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Xabier Itçaina

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Abstract: Interactions between politics and religion are frequently reduced to mediatized and politicized ethical and civilizational issues. Focusing instead on the role of religious - here Catholic - actors in the local experience of the social economy and welfare provision in times of economic crisis helps instead to highlight the discrete interactions between politics and religion. In particular, the strong involvement of religious actors, beyond their traditional charity-oriented activity, also concerns more solidarity-oriented socioeconomic experiences as well as political advocacy. These articulations generate new forms of politicization with respect to both social movements and policy makers. These issues are addressed here comparatively in a Spanish region (the Basque Autonomous Community) and an Italian region (Emilia-Romagna).

Keywords: Catholic Church, territorial welfare, social economy, economic crisis, Italy, Spain

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Xabier Itçaina

CNRS-Centre Emile Durkheim, Sciences Po Bordeaux

Marie Curie Fellow (2012-2013), European University Institute, Florence

x.itcaina@sciencespobordeaux.fr

Introduction

Interactions between religion and politics frequently tend to be reduced to highly-politicized ethical and civilizational controversies. However, there is also a need to address a less visible but nonetheless essential dimension of the activities of Churches, namely their role in the arena of social services and welfare provision. The case studies which will be discussed here aim at contributing to a set of investigations into the social work carried out by religious organizations and into the role of religion in shaping European and national welfare regimes. Van Kersbergern and Manow (2009) have introduced a new perspective on the way religion has shaped modern social protection systems by addressing the interplay between societal cleavage structure, electoral rules and religion in the different welfare regimes in the Western world. The WREP project addressed the changing nature of both religion and welfare in Europe, highlighting the increased visibility of religion in the public sphere, the anxieties felt by European populations about the welfare state and the centrality of gender to both questions (Bäckstrom, Davie et al., 2011). In the same vein, Bassi and Pfau-Effinger (2012), Lynch (2009), Bode (2003) introduced new perspectives concerning the role of religion, both as an institution and as a set of doctrines, in shaping the Italian, German, French and European welfare regimes. These national perspectives have been complemented by territorial focuses, such as the analysis of the Catholic third sector's social and/or political dimensions in, among others, Bologna (Colozzi and Martelli 1988), Vicenza (Frisina 2010), in Lombardy (Giorgi 2012; Muehlebach 2012) or in Tarragona (Belzunegui et al. 2011). In particular, the role of Catholic organizations working with migrants has sparked specific interest from social scientists (see, among others, for Italy: Bassi 2014; Scotto 2013).

These approaches make two major contributions to the study of religion and politics. First, they all relocate the study of religion and politics away from both the micro (individual) and macro (global) approaches. They propose a meso-level approach to religion and politics, located at the cross-roads between social movements and policy studies. In particular, by recasting the role of religious actors in the territorial welfare mix, these contributions help us to understand how their agency and skills go far beyond the religious sector itself by constituting ethical and organizational resources for territorial welfare. Secondly, by shifting attention towards regions and infra-regional territories, this set of research contributions allows us to fully grasp the complexity of the relations between religion and politics in terms of territorial networks and social interactions. Nonetheless, there are some gaps in this literature: some research contributions concentrate on the organizational sociology of these Catholic networks without directly addressing its interaction with policymakers; conversely, social policy research tends to present the Catholic sector as a homogeneous block, failing to account for its internal pluralism; finally, many local monographs fail to obtain more generalizable results.

Against this background, this paper is intended to contribute to the debate by approaching the sociology of the Catholic territorial networks in their articulation both to territorial social movements and to policy-makers. This analysis will be conducted comparatively in two Southern European territories. Rather than addressing the impact of religion on national welfare systems, I argue that, at least in the two Spanish and Italian regions under consideration here, the economic crisis which began in 2008 has seen a redeployment of the social role of the Catholic third sector at the local level, thus redefining its relations with the public sector and with social movements, and incidentally revealing its own internal pluralism. This highly-significant social role of the Catholic third sector will be considered in

two regions which according to classical indicators are particularly secularized: Emilia-Romagna in Italy and the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain, focusing on the provinces of Forlì-Cesena and Bizkaia (Vizcaya). Furthermore, both regions have long been among the wealthiest in their respective countries, where the presence of public welfare has been consistent. In both regions, the Catholic third sector saw its role as a service provider strengthened by a crisis affecting both the territorial economy and public welfare. These two case studies illustrate the need to go beyond simplifying approaches portraying the complete secularization of European public spheres in order to properly address the new social role of religious organizations in a postsecular context¹.

An additional hypothesis concerns the internal pluralism of the Church. This “return” of Catholic associations to the arena of social welfare should not be interpreted as an expansion strategy adopted by the Church. Instead, and following Portier’s (2012) distinction, this discreet social repertoire could be seen as the mark of a more “open Catholicism” (*catholicisme d’ouverture*) rather than an “identity-affirming Catholicism” (*catholicisme d’identité*). Identity-affirming Catholics fight against relativism in the name of three principles: an intransigent rejection of modernity, the supremacy of papal doctrine, and the visibility of religion. Open Catholicism, by contrast, offers a more distanced relationship to the hierarchy and advocates freedom of conscience on moral and ethical issues, while condemning the excesses of economic neoliberalism and promoting solidarity and certain rights (to work, to education, to health). Faith, therefore, is based on a “regime of testimony” rather than a “regime of authority” (Lagroye 2006), and can lead to political commitment alongside progressive social movements (Portier 2002; Hutchinson 2012). In this sense, the crisis has constituted a constrained opportunity for Catholic social organizations, rather than an instrument for a potential re-conquest of the public sphere. The social action of Catholic organizations offers a good illustration of the internal plasticity of Catholic institution which, as a “strategically selective context” (Hay 2002: 133), not only constrains but also enables its members to pursue different strategies.

The basis for this paper is an ongoing qualitative research conducted in both territories. Secondary data was collected on the local religious landscape, on the socio-economic situation, and on third sector organizations. Primary data was collected through personal interviews. In Emilia-Romagna in 2013, I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews in Forlì with the following bodies: Caritas, the Social Pastoral Care of the Diocese of Forlì-Bertinoro, the Consortium of Social Cooperatives (*Consorzio Solidarietà Sociale* or CSS), the *Apebianca* centre for sustainable goods and services, the ACLI², the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, the Adventist Church, the City councilor for welfare in Forlì, two organizations working with migrants, and university experts (AICCON). I attended the presentation of the 2013 Caritas Forlì-Bertinoro report on poverty and resources (Forlì, April 2013), the debate on properties in Forlì confiscated from the Mafia (May 2013), the presentation of the Caritas Europe report on poverty in Southern Europe and Ireland (*Terra*

¹ In the sense given by Rosati and Stoeckl (2012), who propose enriching Habermas’ approach to the postsecular as a process of complementary learning between religious and secular worldviews and practices by including “reflectivity of both secular modernities and religious traditions, co-existence of secular and religious worldviews and practices, de-privatization of religions, religious pluralism vs. religious monopoly, and the sacred understood (also) as a heteronomous transcendent force vs. only immanent understanding of it” (p. 6).

