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Local development of Italian voluntary organizations

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LOCAL DEVELOPMENT OF ITALIAN VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to analyse some of the results from Istat second survey on voluntary organizations, focusing on the analysis of the association between geographical location of the organizations and their behavioural patterns.

The data show that Italian voluntary organizations are not homogeneously distributed within the whole country and rely on a large variety of structural forms and organizational sizes. The majority of them work in the North of Italy and more than 50% are settled in four regions only. Regarding structural and behavioural patterns, about 50 percent are members of larger groups, a half are rather young, and most work with few volunteers and small income. The majority of Italian voluntary organizations operate in Health and Social Welfare and tend to be specialized in one field of activity while supplying more than one social service to their clients.

In order to evaluate the degree of geographical similarities among voluntary organizations the descriptive analysis is enriched by a cluster analysis. By means of this statistical method two groups of regions showing some relevant degree of association between territorial and organizational attributes are obtained.

Foreword

The purpose of this paper is to analyse geographical and structural diversity among Italian voluntary organizations.

The statistical data described in the paper come from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) second survey on voluntary organizations. The survey was referred to 1997 and the population was composed by 11,710 organizations recorded in the regional administrative files established by the Italian law on voluntary organizations (law n.266 dated August 11th 1991)¹.

Although taking into account a quite well defined group of organizations the data show that Italian voluntary organizations may not be thought as a homogeneous set. They show some territorial concentrations in the distribution within the whole country, rely on a large variety of structural forms, have different organizational sizes and, although operating in the same fields of activity, display several degrees of specialization in performing their activities. The aim of the paper is to assess the association between geographical location and similar behavioural patterns of the organizations. The hypothesis followed is that organizations settled in administrative regions close to one another share similar structures, sizes and behaviours. The descriptive analysis of the data shows that among voluntary organizations settled in the same geographical area, some kind of similarities, even if not sharply defined, exist. To evaluate the goodness of this preliminary result, a test of the hypothesis by means of a cluster analysis is done and two patterns of behaviours are obtained.

The paper is divided into three sections: the first one offers a general picture of Italian voluntary organizations described through the data of the survey; the second one is focused on the statistical method applied; in the last section a brief discussion of the results obtained is carried out.

1. Geographical location, structural forms and fields of activity of Italian voluntary organizations

The distribution of organizations throughout the country shows some geographical differences regarding organizations settlement. The majority of organizations (59.9%) work in the North of Italy, while 22.3% operate in the Centre and 17.8% in the South². More than 50% of the whole population is settled in four regions: Lombardia, Toscana, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto.

In order to obtain an indicator of territorial voluntary organizations concentration, the number of organizations was standardized with the number of inhabitants in the same geographical area. In this way territorial differences become even more evident: the ratio between the number of organizations and the resident population is 2.0 organizations per 10,000 inhabitants for Italy as a whole, 2.7 for the North, 2.4 for the Centre and 1.0 for the South.

By ordering the Italian regions by this ratio some peculiar characteristics of the standardized distribution of the organizations throughout the country can be pointed out.

Table 1 – Italian regions ordered by voluntary organizations per 10,000 inhabitants

Regions	Organizations per 10,000 inhabitants
Trentino-Alto Adige	9.0
Toscana	4.8
Valle d'Aosta	3.8
Sardegna	3.7

Friuli-Venezia Giulia	3.5
Umbria	3.5
Emilia-Romagna	3.4
Liguria	3.0
Veneto	2.4
Marche	2.4
Piemonte	2.3
Basilicata	2.2
Molise	2.1
Lombardia	2.0
ITALY	2.0
Abruzzo	1.3
Calabria	0.9
Campania	0.7
Puglia	0.7
Lazio	0.6
Sicilia	0.5

The regions with a higher ratio (more than 2.5) are located either in the Northern area of the country (Trentino-Alto Adige, Valle d'Aosta, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna and Liguria) or in the Centre (Toscana and Umbria) or even in the South (Sardegna). The same scattering process is to be found for the regions with an average ratio (between 1.5 and 2.5): three of them belong to the North of Italy (Veneto, Piemonte e Lombardia), one to the Centre (Marche) and two to the South (Basilicata and Molise). The regions with a lower ratio (less than 1.5) are all Southern ones (Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Puglia, and Sicilia) with the exception of just one, belonging to the Centre (Lazio) (*Table 1*).

