Student Politics in Italy: Continuities and Discontinuities across Three Eras

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Introduction

Contemporary student politics in Italy emerged after 1945, with the end of the fascist regime and the proclamation of the Republic. The contemporary representative student associations mapped and analyzed in the research are the collective student actors elected in the 2019–22 mandate within the CNSU. This delimitation defines the politically relevant actors in the national system of student politics by employing the criterion of representativeness in the institutional national representative body excluding movements of general or particular instances on the national level, which do not participate in student elections.

The study of student politics in Italy tests the classification proposed by Vespa, Sguazzini & Pratissoli (2024) as a revision of the typology presented by Klemenčič (2012). We argue that student politics in the Italian republican period can be explained through the positioning of student associations on a series of axes pertaining to their structure, goals, and methods of work, with a distribution of characteristics such that they cannot be mapped through a clear dichotomy between "student associations as social movements" and "student associations as interest groups."

The chapter is structured in five parts. After the introduction, the second part consists of a historical literature review of student politics since 1945: we identify three eras of student politics and we contextualize the different student collective actors belonging to one of the four streams of student politics in Italy (the left, the apolitical and non-confessional, the Catholics, the right). The third part describes the current framework of national student politics, focusing on the analysis of the institutional framework and the actors involved. The findings show a pluralist national system of student representation, intertwined with a system of intermediation holding characteristics of both formalized (guarantees of representation in advisory bodies and observatories) and informal (institutional and informal associations' advocacy strategies) ideal-types. The analysis uses the following sources and methodologies: content analysis of the legislation regarding HE and student representation in Italy; semi-structured interviews to Presidents of CNSU from the last three mandates of the 2010 decade (2013–16, 2016–19, 2019–22); semi-structured interviews to the two authors who wrote scientific articles about student representation in Italy from the 2000s onwards and to an expert of HE and student support policies; surveys, developed as a synthetic form of NAT-SIHEG and LOC-SIHEG

(plus semi-structured interviews for clarification of some answers), submitted to leaders of national associations elected to the CNSU, obtaining nine out of eleven responses; for Fenix Vento di Cambiamento—Atlante and Link, the content analysis of the official website in the years 2019–21 was done, integrated with a short interview for Fenix. In the fourth part, we analyze student representation on the local level, considering that the institutional context in which the main right concerns a 15 percent minimum quota in the universities' collegiate bodies (executive, academic, and QA) underpins a heterogeneous degree of involvement in universities' governance across the country. The analysis is based on responses to the LOC-SIHEG survey administered to student leaders involved in UDU (with a response rate of 32.3 percent—ten out of thirty-one local sections), one of the main national-level student associations in Italy and the only Italian association member of the European Students' Union, as well as from the data used for the second part. In the fifth part we compare the findings with our conceptual framework. In conclusion, we offer a brief research agenda for further inquiry.

All the authors are or have been student leaders for UDU. We strove to structure the research and present the results objectively, trying to indicate as accurately as possible, within the space available, the methodologies and sources employed.

The Three Eras of the Italian Republican Student Politics

We can divide the history of Italian student political systems into three eras (1945–68, 1968–94, 1994–present), through which four main political streams flow: the left, the apolitical and nondenominational, the Catholics, the right.

The First Era (1945–68)

With the end of the fascist regime in 1943, university student politics had to reinvent itself: three of the four streams (the left, the apolitical and non-confessional, the Catholics) started to organize at the national level (Quagliariello, 1998), with the right constituting itself in 1950 as FUAN (*Fronte Universitario d'Azione Nazionale*), organization with ties to the post-fascist party MSI (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*) (Quagliariello and Orsina, 2005). The questions on whether to have a single national association, many of them or only local ones, what kind of relationships to have with the parties, and the nature of the advocacy of these associations were present in the debate of the first post-fascist years (Torresi, 2018).

The left, guided by the communists, favored the creation of a unitary student union. The Catholics opposed a unitary structure, but, confronted with the reality of spontaneously emerging unitarian student councils in universities, favored the creation of a single, institutional, corporatist union coexisting with a pluralist set of political and cultural student associations. The apolitical and non-confessional stream was represented by the reemergence of the *goliardi*, whose local associations, dedicated to hedonism, parties, and cultural activities, were prevalent from the Italian

unity (1861) until the fascist period: they founded the FIG (*Federazione Italiana Goliardica*) in 1945, in defense of a "free" university space against "alien" political and confessional tendencies. The recognition of a specific identity for the *goliardi* was signaled by the transformation of FIG into UGI (Unione Goliardica Italiana, 1948)(Quagliariello, 1998). Their preference was to create a "technical body" strictly defending the material interests of the students.

The alliance of the Catholics and the *goliardi* against the communist proposal of a single, all-encompassing student union led to the establishment in 1948 of UNURI (Unione Nazionale Universitaria Rappresentativa Italiana): a unitary, independent, apolitical, non-confessional union for the technical defense of the material interests of students and guarantor of the pluralism of student associations (Torresi, 2018). UNURI had technical commissions at the national level (e.g., that for international representation) and it was linked to the local representative student councils (Quagliariello, 1995).

