

## THE ITALIAN 'SECOND LEVEL' IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY: TRANSFORMATION OF THE PROVINCE AND THE BIRTH OF THE METROPOLITAN CITY

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### Abstract

In 2014, the Italian government approved an important local government reform, through Law no. 56. *Concerning Metropolitan Cities, Provinces, Unions and Amalgamations of Municipalities*. The Law suppresses second-tier institutions (provinces) except in the main metropolitan areas, transforms the remaining second-tier institutions into indirectly elected bodies, and redesigns their functions. Here, this innovation is scrutinised. A secondary analysis is combined with an original analysis of the statutes adopted in metropolitan cities, the results of the first indirect election of their presidents, and Italian data from a European comparative survey on second-tier local governments, administered two years before the reform. The reform was designed to control the 'costs of politics' and to define a model of governance for metropolitan areas. However, it leaves many crucial problems unsolved, and delegates many decisions on the implementation of the model to the regions. As shown in the analysis, it also provides the opportunity for different reconstructions of political strategies in the ten metropolitan areas.

Keywords: Local governance; Metropolitan areas; Italian Politics.

### EL 'SEGON NIVELL' ITALIÀ A LA RECERCA D'IDENTITAT: TRANSFORMACIÓ DE LA PROVÍNCIA I NAIXEMENT DE LA CIUTAT METROPOLITANA

#### Resum

*El 2014, el govern italià va aprovar una reforma important del govern local, mitjançant la Llei número 56, relativa a ciutats metropolitanes, províncies, unions i agrupacions de municipis. La llei suprimeix les institucions de segon nivell (províncies) excepte en les àrees metropolitanes més importants, transforma les institucions de segon nivell restants en òrgans elegits de forma indirecta i en redissenya les funcions. En l'article s'analitza aquesta innovació. Es combina una anàlisi secundària amb una anàlisi innovadora dels estatuts aprovats en les ciutats metropolitanes; els resultats de la primera elecció indirecta de presidents, i les dades italianes d'un estudi comparatiu europeu sobre els governs locals de segon nivell que es va fer dos anys abans de la reforma. La reforma va dissenyar-se per controlar els "costos de la política" i per definir un model de governança a les àrees metropolitanes. Tanmateix, no resol alguns dels problemes més importants i delega a les regions moltes de les decisions pel que fa a la implantació del model. Tal com es mostra, a l'anàlisi, la reforma ofereix l'oportunitat per a reconstruccions diferents de les estratègies polítiques en les deu àrees metropolitanes.*

Paraules clau: govern local, àrees metropolitanes, política italiana.

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Article received: 5.08.2015. Blind review: 15.01.2016 and 22.02.2016. Final version accepted: 25.04.2016.

**Recommended citation:** BACCETTI, Carlo; MAGNIER, Annick. "The Italian 'Second Level' in Search of Identity: Transformation of the Province and the Birth of the Metropolitan City". *Revista catalana de dret públic*. No 51 (June 2016), p. 1-21, DOI: [10.2436/20.8030.01.63](https://doi.org/10.2436/20.8030.01.63).

## Summary

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## 1 Introduction

In 2014, the Italian government approved an important local government reform, through Law no. 56 of April 2014, Concerning Metropolitan Cities, Provinces, Unions and Amalgamations of Municipalities. The Law has three main impacts on local settings: 1) it suppresses second-tier institutions (provinces), except in the main metropolitan areas, in which provinces become metropolitan cities; 2) it transforms the remaining second-tier institutions, that is, the ten metropolitan cities, into indirectly elected bodies and redesigns their functions; 3) it maintains forms of cooperation and joint management of many functions among minor municipalities, while maintaining the support of amalgamations or unions of more municipalities.

The innovative trends that were adopted for the second tier are currently being implemented at regional level. Due to the openness of their possible interpretation, and the large space left for regions to reduce their complexity, they have until now stimulated the attention of lawyers more than political sociologists. Nevertheless, with this reform Italy offers an interesting case of dramatic annihilation of the French-inspired model, after decades of progressive reduction of the visibility of the second tier. Large-scale governments are only maintained for the main urban agglomerations and specifically organised: the principle of uniformity of local government settings (which survived not only previous local government reforms, but also the recognition in the 1990s of the constitutional principle of statutory autonomy of the municipalities), is consequently cancelled. Therefore, the way is open for what is essentially a two-level system, combined with a variety of cooperative and institutional schemes that enable municipalities to face large-area challenges. In contrast with the Napoleonic tradition, this structure is exceptional among the demographically largest European countries, whose governmental architecture, which has been extensively revised in recent decades, has been maintained or now includes three institutional levels (Heinelt and Bertrana 2011, 4; Almeida Cerredá, Tuberini and Costa Gonçalves 2015). Traces of second-tier government are only maintained in Italy in the ten major urban areas.

The innovation introduced at this remaining second-tier level will be scrutinised here. A secondary analysis of the scarce literature available on the topic is combined with an original analysis of the statutes adopted in metropolitan cities, and the results of the first indirect election of their presidents.

As a premise, we refer to the Italian results of a European comparative survey administered two years before the Reform, when the institutional debate on the second tier was already receiving public attention: between April and May 2012. 'The Second-Tier European Survey', which was designed to add an empirical assessment to the original insights offered on this level of government in the 2011 collective publication *The Second Tier of Local Government in Europe* (edited by Heinelt and Bertrana), registered the opinions, democratic values, and role interpretations of some of the main actors in the province, and particularly of provincial presidents. In the case of Italy, the survey helps to determine some traits of the national model of second-tier government before the reform. The picture of the Italian province obtained through the answers of the provincial presidents is used as a starting point for the analysis: considered in relation with the actual innovation introduced in the second tier, it clarifies the choices that were made and emphasises some elements of context which may affect their enforcement<sup>1</sup>.

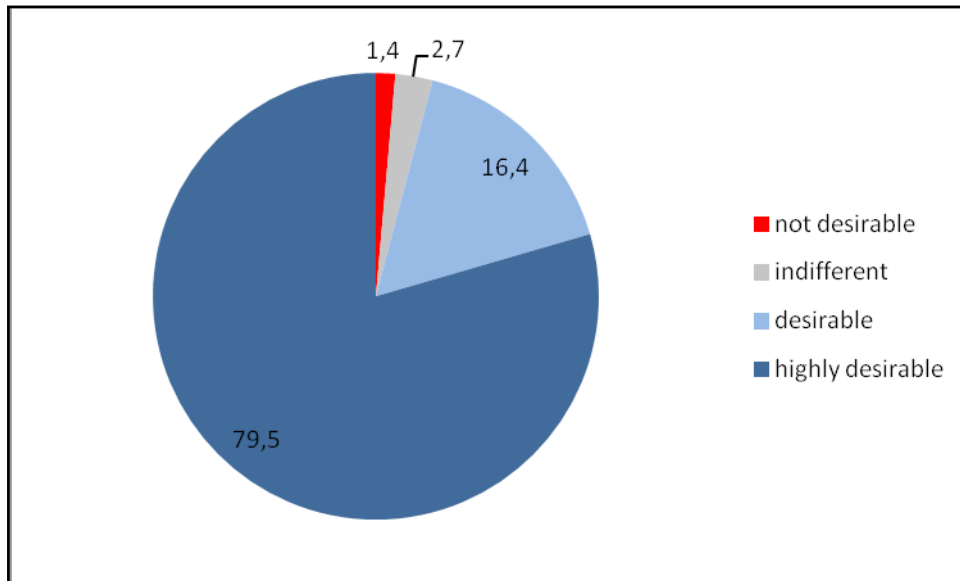
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1 The 'Second-Tier European Survey' is the fourth in an already long series of cooperative projects undertaken over the last twenty years by a group of scholars, principally political scientists and sociologists, from a wide range of European Universities, who have studied actors performing different roles within local government (partly in the framework of ECPR LOGOPOL and EURA): municipal CEOs (UDITE research), mayors (POLLEADER research), local councillors (MAELG), and currently mayors ('The European Mayor II') (see Klausen-Magnier 1998, Dahler-Larsen 2000, Mouritzen-Svara 2002, Bäck et al. 2006, Egner et al. 2013, and Bertrana et al., in print). As in previous surveys, the 'Second-Tier European Survey' was based on a written questionnaire (containing a few variations according to the different positions of the officials) administered in a range of countries to a large sample of agents of second-tier governments (presidents, members of the executive, councilors, and CEOs). In Italy, the questionnaire, which contained some additional questions on the debate on potential reforms, was sent to all the provincial presidents in particular. Over 70% of them completed the questionnaire. The data presented here are from 73 provinces, from the following geographical areas: 17 from the northwest, 10 from the northeast, 17 from the centre, 22 from the south, and 7 from the islands. Thirty-three of the areas had a population of less than 350,000 inhabitants, 23 had a population from 350,000 to 700,000, and 17 had over 700,000 inhabitants. These data, which are represented as distributions (frequencies and percentages), were also used to provide a background picture, and are useful for identifying a 'traditional' Italian reference model of the intermediate level of government, rather than a profile of the diversity of local experiences.