² *Associazione di lavoratori cristiani italiani*- Italian Association of Catholic Workers.

futura, Florence May 2013), and the 40th anniversary of Caritas Florence (2012)³. In the Spanish Basque Country in 2012-2013, I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews in Bilbao with: Fiare Banca Etica, Caritas Bizkaia, Bultz-Lan Consulting, the Jesuit NGO Alboan, the Centro Ignacio Ellacuria, the Diocese of Bilbao, the Bidari and Eutsi Berrituz (Donostia) Christian Collectives, and university experts. These interviews updated those carried out previously with Catholic organizations working with migrants in Spain and in Italy (Dorangricchia and Itçaina 2005; Itçaina and Burchianti 2011) and with the Catholic peace movement in the Basque Country (Itçaina 2013).

This working paper is structured as follows. Section 1 contextualizes the two territories being compared. Section 2 considers the crisis as a constrained opportunity for the Catholic third sector. Section 3 addresses the interactions between the Catholic third sector and public authorities. Section 4 offers some concluding remarks and proposes further avenues of research.

1. Catholic Dynamism in Postsecular Societies

This section contextualizes the territorial comparison. According to classical indicators, both Emilia-Romagna and the Basque Country are among the most secularized regions in Italy and Spain. However, this weakening of the classical features of religiosity does not mean that the Catholic third sector has become a residual player: in fact, the opposite holds true. This contrast also stems from a partial secularization of Catholic organizations resulting from a process of mutual learning with secular organizations (Rosati and Stoeckl 2012) and from the internal pluralism of the “Catholic archipelago” (Colozzi and Martelli 1988).

1.1. *Two secularized societies?*

Even though many deem them insufficient, classical indicators on secularization provide some contextualization of the comparison undertaken in this paper. These data provide an initial picture of two very secularized regions. Cartocci (2011: 42) provides evidence that Emilia-Romagna, along with Tuscany and Liguria, ranked in 2009 among the regions with the lowest rates of Church attendance, located as it is between the more Catholic Northern and Southern regions. Similar rankings could be observed as regards civil marriage, attendance at religious lessons in schools, and individual choices concerning the allocation of the proportion of the income tax (the *8 per mille* or eight per thousand) to the Catholic Church. According to Cartocci’s aggregated index of secularization⁴, the province of Forlì-Cesena ranked 19th out of the 110 Italian provinces. In Spain, the Basque provinces, which were among the most Catholic areas of Spain until the early 1970s, underwent a process of rapid secularization during the democratic transition, a process which has been more pronounced in this region than in the rest of Spain (Pérez-Agote 2006: 110). Together with socioeconomic changes, both these processes have been commonly ascribed to territorial political cultures. In Emilia-Romagna, the socialist-communist and – particularly in Romagna – republican subcultures certainly played a role in this respect, together with a certain anticlericalism going

³ In Italy, I carried out a further and similar case-study in Brescia (Lombardy) in 2013. In addition, I visited the Focolari *Cittadella* and the Polo Lionello Bonfanti (*Economia di Comunione*) in Loppiano-Incisa Val d’Arno (Tuscany). However, this article will focus upon the Bilbao-Forlì comparison.

⁴ Based on the decline of the centrality of the Catholic Church, and a decline in religious attendance, numbers of church weddings, and trust in the Church (Cartocci 2011: 25).

back to the pre-1860 period, when the Romagna formed part of the Papal States. In contrast, Basque nationalism, previously very Catholic, did not undergo a process of internal and fast secularization before the 1960s and 1970s (Pérez-Agote 2006).

At the same time, both Emilia Romagna and the Basque Country are ranked among the foremost regions in Italy (Cartocci 2007) and Spain (Mota and Subirats 2000) as regards levels of social capital. The problems raised by such measurements are well-known: the choice of indicators is questionable, and the ranking of social capital does not say a lot about the effectiveness and the positive or negative nature of social linkages and networks (Ritaine 2001). Keeping these caveats in mind, what remains true is that both regions were marked by very their dynamic civil societies and their organized associations, both secular and religious. In particular, both Emilia Romagna and the Basque Country were characterized by a well-established tradition of an active social economy, understood as the set of organizations engaged in economic activity located “between” the public sector and the private for-profit sector. The social economy was historically related to political and religious subcultures in both regions, even if this connection was more institutionalized in Italy than in Spain⁵.

1.2. Two dynamic Catholic networks

Classical indicators of secularization, while providing a useful insight for a first attempt at comparison, only provide a contextual perspective, thus neglecting the properly religious dynamics that are in play⁶. In both regions, the decline of church attendance did not prevent the consolidation of Catholic networks (Giorgi 2012: 336) in education and social services, but also in the social and solidarity economy. Both the provinces of Forlì-Cesena and Bizkaia present a varied picture of Catholic organizations working on territorial welfare, with a whole range of institutional affiliations that could be summed up as follows:

- a) Direct institutional affiliation: Caritas, religious congregations, and Diocesan institutions.
- b) Informal parish groups and self-organized Christian grass-roots communities.
- c) Catholic Action lay movements.
- d) Organizations historically emanating from social Catholicism (social cooperatives affiliated to Federsolidarietà, ACLI).
- e) Specialized secular organizations founded for functional purposes by Church organizations (social integration companies, consulting companies and social businesses).
- f) Secular organizations resulting from the fusion of secular and religiously-inspired organizations.

⁵ In the Basque Country, the first cooperatives emerged (as consumer cooperatives) from the socialist movement in the late 19th century. The emblematic Mondragon experiment emerged in the 1950s from an atypical social Catholicism mixed with Basque identity and anti-Francoism. In Emilia-Romagna, the cooperative movement was – and remains, despite a recent rapprochement – structured around three ideological poles: the socialist-communist pole (Legacoop), the Catholic pole (Confcooperative) and the minor Republican pole (ACGI) (Menzani 2007). The Confcooperative-Federsolidarietà model of social cooperatives (the Consortium of Social Cooperatives in Forlì since 1985) was characterized entirely by small-scale social cooperatives, with a complete territorial coverage and model of dissemination (the “strawberry fields” model) and marked by high levels of volunteering.

⁶ See Abruzzese’s criticism of Cartocci (Abruzzese 2012).

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- g) Secular organizations named after a charismatic Catholic founder (as with the *Centro per la Pace Annalena Tonelli* in Forlì).