Despite the compromise between Catholics and *goliardi* was based on the slogan "*fuori i partiti dall'università*" ("keep the parties out of university") (Torresi, 2018), the student associations, already formed along political cleavages, started to have ties with the political parties. FUAN was linked with MSI. Intesa coordinated the Catholics coming from FUCI (*Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana*, founded in 1896 and survived legally during fascism, by focusing specifically on spiritual education, Torresi, 2018) and from other organizations, and its reference was the main government party, the Christian-democrat DC (*Democrazia Cristiana*). UGI had a dialogue with several parties: initially on the non-confessional center (e.g., the republicans PRI, Partito Repubblicano Italiano), and after 1956 more to the left, when the social-communist student organization CUDI (Centro Universitario Democratico Italiano) dissolved itself and entered in UGI. This, on the one hand, provoked the splinter of AGI (Associazione dei Goliardi Indipendenti), close to the liberal party PLI (Partito Liberale Italiano) and, on the other hand, made UGI the house of the three left parties, the communist PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano), and the two socialists PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano) and PSIUP (Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria), with the hegemony of PSI (Quagliariello, 1995; Quagliariello and Orsina, 2005). UNURI was considered a student parliament, and (with the peculiarities of the university world) followed logics akin to the party-political ones, experimenting formulas later taken by the parties, like the stable alliance UGI—Intesa and the entering in UNURI executive committee of a communist member of UGI in 1964 (Quagliariello and Orsina, 2005).

Demands of independence from the political parties and of revendication of material interests of students, together with new preferences for direct democracy and movement-like structures, emerged in the early 1960s, due to the opening up of University to more students, toward what was called "mass university." The institutional associations tried to adapt to this new reality, inspired by UNEF,[1] promoting demonstrations (UNURI, UGI, Intesa) against a proposed law by University Minister, Gui, reforming university, which was later dropped, as well as starting discussion of reform (UNURI) and of becoming the "single student syndicate" (UGI). The radical factions did not manage to reform their organizations (even if they sometimes took the leadership, as in Intesa), and when the "Student Movement" emerged in '68, these organizations were dismantled: UNURI was dissolved in 1968 and the others followed, with the exception of FUAN, whose position at the fringes within the previous student system allowed itself to adapt to the new "age of the movements" (Quagliariello and Orsina, 2005).

The Second Era (1968–94)

Despite this disintegration, the pillarization of the existing fronts (right, left. and Catholics, with the disintegration of the apolitical and non-confessional) remained intact, albeit with various nuances within them. From '68 the left factions of UGI came out weakened, while the youth of PCI entered into the "Student Movement." The leaders of the "Student Movement" tried to maintain national coordination in an organized form: however, the different internal tendencies, and the absence of references in the broader social and political spheres, led different factions to leave over the years, coming to a final conclusion of the experience at the dawn of the 1977 Movement. The latter acts as a definitive disruptive element of the links between student associations and parties within the left, which saw, however, various associations, more or less organized, on the territorial level that tried to converge in different national coordination structures (Guzzo, 2019), without success (Capelli, 2014). Furthermore, "between 1975 and 1979 young people in several major Italian cities entered the political scene as the protagonists of new forms of urban conflict" (Lumley, 1990): in this scenario also took place the student mobilizations against the "Malfatti Law," seen as aimed at restricting access to the mass university (Lumley, 1990). The 1977 protests were much more violent, with several deaths and many injuries, and characterized by clashes between different factions of the student movement itself (Lumley, 1990). Catholic associationism was strongly affected by the cultural impact of the '68 Movement (e.g., on divorce referendum in 1974 and the one abortion in 1981) (Capozzi, 2010; Moro and Torresi, 2014): in the aftermath of '68, FUCI continued to carry out its function of "spiritual education" within the universities, but its political impact on the student policy front progressively diminished (Pomante, 2015). On the contrary, between the late 1960s and early 1970s, the movement "Comunione e Liberazione" appeared and developed an increasing influence and characterization within academic circles, distinguishing itself from its origins within "Gioventù Studentesca" (the student branch of Catholic youth association "Azione Cattolica"). In the 1980s, this movement grew vigorously within academic and student circles, even though it did not implement a national coordination of the student groups and individuals present in individual universities (Abbruzzese, 1989). This organizational process took place only in the mid-90s (CLDS website, 2022), with the establishment of CLDS as a national organization (Genicot, 2012).

From '68 onward, despite several contrasts with some political positions of MSI and its youth wing, FUAN managed to carry on its existence during the '70s and '80s and up to the '90s, when it changed its name in *Azione Universitaria*, following the transformation of MSI into *Alleanza Nazionale* (Rao, 2007).

The proposal for a reform of university by the Minister Ruberti, whose aim was to establish a general university autonomy and the opening up of the institutions to private funds (Maltese, 2020), kindled in 1990 the new student movement *Pantera* ("Panther"): inspired by an episode of local news (a panther spotted wandering near Rome), it took the symbol of the Black Panthers. The movement linked the national opposition to the reform to local issues about the material interests of the students, and was based on the work of "faculty collectives" emerging in the previous years as places of discussion on university issues. The students of the '90 movement identified themselves as an autonomous social group with its specific interests and the need to self-organize, and not as part of broader movements, as in '68 and '77. The mobilization achieved to obtain many of the claims at the local level. At the national level, the lack of a national strategy

and of broader alliances against the Ruberti reform led this law to be approved and the movement to be defeated (Simeone, 2010).

The Third Era (1994–present)

From the failure of *Pantera* and the reorganization of the party system, in the early 1990s, new student organizations were formed: in 1994, Unione degli Universitari (UDU) was born, as a confederation of local, pre-existing student organizations, traceable to the socialist and communist political strand, as the first student union in Italy recognizing itself as a "student syndicate," with partnership with the workers' union CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro); in 1995, Coordinamento delle Liste per il Diritto allo Studio (CLDS) was founded, as a confederation of local student associations, mainly related to "Comunione e Liberazione" (CL); in 1996 FUAN reconverted into Azione Universitaria (AU), within the right (subsequently, within the center-right, the association of "Studenti per le libertà" SpL was formed as the student wing of Berlusconi's party "FI—Forza Italia," then PdL "Popolo della Libertà"); on the apolitical and non-confessional stream, the birth of Confederazione degli Studenti (after 1994) should be noted, with a strong presence in some Universities in the South (Genicot, 2012).