## 2 The previous model: the second level as an institution of self-government

In 2012, the provincial presidents were decidedly open to institutional changes: they did not contradict the universal conviction that the Italian system of local authorities must be deeply rationalised with many profiles. However, they firmly contested the proposed indirect designation of the president of the second-tier institution. They almost unanimously considered that direct election was essential for the second-tier level to function correctly, regardless of their position on its possible reconfiguration.

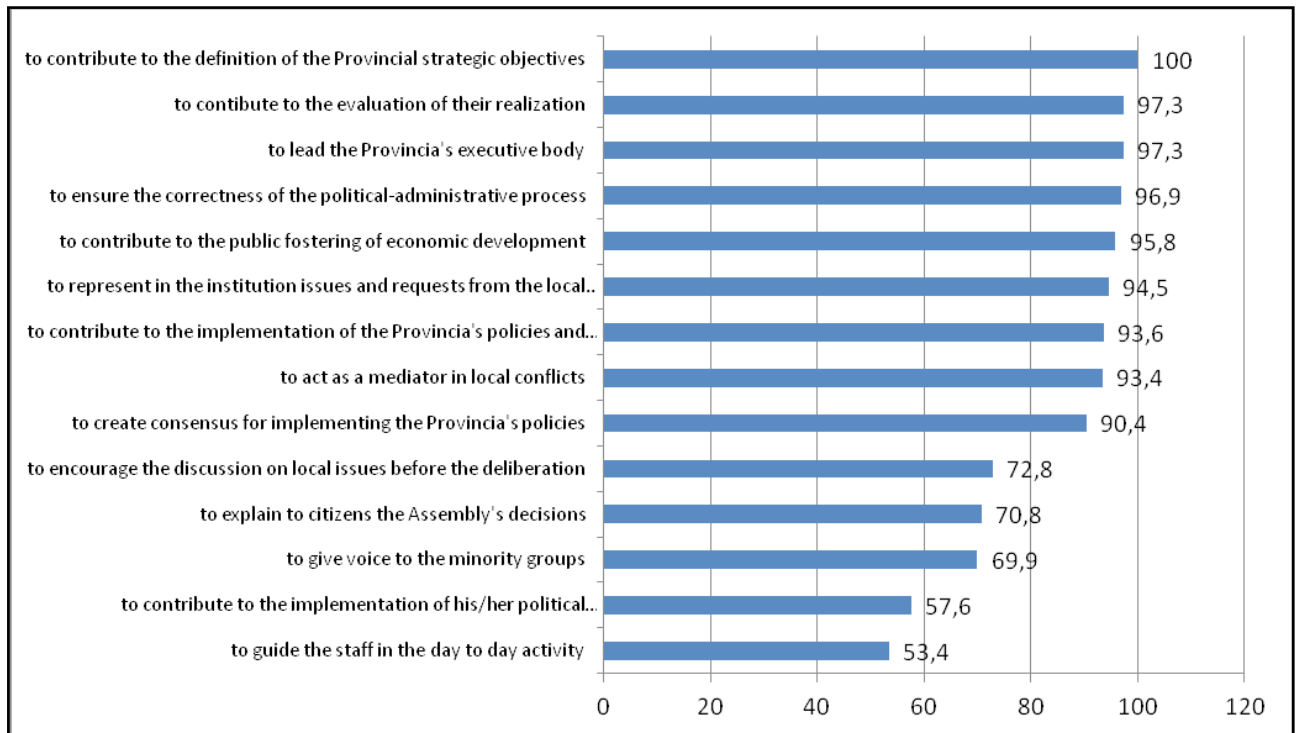
**Fig. 1. Do you consider the following aspect of reform desirable or undesirable? Direct election of the provincial president (%)**



*Source:* Second-Tier European Survey (compiled by the authors).

Such universal support for direct election may be linked to a widespread appreciation of its effects on the image of local government after its introduction for the position of mayor through Law 81/1993. It confirms how much the local political class adhered to a model of local authority that, in Italy as in other European countries, was common to the different levels of local government. Like the municipality and the region, the province was considered an institution of self-government rather than a territorial aggregation of deconcentration: indirect election would have contradicted such a model, and was incompatible with the model of political president that is common to Italy, France and Spain, in which the president of the second tier was, like the mayor, an important representative of the territory, even if he/she did not always have wide powers. This was how the role was interpreted by provincial presidents, who hoped that rationalisation of the multi-level system would not affect it. Most of them considered that their core tasks were related to political formalisation of input from local society, mediation in local conflicts, cooperation with other local authorities to implement provincial policies, and maintenance of economic development. All of these tasks meant that they were involved in a wide range of fundamental, representative functions.

**Fig. 2. How important are the following tasks for a provincial president?**  
% of (answers 'very important' + 'important')

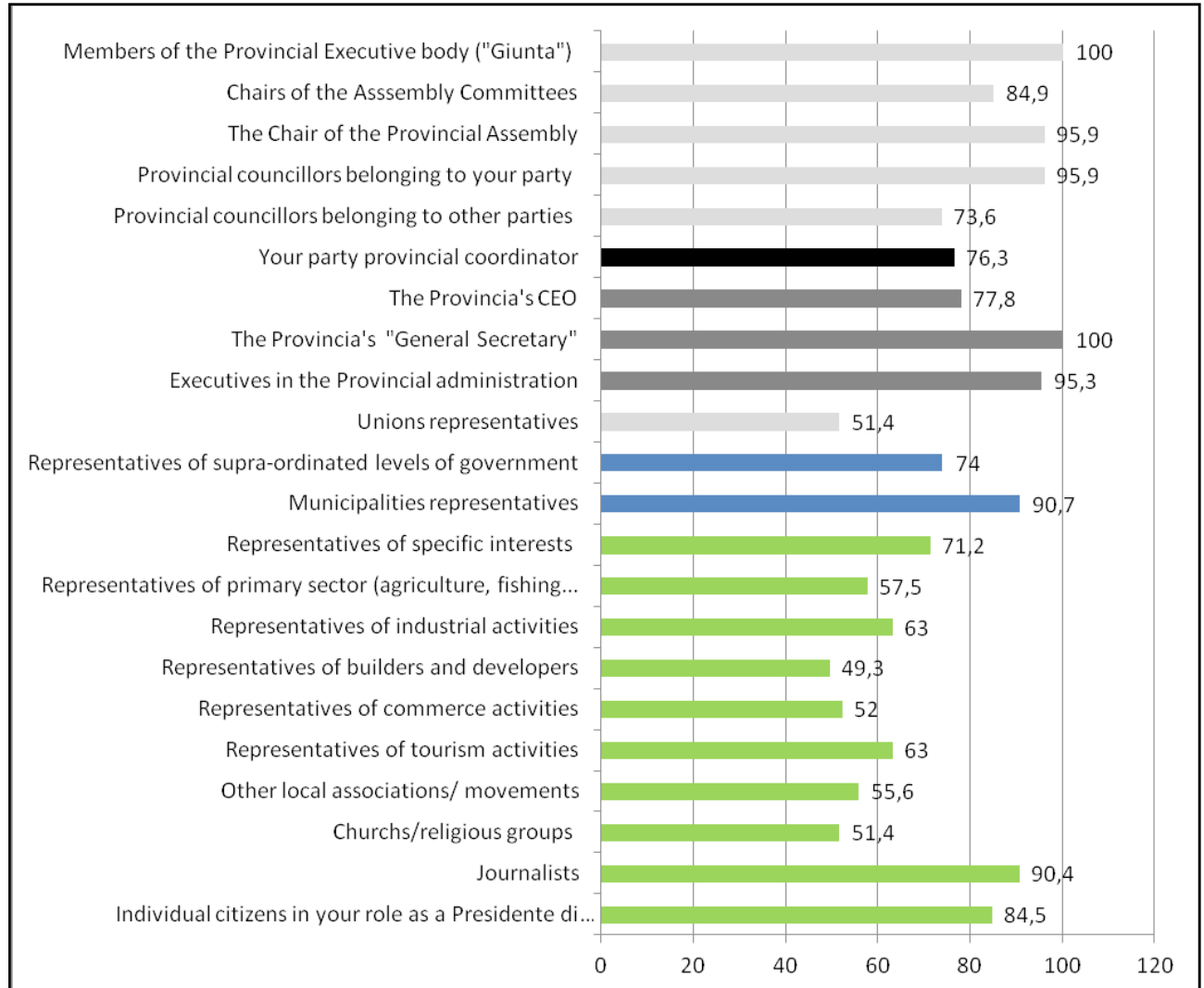


Source: Second-Tier European Survey (compiled by the authors).