From an institutional perspective, this range of affiliations to the Catholic constellation has consequences for the governance of every organization. A social cooperative designs its governance structures in an autonomous way, basing them upon cooperative principles while collaborating with the diocesan apparatus. A religious congregation's activities follow the priorities given to the social sector by its hierarchy organized according to specific territorial jurisdictions (such as the Jesuit Province). Caritas depends on the policy choices made by the bishop, especially, in Italy, as regards the allocation of the *8 per mille*⁷, even if this leadership is regulated by institutionalized advisory processes, as mentioned by Caritas Forlì's representative:

Caritas, like all the ecclesial structures, is not a democratic structure. They are vertical structures. Whereas in a cooperative it's 'one person, one vote', in the Church, there is a hierarchical organization. Pope, Bishop, Directors of National Offices, Director of Caritas... But this has also been considered by the Church: when they have to make a decision, they have to surround themselves with advisory boards, which must express their views. This advisory vote is strongly requested. The Church leaders are asked to listen to the base. But the final decision remains in their hands, there is no voting.⁸

At the other end of the spectrum, some organizations have experienced a process of internal secularization, while still referring to a Christian background as the source of a set of values. In Forlì, the Consortium of Social Cooperatives, while acknowledging its historical roots, did not define itself as institutionally part of the Church, given its own internal pluralism:

From a statutory point of view, the Consortium refers to the social doctrine of the Church. It refers to some values, so to speak, to typical statements from the cooperative world, the most original ones. I don't say old, I say original. I am thinking, for instance, of a beautiful passage mentioning the pursuit of Utopia. Or economic democracy. But it is also clear that the Consortium, as a network of companies, always had this reference, but without ever practicing either *collateralismo*⁹ or exclusion. This never characterized the identity of the Consortium. To the point where, even if we have a long story of collaboration with Caritas and with the diocese - as president of the Consortium I am for instance part of a diocesan body representing the associations working in this sector -, I can hardly define myself as a service project or as an initiative belonging to the Catholic area. If I did so, I would probably offend one of my members who do not have this explicit reference. (...) There is certainly a cultural reference to the social doctrine of the Church, but in a very secular sense.¹⁰

This flexibility has proved to be an effective element within the Catholic third sector's response to the crisis.

⁷ Whereas in Spain, taxpayers choose to attribute the 0.7% a) to the Catholic Church, b) to NGOs, among them Catholic ones, c) to both of these, d) to neither of these.

⁸ Personal interview. Coordinator of Caritas Forlì-Bertinoro, Forlì, 22 February 2013. Translated from Italian.

⁹ *Collateralismo* refers here to the formal or informal sponsorship of a political party by a trade union, a cooperative or other organization.

¹⁰ Personal interview, president of the Consorzio Solidarietà Sociale, Forlì, 22 March 2013. Translated from Italian.

1.3. *Wealthy regions facing the crisis*

Both regions have been long seen as leaders of regional socio-economic development within their respective countries. Emilia-Romagna and the Basque region have been frequently cited in the literature on regional studies as virtuous examples of local development based, in the Italian case, on SMEs, industrial districts, cooperatives and the so-called Emilian model of local development (Brusco 1982; Restakis 2010). In the Basque Country the cluster policy designed by the Basque Government in the 1990s, in collaboration with industrial cooperatives, had been the key to overcoming the previous economic crisis. Despite their paradigmatic dimension, both regions were caught up in the 2008 crisis, even if to a lesser extent than their national counterparts. Tensions were acute on the labor market, with a decrease in regional productivities and increasing unemployment. In Emilia-Romagna, the unemployment rate was 2.9% in 2007 and 7.1% in 2012¹¹. The unemployment rate in the province of Forlì-Cesena was 7% in May 2012¹². In March 2013, there were 35,433 unemployed, an increase of 61% from 2008. The situation was more critical in the Basque Country. In April 2013, there were 164, 700 registered unemployed in the Basque Autonomous Community, which represented an unemployment rate of 16.28 % (27.16 % in Spain)¹³ (Bizkaia: 18.03 %, Alava: 16.37 %, Guipuzcoa: 13.27 %). The crisis was weathered in the Basque Country rather better than in the rest of Spain because of an efficient public welfare system and a well-structured third sector. However, these factors did not prevent an undeniable social deterioration.

2. Beyond Charity: the Social Work Undertaken by Catholic Organizations

2.1. *Caritas between a vanguard role and a primary provider*

As evidenced by the WREP project, Churches, like other voluntary organizations, have different functions as regards national and territorial welfare systems:

In the *vanguard role*, the church acts in the frontline, highlighting new areas of need and prioritizing forgotten groups of people. As an *improver*, the focus is on the enhancement of existing welfare provision in order to increase different aspects of its quality. In its role as *value guardian*, the church acts as a defender of, and advocate for, various human values (...). The *service-provider* role, finally, can itself be of three different kinds (...). As a primary provider, the church is either the sole provider or among the main providers, of a certain kind of welfare. If the church is offering services which are qualitatively different from what is provided by the public welfare system, these can be labeled complementary services. When the church-provided service is simply an alternative choice, a substitute for the same service offered by the state, it offers a supplementary welfare service (Pettersen 2011: 33).

A major common feature of the Basque and Romagna church organizations is their strong commitment to providing basic welfare services. As observed by Frisina (2010) in Vicenza (Veneto region), the role of organizations as primary providers goes together with a vanguard role. In both our territories, Caritas was the central, frontline actor working for the provision

¹¹ Unioncamere Emilia-Romagna, *Rapporto sull'economia regionale. Consuntivo 2012*, p. 42.

¹² "Crisi senza fine, a Forlì tasso di disoccupazione al 7%", *Forlì today*, 21 May 2012.

¹³ "La tasa de paro llega en Euskadi al 16,28% en el primer trimestre de 2013", *El Mundo*, 25 April 2013.

of basic welfare services and highlighting new areas of need. The central position of Caritas within the Catholic network of social organizations was also obvious in both the territories under scrutiny. Apart from its prevalence in terms of human and material resources, Caritas also played a crucial role in coordinating the network of Catholic organizations working in the social field. Caritas' institutional proximity to the Diocesan hierarchy reinforced its legitimacy. The crisis, in a sense, strengthened this centrality of Caritas. In this respect, the consequences of the crisis can be measured through three phenomena which are present in both territories.

The first of these is the quantitative and qualitative change in the users of Caritas' emergency relief. The extensive, intensive and chronological dimensions of the current crisis exacerbated inequalities that had been deepening during the period of economic growth. In Forlì, the 25 'Listening Centers' set up by diocesan Caritas received 4661 persons and 1963 families in 2009, and 6661 persons, 1991 families and 45,323 transients in 2012 (Diocesi di Forlì-Bertinoro 2013: 22). In Bizkaia, 13,002 persons participated in Caritas projects in 2012, 4723 of them for the first time (Cáritas Bizkaia 2013). The profile of the users of Caritas' services changed. While the traditional profiles were still present (migrants, single women, homeless people), the crisis brought new forms of precarity: middle-class single persons or families, seniors, and precarious workers. The crisis also impacted on the flows of migrants coming to Caritas. In Forlì, with the crisis, Caritas saw the return of former users who in the 1990s had found a job and who had reunified their family. At the same time, the number of asylum seekers coming to Caritas started to decrease from 2008, not because the flows were diminishing, but because the territory had become a transit point. By contrast, the number of Italians users of Caritas services increased from 23.35 % in 2011 to 26.24 % in 2012 (Diocesi di Forlì-Bertinoro, 2013: 21). In Bilbao, the number of EU citizens approaching Caritas for assistance increased by 42.6 % between 2010 and 2012, while the number of non-EU nationals, while still representing the majority of users in 2012 (54.4 %), decreased by 18 % between 2010 and 2012 (Cáritas Bizkaia 2013). In both territories, this change had psychological consequences. While for many vulnerable populations, and especially migrants, applying to Caritas for assistance was a sign of hope, many people experiencing poverty for the first time found resorting to Caritas constituted a very difficult, if not traumatic, experience. This feeling of *shame* was mentioned both by our interviewees in Bilbao and in Forlì. As explained by a Caritas social worker in Forlì:

When I started working in this service in 2007, I was struck by the diversity of visions between the Italians and the foreigners. In the sense that, when the foreigners applied to Caritas, there was hope for improvement in their eyes. Because they came here to find a better life. To find a job, to send money home, to call their family, etc. [Applying to Caritas] was a temporary solution, before their condition improved. The Italians, at that time, were those who had not made it, those who had tried everything, with situations of dependency, former prisoners, others who were mentally ill, etc ... Now, on the contrary, the Italians are still there, but the majority of these are "normal" persons, your neighbor, your friends, people who have lost their job, separated couples, who cannot make it anymore. And they feel ashamed. Because it's one thing to be the homeless person, who has always lived like this, or the drug addict living by his wits. These no longer feel ashamed. But for the normal persons for whom Caritas is for the *barboni* (the homeless), there is shame.¹⁴

¹⁴ Personal interview, social worker at Caritas Forlì-Bertinoro, 8 May 2013. Translated from Italian.

Secondly, and as a consequence, Caritas had to adapt both their response and their services to these new flows. In Bilbao, Caritas felt the reality of the crisis as soon as 2008 through the initial reception in parishes and Caritas local centers and the distribution of basic economic assistance. In mid-June 2008, the 2008 budget for basic assistance had already been spent, despite its being twice as large as the previous year. In 2007, Caritas Bizkaia helped 7,000 persons and distributed €700,000 of basic economic aid. In 2009, 11,000 people were helped, but the amount of aid had grown exponentially, reaching €2 million. Not only did the number of people in need increase, but also the needs themselves. Before the crisis, individuals applied to Caritas as a transition before accessing the social benefits provided by the public welfare system. This transitional situation became a structural one, and Caritas had to set up a food voucher system, in collaboration with the “old” cooperative sector¹⁵. In addition, Caritas set up a voucher system for clothes, in collaboration with the Kooperera cooperative. This system was conceived as a way to safeguard people’s dignity: rather than *being given* food or clothes, individuals went to *buy* them. Caritas also opened a social canteen in Baracaldo, one of the industrial zones hardest hit by the crisis. In Forlì, Caritas Forlì created a special solidarity fund financed by banking foundations, the diocese and fundraising in parishes, in order to meet the increasing needs.

Thirdly, as a solidarity effect, the crisis gave rise to a slight increase in volunteering and in donations to Caritas. This was particularly noticeable in Bilbao, where the number of volunteers working alongside the 138 professional Caritas workers increased by 3.16 % between 2011 and 2012, with 337 new volunteers out of a total of 2444 (81 % of whom were women). The number of Cáritas Bizkaia members and donors increased by 8.6 % between 2011 and 2012, reaching a total of 5121 (47.7 % of whom were women) (Cáritas Bizkaia 2013). Along with the traditional social and gendered profiles of volunteers (Bäckstrom, Davie and al. 2011), new profiles appeared: doctors, lawyers, journalists, those willing to share their knowledge. Private companies, rather than giving money, offered their expertise for free. In Forlì, at the time of our fieldwork, diocesan Caritas consisted of 12 professional workers and about 100 volunteers. Among the latter was a sizeable quota not only of pensioners and of individuals volunteering as an alternative to imprisonment, but also new profiles such as professionals and University students.

2.2. *Beyond charity: the solidarity economy as empowerment*

Catholic organizations, even if under pressure, were not restricted to offering basic assistance. All the organizations encountered both in Bilbao and in Forlì firmly refused to describe their role as being confined to mere charity. Rather, they aimed to support people in need through a process of co-construction of personal and collective itineraries towards social inclusion. Even initial assistance, while totally free of charge, was not offered unconditionally: board and lodging were provided in exchange for an undertaking by the recipient to overcome his or her addictions, to look for work or community service. Beyond the not unexpected moralizing dimension, anthropologists would see in this exchange a gift/counter gift sequence transferred to the third sector (what Godbout (2000) calls the “gift to foreigners”), where the relation between the donor and the recipient is expected to last far beyond the single material exchange.

¹⁵ The major Basque consumer cooperative Eroski and the cooperative bank Caja Laboral.

This process of providing support led Catholic organizations to innovate in the field of the social and solidarity economy through a number of small-scale ventures. Interviewees in both regions related current Catholic initiatives to the “solidarity” or to the “alternative” economy, whereas “traditional” cooperatives were described as being part of a more market-oriented social economy¹⁶. Here too, Caritas spearheaded these initiatives in both territories. In Forlì, the crisis led Caritas and its Social Pastoral Commission to promote a series of experiments framed as contributing to an “economy of proximity” based on informal solidarity, and rejecting both dependence on public subsidies – which, in any case, had been reduced – and the traditional charity of the Church. Rather, the objective was to build equal interpersonal relationships. Beyond material exchanges, non-material and non-monetizable forms of relations were promoted: family tutors, reception of migrants by local families, etc. Caritas Forlì-Bertinoro set up a second-hand market where persons could bring used items and exchange them for a token in order to “buy” another object on the market. Unlike a traditional barter market, there was (almost) no calculation of monetary equivalence, with monetary value being held to have disappeared once personal use of the device had ceased. The relation of exchange was not dyadic, but a form of circular solidarity. Empowerment was also at the heart of the microcredit scheme established by Caritas Forlì with an Italian financial institute working on the Yunus model: small 5-year loans (between €6000 and €12,000) on preferential terms were made to individuals with a small business project thought to offer the opportunity of employment, with Caritas playing a role as a guarantor. The projects targeted were those which would have been refused loans by the traditional lenders due to a lack of guarantees.

While Caritas and some religious orders, such as the Capuchin friars in Forlì (before they left in 2012), or the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Forlimpopoli, focused on the delivery of primary services, the Consortium of Social Cooperatives was to concentrate on working for integration and social business, social housing, or on fair trade and ethical consumption with the Apebianca venture initiated in 2011. Caritas also launched a partnership with the *Papa Giovanni XXIII* (Pope John XXIII) Community, which opened a night shelter. The division of labor also arose from the differentiated nature of public support. While some associations were directly subsidized by the municipality, which made a payment for every user they sent, this was not the case for Caritas, which, despite a small-scale agreement with the municipality, depended for the most part on private and on Church donations.