The student associations born from 1994 onward carved out a space for dialogue with the Higher Education Ministry, with alternate outcomes: for instance, UDU's influence over the funding schemes for scholarships (La Repubblica, 1995), or UDU's struggle against the establishment of numerus clausus and subsequent demonstrations and legal battles against it (La Repubblica, 1999, 1999, 2000b; Repubblica.it, 2006)

The presence of various student associations and their pressure toward the government led to the creation of the CNSU (National Council of the University Students) in 1997, which became operational only in 2000 (La Repubblica, 2000a). In the same year, UDU entered the ESIB (European Student Information Bureau, later to become ESU—European Students' Union) (European Students' Union, 2012). This signals the emergence of Europe as a policy-making space in higher education, with the start of the Bologna Process in 1999 and the adaptive reforms of the Italian higher education system, especially with the "Berlinguer reforms" (1999–2004). With the coming to power, and subsequent reappointments, of the Berlusconi governments (2001–5, 2005–6, 2008–11), began a phase of complex institutional dialogue between representative institutions (especially CNSU) and student associations, on the one hand, and the government, on the other. In this period, relations with the associations close to the government parties were strongly favored (Expert 2, personal communication, March 16, 2022).

In 2008 the multi-year policy guidelines for the economy included severe cuts to the university, which were opposed by the students through the movement identified as "Onda" (also referred as "Onda Anomala") (Repubblica.it, 2008). As a result of those cuts, in 2010, a reform of the university was proposed (the so-called "Legge Gelmini," Law 240/2010), which saw a very strong institutional and street opposition from the students, who, however, collected a defeat (Piazza, 2014). After the 2008 mobilizations, the internal discussions within UDU led to two splits: the one that gave rise to "Link" in 2009 (Il Sindacato degli Studenti—old website, 2009) and the one that gave rise to "RUN—Rete Universitaria Nazionale" (linked to the center-
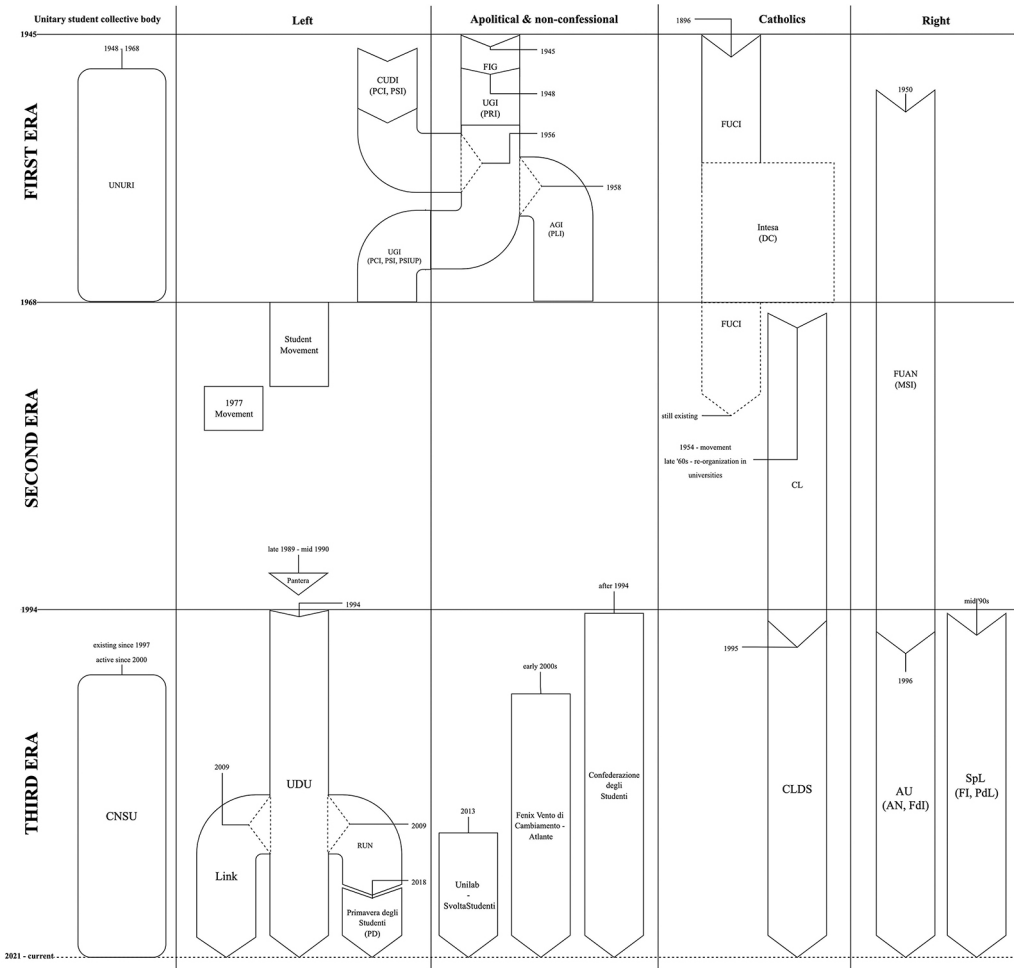
Figure 31.1 Overview of the student collective actors during the Italian republican period (in brackets their closeness to political parties).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

left PD—Partito Democratico and its youth wing) in 2010 (RUN, 2014). The latter association disappeared within a few years and was replaced by "Primavera degli Studenti" (PdS) in 2018 (Giovani Democratici, 2018). Furthermore, outside of these dynamics, in the beginning of the 2000s in Rome Fenix—Vento di Cambiamento (*Interview with Student Leader 10*, personal communication, March 18, 2022), and in 2013 in Lombardy Unilab—Svoltastudenti, were born as apolitical and non-confessional organizations (Unilab Svoltastudenti, 2022). An overview of the evolution of the collective actors along the four streams of student politics in Italy is provided in Figure 31.1.

