internal processes. Being an agent of institutional change, within the context I analyzed, PM professional associations are responsible for a sort of management by projects orientation (or ‘projectification’) of corporations (Case & Piñeiro, 2009; Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Ekstedt, 2009; Gareis, 1989; Maylor et al., 2006; Midler, 1995). Starting from the work of Gareis (1989), published in the “International Journal of Project Management” (that is printed in collaboration with the Association for Project Management - APM and IPMA) there is growing interest in the analysis of the relations between PM and business organizations. In his work Gareis (1989) shows the schema of a project-oriented company that has to perform a set of projects simultaneously (that can be internal or external to the organization or both) thus laying the foundations for the demand for a project management approach in the design of the organizational structure. The way ENI, with PMI's support, and Siemens, with IPMA's support, have built their internal development programs is a clear example of that (see the section “Engagement with corporate stakeholders”).

The thought arising from the findings presented in the thesis led to two conclusions. On one side, it is possible to observe the emergence of a new field characterized mainly by shared practices, innovative activities, new skills and actors²⁹. This emerging field as such led to the development of a new area of institutional life around PM (regardless whether this discipline is professionalized in a traditional sense or not). On the other side, connected to these occupational efforts, PM professional associations are playing a broader institutional role: creating new organizational forms (project-based organization) and re-organizing and re-defining key activities as projects (projectification).

As seen in this thesis, a ‘professional project’ (Larson, 1977) is a well described concept in academic literature to explain the motivations and processes that drive a given occupation to its professionalization. In the implementation of the activities implied in the process of professionalization, professionals exchange “resources and commitments” (Suddaby & Viale, 2011, p. 426) with other institutional actors, thus ultimately

²⁹ These characteristics can be easily recognized looking at: the chapter on history for the emergence of a new field; the mix of old and new credentials highlighted earlier in this chapter to understand the innovative activities; Figure 1, p.26 in the methodology for the actors;

triggering a process of institutionalization. These activities, as seen in the case of PM in the Italian context, involve relations with a wide range of different institutional actors (including the state, corporate clients and universities as in (Muzio, Kirkpatrick, et al., 2011); thus the fact that professions are deeply rooted into modern society and markets leads their professional projects to impact, directly or indirectly, the institutionalization project of other entities.

To highlight the link between a project of professionalization and the process of institutionalization, I have tried to reinterpret the dynamics through which professionals reshape the institutions and the organizational field, developed by Suddaby & Viale (2011), in the light of the findings on Italian PM. Those dynamics are the following: (1) Challenge incumbent order and define new space; (2) Populate the field with new actor identities; (3) New rules and standards that recreate boundaries of the field; (4) Professional reproduction of social capital to confer new status hierarchy or social order within the field. In this way I have provided empirical evidence to support their work.

The first step pertains to the challenge to the incumbent order that PM does. ‘Forcing’ the field to which it belongs to consider how to develop projects with the set of practices that PM professional associations recommend is a way to challenge the incumbent order. Without using PM techniques, a project is not conducted properly. Hence, PM defines in this way a new space in which it can operate. The second step concerns the colonization of this new space with new actor identities. PM achieves this through an army of practitioners that are willing to be certified and call themselves ‘professional project managers’. The third step pertains to building new rules and standards to recreate the boundaries of the field. I believe that this stage is concretized in two ways: by the pressure that PM professional associations exert on the state (in order to be recognized by the law); and by the enlargement of the sphere to which PM was originally oriented. The first aspect relies on the need to have a legal framework (thus a strong barrier to defend themselves from other professions). The second aspect depends on the birthplace of this profession, that is inside big multinational, and now is also expanding to SMEs (“all managers have to have project management skills” – PMI 1), this theme will be better discussed in the next section. The fourth step concerns the professional reproduction of the ‘social capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1964) to establish a new status hierarchy or a new social order within the field. In this case, the process of professional reproduction of the ‘social capital’ in the Italian field of PM is not well developed yet. As this occupation is still in the early stages of its development, it has not fully accomplished the last step defined by Suddaby & Viale (2011). Here there is a summary table that represents the institutional change brought about by PM while developing its professional project.

Step	Dynamic of reconfiguration	Italian PM accomplishment
1	Challenge incumbent order and define new space	✓
2	Populate the field with new actor identities	✓
3	New rules and standards that recreate boundaries of the field	✓
4	Professional reproduction of social capital to confer new status hierarchy or social order within the field	✗

Table 20: Essential dynamics through which professionals reconfigure institutions and organizational field (Suddaby & Viale, 2011) compared with the status of PM within Italian context

The conclusion that Suddaby & Viale (2011) make, and I share, is that the professionalization and the institutionalization projects occur simultaneously; thus professional projects become essential vehicles of institutionalization and field-level change.