Finally, and from a normative perspective, the crisis was read by the Catholic third sector in Forlì as a structural one, requiring structural changes at both societal and individual level. The concept of “voluntary simplicity”, presented by Caritas as typically Catholic, promoted a decrease in excessive consumption, a reduction of working hours and priority for family life¹⁷. It was however couched in language close to environmentalist discourse on sustainable decrease. This closeness to social movements entailed participation in common networks. In particular Caritas supported GAS (*gruppo di acquisti solidale*), solidarity purchasing groups. These made bulk purchases in order to guarantee a decent price to local farmers or to social cooperatives from the South of Italy working on lands confiscated from the Mafia (Buccolo 2013). Many GAS groups were set up informally by local parish groups, which helped to blur

¹⁶ In several cases however, both in Emilia Romagna and in the Basque Country, “traditional” cooperatives outside the social cooperative sector also reacted to the crisis by collective wage cuts rather than lay-offs.

¹⁷ The same concept, translated in Basque as “*desazkundera*”, lies at the heart of the Bidari Christian community’s thinking in Bilbao (interview).

the boundaries between Catholic and secular initiatives. For a while Caritas also played a role in as a labor market intermediary in the domestic sector, essentially between Italian families and immigrant women. Given the high levels of undeclared work in this sector (Scrinzi 2008), the provincial association of Catholic workers ACLI provided assistance for the regulation of work contracts. The Consortium of Social Cooperatives and the Dia-Logos social cooperative also launched an office providing assistance for domestic workers.

A similar orientation towards the solidarity economy could be found in Bizkaia. Any difference from the Italian case resulted from demographic differences (Bizkaia had 1, 155, 772 inhabitants in 2010, Forlì-Cesena 395, 489) and from unemployment rates (18 % in Bizkaia in 2013, 7 % in Forlì-Cesena), which required socio-economic responses on a different scale. However, the basic inspirations remained similar, as expressed by the Diocesan delegate for Caritas Bizkaia:

The idea behind Caritas is not what is commonly imagined. Caritas gives food and clothes. No. The idea of Caritas is to give neither food nor clothes. If there is an emergency situation, Caritas provides emergency aid. But Caritas' work is intended to provide support, being there for people. Helping people. Why is this person in this a situation? Empowerment. The person has to discover in himself or herself their own internal resources to escape this situation. Caritas needs to be there for people. It is not so much charity, even if in some cases there is a need to offer this, but supporting, promoting.¹⁸

In Bilbao, beyond meeting basic needs, Caritas strengthened its Gizalan employment program, which was founded in 1988 in collaboration with the Carmen Gandarias Foundation. Within this framework, Caritas has created more than 100 jobs over the last few years, for persons having difficulty complying with the requirements for receiving welfare benefits or for migrants without a stable situation. A cooperative was set up for women working in the domestic sector, together with a legal advice department. A social housing project was launched. As in Forlì, these initiatives were undertaken either by Catholic organizations acting alone, or networked with secular organizations. Bultz-Lan Consulting is an instance of the first of these categories. This consulting company, 95% owned by Caritas Bizkaia (in 2013), was created by the Church of Bizkaia in 1983 after major floods in that province. With the aim of promoting job and business creation, Bultz-Lan began operating in the Basque Country, in the rest of Spain and in Latin America, helping both Basque non-profit and for-profit businesses to set up in Latin America, or supporting working integration initiatives in the Basque Country¹⁹. In that sense, Bultz-Lan is an illustration of a Catholic social commitment geared towards business development.

Other ventures promoted by the Church of Bizkaia were closer to the “alternative economy”, an expression frequently used by interviewees. Promotion of fair trade began at the end of the 1990s. As was to be expected, Church organizations working in the Third World were on the front line in this respect. Two Fair Trade stores (Kidenda) opened in Bilbao, promoted by Caritas, the Diocesan Missions and the Jesuit NGO Alboan. Caritas was instrumental in the birth of Kooperera, an aggregation of social initiative cooperatives and social businesses providing second-hand goods and environmental services. In 2013, 200 persons, half of them members of social integration programs, were working within Kooperera. This commitment could also be seen in the participation of Catholic organizations in secular networks, such as

¹⁸ Personal interview, Diocesan delegate for Caritas Bizkaia, Bilbao, 19 June 2013. Translated from Spanish.

¹⁹ Like the Jazkilan textile cooperative, the Kooperera cooperative for recycling material or the Gaztempresa foundation in partnership with the Caja laboral.

the Basque Social and Solidarity Economy Network (REAS²⁰). A very similar organizational development from a basis in straightforward charity towards empowerment was experienced by some religious congregations. In Bilbao the Piarists created the Itaka Foundation in order to address new social needs, and launched the Peñascal Foundation as a body working for economic reinsertion. In the case of the Jesuits, their move towards social commitment stemmed from their transnational experience. The social sector of the Jesuit province of Loyola had been weakening since the departure of its most committed members in the 1970s. A new generation of Basque Jesuits, back from Latin America, revitalized the social sector of the Society in the mid-1990s and founded the Alboan NGO for international cooperation in Bilbao, the Ignacio Ellacuria Centre for migrants in Bilbao, and the Loiola Etxea for ex-detainees in Donostia (San Sebastián). These organizations were to be on the frontline from the beginning of the crisis.

One of the most significant ventures concerned ethical finance. The ethical bank Fiare was founded in Bilbao in 2002-2003 before it was extended to the whole of Spain, and its role increased during the economic crisis. Fiare illustrated a process of mutual learning between Southern European experiences, as it was designed on the Italian model of the Banca Popolare Etica, to the point of becoming the Spanish branch of the Italian bank. Although completely secular, Fiare had two origins: the Basque networks of the solidarity economy on the one hand, and the most progressive sectors of the Basque Church (in particular from Bizkaia). In 2012, of the 48 member organizations of Fiare in Euskadi, 23 at least were institutionally related to the Church (Caritas, dioceses, parishes, congregations, foundations, schools, associations of parents, and lay communities)²¹, as well as 33 of the 80 members of the Fiare Foundation who backed the project. According to one of its founding members, Fiare gained its “reputational legitimacy” from Catholic organizations, and constituted an illustration of a process of postsecular complementary learning (Rosati and Stoeckl, 2012) between religious and secular actors, and between Southern European territories.

As observed in Romagna, Basque Catholic organizations considered the crisis to be a structural one, thus challenging the sustainability of the whole socioeconomic system. Caritas campaigns targeted part of its campaigns towards individual behaviors. A structural equivalent to the Italian discourse on “voluntary sobriety” was expressed in the *Caritas española* campaign “*Vivir con sencillez*” (living simply), or in the Basque campaign “*nik zer egin dezaket?*” (“what can I do myself?”), in order to promote volunteerism and donations as well as sober ways of life. In a typical Catholic style (Tosi and Vitale 2009), responsibility for the crisis was not framed *only* as that of public institutions and market forces, but also as the direct responsibility of the individual.

On the basis of the above, one should not conclude that this social effort of the Church was a unified, homogeneous and totally pacified one. While, from the doctrinal point of view, this equilibrium between charity and empowerment was justified by reference to the social teaching of the Church as a whole (such as the *Caritas in veritate* 2009 encyclical), doctrinal and organizational references were plural in nature. As observed by Bassi (2014) as regards Palermo, the Christian sphere acting in the social realm is of a heterogeneous nature. The generalist references to the Catholic social doctrine were mixed with others, depending on the

²⁰ *Red de redes de economía alternativa y solidaria*.