The Current National Student Politics System

Within the Italian higher education system, there are three types of institutions: universities, AFAM, and ITS—either public or private. Universities, which are numerically the most important and politically most relevant ones (Fondazione Res, 2016, Viesti, 2018), are open to students from all types of high schools. AFAM are dedicated to Art, Music, and Choreutic studies and ITS are technical studies characterized by high commodification (Servizio Studi della Camera dei deputati, 2021).

Even if CNSU is the institutional representative body for university students, it issues resolutions also on AFAM and ITS topics. AFAM students are represented within the CNAM (Art.3 L.508/1999) together with all AFAM components (teachers, staff, etc.), apart from having different national bodies, composed only by students, linked to the different disciplines.

As stated in the Italian Constitution (Art.33) students' representation legislation is characterized by university autonomy in respect of the existence of certain bodies and to the state laws (Cassese, 1990, Foroni, 2011, Rosboch, 2013). At the national level, student representation is guaranteed in advisory bodies and observatories.

In 1997, CNSU was created (Art. 20, c.8, L.59/1997) as a consultative body of the Ministry responsible for university policies. It is composed of thirty members, elected every three years, directly by all the students which paid tuition fees and enrolled no later than the first year *fuori corso*[2]: twenty-eight bachelor and master students elected on four different territorial constituencies; one PhD student and one postgraduate specializing student, elected on single national constituencies. CNSU provides recommendations and proposals to the Minister (Art.1, c.1, D.P.R. 491/1997)[3] on university's systemic reform, teaching, financing, QA, and student support policies (Foroni, 2011). Furthermore, CNSU "may address questions to the Minister regarding facts or events of national importance concerning teaching and student status, which are answered within sixty days" (Art.1, c.2, letter d), D.P.R. 491/1997). Once per mandate CNSU submits to the Minister "a report on the condition of students within the university system" (Art.1, c.2, letter c), D.P.R. 491/1997). From the period after the 2010 reform onward, CNSU tried to slightly expand its competences, formulating annual recommendations also on the state budget law. Furthermore, CNSU, within its components, nominates eight representatives in the *Consiglio Universitario Nazionale (*CUN[4]); three representatives in the *Associazione Nazionale per gli Organismi per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario* (ANDISU) (Statuto ANDISU, 2018), since 2015; three representatives in the national QA Agency ANVUR (*Agenzia nazionale di valutazione del sistema universitario e della ricerca*) Advisory Committee.

Within CUN, six out of the thirty components must be students[5] appointed from CNSU among its own members (Art. 17, c.104, lett.b), L.127/1997; Art.1, c.1, lett. a) to f), L.18/2006).

L.766/1973 established the presence of student representation within the Opere Universitarie (bodies then in charge of implementing policies on student support policies), but in 1977 (D.P.R. 616/1977), the responsibility of the student support policies was transferred to the regions, without any mandatory provision of student representation. Only in 2015, a law establishing *ad hoc* regional bodies for student support policies, included the guarantees for student representation within them (Art.1, c.269, L.208/2015): their establishment, however, has exceptions and several regions have decided not to establish them. Even the observatories that include students are

not active: the *Consulta Nazionale per il diritto agli studi universitari* (Art.6, L.390/1991) has never been fully activated; it was substituted by the *Osservatorio Nazionale per il Diritto allo Studio* (L.240/2010, Art. 20, Leg.D.68/2012), formed late and convened few times, to the point of being—to date—irrelevant with respect to the institutional framework.

Finally, students are involved in QA processes: from 2006 onward, three student representatives nominated by CNSU and two by ESU (on the total composition of seventeen members) are included in the Advisory Committee[6] of ANVUR (but they are not part of the governing body) (Art.11, c.2, D.P.R.76/2010). Students are also selected through a public call for applications as expert evaluators in external QA processes, such as on-site visits aimed at the periodic accreditation of universities.

Within this framework, several student associations work at a "national" level. Those that engage in student representation typically run in the elections for CNSU. However, many of the associations represented in CNSU do not have a national outreach: if we look at the last three CNSU elections of the 2010 decade (2013, 2016, 2019) only UDU, RUN-PdS, CLDS, Link, AU, and SpL candidate in all the four electoral districts (North-West, North-East, Centre, South), but only UDU and Link (since 2016) managed to elect at least one person in each of the districts (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2013, 2016, 2019). AU and SpL are particularly strong in the South district, where they ran separately in 2013 and 2019 managing to elect one person each, as well as in the Centre district, where their joint list managed to elect two candidates at each election (each district has seven seats). CLDS is particularly strong in the North-West district and weak in the South: as its national coordinator affirmed, Milan, which has expressed all the coordinators in the past years, coordinates with the other realities and supports the less structured realities in the Centre and in the South (Student Leader 3, personal communication, February 28, 2022). While Unilab—Svoltastudenti started to reach out of its founding territory in the North-West district by candidating also in the North-East and in the Centre in 2019, its electoral presence is strong only in its original region. Confederazione, on the other hand, candidates and elects only in the South district; Fenix candidates only in the Centre. The association with the relative majority has been UDU's list (which included several times a joint list with RUN or PdS in many districts), while CLDS, AU-SpL, and Link usually take the second, third, and fourth positions.[7]

These associations are normally registered NGOs, others are informal associations or movements, and all of them have a low degree of professionalism: most of them do not have a national seat and work with completely voluntary staff, and none of them has employed staff. They do not receive national public funding, and some of them even do not have an independent bank account for the national association. There are varying degrees of centralization, but the tendency is to have a middle-to-low level of centralization, with a strong role of the local associations and the national executive being more of a figure steering the processes.