The number of volunteers *employed* by voluntary organizations is 591,000. The distribution of the volunteers by gender (57% male and 43% female), although slightly different from that of the Italian resident population (49% male and 51% female), is almost the same throughout the Italian regions, therefore showing no peculiarity.

The geographical distribution of volunteers is strictly related to that of the organizations, therefore showing a higher concentration in Northern Italy. As in the case of the organizations, in order to obtain an indicator of territorial concentration, the number of volunteers was standardized with the number of inhabitants in the same geographical area. Taking into account this ratio, volunteers territorial diversification is even wider than that of the organizations. The ratio between the number of volunteers and the population is 10 volunteers per 1,000,000 inhabitants for Italy as a whole, 14 for the North, 13 for the Centre and 4 for the South.

According to this ratio the three following groups can be obtained:

- High ratio regions (more than 12 volunteers per 1,000,000 inhabitants): Trentino-Alto Adige, Toscana, Sardegna e Liguria, Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna, Valle d'Aosta and Friuli-Venezia Giulia;
- Average ratio regions (from 9 to 12 volunteers per 1,000,000 inhabitants): Piemonte, Veneto, Umbria and Marche;
- Low ratio regions (less than 8 volunteers per 1,000,000 inhabitants): Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Puglia and Sicilia.

Classifying the Italian regions by the volunteers per inhabitants helps to specify more clearly the subsets obtained by considering the organizations ratio. As it is shown by the three groups above, high ratio regions belong mainly to the North, with the exception of Toscana and Sardegna; low ratio regions to the South, with the exception of Lazio; average ratio regions are equally distributed between the North and the Centre of the country (*Table 2*).

Table 2 – Italian regions ordered by volunteers per 1,000,000 inhabitants

Regions	Volunteers per 1,000,000 inhabitants
Trentino-Alto Adige	50
Toscana	26
Liguria	18
Sardegna	16
Emilia-Romagna	15
Valle d'Aosta	15
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	13
Lombardia	13
Piemonte	11
ITALY	10
Veneto	10
Marche	10
Umbria	9
Basilicata	8
Molise	6
Lazio	6
Abruzzo	5
Calabria	3
Campania	3
Sicilia	3
Puglia	2

Besides geographical differences, also structural differences can be found among voluntary organizations. Regarding the year of foundation, most of them are rather young (50% were founded after 1986) and, generally speaking, younger organizations can be found in Southern Italy (50% of the organizations of this area were founded after 1989). In Trentino-Alto Adige there are a lot of old organizations (the median year of foundation for the organizations of this area is 1964); at the opposite in Basilicata and Molise there are several young organizations (in these two regions the median year of foundation is 1994) (*Table 3*).

Structural differences come out, also, from the examination of the data related to the choice of voluntary organizations between working in isolation or in connection with other organizations operating in the same field of activity. More than 50% are members of larger groups and these links among organizations occur more often in the Centre and in the South than in the North of Italy. The percentage of isolated organizations is higher than the average (48.6%) in ten regions scattered within the country: four regions

belong to Northern Italy (Valle d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia), two to the Centre (Lazio and Umbria) and four to the South (Molise, Campania, Puglia and Calabria) (Table 4).

Table 3 – Italian regions ordered by the median year of foundation

Regions	Median year of foundation
Basilicata	1994
Molise	1994
Lazio	1992
Puglia	1992
Campania	1991
Sardegna	1990
Valle d'Aosta	1990
Umbria	1990
Abruzzo	1990
Sicilia	1990
Veneto	1989
Calabria	1989
Emilia-Romagna	1988
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	1987
ITALY	1987
Marche	1987
Piemonte	1985
Liguria	1984
Lombardia	1984
Toscana	1982
Trentino-Alto Adige	1964

Table 4 – Italian regions ordered by the percentage of isolated organizations

Regions	Percentage of isolated organizations
Marche	30.0
Sicilia	31.7
Toscana	32.0
Basilicata	39.8
Piemonte	41.7
Abruzzo	45.6
Sardegna	46.1
Emilia-Romagna	46.2
Lombardia	46.5
Liguria	46.8
ITALY	48.6
Campania	50.1
Calabria	50.3
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	55.7
Lazio	57.2
Molise	58.0
Umbria	58.1
Veneto	59.5
Puglia	60.4
Trentino-Alto Adige	84.6
Valle d'Aosta	84.8

There are also size differences among these organizations: 49.7% of them work with a very small number of volunteers (less than 20), but, as the average number of volunteers per organization is 50, there also organizations (16.4%) with more than 60 volunteers. The organizations settled in the North and in the

Centre tend to operate with a greater number of volunteers, since there the mean is 51 and 55, while in the South the average number of volunteers is 43.