The relations that presidents regularly maintained during their mandate with different local actors confirmed this interpretation. Their network of strong relations, which were not dissimilar from the mayors' networks, included elected and non-elected local provincial officials, municipal officials, and various local business representatives and individual citizens.

**Fig. 3. How often do you normally communicate with the following persons/groups of persons? (oral communication only)**

**% of the most frequent contacts (from 'a few times a week' to 'a few times a month')**



Source: Second-Tier European Survey (compiled by the authors).

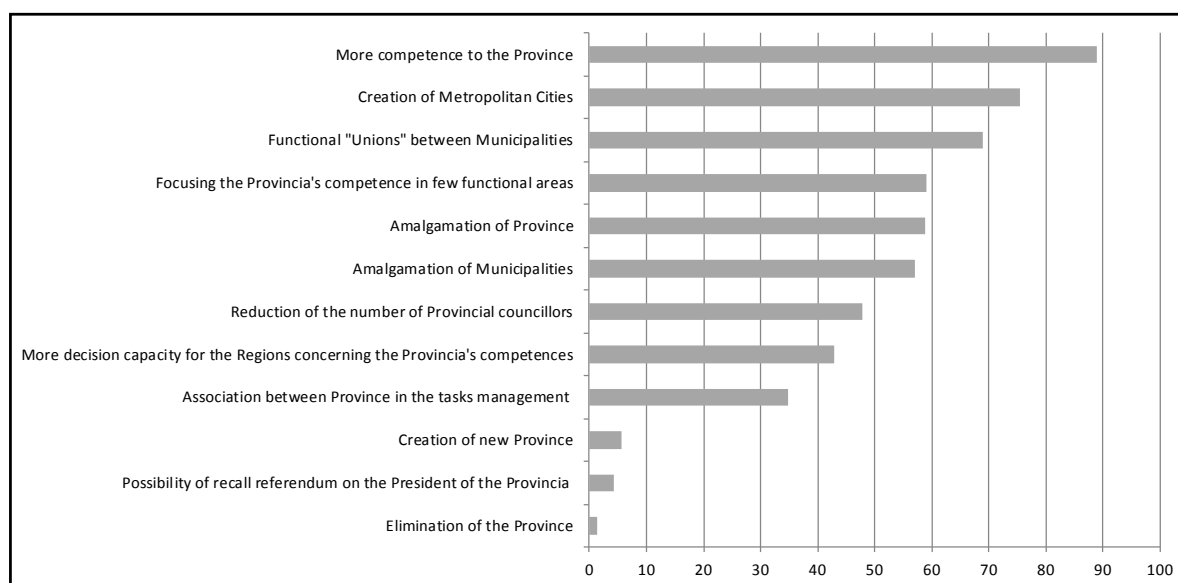
This political interpretation of the role is associated with a 'political party' dimension, which varied according to the context, but was stronger than registered at municipal level: contact with party officials was more frequent on average among provincial presidents than among mayors (Bäck-Heinelt-Magnier 2006). This partisan feature was widely acknowledged by citizens, and became highly unfavourable to the province in a context of marked anti-political feelings.

Most provincial presidents were in favour of a complete reconstruction of the multi-level system, generally based on the creation of metropolitan government bodies and on solutions involving stable, functional cooperation between municipalities (*Unioni di Comuni*). Over half of the respondents also supported municipal amalgamations. Similarly, most presidents were in favour of amalgamations for the second tier.

The emphasis on the need to maintain a model of territorial self-government steered by a political president led to a preference for functional reinforcement of the institution in reform proposals: almost 90% of respondents considered that the provinces should be granted more power. In many cases, this meant that they should specialise by concentrating on a set of functions corresponding to the existing core activity (urban and

land planning, and active labour policies). However, not all provincial presidents agreed: how best to define competences was highly debated, and positions were not always free of internal contradictions.

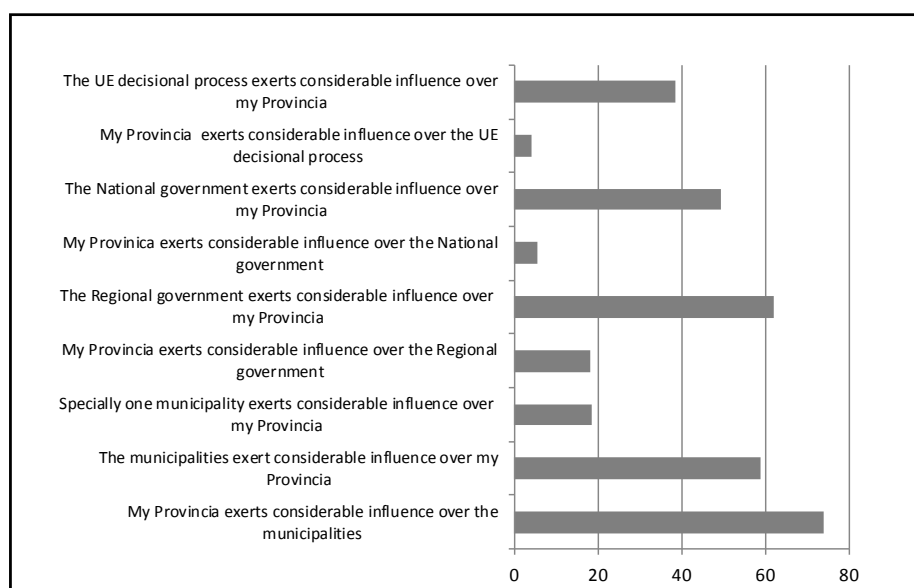
**Fig. 4. Do you consider the following aspect of a reform desirable or undesirable? (% of answers 'desirable' + 'highly desirable')**



Source: Second-Tier European Survey (compiled by the authors)

The multi-level system described in presidents' answers on the reciprocal influence of the four levels of government (Italian and European) partly corresponded to the state's hierarchical structure, as outlined in the 1947 Constitution. It also revealed the strong impact of the regionalisation movement at that time, and showed the coherence of 'vertical' subsidiarity that was introduced ambiguously in the national political system from the 2001 Reform of Title V of the Constitution. The presidents often attributed to the province a strong influence over the *Comuni*. In two-thirds of the cases, presidents spoke of a strong influence of *Comuni* over the same province. The same pattern of shared influence was not observed between the *Regioni* and the provinces. To sum up, in these descriptions of the actual power relations between the local authorities, the provinces appeared in a contested, rather than an intermediate, position.

**Fig. 5. How much do you agree with the following statements? (% of answers 'fully agree' + 'agree')**



Source: Second-Tier European Survey (compiled by the authors)



The direction chosen in the rationalisation of the multi-level system through Law 56/2014 is totally different from the wishes of the segment of the local political class, which led the province in the last decade. We shall see how the Law concentrated the capacity for local representation in other agents. However, we shall also see that the question of functional specialisation of intermediate local governments, which had emerged in 2012 as one of the main issues requiring more space in the debate on the future of the province, remains the main problem in the current implementation of the innovation by the regions.

### 3 The turnaround: cutting out the provinces

#### 3.1 The central role of the mayor and the municipality

The importance of Law 56/2014 lies, first and foremost, in the fact that it makes a decisive political choice in favour of the first level of local government, i.e., the municipalities and the municipal political class, led by the mayors. There are two main innovations. Firstly, the provinces have been downsized, stripped of some of their powers, and transformed into second-level organisations that are no longer elected by the people. This is an immediate, but non-permanent, stage that will remain in place until the completion of a constitutional bill that will eliminate the province from the Italian authorities altogether<sup>2</sup>.