The Italian context

An important consideration that comes from this study refers to the context considered in the empirical analysis. As already mentioned in the findings chapter, the context that has been taken into account presents a number of characteristics that are quite peculiar if compared to other similar studies in comparable fields. Those characteristics are relative to: Italian political economy (with the recent willingness to shift towards neoliberal ideas), the vast range of diverse actors within the PM field, the variety of strategies adopted by PM professional associations.

The Italian political economy has historically always been quite favorable to regulatory practices (Deiana & Paneforte, 2010; Pammolli et al., 2007; Sterlacchini, 2002). Therefore, due to this economics conception, many economic aspects within the Italian context are now regulated by rules and standards. And professions are one of those aspects.

As anticipated before, in recent years (around the beginning of '90s) there has been a slight shift in the Italian political economy towards a more liberal approach on the regulation of profession. This change, partially forced by the European Union directives, was oriented to increase the competition in the market of occupations. This willingness has found many obstacles raised by established professions (see Micelotta & Washington, 2013) confirming the classic thesis of Abbott (1988) that professions are unstable entities in an enduring struggle with adjacent entities and that they are “the product of a dialectical relationship with its environment” (Hanlon, 1999, p. 3). In his work Abbott (1988) interprets this struggle only with other profession, while in this case the struggle is with many other actors, such as the nation-state.

This negotiations and bargaining with the nation-state are thus different from state to state; “professional occupations are different both within and between nation-states and contexts are constantly changing as new nation-states and European policies emerge, develop and are adapted and modified in practice and in local workplaces” (Evetts, 2011, p. 414). This could be an important element of contribution of this thesis, since there has been no comprehensive work in this field yet. Indeed, Collins (1990) was able to distinguish ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Continental’ modes of professionalism. In Continental modes the nation-state was the main actor while in the Anglo-Saxon model self-employed practitioners had freedom and control on their working conditions; even if this distinction could be considered obsolete, it strengthens the need for diverse contributions from different fields. Ackroyd argues, “much of what has passed for the sociology of the professions published in English actually describes something culturally specific, primarily relating to Anglo-American experience” (Ackroyd, 1996, p. 600).

Part of my conclusions contradicts the literature. As a matter of fact, they are contrary to the findings of Hodgson & Muzio (2011), according to which the reference point for the main professional associations is not the state but the market, whereas I found, particularly for ISIPM, that the relationship with the state is deep and very strong.

In Italy, as already underlined, the professional struggle between the professions and other entities involves two different categories of professions: regulated and non-regulated professions. While traditional professions (such as medicine, law, architecture, etc.) are regulated by law into *ordini*³⁰, new professions will receive a

³⁰ That can be defined as: “a public entity, indissolubly professional and institutional, territorially diffused, compulsory, formally distinct, and (relatively) autonomous, enjoying the power to regulate itself and to represent the entire professional group” (Olgiate & Pocar, 1988, p. 340).

different legal treatment. As seen in the findings, a recent law passed at the beginning of last year has attempted to make order in the ‘non-regulated profession; thus this field is now experiencing great chaos.

Going in depth in those considerations, it is possible to say that PM professional associations, within the Italian field, implement two main types of strategies; PM professional associations compete among themselves within the Italian national context applying strategies used at global and international level and strategies that comes as a response to peculiarities of Italian field.

Here I will summarize four conclusive considerations on the difference between the Italian context and other contexts. The comparison with other contexts is not coming from my empirical analysis, but is mainly based on the analyzed relevant literature. First, one consideration affects the adaptability of the strategies of ‘born global’ PM professional associations. The strategies of ‘born global’ PM professional associations do not fit very well into the Italian economy which is characterized by small and very small organizations. SMEs struggle to cope with the rigidity of the traditional PM discipline. To support this idea there is the great success that new methodologies, such as ‘agile project management’, are having. The conception of agile project management relies on the necessity to streamline the PM methodology in order for it to be suitable also for small projects (that are very common in SMEs)³¹. This adaptation symbolizes a tangible peculiarity of the way in which Italian PM is professionalizing.

Second, the usual resistance to the professionalization processes of new occupations, in the name of neoliberal ideas, is typical of the Anglo-Saxon countries. This opposition to professionalization processes is less pronounced in the Italian context. In Italy, measures to foster the liberalization of the professional market have been proposed (see Table 18)³² but the resistance of the traditional professions, on one side, and, on the other side, the lack of strong, effective and tangible implementation of this measure have ensured the maintenance of the established order. In fact, the biggest hurdle for PM is not the state (which claims to be liberal), but rather the incumbent (traditional) professions that try to defend their jurisdictional domains from the new professions.