The median of volunteers per organization, that represents a better measure when the dispersion around the mean is great, is 21 for Italy as a whole. A lower value of this indicator is reached by the organizations located in nine regions belonging, with some predominance, to Central and Northern areas. In fact, among the regions showing a lower median of volunteers than the national one there are four Northern regions (Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Piemonte and Emilia-Romagna), two Central ones (Marche and Umbria) and three Southern (Molise, Basilicata, Abruzzo) (*Table 5*).

Table 5 – Italian regions ordered by the median of volunteers per organization

Regions	Median of volunteers per organization
Trentino-Alto Adige	35
Valle d'Aosta	32
Lazio	26
Campania	26
Liguria	25
Puglia	25
Sicilia	25
Sardegna	25
Calabria	24
Lombardia	21
Toscana	21
ITALY	21
Veneto	20
Molise	20
Basilicata	20
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	19
Abruzzo	19
Piemonte	18
Marche	17
Emilia-Romagna	16
Umbria	16

Almost the same kind of differences described for the social size of the organizations arise by taking into account their economic size. About 50% of them have an income of less than 20 million lire (about 10,329 euro), but as the average income per organization is 112 million (about 57,843 euro), there are also organizations (10.4%) with more than 200 million (about 103,291 euro) income. The median income is 20 million lire for the population as a whole. A higher value than the national one has to be found in the following seven regions scattered throughout the country: Trentino-Alto Adige, Liguria, Lazio, Sicilia, Calabria, Lombardia and Abruzzo (*Table 6*).

Table 6 – Italian regions ordered by the median income per organization

Regions	Median income per organization
Trentino-Alto Adige	34
Liguria	30
Lazio	29

Sicilia	28
Calabria	24
Lombardia	24
Abruzzo	21
ITALY	20
Toscana	20
Emilia-Romagna	19
Sardegna	18
Campania	18
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	17
Umbria	17
Veneto	15
Marche	15
Piemonte	12
Valle d'Aosta	12
Puglia	12
Molise	8
Basilicata	8

Regarding the fields of activity in which Italian voluntary organizations work, most operate in Health (37.6%) and Social Welfare (28.7%), while the others work in fields like Leisure (12.3%), Civic Protection (9.3%), Environment (3.4%), Education (2.9%), Advocacy (2.7%), Sport (1.7%) and Culture (1.4%).

This kind of distribution among fields of activity show very few changes if considered at regional level. Health and Social Welfare (even if not always right in this order) are the two main fields of activity in sixteen regions. In three regions one of the two main fields become the third one, while the second is Leisure. In particular most of the organizations located in Umbria and Molise work in Health and Leisure and most of the ones settled in Friuli-Venezia Giulia operate in Social Welfare and Leisure. In Trentino-Alto Adige only, the two main fields of activity differ from that recorded somewhere else: in this region Civic Protection shows the highest percentage of overthere working organizations and Leisure represents the second field of activity in term of relative weight (*Table 7*).

Table 7 – Voluntary organizations by regions and field of activity

Regions	Social Welfare	Health	Education	Leisure	Sport	Advocacy	Culture	Civic Protection	Environment	Total
Piemonte	30.9	45.0	1.8	5.2	0.5	1.7	2.4	8.6	3.8	100
Valle d'Aosta	17.4	67.4	-	6.5	-	-	-	6.5	2.2	100
Lombardia	33.4	43.0	2.4	10.9	1.3	2.4	0.3	3.4	2.8	100
Trentino-Alto Adige	11.3	6.5	4.3	28.8	11.9	0.4	2.2	33.4	1.2	100
Veneto	41.4	22.7	4.0	16.1	0.8	3.4	2.9	6.5	2.1	100
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	37.8	18.7	4.3	19.4	2.6	7.2	1.4	4.1	4.5	100
Liguria	26.2	41.9	1.8	10.6	1.8	4.3	0.2	8.4	4.7	100
Emilia-Romagna	26.2	41.4	2.8	10.8	0.4	3.9	1.3	7.4	5.7	100
Toscana	22.0	55.2	2.0	8.0	0.5	1.3	2.4	5.2	3.3	100
Umbria	24.6	29.4	5.5	24.9	2.4	2.4	0.3	8.0	2.4	100
Marche	23.9	51.3	1.5	7.0	0.3	2.9	1.2	8.7	3.2	100
Lazio	34.9	21.6	6.8	9.6	1.4	3.1	2.4	13.0	7.2	100