Secondly, metropolitan cities have been introduced. These are the specific governing bodies of Italy's ten biggest cities (in the 15 regions with an ordinary statute)<sup>3</sup>, the emergence of which was first envisaged in a law dating back to 1990. In these ten places, from 1 January 2015, the metropolitan city completely replaced the province, which was eliminated permanently.

Local government reform has been a long-term commitment of Italian governments. It began with Framework Law 142/1990, which initiated a decentralisation process in which important political powers were transferred to local government bodies. The process was uncertain and confused, because it did not provide a clear answer to the crucial question of which decentralisation model to implement. Specifically, it did not clearly choose between: a regionalist model in which powers and tasks were mainly devolved at intermediate government level represented by the regions; and a direct relationship between state and local authorities (municipalities and provinces) through decentralisation, to create a local autonomy model of the state. During and after the 1990s, when the government addressed the decentralisation process it made quite a precise political choice: that of not choosing. The aim was to keep the regions happy on the one hand, and the municipalities and provinces happy on the other (Baccetti 2008). This 'non-choice' characterised the many legislative actions on local government pursued during a period of over twenty years by various governments, with both centre-right and centre-left tendencies.

The turnaround in favour of the municipalities occurred between 2013 and 2014. It was during this two-year period that work on major reforms with a specific political aim began and was largely completed. The man who led this reform process was Graziano Delrio, former mayor of Reggio Emilia and former president of the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI - Associazione Nazionale dei Comuni Italiani). Delrio was Minister of Regional Affairs and Local Autonomies in Enrico Letta's government (2013) and subsequently (from February 2014) held the key role of Undersecretary to the Presidency of Council in the government led by the leader of the Italian Democratic Party, Matteo Renzi. Delrio outlined a plan for organic reform that overturned the polycentric arrangement (state, regions, provinces and municipalities) that still permeated the constitutional reform of 2001 (Law 3/2001), which had lacked coordination among

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2 The Bill for the constitutional amendment 'Abolition of the *Provincia*' was passed by the Cabinet on 5 July 2013. The process of the law of constitutional reform has been started, but it appears long and difficult to implement.

3 As regards the three regions with special status that could establish a metropolitan city (Sardinia, Sicily and Friuli-Venezia Giulia), Law 56 applies only as a general reference, in principle. The decision of whether or not to establish these regions, with features such as institutional and functional powers, is the responsibility of the respective Regional Councils. As for Sicily, where the *Provincia* have institutional characteristics different from the rest of Italy, the discussion of whether to transform three provincial capitals and their respective *Provincia* (Palermo, Catania and Messina) into metropolitan cities has a long way to go and it is not easy to predict the outcome. Sardinia is discussing the reorganisation of local authorities to establish the metropolitan city of Cagliari, but according to a restricted model of metropolitan area that does not cover the entire *Provincia* as required by state Law 56. Meanwhile, Friuli Venezia-Giulia is discussing a comprehensive reform of the system of local authorities that does not take into account the possibility of transforming the regional capital, Trieste, into a metropolitan city (Giuffrè 2014a and 2014b; Demuro 2014; De Gotzen 2014).



the various institutional levels, giving life, as expressed with an effective oxymoron, to 'anarchic' multilevel governance (*Accompanying Report* 2013).

The reform procedure began on 26 July 2013, when Delrio, then minister of the Letta government, hinged the legislative procedure of the bill that would become Law 56 just nine months later (a record for Italy) on the Chamber of Deputies. The main concept behind the Law was to make the Italian republic a 'Republic of Autonomies founded on just two territorial levels of direct representation of the respective communities: Regions and Municipalities'. Law 56 is inspired by this institutional philosophy: 'reducing the political class and the costs of politics [...], making the mayors and presidents of the Unified Municipalities the basic political class of local government and therefore also, and not to a slight extent, of our democratic and constitutional order,' (*Accompanying Report* 2013). Politically, the decisive point was this: the mayors would be the backbone of the political class at local government level, called upon to govern not only the municipal administration in the strictest sense, but also 'the entire territorial organisation over a vast area'. The aim of the collective arrangement was to enhance the value of the municipalities and the municipal political class. The mayors would act as the connective tissue, the strong fabric of local democracy, the political players in which to invest to restore people's faith in politics. In this arrangement, there is room for a second-level body to govern vast metropolitan areas and, subsequently, for a 'plurality of organised forms' that is not elective and is highly flexible and articulate, with functions 'currently performed by the provinces,' and identified with subsequent state laws (*ibid.*).

### 3.2 The weak link of local government

In 2014, a system of local autonomies was approved at just two levels: the institutional and political backbone of local government was to be the municipality and, with it, the mayor. The provinces were changed and downsized, in preparation for their elimination. Meanwhile, they were made into second-level elective bodies, managed by mayors. The metropolitan city was created, which was also a second-level authority, led by the mayors.

Law 56 put the wheels of an important institutional, functional and territorial reorganisation into motion that particularly affected the provinces. It consolidated the fragmented, contradictory reform process that had begun at least five years earlier. Having stripped the province of its power and transformed it into an indirectly elected body, the directors of the new 'provisional' provinces are now elected by the mayors and councillors of the respective municipalities, who choose among those who are already within their ranks.

In fact, the most widely communicated political aim of the reform is to eliminate the provincial political class. In a context of severe crisis in the relationship of trust between society and politics, the province quickly became the scapegoat, apportioned, in the eyes of the public, the lion's share of responsibility for the uncontrolled rise in political costs; a matter that is always central to public debate in Italy (Salvi and Villone 2005; Baccetti 2014). For at least ten years, government attention was focused on the province, which was seen by almost everyone as the weakest and least useful link in the local government system. This intermediate authority also came under attack from the most respected media and public opinion. It was identified as a redundant level of government, a source of wasted economic resources that was only good for feeding a superfluous segment of the local political class. Within the Italian political context, the province occupied a marginal position for decades, in terms of institutional and functional legal jurisdiction. At least until 1990, when Law 142 significantly reinforced its attributions particularly in the field of environmental defence and territorial governance, it was not involved in any major legislative actions, with the exception of recurrent proposals on the institution of the new province. The political history of the province during the years of the Republic is comprised almost exclusively of proposals for self-multiplication by parthenogenesis, and the formation of a new province. And this is the crux of the matter.

It is clear to everyone that the thrust towards the political-administrative breakdown of the territory and the creation of a new province was based on the consolidation of locally influential structures, and definitely not on administrative efficiency. Every new province that is created, however small, leads to more offices in the party and elective offices in the institutions. For the parties, a new province means new secretaries, new executive bodies, and new areas of negotiation for electoral campaigns. Basically, 'creating a new province

can help the self-promotion of a slice of the political class,' (Salvi and Villone 2005, 31). The proliferation of provinces and particularly the final acceleration, with the recent emergence of numerous small and tiny provinces<sup>4</sup>, to the point where the original number has almost doubled, definitely made a decisive contribution to making the province a scapegoat in terms of wasted public resources and bad politics.

### 3.3 Towards the elimination of the province

So, the province is the link intergovernmental relations that has been selected for elimination, for the presumed purpose of reducing public spending. It reflects the anti-party sentiment found in much of public opinion. The final charge began in 2011, encouraged explicitly by the European Central Bank<sup>5</sup>, no less. It was first enforced by the provisions of the Berlusconi government, and then by those of the government led by Mario Monti which, while hoping for the final solution of elimination of the provinces, aimed at the closer target of reducing their number by merging them<sup>6</sup>. The aim of stripping the provinces of almost all their functions and jurisdiction and transforming them into second-level authorities managed by the mayors of the relative municipalities was finally achieved with the legislative initiative of the coalition government made up of PD-PdL-Scelta Civica and led by Enrico Letta, which came to power after the general election in February 2013. The fall of the Letta government at the beginning of 2014 did not slow down the bill to eliminate the provinces, which was finally approved in April of that year. Therefore, Renzi, the new Prime Minister who had just taken office, was able to boast that he had completed a reform that many before him had tried, but failed, to achieve.

At the administrative elections held on 25 May 2014, in the 15 Italian regions with an ordinary statute the electors did not receive a card to vote for the president and provincial councillors. The 73 provinces that should have voted were put under administration until the end of 2014<sup>7</sup> (21 of these were already in this situation for various reasons, 52 were reaching their natural expiry) by the presidents who were about to leave office. After 13 council terms, the province that had been elected directly by the people and had formed the basic democratic web of local government since 1951 (along with the municipality) disappeared.