This pluralist system finds a common terrain in CNSU, for whose seats the associations compete with direct elections at the national level. The results lead to a complex system of coalition-building beyond the pre-electoral national alliances which resulted in joint lists at the ballot, visible at the moment of the election of CNSU President.

Since CNSU is a consultative body of the HE Ministry, the importance for the Ministers of the resolutions filed by the CNSU has always been dependent on the Minister's individual interest in them. Most ministers were inclined to ignore them, thereby discrediting the work of the body.

Therefore, it has become common for the CNSU President to personally submit the resolutions to personnel of the Ministry, as well as to parliamentary committees and other stakeholders. A key problem is the very limited resources allocated to CNSU by the Ministry. Most CNSU representatives and student leaders complain about the large lack of funds available that makes the work difficult and has a negative impact on effectiveness.

The national panorama of student politics has an influence also on the functioning of the council, which indirectly depends on the legitimization given by the national organizations. For some associations, CNSU is a place where to give an institutional setting to campaigns and proposals; for others, it is the main *raison d'être* for the association at the national level. However, as the 2019-2022 current CNSU President recalled, the identity of the different associations is visible inside of CNSU, and "it does not live a life of its own, but it lives of what the associations put in it" (CNSU President 3, personal communication, February 24, 2022). In fact, even if all the associations in CNSU would like to see a stronger role of the body, no one is advocating for a unitary organization. As the President of Unilab—Svoltastudenti put it: "On the one hand, having a unitary organization on the model of the students' union would be more effective; on the other hand, the plurality of visions would diminish, as the organizations that today are stronger would become even more hegemonic" (Student Leader 5, personal communication, March 16, 2022).

Outside of CNSU, all the associations have their own advocacy strategies: all of them engage with some sort of institutional lobbying, be it with government officials, MPs, or members of political parties, while the most common advocacy actions are information campaigns, with only a minority taking part in demonstrations and even fewer considering them as an equal counterpart to institutional representation. However, the general efficacy of the system is criticized by all the interviewees, student associations, and experts alike. No association expressed an increase in student power in the last five years, and while some student associations indicated that big student demonstrations happened in that period (dealing mainly with the pandemic), the experts did not recall any relevant student demonstrations, nor moments where HE student issues made the news in the public opinion. Furthermore, according to an expert, CNSU is the weakest of the HE national bodies (being the Rectors Conference CRUI the strongest), and it manages to obtain results on strictly student issues (e.g., on scholarships, international mobility), while on more structural issues (e.g., financing of HE) would be little effective (Expert 3, personal communication, February 22, 2022). The political divisions matter also at the national level: one expert recalls that in 2004, while she was conducting a research on UDU's representatives in a European meeting, they lamented the ineffectiveness of CNSU as not being heard by the Minister of Higher Education, who had a direct link with CLDS representatives (Expert 2, personal communication, March 16, 2022)**.**

The Local Level of Student Representation

Since 1995, by national law universities must ensure "the representation of students in an amount not less than 15 percent" in the collegiate bodies (Art.6, c.1, D.L.120/1995). Elective

representative students have to be guaranteed in all executive, academic, and QA bodies of HEIs (L.240/2010). In several universities directly or indirectly elected student councils exist as purely institutional, consultative bodies.

Within this legal framework, local student associations are typically associated into a national student association or network: it is the case of all of the associations competing in the CNSU elections. However, some groups operate only on the local level where they may also participate in local students' elections. There are groups that can be affiliated at the university or national levels, or have no affiliation whatsoever.

Membership in local student associations is voluntary and occurs without institutional intermediation. The legal status varies between registered associations (42.8 percent in LOC-SIHEG, 33.3 percent in national leaders' survey) at the *Agenzia delle Entrate* and unregistered ones, with a further presence (57.1 percent in LOC-SIHEG, 33.3 percent in national leaders' survey) of a registration within the register of university associations.

LOC-SIHEG data are referred to UDU's local sections. Regarding material resources, it shows that: funds mainly come from membership fees (88.9 percent) and project funding (55.5 percent), while fundraising events or donations from members are a limited phenomenon (both 11.1 percent); the budget varies greatly from zero to 25,000 euros, influenced by the availability of project funding and institutional calls; 90 percent say have no property; only 40 percent say they run an office. A large part of the executive roles is elected (90 percent) and carry out their duties voluntarily and free of charge in 70 percent of cases, while in the remaining 30 percent receive reimbursement of expenses. In addition, local sections do not formally prescribe diversity markers for the composition of their governing bodies, but 40 percent of them say they apply them informally. With respect to the political issues, associations followed the themes of scholarships, learning and teaching (70 percent), tuition fees (60 percent), students' accommodations (50 percent), free psychological support, free local public transportation, and management of the Covid-19 pandemic (30 percent); less than 30 percent mentioned also issues like gender equality, spaces in the university, inclusiveness, tutoring. The most common mode of political action is the hybrid mode of institutional representation and protest, campaigns, and contentious politics. With respect to links to political parties, 60 percent say they have no organizational relations, but some individuals do; 20 percent say they have none; the remaining 20 percent say they have contacts through institutional channels. On the contrary, 90 percent maintain that they have direct contact with workers' unions. The turnouts reported by local sections vary between 15 percent and 75 percent (all of them increasing, compared to previous run), distributed unevenly across the country: given the different modalities of data collection, it would be necessary to perform an in-depth electoral analysis to have consistent data.