Regions	Social Welfare	Health	Education	Leisure	Sport	Advocacy	Culture	Civic Protection	Environment	Total
Abruzzo	27.5	43.8	2.5	15.0	-	5.0	0.6	3.8	1.9	100
Molise	11.6	31.9	2.9	23.2	-	2.9	2.9	15.9	8.7	100
Campania	36.1	27.0	3.4	10.1	1.5	3.4	0.7	14.5	3.2	100
Puglia	29.1	26.0	3.2	11.9	1.1	2.5	-	25.3	1.1	100
Basilicata	27.1	37.6	3.8	12.0	-	3.8	-	14.3	1.5	100
Calabria	44.1	19.8	4.5	11.3	2.3	5.6	-	10.2	2.3	100
Sicilia	27.6	51.6	1.6	11.8	-	2.0	0.4	3.7	1.2	100
Sardegna	28.3	42.7	2.8	8.9	1.3	2.1	0.3	9.9	3.6	100
ITALY	28.7	37.6	2.9	12.3	1.7	2.7	1.4	9.3	3.4	100

Table 8 – Italian regions ordered by the percentage of specialized organizations

Regions	Percentage of specialized organizations
Trentino-Alto Adige	79.4
Valle d'Aosta	71.7
Piemonte	70.8
Lombardia	63.2
Emilia-Romagna	60.8
Liguria	60.1
Marche	60.1
Veneto	59.2
ITALY	58.9
Toscana	57.8
Umbria	57.4
Sardegna	55.5
Basilicata	53.4
Molise	49.3
Abruzzo	46.9
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	45.5
Sicilia	45.1
Lazio	41.1
Puglia	36.8
Campania	36.1
Calabria	35.6

Regarding the way in which Italian voluntary organizations produce facilities and commodities they seem to be quite specialized. About 60% of them work in just one field of activity. A little lower degree of specialization than the national one (58.9%), this figure still remaining over 50%, is to be found in Toscana, Umbria, Sardegna, Basilicata and Molise, while greater decreases in the degree of specialization (till 35.6% of organizations working in just one field of activity) are recorded for the organizations located in Abruzzo, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sicilia, Lazio, Puglia, Campania and Calabria (*Table 8*).

Despite the voluntary organizations specialization regarding the fields of activity, their supply of social services is quite diversified: almost two thirds of them, in fact, offer more than one social service to their clients. Regarding the number of social services offered, a lower percentage of *multisupplying* organizations than the national one (62.7%) characterises Trentino-Alto Adige, Piemonte, Marche, Lombardia, Toscana, Liguria and Emilia-Romagna (*Table 9*).

Table 9 – Italian regions ordered by the percentage of monosupplying organizations

Regions	Percentage of monosupplying organizations
Trentino-Alto Adige	48.1
Piemonte	36.0
Marche	33.8
Lombardia	33.3
Toscana	31.7
Liguria	29.0
Emilia-Romagna	28.6
ITALY	27.4
Valle d'Aosta	26.1
Umbria	26.0
Sardegna	22.7
Sicilia	18.3
Veneto	17.5
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	16.5
Basilicata	14.3
Abruzzo	10.6
Lazio	10.3
Puglia	10.2
Campania	8.6
Molise	7.2
Calabria	5.6

Finally, half of the organizations directly take care of people. They take care of about 2,500,000 people (the majority being sick people, elders and children) and tend to be specialized in offering their social services to only one kind of people in need. Organizations that directly take care of people are located mostly in Southern Italy (60% of the organizations of this area take care of people). The median of people in need helped by the Italian voluntary organizations as a whole is 56. A higher value of this measure is reached by eight regions, three of which belong to the Centre (Marche and Lazio), two to the North (Liguria and Lombardia) and two to the South (Sicilia and Sardegna) (*Table 10*).