The reform of the province achieved the aim of eliminating a few thousand (about 3,400) elective and local government offices from those available to the political class. According to the government, one of the main effects of Law 56 was to reduce considerably the political costs of the institutional bodies that politically managed the provinces (indemnities and reimbursements for the provincial president, aldermen and councillors) and of electoral consultations. 'With the new legislation, basically, more than 700 aldermen will stop exercising their functions and the almost 2,700 provincial councillors who currently perform that function alone will be eliminated' (*Governoinforma* 2013). However, various experts have stated that the economic savings that can be obtained from this reform are not clear, if we consider that the amount of money required to sustain provincial committees and councils is quite low, and the savings achieved by cutting the provinces will actually be rather modest (Perotti 2013). There are doubts about whether the disappearance of opportunities and resources will contribute to improving the quality of the local political class.

In any case, there is no longer room for an intermediate local political class, and the new and temporary provinces are now second-level authorities, governed – as already mentioned – by the mayors. Provincial Committees have been suppressed, and the President and Provincial Council, while still in office, have been deeply transformed. The Mayors' Assembly has been introduced and is comprised of the mayors of

4 We should bear in mind that provincial capitals are more numerous than *Provincia* themselves, and amount to 117. In fact, five *Provincia* have two capitals, and one *Provincia* has as many as three.

5 In a letter of 5 August 2011, co-written by President Jean Claude Trichet and his designated successor Mario Draghi, the ECB informed the Italian government, inter alia, of decisions that should be taken immediately to improve the efficiency of public administration. The suggested measures included 'targeted actions to exploit economies of scale in local public services' and, indeed, 'a strong commitment to abolish or merge some administrative intermediate layers (such as the *Provincia*)'. See the wording of the letter on *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 29 September 2011.

6 Law 56 completes and modifies the previous reform efforts on this point, that is Law 42/2009 (Berlusconi government), Decree Law 95/2012 and 188/2012 (Monti government).

7 There are currently 110 Italian Provinces: 24 belong to the Regions and have special status (and therefore are not affected by Law 56) and 86 belong to Regions under an ordinary statute. Of these, only 73 were to expire in 2014, as stated above, and were transformed into second-level entities. The other 13 are still under a mandate that will expire in the next two to three years.

municipalities located within the provincial district. This body is responsible for adopting the statute, and has the power to approve financial statements. The President of the Province is a mayor who is elected (with a vote weighted according to the demographic status of the elector) by all the mayors and councillors of the municipalities within the Province. He holds office for a four-year term (and automatically loses this office if he/she ceases to be mayor). To stand for office as president, a mayor must collect a number of signatures equal to at least 15% of the electorate. The electoral system adopted for the election of the president is a simple first-past-the-post majority. Each elector votes for one of the candidates, and the one with the highest-weighted electoral vote wins. In the event of a draw, the younger candidate is elected (Emanuele 2014). The president may appoint a deputy and may assign mandates to councillors.

The Provincial Council is made up of the President of the Province and a number of members that varies in relation to the population: 16 in provinces with over 700,000 residents, 12 in those with a population between 300,000 and 700,000, 10 in those with up to 300,000 residents. The electoral system adopted for the Council is proportional, divided on the basis of the D'Hondt method and with the possibility of expressing a preference, with a weighted vote. After the individual weighted vote for each candidate has been calculated, a single ranking of all candidates is drawn up. The mayors and councillors of municipalities within the province hold active and passive electorate rights, on the basis of lists (which guarantee gender balance) in a single provincial district. For the first elections only, the law establishes that provincial councillors at the end of their term can also be elected. Elected councillors hold office for a two-year term.

The offices of President of the Province, provincial councillor and member of the Assembly of Mayors, are held without receipt of payment<sup>8</sup>.

**Table 1. Provincial governing bodies, before and after Law 56**

<i>Provincia</i> (except metropolitan cities)	Governing bodies before Law 56 (president and councillors elected by the people)			Governing bodies after Law 56 (president and councillors elected by mayors and city councillors)		
	President	Committee: maximum number of aldermen	Council: no. of councillors	President (elected from the mayors, unwaged)	Council (mayors and city councillors, unwaged )	Mayors' Assembly
< 1,400,000 residents	X	10	36	X	16	All the mayors of the municipalities of the area
< 700,000 residents	X	8	28			
From 300,000 to 700,000 residents	X	7	24	X	12	
> 300,000 residents	X	5	19	X	10	

The following essential functions continue to be performed by the provinces: *a)* territorial planning for the coordination, defence and enhancement of the environment; *b)* planning of transport services within the provinces, authorisation and control of private transport, as well as the construction and management of provincial roads; *c)* planning of the provincial schools network; *d)* collection and processing of data and technical-administrative assistance for the municipalities; *e)* management of school buildings; *f)* control of discriminatory elements in the workplace and the promotion of equal opportunities throughout the provincial territory.

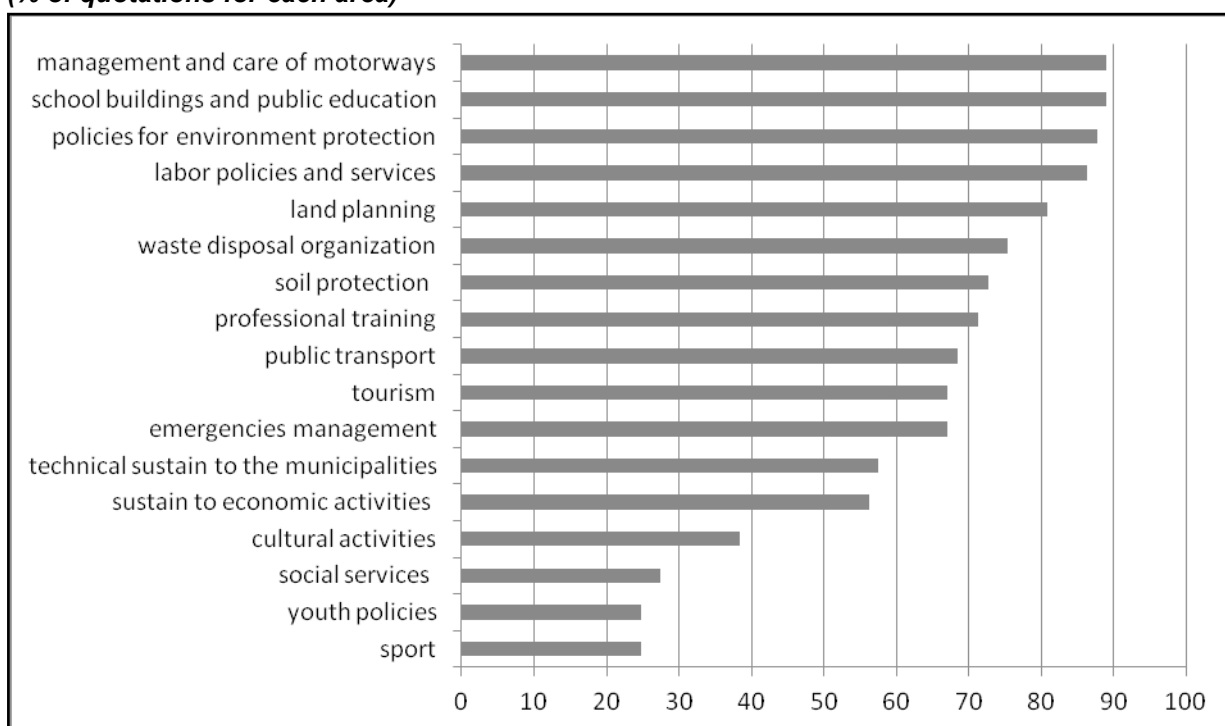
<sup>8</sup> The statutes allow the president of the new province and the mayor of the metropolitan city to enjoy an additional allowance.

The state and regions will reorganise and redistribute all the other functions that are currently performed by the provinces, and implement their laws on the basis of the general principles of effectiveness and efficiency indicated by Law 56.

It should also be noted that while Law 56 suppressed an independent provincial political class, it did not do much to downsize the number and weight of functions that the province continues to manage, which must now be taken care of by the mayors and municipal councillors (in their dual roles) who are elected to provincial office. This is patent if we compare the above list with Figure 6 below, which summarises the answers given by the last democratically elected provincial presidents to a question included in our survey, regarding what they thought were the functional areas in which the province played a strategic role. As you can see, four of the first five functions indicated are also on the list of those who remained with the province, under Law 56. Two more functions are added to this list under Law 56: public transport and assistance for small municipalities. These functions were also considered strategic by over half of the former presidents.