The effectiveness of the student power varies across the different universities and regions, but tends to be stronger at the local/institutional than at the regional level (Expert 3, personal communication, February 22, 2022)**.** The politicization of student politics affects also the effectiveness of the advocacy at the local level: according to an expert, when the President of a Region is politically distant from the strongest student associations of the Region, it is more closely scrutinized, while more leniency would be given if they are politically closer (Expert 1, personal communication, March 17, 2022).

Application of the "Student Politics System" and the "Axes" Frameworks to the Italian Case

For what regards individual student associations, Klemenčič (2012) proposes a classification that clusters the variables into the dichotomic typology "student associations as social movements vs. student associations as interest groups," while Vespa, Sguazzini and Pratissoli (2022) propose a

Relationships with political parties

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                              ADI
         Conf.      CLDS      SIGM
         Fenix*     Unilab    Link*   UDU                PDS      AU      SPL
independence ————●——————●——————●——————●————————————————————●———————●———————●—— affiliation
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Relationships with non-youth stakeholders

```
    SPL.                                ADI
    Unilab                   Conf.      CLDS
                    SIGM PDS  Fenix*     Link      AU         UDU
isolation ——●——————————————●———●——————●———————————●——————————●———————————— integration
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Organizational structure

```
                              SIGM
            Fenix*            SPL             ADI
         Conf. CLDS   PDS   AU Unilab  Link*   UDU
movement ——————●——●——————●——————●——●——————●———————————●———————————— organization
```

Conception of the representation at the national level

```
                                   Fenix*
                                   PDS
                                   SIGM
                                   SPL        AU
                          ADI      UDU     CLDS  Conf. Unilab
plural ——————————————————————●————————●——————●———●———●———————— unitary
```

Mode of action

```
                                                    Confederazione
                                          ADI        Fenix*
                          Link* UDU  PDS AU SIGM    CLDS Unilab SPL
activism ——————————————————●———●———●——●————●————————●————●————●—— institutional
                                                                  representation
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Nature of the set of claims