Table 10 – Italian regions ordered by the median of people in need

Regions	Median of people in need helped by voluntary organizations
Marche	100
Liguria	75
Toscana	71
Lazio	69
Sicilia	66
Lombardia	61
Sardegna	60
Piemonte	56
Trentino-Alto Adige	56
ITALY	56
Calabria	56
Abruzzo	55
Basilicata	54
Valle d'Aosta	52
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	51
Veneto	50
Emilia-Romagna	45
Campania	45
Puglia	45
Umbria	22

2. The application of cluster analysis

Most of the data presented above were chosen following a bivariate analysis that allowed to select the most discriminating variables at regional level. Despite this choice, in the descriptive analysis no strong similarities among the behaviours of voluntary organizations operating in closer regions was found. To test the hypothesis of association between geographical location of the organizations and their structural and behavioural patterns of development, more comprehensive statistical methods are needed. To determine which Italian regions are similar and dissimilar following the characteristics of voluntary organizations described in the previous section, a cluster analysis was, then, applied.

The objects in the cluster analysis were the twenty Italian regions described by the voluntary organizations attributes. For quantitative attributes the variables chosen were the two territorial concentration ratios (organizations per 10,000 inhabitants and volunteers per 1,000,000 inhabitants) and the four medians (median year of foundation; median of volunteers per organization; median of income per organization, median of people in need helped per organization); for qualitative attributes the variables were the three percentage distributions (percentage of organization working in isolation, specialized in one field of activity, supplying one social service).

The data matrix, consisting of the twenty regions described by the nine attributes, was then cluster analyzed and three clusters were obtained.

The little number of objects taken into account (20 regions) influenced all the steps of the analysis. Bearing in mind this constraint, in each step of the analysis (selection of the index of similarity, choice of the clustering method and determination of the number of groups) the most careful strategy among the different ones at hand was taken.

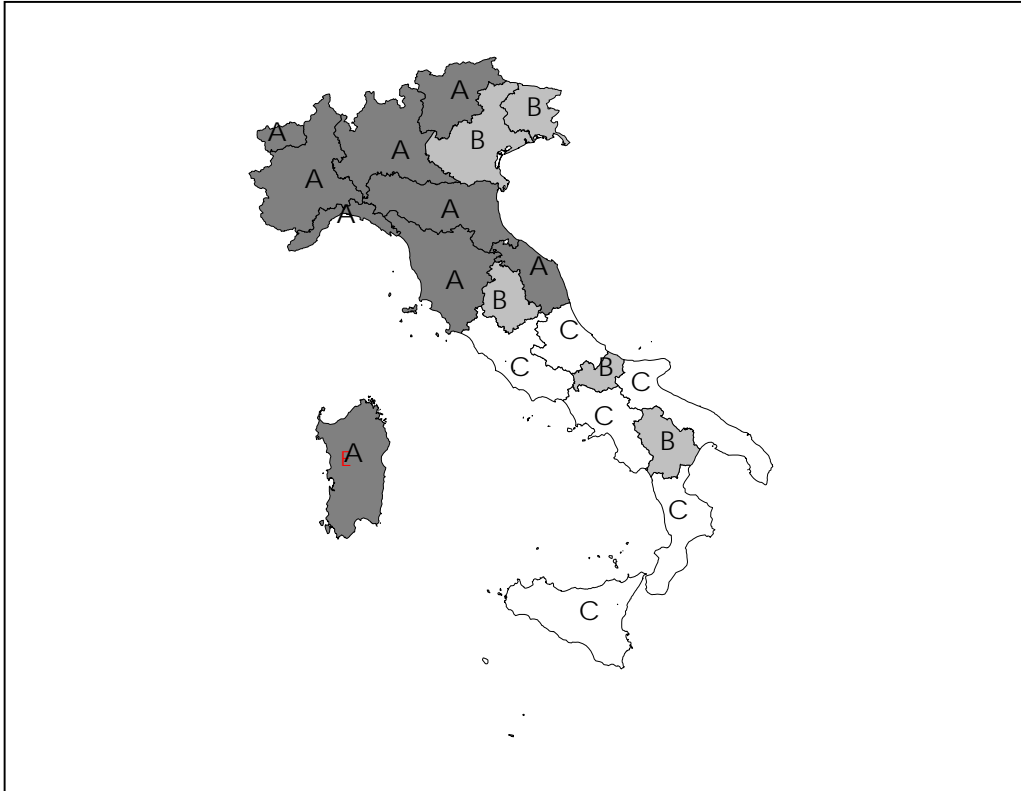
In particular, since a deep analysis of small differences among regions was not necessary, the Pearson correlation coefficient was selected as index of similarity between objects in the data matrix. This index is generally used to avoid *size displacement* between the data profiles and it was thought as the most suitable considering the aim of the cluster.