**Fig. 6. In which policy areas does the province currently play a strategic role?**

*(% of quotations for each area)*



Source: Second-Tier European Survey (compiled by the authors)

#### 4 The metropolitan city

Law 142/1990 introduced for the first time the idea of creating ten metropolitan cities in Italy's 15 regions with an ordinary statute. The metropolitan cities would be institutions with specific territorial characteristics and powers, to govern Italy's major cities and neighbouring areas. Art. 17 named 'the Municipalities of Turin, Milan, Venice, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Bari, Naples and the other Municipalities with towns relating closely to them in terms of businesses, essential services, social life, cultural relations and territorial characteristics' as metropolitan areas. The Law also envisaged that regions with a special statute could define metropolitan cities within their territory through autonomous legislation.

Law 142 basically considered the metropolitan area as a province with special powers (Coppo 1990, 71) and established that metropolitan cities should be assigned the functions of both province and municipality, when they were primarily of a supra-municipal nature or when these functions had to be carried out in a coordinated manner for reasons of cost and efficiency (Art. 19). Law 142 entrusted the regions with the job of drawing up the territorial boundaries of the new areas through their own laws. However, the proposal to obligatorily

absorb municipalities within the territory of the metropolitan city into a single 'strong' governance institution at provincial level met with considerable opposition and floundered immediately (Baccetti 1995). In 1995, sanctioning the failure of the path indicated by Law 142, the regions' delimitation of the boundaries of metropolitan areas was made optional, in acknowledgement of the fact that it was impossible to oblige municipalities that objected to join.

The provision of a special government body for metropolitan areas, which would have finally broken down the 'Napoleonic' uniformity of Italy's local governance system, was confirmed by subsequent legislation and sanctioned in 2001 by the reform of Title V of the Italian Constitution (constitutional Law 3/2001). In the Italian Constitution, the metropolitan city was introduced as an abstract category, but there were still crucial matters to be clarified, such as the context and the conditions in which it had to be created, whether it should be compulsory or optional, and whether it had to replace or complement the existing territorial institutions. Under Law 142, the metropolitan cities would have taken the place of the province. In contrast, the constitutional reform allowed the joint presence of both the province and the metropolitan city.

However, until Law 56/2014 was approved, the metropolitan government authority did not take off and no metropolitan city was created<sup>9</sup>.

Possibly the most important reason for this failure is political-electoral. In order for a metropolitan city to emerge as a local authority elected by universal suffrage, as envisaged by the Constitution, all the municipalities involved would have had to be disbanded and the electorate would need to vote again. This introduced an element of uncertainty and unpredictability that the parties found very hard to accept.

Therefore, the metropolitan city was only able to effectively come about in a general political context like that found in Italy today, in which the party system is in considerable organisational difficulty with a lack of public consensus; and the economic situation is difficult and justifies emergency legislation aimed at dramatically reducing (or attempting to reduce) public spending. In this political situation, Matteo Renzi, the Italian prime minister and leader of the strongest party in government, who is very popular with the general public and holds immense decisional power, has come to the conclusion that it could be politically possible and helpful to accelerate local government reform and overturn its institutional organisation to simplify it. The metropolitan city emerged because the government wanted to give up the province to appease public opinion, and it wanted to finally respond to the specific problems of major urban areas with a specially designed instrument of governance empowered to manage local functions in a coordinated, continuous way with a view to tackling problems head-on and grasping the development opportunities present in the specific areas. A year after the event, we can see the creation of the metropolitan cities, and the gradual elimination of the province, as the first embodiment of the actions for reform announced by the Renzi government.

In keeping with the transformation of the province, the metropolitan city is created as a second-level authority that is not elected by the public. It is characterised by the functions it performs, and its purpose is not to directly represent the metropolitan community, but to 'simplify the action of level-one territorial authorities, the municipalities, within the territory, making them coherent and rational,' (Relazione di accompagnamento al disegno di legge 2013). In short, the metropolitan city has been conceived mainly as a container; a tool at the service of the municipalities.

#### 4.1 Identity and functions of the metropolitan city

The territory of the metropolitan city coincides with that of the province it replaces. The functions are the same as those already assigned to the province, enriched by a few other essential functions that should guarantee the quality of government in the metropolitan area. With the metropolitan city, the municipal

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<sup>9</sup> The only exception that should be considered was a pilot metropolitan government that began in 1994 in Bologna, as a result of a cooperation agreement on a voluntary and flexible basis and signed by most (51 out of 60) of the municipalities involved (Comune e Provincia di Bologna 1994). Here, the path of a mayors' metropolitan conference was followed, chaired by the President of the Province, and identified as a 'stable place of concerted policy aimed at identifying administrative solutions for the joint management (between municipalities, unions of municipalities, mountain communities and *Provincia*) of certain activities of a metropolitan nature' (Dente and Melloni 2008, p. 125). Over time, the Bolognese Conference has addressed issues related to the government of the wide area, such as the reorganisation of the network of road and rail infrastructure at provincial level, the management of water resources and waste, the reorganisation of the hospital network, and the provincial energy plan.



political class – mayors and presidents of the Unions – are given a new governance tool that is flexible and has extensive scope for coordination and planning. The metropolitan areas are the hub of Italy's economy, if it is true that over half of Italy's annual GDP is generated in them. These areas house the most important and innovative companies, the most prestigious research centres, and the main financial structures. They are home to the main service and transport nodes. Therefore, the mission of the new metropolitan government authority, as seen by the government, is to be the driving force behind the development of the entire economic and manufacturing system. This will enable the introduction of the most productive areas into the big international networks of cities and into European Union development programmes (*Relazione di accompagnamento al disegno di legge 2013*).

The main institutional tasks of the metropolitan city include strategic development of the metropolitan territory, the promotion and integrated management of services, infrastructures and communication networks within the metropolitan territory, and institutional relations concerning its level, including those related to European metropolitan areas and cities.

The metropolitan city is assigned the essential tasks of the province and those that will be assigned to it by regional legislation within the scope of the process of reorganising the functions of the province. It also has its own essential functions, as follows: *a)* strategic plan of the metropolitan territory; *b)* general territorial planning; *c)* organisation of public services of general interest; *d)* mobility and viability; *e)* promotion and coordination of economic and social development; *f)* IT and digitalisation systems in the metropolitan context.

The Law envisaged that the election of the metropolitan city bodies should take place within quite a short space of time – by 30 September – and this actually happened in most of the cities (the last elections were held on 12 October). The close, peremptory deadline of 31 December 2014 was indicated for the approval of the statutes. Eight statutes out of ten were approved before the established deadline. From this perspective, we can say that 'the metropolitan city has been taken seriously,' to quote Dario Nardella, Mayor of Florence.

The Law left considerable margin for interpretation in the drawing up of the statutes and, looking at the content of the statutes that were approved, we get the impression that every metropolitan situation will be different, although at the moment it is still quite hard to tell which operational methods and strategic aims will actually be pursued. The uncertainty also, and perhaps mainly, stems from the fact that the institutional and functional content of the metropolitan city and the municipalities associated with it will have to be defined by the contribution of regional legislation. Uncertainty abounds on this crucial point of coordination between state legislation and future legislation of the regions. Numerous regions are probably unhappy with the 'decisional approach' of Mr Renzi, and feel that various aspects of Law 56 invade the field of regional legislative jurisdiction. However, the battle between state and regions has still to be staged, and this delay seriously risks making the operation of the metropolitan cities hard, if not impossible. In this initial phase, the involvement of the regions in the debate on the metropolitan city is almost nil, and the only places where there is some involvement (Apulia and Campania for example) have already activated a 'Regional observatory for the implementation of Law 56/2014, with functions to 'boost, connect, work jointly on and monitor the implementation of the Law'', as envisaged by the agreement entered into between state and region on 11 September 2014.

The most critical point is still the detachment in terms of timing between the old activities of the provinces, which passed automatically to the metropolitan city from 1 January 2015, and the new metropolitan activities envisaged by Italian Law 56. The (relative) speed with which the metropolitan city was created and implemented 'contrasts [...] with the difficulties that the reorganisation of the provincial functions is going to encounter, as this is closely and unavoidably connected with the process of construction' of the metropolitan city (Tubertini 2014, 206). The weakness or complete absence (as in the Florentine statute) of references to the regulation of the connection between acts of the metropolitan city and acts of individual municipalities, meaning the reference to intermunicipal cooperation institutes, such as the conventions (*convenzioni*) or programme agreements (*accordi di programma*), also results from this uncertainty with regard to the effective operation of inter-institutional vertical governance.