Partially related to the second, the third consideration affects the PM professional association process of public recognition by public entities (such as COLAP & MiSE³³). Those entities are making, very recently (2013 and 2014) a selection of professional associations on non-regulated professions. This process is very important for a professional association in order to gain a social status of ‘recognized association’³⁴. IPMA being a professional association that is internationally oriented has no interests in pursuing those kinds of processes, while its objectives are targeted to multinationals and big corporations. The situation of ISIPM is different; this association was created as an ‘Italian’ association and it pursues mainly national strategies neglecting the international ones.

The last consideration on the Italian specificities is on the Italian Public Administration (PA). The PA, as I showed in the findings chapter, is on one side very important in economic terms in the Italian context, but, on the other side it not very flexible and adaptable to the fast-changing modern economy. My aim is to show how

³¹ In this case it is interesting to look at ISIPM strategies. This association could be a direct expression of the Italian economic structure, which is fragmented into a myriad of small and medium-sized enterprises. Those micro-organizations (often run by less than 5 employees) receive a very little consideration (or are completely ignored) from international PM professional associations.

³² Italian Government law n.248/06 (art.2): Urgent measures to guarantee competition in the professional services sector.

³³ The Ministry of Economic Development is developing a list of professional associations allowed to determining the quality of a given non-regulated by law profession.

³⁴ This statement is also linked with the following consideration since for an association being public recognized means recognized also by Italian Public Administration.

this is related also to the possibility to adopt a project-oriented approach. The lack of flexibility from the PA relates to the need for any kind of professional to be recognized in a public legal framework. In the absence of any specific provision that recognizes (with a state-sanctioned law) a given professional figure (or a given occupation), the PA cannot take advantage of those kind of professional services (see the story of the RUP in the ‘public administration and Local government actions’ section in the findings). To offer a quick comparison, it is possible to note how the English PA also has a relevant size (and is therefore important for the British economy), but enjoying more flexibility, it can adapt to market contingencies. In this case, if it is considered necessary, the PA can decide to require professional services from any professional (and therefore also from PM professionals).

PM, as a discipline, was born and spread around the world within global and multinational firms; the strategies it has developed are normally focused on the international level. This means that these strategies do not tend to take into account the peculiarity of each single country in which they will be implemented. The Italian PM professional associations PMI and in particular IPMA rely on strategies that do not take into account the national specificities. Conversely, ISIPM grounds its strategies in the Italian context. These multiple-focus strategies reflect the ‘Italian way’ of professionalizing.

Directions for Further Research

I am confident that this thesis will give some hints on the PM occupational project of professionalization at least with regard to the Italian context, and I hope that it will help to better understand new expert occupation and their ongoing processes of professional change and development. Moreover, besides the possible contribution that this thesis can offer, there are large areas of research that can be further (and perhaps better) analyzed. For this reason, in conclusion, I would like to address the shortcomings of this study and highlight some areas for further research activity.

One element for future research refers to the comparative element with other fields in similar contexts. For example, a similar work that replicates the same analysis across different professional and national contexts could bring to remarkable and interesting findings. In particular, a qualitative form of analysis could be extremely useful. In this way it will be easier to understand how power relationships develop and how professional transformation patterns work. As this thesis has shown, only through qualitative work it is possible to identify the actors (especially professional stakeholders) and their respective strategies to effectively document the political dimension of professional transformation processes.

A systematic approach to this topic, based on comparisons between different fields and different countries, could help in building an empirical classification to distinguish and evaluate the different occupational principles. In particular, it would be important to understand how those principles are inextricably linked with historical contingencies (such as the type of actors playing in the field, their actions and relationships). It should be underlined how the presence or the absence of some actors could affect the success of some professionalization practices and the failure of others. This is of some importance if considered in the light of new expert occupations that have emerged using mainly non-professional methods, tactics and strategies for their professional projects. Linking these consideration to those of Muzio (2003, p. 234): “further research efforts should be spent on how, occupationally and geographically contingent variables play a fundamental role in the selection, development and ultimately in the success of any specific occupational principle (professionalism, managerialism, bureaucracy, entrepreneurship)”. Thus to achieve a largely shared theoretical status and a common classification framework it is needed a triangulation of strategies used, current active actors and historical period.

Besides just carrying out an empirical analysis of the PM professionalization process in the Italian context, this thesis has attempted to further the understanding of the patterns and trajectories of new occupations, the professional change, the processes and the dynamics of new occupations.

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