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                 Link*
                 PDS                               Conf.
                 SIGM                     CLDS      SPL.
                 UDU          ADI AU       Fenix*    Unilab
political ——————————●——————————●——●—————————●————————●—— corporatist
```
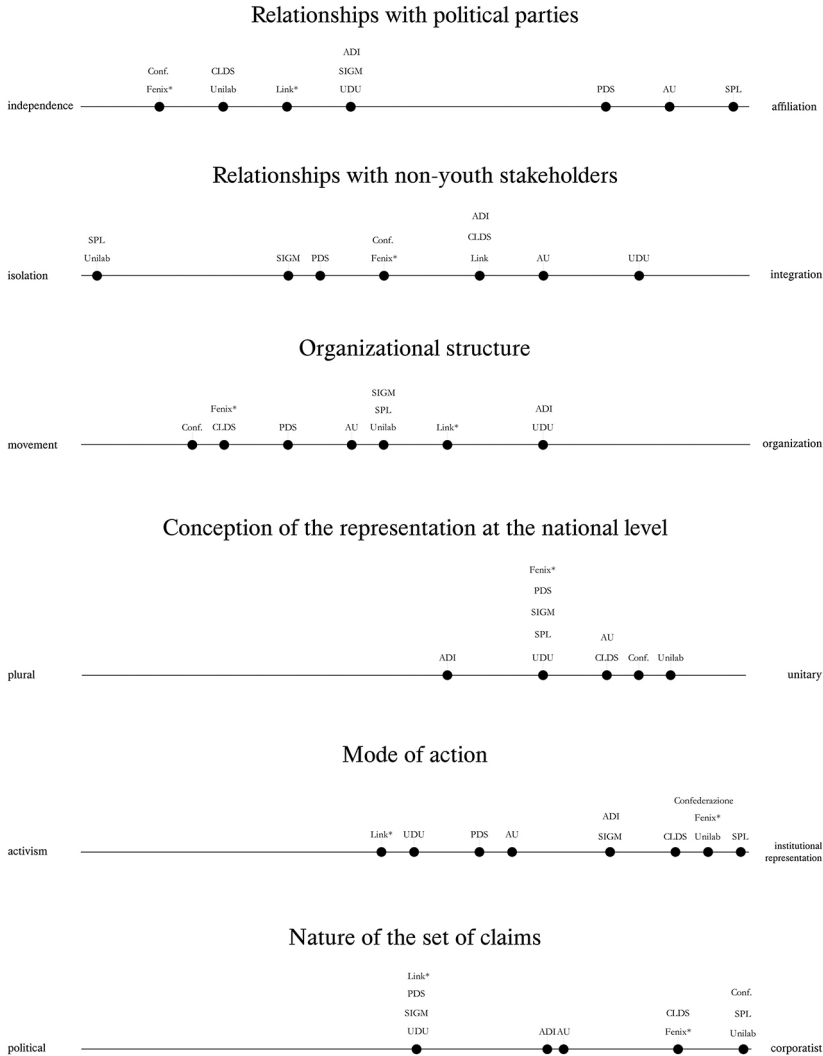
Figure 31.2 Axes classification[8].

Source: Prepared by the authors.

conceptual framework where the values of the variables are based on a continuum (the "axes") and where there are no pre-determined clusterized correlation between values of different variables and ideal-types. The application of the framework to the Italian case is provided in Figure 31.2.

The axes "relationships with political parties" shows how three student associations are closely associated with political parties, tending to being their student wings, in a more or less formalized way: PdS (for PD), AU (for FdI). and SpL (for FI). The axis "relationships with non-youth stakeholders" shows that associations are distributed throughout the axis, with the most integrated being UDU and the most isolated being SpL and Unilab—Svoltastudenti; five of them (UDU, AU, Link, CLDS, ADI) are more or less integrated into different networks of civil society organizations, which share a similar culture. The axis "organizational structure" shows that student politics in Italy has a general low degree of organizational professionalism: most of the organizations tend toward the pole "movement," while even those closer to the "organization" pole do not hold any properties, nor an employed staff, which is typical of other student organizations across Europe. The axis "conception of the representation at the national level" shows that all the organizations tend more toward the "unitary" pole: all of them would welcome a stronger CNSU (with varying degrees of intensity): the fact this consensus does not materialize might be found into other systemic constraints, for example, political divisions due to the four streams and the need for a governmental consent in order to obtain such a reform. The axis mode of action shows that institutional representation is the preferred tool by almost all the associations, with only UDU and Link giving at least an equal weight to the "activism" side. The axis "nature of the set of claims" shows three clusters: a "corporatist" cluster (Confederazione, SpL, Unilab—Svoltastudenti, CLDS, Fenix), a "student syndicate" cluster, where political and corporatist claims are equally weighted (Link, PdS, SIGM, UDU), an "intermediate" cluster between the two (ADI, AU).

The axes framework proves useful in capturing the existence of outliers of Klemenčič (2012) typology. Comparing Confederazione and UDU on the axes "nature of the set of claims" and "organizational structures" shows that the dichotomic approach is not applicable there: on the former axis, Confederazione is heavily positioned close to the corporatist pole (which Klemenčič, 2012 associates with interest groups) and UDU is positioned as a student syndicate, therefore tending more to the political pole (which Klemenčič (2012) associates with social movements); conversely, on the latter axis, Confederazione is heavily closer to the "movement" pole (which Klemenčič (2012) associates with social movements) and UDU to the "organization" pole (which Klemenčič, 2012 associates with interest groups). Finally, the addition of the axes "relationship with political parties" is fundamental to map the different degree of affiliation, both to analyze possible organizational patterns and to further study if this may create opportunities or obstacles. For what regards the "systemic level," Klemenčič (2012) does not propose a correlation between the student actors and the systems of student representation and intermediation, while we argue that a "student politics system" is based on the reciprocal positionings of the student collective actors within the axes, with a feedback frame of opportunities and obstacles between the system and the actors, together with the institutional framework. Although the detailed mechanisms need to be further theorized, it is possible to detect the relationships in the rise and fall of the student politics system of the first era. The different "conceptions of the representation at the national level" and the relative strength of the student actors were the basis of the UNURI-based system;

its rigidity to change was one of the main obstacles to the reform of UNURI in the late '60s, which led to the collapse of that student politics system and the dissolvement of almost all its associations.

Finally, the system of student intermediation of the third era resembles more a hybrid between "formalized" and "informal": the percentage of student representation in the local HEI is established by law and the CNSU was established as an advisory body for the Ministry; at the same time, the different student associations have their own channels to exercise pressure on the policy-making, according to their different modes of action.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we identified three eras of the student political system in the history of student politics in the Italian republican period: the first "era" (1945–68), where a unitary, corporatist, institutional association (UNURI) coexisted with and was governed by a plurality of political, institutional, party-affiliated associations; the second era (1968–94), where almost all the previous organizations were dissolved and which was characterized by a plurality of independent, political student movements refusing any institutional national representation; and the third era (1994–present) where a plurality of student associations positioning themselves in several combinations within the axes have led the government to establish by law a completely institutional student parliament (CNSU). Furthermore, we identified four main political streams throughout those eras: the left, the apolitical and non-confessional, the Catholics, and the right.

We used Italy as a case study to test the "student politics system" and the "axes" frameworks proposed by Vespa, Sguazzini, and Pratissoli (2024) and found them suitable to describe the Italian student politics landscape. We found that today in Italy, the national system of student representation is pluralist, despite the system of intermediation holding characteristics of both formalized and informal ideal-types.

From this work further lines of research emerge. First of all, a systematic review of the student politics system exists only for the first era. Systematic reviews for the second and third eras would shed light on the characteristics of the actors and of the student politics system of those eras. Furthermore, two systemic phenomena could be further studied: the relations between higher education student politics and upper secondary school student movements, which seem to have been important in several occasions during the republican period (Capozzi, 2010, Galfré, 2019); the role of the university autonomy and the local level in shaping the national student politics, for instance, assessing whether the apolitical and non-confessional stream, which virtually disappeared at the national level during the second era, survived at the local level and was important for the birth of some of the current student associations included in that stream. Finally, it may be useful to plan a long-term survey analysis through the LOC-SIHEG, to be directly sent to single universities, to collect data directly from all of the existing associations on the local level (nationally affiliated or not), aimed at mapping local student politics and the different types of relationships with the different membership levels.