In the background of the dialogue that is required between state and regions, are budget restrictions contained in the Italian stability law (Law 190/2014), which obliges the metropolitan city to contribute to reducing

public spending and staff. There is no doubt that this is the ultimate aim of the reform, like all recent reforms concerning local government.

In the months that followed the approval of Law 56, various municipalities initiated a brainstorming process in which they convened meetings with the directors of municipalities within the province to get ideas and proposals for the statute. Alternatively, they activated a public consultation process on the draft of the statute, before its final approval. The Association for the Representation of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) also played a significant role in involving institutional parties, particularly in Turin, Milan and Genoa. In various statutes, such as those of Milan, participative democracy tools (such as referendums) were implemented, or tools of intermunicipal cooperation were strengthened, as in Turin.

The approved statutes differ in numerous aspects, starting with their length, which ranges from 25 articles in Florence's statute to 71 in Milan's. For some, such as Florence, the metropolitan city appears largely to be a derivation of the municipalities that merely prefigures a kind of intermunicipal coordination. For Bologna's statute (42 articles), the philosophy is exactly the opposite – the metropolitan city has to seek a new, specific identity and is seen as a new institution, which is entitled to imprint its own political stamp on territorial governance. This difference in political organisation perhaps also explains the different structure and length of the statutes.

All statutes have urban and territorial planning at their centre; their identity-related and strategic pillar. Often, however, they neglect to refer to other essential, strategic functions envisaged by the law as pertaining to metropolitan cities. For example, the coordination of network services (including transport, water and gas) and social services is still somewhat overlooked. One of the most detailed statutes is that of Genoa, which promotes the strategic priority of policies such as territorial defence, the fight against hydrogeological imbalance and decline, the centrality and strengthening of public local transport and the institutional role of service and support for all (small) municipalities in the area.

Other statutes even go as far as to envisage the possibility of setting up a new local police force within the metropolitan context.

Table 2 presents us with an overview of the ten metropolitan cities. As can be seen, there is not a strong concentration of population in Italy's city centres. No metropolitan city has a population of five million, and only three out of ten exceed a population of three million. Italy's territorial structure is still one of widespread urbanisation without polarisation (similar to Germany). The ten metropolitan areas together do not reach a fifth of the total Italian population (about 60 million); not even if we were to add the possible future metropolitan cities of Sicily (Palermo, about 1,100,000 inhabitants; Catania, 770 thousand; Messina, 500 thousand)<sup>10</sup>. We ought to particularly consider the small demographic dimensions of the metropolitan city of Reggio Calabria which, for this very reason, had not initially been envisaged by Law 142/90. At the moment, the metropolitan city of Reggio Calabria still has to be formed because, when the elections were supposed to take place, the representative bodies of the chief municipality had been disbanded due to links with organised crime, and the municipality was being managed by a government commissioner. The election for the metropolitan city is expected to take place when the mandate of the province expires, at the end of 2016.

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10 The three metropolitan areas of Sicily have been identified and defined by a regional law (Law 9/1986) and by a Decree of the President of the Region (in 1995). However, as mentioned above (v. Note 3), their institutionalisation according to the regulatory framework of Italian Law 56 is far from certain.



**Table 2. Ten metropolitan cities**

	No. Municipalities	No. residents metropolitan city	No. residents chief municipality	% chief municipality of metropolitan city
Turin	315	2,247,780	872,367	38.8
Milan	134	3,038,420	1,242,123	40.9
Venice	44	846,962	261,362	30.8
Genoa	67	855,834	586,180	68.5
Bologna	60	976,243	371,337	38.0
Florence	44	973,145	358,079	36.8
Rome	121	3,997,465	2,617,175	65.5
Naples	92	3,054,956	962,003	31.5
Bari	41	1,247,303	315,933	25.3
Reggio Calabria	97	550,967	180,817	32.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,015</i>	<i>17,789,075</i>	<i>7,767,376</i>	<i>43.7</i>

Source: ISTAT, Census 2011.

#### 4.2 Government bodies

As the immediate priority of Law 56 was to 'eliminate' the provinces and reduce the costs of elective offices, for metropolitan cities too, it was imperative to envisage the indirect election of government bodies to avoid the reproduction of a new province. However, the concern that, in order to be effective and authoritative, a metropolitan government authority would have to have a direct democratic investiture must have been brought to the legislator's attention. As a result, the statutes could envisage election by popular suffrage for the capital Rome and for the bigger cities (Milan and Naples), as well as for the metropolitan cities that might be created by regions with special statute, following the approval of a state law on the metropolitan electoral system and the institutional breakdown of the capital municipality into several smaller municipalities. This is, obviously, a possibility which is rather difficult to put into practice. Some statutes however decided to opt for direct elections, with at least 40% representation in terms of equal opportunities, and to qualify the metropolitan city as a body with a strong political value.

Three government bodies are envisaged for the metropolitan city: the metropolitan mayor, metropolitan conference and the metropolitan council. The Law states that all three offices shall be held without receipt of payment (but the statute of the metropolitan cities can provide for some form of compensation). Only one of them, the metropolitan council, is elective. The metropolitan mayor is also the mayor of the central municipality, while the metropolitan conference is made up of the metropolitan mayor and all the mayors of the municipalities of the metropolitan city. The second-level elective body is therefore the metropolitan council, made up of the metropolitan mayor and a number of councillors that can vary between 14 and 24, depending on the population of the metropolitan city (Table 3).

**Table 3. Government bodies**

	Metropolitan mayor (mayor of the central municipality)	Metropolitan conference (all the mayors of the municipalities of the metropolitan city)	Metropolitan council (elective) N
< 3,000,000 residents	X	X	24
From 800,000 to 3,000,000 residents	X	X	18
Up to 800,000 residents	X	X	14

The council remains in office for five years. The active and passive electorates coincide: the mayors and councillors of the municipalities within the metropolitan city are voted in. For the election of the council, lists of candidates are presented and endorsed by at least 5% of those entitled to vote. The elector votes for

one of the lists and expresses, if he/she wishes, a preference for a candidate on this list. In short, the methods used to elect the metropolitan council are the same as those of the provincial council. A weighted vote is also considered in this case. The municipalities of the metropolitan city are split into demographic areas, and the vote is weighted on the basis of the portion of the population that the electors, mayors and councillors represent in relation to the total metropolitan population. The council is the body that is responsible for direction and control. It approves regulations, plans and programmes and implements all the deeds submitted by the mayor. The council can make amendments to the statute and approves financial statements.

The metropolitan conference has the founding task of approving the statute and has the power (in terms of consultation) to approve financial statements. The statute can assign it additional powers of proposal and consultation.

#### 4.3 Elections

When lists of metropolitan council candidates were drawn up, there was also a discussion on whether the representative nature of the metropolitan city's government bodies should be structured on a territorial basis or on a party basis; whether space should be given to the competition between parties or whether an attempt should be made to represent the territories as such, overcoming political and ideological antagonisms. These difficulties in 'reconciling territorial and political representation' (D'Alimonte 2014, 1) were the element that most strongly influenced the formation of the electoral offering and led the parties to make very different choices from one city to the next. Some cities maintained the visibility of the 'national' code, symbol and reference, while others mitigated the party identity within coalitions (to varying degrees) with local lists, personal lists, etc. The electoral competition between the parties was structured according to lines that only partly reflected national political alliances, while partly trying out new transversal alliances. The most important thing was probably the consistent presence of lists with no specific reference to the Italian political system, non-party lists with a variety of orientations which, in many cases, were hard to position on the traditional left/right axis.

However, in Turin and Genoa, with the support of the two mayors of the cities, attempts were made to give life to an institutional rather than party representation. To achieve this, there was one long, inter-party list that expressed the various territorial realities that make up the metropolitan city, as opposed to the political forces present in the municipal administrations. In Turin, the inter-party list was successful, while, in Genoa, it was only partly achieved, and two 'transversal' political lists were presented, made up of members of parties and local formations with different ideological inspirations (even though the list that obtained most of the votes was characterised mainly by a left-wing component).