²¹ There was also a significant presence (6 out of 18) of organizations with a Catholic background among the founding members of the Italian Banca Popolare Etica (www.bancaetica.it), accessed 29 July 2013.

charisma of each organization and on the territorial contexts. Apart from religious references, in Forlì, several references were made by interviewees and in Diocesan reports to the “School of Bologna” on the social economy and the civil economy (Bruni and Zamagni 2010). In Bilbao, the Jesuit social presence in was based on a revised formulation of the Theology of Liberation, following *inter alia* the teaching of Ignacio Ellacuria, himself a Basque Jesuit priest killed in San Salvador in 1989, who gave priority to the agency of old and new “popular majorities”. In some cases, the internal pluralism of the Church was even more acute and could be read in the light of the above-mentioned distinction between “open” and “identity-affirming” Catholics. In Forlì, CSS social cooperatives carefully distinguished themselves from an organization such as *Comunione e Liberazione* (CL) which combines a religious community life embracing the spiritual, the emotional, the private and the professional, with historical links with Christian Democracy (Giorgi, 2012). CL would represent a “Catholicization of Neoliberalism” (Muehlebach 2012), constituted by “conservative Catholics for whom the rise of the welfare community represents an opportunity to resuscitate a long-submerged social project” (*ibid*: 95). As a result, CL (and its “economic arm” the *Compagnia delle Opere*) members supported their own social cooperatives and food banks (Giorgi and Polizzi, 2013). The same could be applied in the Basque Country to the discrepancies between most of the above-mentioned Catholic social organizations and the more conservative sectors of Spanish Catholicism, also active in the social area. The crisis, in that sense, reinforced an intra-Catholic competition for doctrinal divergences and access to the distribution of (public and private) resources.

To sum up, in both territories, a) the economic crisis gave rise to a situation of continuing emergency for the Catholic third sector; b) the Catholic third sector responded both by using existing tools and by innovating; c) rather than offering straightforward, tradition charity, organizations promoted forms of empowerment; d) the crisis occasioned the promotion of voluntary simplicity, bringing Church organizations closer to advocates for sustainable decrease; e) from the doctrinal point of view, this equilibrium between charity and empowerment was justified by reference to the social teaching of the Church but also to distinct religious and secular approaches.

3. Catholic Social Work and Public Authorities: between subsidiarity, expertise and advocacy

This social activism on the part of Church organizations in times of crisis raises the issue of their relations with policymakers. These interactions can be addressed via a three-pronged approach. The first of these concerns the nature of the relationship between religious organizations and public institutions as regards welfare provision. The second focuses on the advocacy role of Catholic organizations. Finally, the outcomes of campaigning activity will be assessed.

3.1. *Subsidiarity or substitution?*

Pettersen (2011) has emphasized that the key to understanding the interactions between Church social organizations and policymakers lies more in the welfare governance style implemented in the territories rather than in national models for Church-State relationships. In this sense Italy and Spain, as Mediterranean welfare states, are both characterized by the relevance of religious actors in private action in support of the family and the poor, even if the increase in state welfare over the last decades has relegated the charitable action of the Church

to an important but complementary role (Moreno 2006: 74). At the same time, however, welfare in Southern European countries has in recent times experienced a pattern of liberalization in the delivery of welfare services, which had as an effect “a certain extension of free market morals, in the proliferation of ‘non-profit making’ – but characteristically subsidized – NGOs and other providers within the third sector, and the reinforcement of welfare privatization.” (Moreno 2006: 77). In a sense, the *liberalization* of welfare – and particularly the outsourcing of care services - brought religious organizations back to the front line, this time as third sector organizations, reversing the sidelining which the *secularization* of welfare had produced.

This general trend was rendered more complex by processes experienced by both countries which devolved welfare to the regions, thus raising concerns about potential territorial inequalities²². In Spain, an asymmetrical decentralization led to the consolidation of regional welfare regimes (Gallego, Gomà, and Subirats 2009). Because of their greater institutional capacity, the public welfare system was significantly better in the Basque Country and in Navarra than in many other regions. In this case, the pay-off from policy innovation by substate governments with a degree of fiscal autonomy exceeded the advantages of uniformity (Moreno 2006). Basque welfare was also characterized by well-established cooperation between the regional government and the third sector. During the industrial crisis of the 1980s, Caritas had played a pioneering role in the Basque Parliament in the preparation of the 2/1990 bill that introduced a minimum wage for the socially-excluded. This role played by public institutions and the associative network prevented the 2008 crisis from being as destructive as elsewhere. However, austerity policies were to be implemented here as well, although later in time and despite resistance by the Basque government, especially on health care expenditure. In December 2011, the Basque authorities tightened the criteria for entitlement to the minimum wage benefit²³, notably as regards the time period during which migrants had to officially register as residents. In this context, the social work carried out by Catholic organizations became more important than ever.

In addressing this risk that the welfare model be dismantled, Catholic organizations saw their role as oscillating between subsidiarity and substitution:

The poors have to be cared for by the public administration. Public resources need to be redistributed through social policies. Not only with development policies. We are not here to compensate for what the administration has to do. We are here to complement what the administration does not manage to achieve once they have taken the right path. Or to indicate, as spearheads, what should be done, thanks to significant actions. We usually say in *Caritas española*: if we did it, it can be done. Do it! And this has a lot to do with social awareness. (...) In this sense, we enact subsidiarity. We complement what should be done by the administration. Not because they don't have to do it, not to make them feel secure because the Church is doing it. No. This is where denunciation starts. It's up to you. (...) When the administration will do it, we will step aside.²⁴

A similar position was encountered in Emilia Romagna. Within Italy, the role of third sector organizations in the delivery of social services had been increased since the 1970s by regional

²² See Colozzi (2012: 108) on the Italian debate following the reform of Title V of the Constitution in 2001 and the risk of differentiated regional welfare systems.

²³ « Euskadi endurecerà el acceso a la renta mínima », *Publico.es* 13 September 2011.

²⁴ Personal interview, Diocesan delegate for Caritas, Bilbao, 19 June 2013. Translated from Spanish

devolution. However, the regions could only provide very limited funding for the new services falling under their jurisdiction (primarily social assistance and social care services, together with health care), and they left the financial burden to be borne by local authorities (Fargion 2009: 136). Municipalities increasingly turned to the third sector, and especially to non-profit organizations, particularly cooperatives, whose creation was frequently stimulated by local authorities:

Co-operatives could easily provide a wide range of services, including home help, while also addressing youth unemployment. The outcome was an intricate web of public-private arrangements, not only where the Christian Democrats had power but also in leftist regions such as Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, which originally attempted at creating an Italian version of the Scandinavian model. Over the 1980s, even communist-led regions gradually endorsed a pluralist welfare model shifting from a publicly-centered approach to the mixed economy of welfare. As these developments blurred the initial differences between left and centre-left regions, the basic divide which surfaced was once again territorial. To the south of Tuscany and the Marche, one could detect interesting signs of institutional diffusion, but overall, regional policies remained backward and fragmented. (Fargion 2009: 136)

This institutional context favored the consolidation of third sector organizations. As a result, Emilia Romagna enjoyed an effective collaboration between public authorities and the third sector²⁵. The Italian political context strengthened the participation of the Catholic third sector, when the fall of the Christian Democratic party at the beginning of the 1990s deprived the Church of political backing, but this sense of disorientation was to be partly compensated by the consolidation of volunteer activities and involvement in the social economy, which gave a new legitimacy to the public presence of the Church (Garelli 2011: 84) (Donovan 2003: 11-113).