Moreover, to obtain well defined groups, the *complete linkage clustering method* (CLINK) was used as algorithm to make the clusters. By means of CLINK the similarity between any two clusters is determined by the similarity of their two most dissimilar spanning objects.

Finally, to determine a few number of well defined clusters, that is to establish the level of similarity at which *the tree could to be cutted*, the strategy of cutting the tree at some point for which the number of clusters remains constant within a wide range was chosen.

As a result of the analysis the three following clusters of regions, labeled A, B and C, were obtained (*Figure 11*).

Figure 11 – Clusters of regions by voluntary organizations attributes



- Cluster A collects six Northern regions (Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardia, Liguria, Trentino-Alto Adige and Emilia-Romagna), two Central regions (Toscana and Marche) and one Southern region (Sardegna); it is characterized by more volunteers and more, rather old, quite specialized and often monosupplying organizations.
- Cluster B gathers two regions of the North of the country (Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto), one of the Centre (Umbria) and two of the South (Basilicata and Molise); the organizations settled in this group of regions usually are a lot, but rather young, often working in isolation and usually having small social and economic sizes.
- Cluster C groups one central region (Lazio) and five southern regions (Abruzzo, Campania, Puglia, Calabria and Sicilia); the peculiarities of this group are few volunteers and few, rather young, usually not very specialized and often multisupplying organizations.

As shown by these descriptions, while groups A and C are sharply characterized by the attributes of voluntary organizations, this does not seem to hold for group B, whose borders still remain not well defined. This is the reason why two main behavioural patterns only might be envisaged. For the regions gathered in group B the pattern could be a mix of the two, but considering the geographical composition of this group something more similar among these regions should be found out.

The first pattern, that of the regions of group A, could be called the Northern pattern. It implies similar starting condition in relation either to the number of organizations and of volunteers - that, considering the number of inhabitants of these regions, are more than elsewhere in the country - or to the age of the organizations - that are rather mature. Moreover the organizations settled in the regions following the

Northern pattern share similar ways of development in relation to the degree of specialization – they usually work in one field of activity often supplying one social service only.

The second pattern, that of the regions of group C, could be called the Southern pattern. Since it is specular to the previous one it shows characteristics that are opposite to the Northern pattern. The organizations settled in the regions of group C begin to work in places where organizations are few and rather young and volunteers are few as well. Moreover they are often very diversified both in the field of activity and in the supply of social services.

Final remarks

As shown above sharp dissimilarities between the clusters were found only for two of the three obtained by the cluster analysis. Because of that only two behavioural patterns were considered.

All things considered it could be said that the hypothesised association between geographical location and structural forms of the organizations works well. However there are some problems for the four regions grouped in cluster B. The eccentricity of this group is probably due either to institutional reasons or to organizational ones. This could mean that the relationships and processes out of which facilities, commodities and networks are produced by voluntary organizations are influenced by their geographical location as well as by deeper organizationally-specific behavioural patterns.

Moreover, if the technical constraints imposed by the few objects put in the data matrix are taken into account, a suggestion for a deeper analysis starting from micro data (organizations) instead of aggregate data (regions) came out.

These are the reasons why the analysis carried out in the paper has to be considered as a first empirical approach to the problem of pointing out similarities within a population sharply characterized by various organizational forms and different ways of producing almost the same facilities.

Footnotes

¹ This law establishes that, irrespective to the legal form taken on and the type of structure used, the registration to the voluntary organizations regional files is granted when the organization: i) benefits from voluntary and free work in a predominant way; ii) employs regular workers with well defined limits (i.e. only to make its operations stable and to adjust its activities to a standard requirement); iii) establishes its nonprofit scope and the set of democratic principles ruling the membership (admission and exclusion criteria, obligation and rights, associative charges) in the agreement act or in the constitution charter of the organization; iiiii) respects the obligation of having a financial budget in which private and public contributions received and expenses made are registered.

² NORTH includes Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardia, Liguria, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Emilia-Romagna; CENTRE includes Toscana, Umbria, Marche and Lazio; SOUTH includes Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicilia and Sardegna.

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