It has to be said that the adopted electoral system did not encourage the formation of lists based on the representation of the different provincial contexts within the metropolitan city (e.g. representing the interests of the smaller, outlying municipalities rather than those within the metropolitan belt or those of the central municipality in particular). Instead, it encouraged faithfulness to the political-party representation criterion. The electoral formula put the party lists rather than municipalities and their interests in competition with each other, and the party lists were selected in proportion to the votes. In reality, what prevailed in defining the competitive strategies of the political forces was mainly uncertainty, due to the presence of the weighted vote and the possibility of expressing a preference. Faced with uncertainty, the parties often found it more convenient to seek associative solutions, possibly to marginalise and isolate extremes such as 'Lega Nord' and 'M5S', rather than competing on their own. They preferred collusion to competition. 'In a second-level election with quite restricted electoral bodies, colluding is easier and often more convenient than competing,' (D'Alimonte 2014, 1).

In all the cities, a sure winner emerged from the ballot, a list with a clear absolute majority: a non-party list with moderate left-wing tendencies in Milan and Bari, the party list of the Democratic Party, which ran alone, in Bologna, Florence and Rome. Only in Naples, where the competition largely followed the traditional lines of confrontation between 'national' parties, was there notable fragmentation of the vote and there was no absolute winner, with the Democratic Party and Forza Italia each obtaining 7 seats, followed by the left-wing

non-party list inspired by the mayor of Naples, with 5 seats, and the centrist coalition between NCD and UCD with 4 seats.

Lastly, it should be noted that the vote weighting mechanism, which was designed to meet the need to balance representation with the demographic weight of the municipalities, ended up widening the gap between the attractive force of the central city and the marginal position of the other municipalities. In the metropolitan city of Rome, for example, 12 of the 24 people who were elected were municipal councillors from the central municipality, and the other 12 represented municipalities which directly border Rome. No representative was elected from municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, which account for 30 out of 60.

The first session of elections was held in eight metropolitan cities. In addition to Reggio Calabria, where the election will probably take place in 2016, Venice still has to vote. In Venice, the representative bodies of the municipality were disbanded due to legal problems involving the mayor in office, and the metropolitan city election will go ahead in summer 2015.

**Table 4. Metropolitan council elections: competing lists and seats allocated**

Lists	Turin	Milan	Genoa	Bologna	Florence	Rome	Naples	Bari
<b>1</b> 'Transversal' political lists	15		16 (13+3)					
<b>2</b> Right/centre- right non- party lists	1	6	2	3		1		7
<b>3</b> Centre-left non-party lists		16 (14+2)						10
<b>4</b> Left-wing non-party lists				1	1	1	5	
<b>5</b> 'Transversal' non-party lists				1	1			1
Lega Nord		2						
Forza Italia					1	4	7	
NCD/NCD- UDC						2	4	
FdI-AN							1	
PD				12	14	14	7	
M5S	2			1	1	2		
<b>Total seats</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>
Electorate	3,840	2,054	815	834	689	1,685	1,536	717
% Voting	73.9 (2,838)	80.6 (1,657)	84.8 (691)	84.5 (705)	92.2 (634)	88.7 (1,495)	90.7 (1,385)	94.7 (8,663)

Source: compiled by the authors

### **1 'Transversal' political lists**

TURIN: Città di città (PD, Moderati, Forza Italia, NCD) (15)

GENOA: Costituente per la Città Metropolitana (PD; centre-right wing; Lista Doria; SEL; ex IdV) (13); Comuni e Comunità (one Joint-Group regional councillor; 'Noi con Claudio Burlando'; Lega Nord; UDC) (3)

### **2 Right/centre-right non-party lists**

TURIN: Civica alternativa per il territorio (Lega Nord, Fratelli d'Italia) (2)

MILAN: Insieme per la città metropolitana (Centre-right wing) (6)

GENOA: Non-party lists Noi per l'area vasta – Liberi di scegliere (Lista Musso; Fratelli d'Italia) (2)

BOLOGNA: Uniti per l'alternativa (3)

ROME: Territorio e partecipazione (area FdI) (1)

BARI: Alleanza per la città metropolitana (FI; UDC; FdI + non-party lists) (7)

### **3 Centre-left non-party lists**

MILAN: Centro-sinistra per la città metropolitana (14); Lista civica costituente per la partecipazione – La città dei comuni (Radicals and Socialists) (2)

BARI: Città Insieme (PD; SEL + non-party lists) (10)

### **4 Left-wing non-party lists**

BOLOGNA: Sinistra per i beni comuni (1)

FLORENCE: Territori Beni comuni (SEL + others) (1)

ROME: Dalle città uguaglianza e libertà (area SEL) (1)

NAPLES: Città Metropolitana - Bene comune (inspired by the mayor of Naples, De Magistris) (5)

### **5 'Transversal' non-party lists**

BOLOGNA: Rete Civica (1)

FLORENCE: Liste civiche per la città metropolitana (1)

BARI: Terre democratiche (1)

## **5 Concerns and questions**

As we have seen, the metropolitan city became a reality in just a few months, after a quarter of a century of exhausting, sterile debate. The final acceleration was strongly supported by the Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, who tried to characterise his government right from the start as a 'doing' government, as opposed to all the 'talking' governments that had preceded it. Renzi's 'decisional approach' has definitely had a positive outcome for him in terms of electoral consensus, but there are concerns about whether the decisions and laws were made too hastily.

As regards the metropolitan city, the critical point lies in the fact that, although the institutional law is long and articulate, it does not help untie the knot relating to the identity of the metropolitan city. In short, Law 56 might be a 'doing' law, but it has not made much of a contribution to clarifying what a metropolitan city is. It is torn between two models: institutional consolidation, and the cooperative arrangements of the 'new regionalism' perspective (Savitch and Vogel 2000, Kübler and Heinelt 2005).

What it all boils down to is the fact that a metropolitan city has two problematical dimensions: functions and territory. Law 56 remains vague on both, offering general indications that will have to be substantiated by subsequent interpretative and legislative processes at regional and national level, referring to another problematical dimension of vertical governance which, on a matter such as this, will have to be tested *ex-novo*.

As regards the territorial dimension, the choice has been made to include the whole province and, at the same time, to exclude the possibility that the metropolitan city could have a sub-provincial or supra-provincial

extension (although the neighbouring municipalities to the metropolitan city may ask to join later). However, this means that the specific urban conformation of the individual metropolitan province has been wiped out: no distinction has been made between metropolitan 'city' and 'area'; no attention has been paid to the 'profound differences between the ten metropolitan cities, in terms of demographic dimensions, territorial extension and urban conformation' (Salvato 2014, 65). A role of absolute pre-eminence has been assigned to the central municipality, and it is inevitable that this generates diffidence and opposition in the other municipalities incorporated into the metropolitan city – and opposing 'centre-outskirts' dynamics are already being expressed in the formation of the electoral lists, both giving life to numerous non-party lists and, partly, straddling party loyalties.

As regards functions, some metropolitan functions are clear and shared by every metropolitan city: development and infrastructure centres, transport, university, research and industry centres. These are the most identifying functions for a metropolitan area. However, there is no need for a special authority to achieve these things. Particularly, the territorial environment that falls within the jurisdiction of a given institutional body might not necessarily lie within the confines of the provinces. It could be, and often is, supra-provincial (as in the case, for example, of the 'natural' metropolitan area which extends across the Provinces of Florence, Prato and Pistoia, or in the case of the Provinces of Venice, Padua and Treviso). Basically, functional and territorial dimensions entwine and should be (or should have been) defined in a coordinated way (Dente 2010, 3). This would enable (or should have enabled) the understanding that the identification of the optimal metropolitan context refers to the dimension of an area, rather than a city.

Lastly, hovering in the background and risking the long-term blockage of the process to complete the reform, is the fierce competition that the metropolitan city has to endure with an authority that already exists, the region. Many jurists have observed that metropolitan cities would have been a classic exercise in regional legislation. Yet, the state took over, for the reasons outlined earlier and because the regions did nothing for 25 years and the government found it easy to silence them. The metropolitan cities' statutes make little mention of the region; they snub it and thus reveal a conflict that has been smouldering for many years. The Delrio Law establishes essential functions only, while reorganisation of the ordinary functions of the metropolitan cities is entrusted to regional legislation, which does not exist yet. The law also envisages that ANCI, regions, provinces and metropolitan cities should reach an agreement on their own and cooperate, but it provides no clear instructions on how to bring about this voluntary cooperation. The law takes it for granted that a miracle is going to happen.

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