The 2008 economic crisis reinforced these interactions with the local authorities. If, generally speaking, Caritas Forlì felt that they were doing more “substitution” than “subsidiarity”, they however acknowledged that relations between public authorities and the Catholic third sector were relatively well-regulated in their territory²⁶. This collaboration has to be seen within a historical context, given that Forlì had been, with Brescia, one of the main cradles of social cooperatives in Italy (Marzocchi 2012). As a result, over the last 20 years, the centre-left municipality of Forlì has implemented a governance model for new needs in matters of personal services where most of social services are delivered through third sector organizations. Some services, particularly those concerning disability, child protection and minors, were entirely delivered through associations or cooperatives, while in traditional services (such as those for elderly people), the direct presence of public services would be more consistent. Caritas became an essential partner for the local authority not only as regards structural poverty but also exceptional situations, such as the North Africa emergency in 2011, the cold weather emergency or the Emilian earthquake in 2012.

In such a context, subsidiarity did not mean confusion: the role of public authorities also consisted of guaranteeing the quality and efficiency of services, which involved a control

²⁵ Emilia Romagna would provide an intermediary model between Lombardy, where most of the social services have been delegated to third sector organizations, and the Tuscan model where public intervention would be more centralized.

²⁶ The mediating role of the bishop as “the only one able to bring to the table all the authorities within the town” (interview Caritas Forlì-Bertinoro) was mentioned as well.

dimension. This was especially true when dealing with third sector organizations based on voluntarism, themselves often precarious, and the risk of their not complying with legal requirements. As a whole, however, this mixed welfare model appeared to be well adapted to the Catholic approach of subsidiarity, whereas organizations related to the lay/socialist tradition preferred to campaign in favor of the direct management of services by public bodies. Significantly, social cooperatives from CSS Forlì participated actively in Welfare Italia, a national project for the delivery of health services as a substitute for the decline in public provision, promoted by the Gino Mattarelli Consortium²⁷, a network of social cooperatives affiliated to Confcooperative.

Relations between Catholic organizations and public authorities also varied according to the sector and to the level of dependence on public subsidies. Those Catholic organizations most immersed in markets, such as Bultz-Lan Consulting in Bilbao, aimed to generate their own growth - “we live by our work” (interview). This meant that Caritas did not have to fund this work, although it remained the owner of the company. This desire for independence did not prevent Caritas and other Catholic bodies from reaching agreements with public bodies. In 2012, Caritas Bizkaia’s resources came from fundraising campaigns (8.77 %), from Caritas’ own resources (58.53 %), and from the provision of services to the public administrations (32.69 %) (Cáritas Bizkaia 2013). In both territories, the Catholic third sector needed to strike a balance between self-sufficiency and the quest for resources. If, in the case of Caritas Bilbao, the crisis entailed an increase in donations and volunteering, others fell into a state of precariousness because of the decline of public funding. The crisis legitimized the discourse of the third sector, while weakening its resources.

3.2. “Anuncia y denuncia”: *Catholic advocacy*

Establishing solid partnerships with public authorities did not prevent Catholic organizations from engaging in advocacy, in a more prophetic orientation, either alongside other social movements or acting alone.

Acting with other social movements constituted a removal further step away from the traditional charity-based and depoliticized attitude of the Church. In Forlì, Caritas brought together networks and coalitions working on migrants’ rights issues. In particular, the *Ius Soli* campaign asked for access to citizenship for the children of migrants born in Italy. Another significant campaign concerned the North Africa emergency in 2011, coinciding with arrival *en masse* of African refugees after the war in Libya and the Arab spring. The public administration guided these refugees towards a request for political asylum, but most of the refugees did not meet the legal requirements for this. Caritas, together with other organizations, campaigned to obtain residence and work permits, which were obtained through a regularization process which was only completed in March 2013.

In Bilbao, Caritas, the Jesuit Ellacuria Centre, and the Diocesan Missions were regularly called upon in their capacity as members of the Basque NGO coordination body *Harresiak apurtuz* (breaking the walls) set up in 1997 to work for the rights of migrants. In 2013, *Harresiak apurtuz* campaigned in favor of extending the right of access to public health

²⁷ Gino Mattarelli (1921-1986) was a Christian Democrat politician from Forlì who played a pioneering role in promoting the social cooperatives model in Italy.

services to migrants living in Euskadi²⁸. *Harresiak apurtuz* asked the Ellacuria centre to lead the campaign in order to convince the conservative Catholic “silent majority”, deemed to have an ambivalent attitude towards migrants. Caritas and many Catholic organizations also took part in the national campaign asking for a popular legislative initiative against evictions. Caritas Bilbao also participated in the permanent platform in favor of homeless people.

Catholic social organizations also conducted campaigns of their own, stressing their religious identity. In 2011 in Bilbao, a group of Catholic social organizations from Bizkaia²⁹ decided to come together to better address the social needs and to form new partnerships with the secular third sector and with public administrations (Moreno 2012). One year later, the collective – 23 organizations had met on 23 June 2011 - defined itself as testifying to a serving and committed Church, promoting community and volunteering, with a participatory and transparent organizational culture. On 11 June 2012, the collective issued a Manifesto, signed by 21 Catholic organizations. Their diagnosis of the crisis laid stress on three aspects³⁰: 1) attachment to the European model of the welfare state and to the responsibility of public administration; 2) concerns about a recent policy shift that weakened the vulnerable populations (in the Basque Country, a reform of the requirements for the minimum income benefit and changes in the requirements in order to receive special assistance for social inclusion, and, at the Spanish level, labor market reform and *Decreto Ley* (Executive Order) 16/2012 that abolished the right of foreigners to receive health assistance without a legal residence permit); 3) a growing collective imagination, conveyed by media and political discourse, that tended to make disadvantaged people the guilty party³¹. Four proposals were expressed: 1) a need to take up a proactive attitude in order to defend the social model against the restrictions of the system and increasing individualism; 2) a reaffirmation of Church organizations’ personal, community-based and institutional commitment to the most vulnerable; 3) the duty of public administrations to guarantee the rights and fair redistribution of goods on behalf of the most vulnerable; 4) the obligation of every member of society to “live simply so that others can simply live”. In addition, the Ellacuria Centre went public as a Jesuit organization in campaigns calling for religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities³². The inclusion of Catholic organizations within wider issue-based coalitions did not prevent them from campaigning as religious organizations by offering transverse readings of the crisis.