Notes

1 In particular, see *Claudio Petruccioli. Intervistato da Giovanni Cerchia a Roma il 7 ottobre 2003*, pp. 412–13; *Giuseppe Pupillo. Intervistato da Silvio Tullii a Roma il 5 agosto 2002*, p. 463; *Nuccio Fava. Intervistato da Andrea Guiso a Sermugnano, frazione di Castiglione in Teverina (VT), il 18 luglio 2002*, p 197 (Quagliariello and Orsina, 2005).
2 "Fuori corso" is defined as a student who has not completed its degree within the prescribed time.
3 The Decree does not clarify either the mandatory nature or the constraint of them.
4 CUN is an advisory elective body to the Ministry responsible for university and research policies, representing the whole university system (Art.1, L.18/2006). It "formulates opinions and proposals" regarding: general objectives of university planning; criteria for the distribution of the ordinary financing fund of the universities, "general criteria for the ordering of university studies," "didactic regulations of the university," "scientific-disciplinary sectors," ministerial decrees on the structure and content of university qualifications (L.18/2006).
5 Students are part of CUN since its establishment (L.31/1979)
6 Advisory Committee provides advice to ANVUR regarding its policies, but does not have any power to provide mandatory or binding advice.
7 The 2019–2022 CNSU composition of seats was the following: UDU: 7; CLDS: 4; Link: 4; Confederazione—Unilab: 4; PdS: 3; AU: 3; SpL: 2; Fenix: 1; ADI: 1; SIGM: 1.
8 Detailed classification values are in Table 31.1 of the Appendix. The axes framework applied for the associations represented in 2019–2022 CNSU term. The methodology used for Link does not allow for positioning on the axis "Conception of the representation at the national level." ADI represents PhD students, while SIGM postgraduate specializing students.

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Appendix

Glossary of abbreviations

Student politics

AGI   Associazione dei Goliardi Indipendenti/Association of the Independent Goliards

ADI   Associazione Dottorandi e Dottori di Ricerca in Italia/Association of PhD students and research doctorates in Italy

AU   Azione Universitaria/University Action

AUS   Associazione Universitaria Studentesca/University Student Association

CLDS   Coordinamento delle Liste per il Diritto allo Studio/Coordination of the Lists for the Right to Study

CNSU   Consiglio Nazionale degli Studenti Universitari/National Council of the University Students

CUDI   Centro Universitario Democratico Italiano/Italian Democratic University Centre

ESIB   European Student Information Bureau

ESU   European Students' Union

FIG   Federazione Italiana Goliardica/Italian Goliardic Federation

FUAN   Fronte Universitario d'Azione Nazionale/University Front of National Action

FUCI   Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana/Italian Catholic University Federation

GUF   Gruppi Universitari Fascisti/Fascist University Groups

PdS   Primavera degli Studenti/Spring of the Students

RUN   Rete Universitaria Nazionale/Italian University Network

SIGM   Segretariato Italiano Giovani Medici/Italian Young Physicians Secretariat

SpL   Studenti per le Libertà/Students for the Freedoms

UDU   Unione degli Universitari/Union of University Students

UGI   Unione Goliardica Italiana/Italian Goliardic Union

UNEF   Union nationale des étudiants de France/National Union of French Students

UNURI   Unione Nazionale Universitaria Rappresentativa Italiana/Italian National Representative University Union

USI   Unione degli Studenti Italiani/Union of the Italian Students

Political parties

AN   Alleanza Nazionale/National Alliance

DC   Democrazia Cristiana/Christian Democracy

FdI   Fratelli d'Italia/Brothers of Italy

FI   Forza Italia/Forward Italy

MSI   Movimento Sociale Italiano/Italian Social Movement

PCI   Partito Comunista Italiano/Italian Communist Party

PD   Partito Democratico/Democratic Party

PdL   Popolo della Libertà/People of Freedom

PLI   Partito Liberale Italiano/Italian Liberal Party

PRI   Partito Repubblicano Italiano/Italian Republican Party

PSI   Partito Socialista Italiano/Italian Socialist Party

PSIUP   Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria/Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity

HE sectors denominations

AFAM   Alta formazione artistica, musicale e coreutica/Higher education in art, music and dance

ITS   Istituti Tecnici Superiori/Advanced Technical Institutes

HE National institutional bodies

ANDISU Associazione Nazionale per gli Organismi per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario/ National Association for the Right to University Study Agencies

ANVUR Agenzia nazionale di valutazione del sistema universitario e della ricerca/Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes

CNAM   Consiglio Nazionale per l'Alta Formazione Artistica e Musicale/National Council for Higher Education in Art and Music

          Consulta Nazionale per il diritto agli studi universitari/National Council for the Right to University Studies

CRUI   Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane/Conference of the Rectors of Italian Universities

CUN   Consiglio Universitario Nazionale/National University Council

          Osservatorio Nazionale per il Diritto allo Studio/National Observatory for the Right to Study

Local institutional bodies

NUV   Nucleo di Valutazione/Evaluation Board

Table 31.1 Axis framework classification

		ADI	AU	Conf.	CLDS	Fenix*	Link*	PDS	SPL	SIGM	UDU	Unilab
Relationships with political parties	independence	0.6	0.1	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.2	0	0.6	0.6	0.8
	affiliation	0.4	0.9	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.8	1	0.4	0.4	0.2
Relationships with non-youth stakeholders	isolation	0.4	0.3	0.55	0.4	0.55	0.4	0.65	1	0.7	0.15	1
	inclusion	0.6	0.7	0.45	0.6	0.45	0.6	0.35	0	0.3	0.85	0
Organizational structure	movement	0.3	0.6	0.85	0.8	0.8	0.45	0.7	0.55	0.55	0.3	0.55
	organization	0.7	0.4	0.15	0.2	0.2	0.55	0.3	0.45	0.45	0.7	0.45
Conception of the representation at the national level	plural	0.45	0.2	0.15	0.2	0.3	-	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1
	unitary	0.55	0.8	0.85	0.8	0.7	-	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.9
Mode of action	activism	0.4	0.7	0.1	0.2	0.1	1	0.8	0	0.4	1	0.1
	institutional representation	1	1	1	1	1	0.9	1	1	1	1	1
Nature of the set of claims	political	0.6	0.55	0	0.2	0.2	1	1	0	1	1	0
	corporatist	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1