²⁸ “Piden la eliminación de las restricciones sanitarias a los inmigrantes”, *Noticias de Gipuzkoa*, 26 June 2013.

²⁹ Caritas diocesana, Fundación EDE, Fundación Gizakia, Fundación Lagungo, Asociación Bidesari.

³⁰ *Bizkaiko elizaren gizarte erakundeen manifestua*, Bilbao, 21 June 2012.

³¹ The same phenomenon was to be found in Forlì in 2012, when a group of parishioners accused Caritas of having “attracted” delinquents who committed a burglary (“Santa Maria del Fiore. Caritas: ‘Povertà non significa delinquenza’”, *Corriere della Romagna*, 19 March 2013).

³² These campaigns concerned the Basque Parliament’s regional law on cults, and the Municipality of Bilbao’s urban planning as regards places of worship. The Ellacuria Centre also joined the Spanish campaign led by the Jesuit Service for Migration and the Jesuit NGO *Pueblos unidos* asking for effective regulation of the internment centers for foreigners.

3.3. *Catholic expertise and policy outcomes*

Catholic advocacy had mixed results. First, in both regions, Catholic organizations were recognized by local authorities for their expertise. Along with their obvious knowledge on religious matters, their expertise on poverty, social exclusion, immigration, and international cooperation was acknowledged. Caritas was perceived as a data provider and as a social whistleblower. This recognition did not prevent a division of labor: in Forlì, the municipality referred closely to the annual report of Caritas on poverty and resources, while complementing it with other sources and with publicly-provided statistics. Caritas was recognized as an expert on social exclusion, which was only *one* of the social matters the Municipality had to deal with. This mutual acknowledgment implied the participation of third sector organizations in different forums generated by the public administration, especially in the planning of provincial welfare policies. In the Basque Country, Catholic expertise was also required at municipal, provincial and regional levels. In a sense, this legitimization of Catholic organizations *as experts* could be used by public authorities as a way to depoliticize the issue of social exclusion through a process of “technicization” (Jullien and Smith 2008), in order to counter-balance the politicization of the same issues by protest movements (including Catholic activists).

Nevertheless, the policy influence of Catholic organizations could extend far beyond their unique function as data providers. Catholic organizations made legislative proposals whose outcomes were expected to impact on institutions. This was particularly visible in the Basque region. As a positive result of the political work led by Caritas together with other organizations, a draft bill was approved by the Basque Parliament in 2007 – before *this* crisis – forcing public administrations to include a social clause in public tenders, in order to advantage social businesses and social cooperatives. In addition, the *Harresiak apurtuz* campaign in favor of migrants’ health rights had a positive outcome, when the Basque government, led first by a Socialist majority (2009-2012) then by the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV³³) Basque nationalists (2012-date), decided to override injunctions from the Spanish Ministry of Health in order to maintain a universal health care system in the Basque Country³⁴.

In some cases, Catholic expertise and campaigning had a positive impact on regional policy-making, but within a policy sector which was regarded as relatively secondary. For instance, Alboan, as a member of the Basque Council for Development Cooperation, played an important role in the design of the 2007 Basque law on international development cooperation³⁵. Other campaigns ended with negative outcomes, such as that which sought changes in the minimum wage in Euskadi. Moreover, in 2013 a national campaign in favor of a popular initiative law against house evictions failed due to the opposition of the Popular Party³⁶. Even the failed campaigns, however, provided an opportunity to voice claims and to

³³ *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*.

³⁴ “El Tribunal Constitucional avala la atención sanitaria a los sin papeles”, *El País*, 17 December 2012.

³⁵ Jesuits expertise in mediation was also called upon by the Basque government after FARC guerrillas kidnapped Basque citizens in Colombia.

³⁶ In April 2013, supporters of the popular legislative initiative (ILP) on transfer in lieu of payment and the halt to evictions withdrew the ILP from the Congress of Deputies, given that the Popular Party had promoted its

disseminate data among social and political milieus lacking basic knowledge on social exclusion.

Conclusions

The attempt at comparison outlined in this paper came to three main findings, which would need to be expanded by further research.

Our starting assumption on the role of the 2008 economic crisis as a constrained opportunity in these two regions was confirmed. Far from resulting only from the economic impact of the crisis, the renewed social role of the Catholic organizations indirectly resulted from the liberalization of welfare, which brought religious third sector organizations back to the front line, reversing the sidelining which the secularization of welfare had produced. The crisis reinforced the double positioning of Catholic organizations, both as providers of a depoliticized expertise on social exclusion, *and* as advocating social rights, alongside more politicized social movements. Catholic organizations reacted to the new social emergencies by promoting solidarity economy, and not only mere charity. As observed by Bode (2003) in France and Germany, this propensity to social innovation was itself facilitated by an increasing autonomy of the social organizations vis-à-vis their institutional hierarchy: “when the shrinking of the overall influence of Catholic charity seems inevitable, there is more creative agency, and less ‘programming’ by the old stakeholders” (Bode 2003: 205). For their part, the growing dislike in society of Church attempts to give advice on political matters has led prominent churchmen “to fear the reduction of the church to little more than a welfare agency” (Donovan 2003: 113).

The second of these concerns what might be termed the *external and internal proximities* of the Catholic third sector. The “sector of the Catholic third sector” under consideration here proved to be close to secular local and transnational social movements advocating the rights of poors, excluded, migrants, the alternative economy and resistance to austerity policies (Caritas Europa 2013). This closeness confirms previous observations made on the proximity between Catholic activists and the Global justice movement (della Porta and Mosca 2007), peace movements (Tosi and Vitale 2009), support for the rights of migrants (Bassi 2014; Scotto 2013). It is more than likely that these common criticisms of the directions taken by neoliberalism would be expanded to an implicitly or explicitly critical assessment of the positions of the Church on ethical and civilizational issues, which raises the issue of the *internal pluralism* of the Church. Moreover, and as developed above, social work, far from being monopolized by the “open Catholics” (Portier 2002), is also invested by identity-affirming Catholics, thus generating an unexpected intra-Catholic competition, concerning both doctrinal divergences and access to resources.

A third research direction should go deeper in the interplay of issues related to social justice and the politicized issues of religious diversity and peacemaking. In Forlì, the Seventh Day Adventist Church has become a regular partner of Catholic cooperatives in the delivery of welfare projects. Caritas has played host to the Romanian Greco-Catholic church, which delivers religious, cultural and social services to the Romanian community. Both in Forlì and

(Contd.)

own draft law (“Los promotores de la iniciativa popular sobre desahucios la retiran del Congreso”, *El Mundo*, 18 April 2013). The ILP petition had gathered 1,402 854 signatures.

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in Bilbao, the Catholic Church has allowed other Christian denominations and Muslim associations to use Catholic facilities for their religious and social activities. In Bilbao, the Ellacuria Centre has advocated interreligious dialogue, religious pluralism and peacemaking, and the Piarists have played a major role in setting up the pacifist movement *Gesto por la paz*. These overlaps have helped to blur even further the grey line that separated religious, secular, social and political issues in these two definitively postsecular territories.

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