

## CONTEXTS AND DEBATES

### Images of Lombardy in historiography

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The historiography of contemporary Lombardy has been dominated by in-depth studies of local contexts but has rarely addressed the regional dimension. Those studies that have had a regional outlook have drawn divergent and fluid regional boundaries, rarely connected to the administrative and by now political reality of the region of Lombardy. This article aims to reconstruct some of the most salient moments of this ‘identification’ of Lombardy in the economic, social and administrative history of the region. It tries to trace the cultural roots and persistence of this identification, which has sometimes been embroiled in political controversy. Focusing mainly on more recent studies, this article will also address the aporias and unsolved issues surrounding the study of Lombardy.

**Keywords:** historiography of Lombardy; regional identity; Padania; local history; Italian regions

#### Introduction

This article examines some of the most important historical essays on contemporary Lombardy, paying particular attention to those that have appeared over the last 20 years.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to draw a map of the cultural references shared by all these works. The path that the article traces is at times personal, but it touches on some of the key questions with which historians of this subject are faced. The first regards the existence or not, as an object of study, of a Lombard ‘region’. A second question, deriving from the first, is what the borders of such a region might be. Finally, it is worth examining the driving forces behind the work of the historians who have addressed this subject.

The cultural map drawn by these studies reveals a quest for discovering and consolidating a sense of a ‘personality’ of Lombardy, to be dialectically compared with other regional identities within a national history. This historical and civic goal is part of the same cultural project that promoted the Einaudi series *Le regioni dall’unità a oggi*. This series, started in 1977, was influenced – at least in the beginning – by the will to give historical roots to the regional system set up by the republican constitution and was turned into an administrative reality only in 1970. These regional histories (by Einaudi and later by other publishers) and in later years the spread of regional universities, contributed to the return and development of a local dimension in contemporary historiography, following rigorous research standards and often innovative approaches. We will try to show that these

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studies actually highlighted the impossibility of reducing the Lombard region to a single entity; they exposed the changing interdependence of the Lombard territories in ways that did not keep them contained within the administrative confines of the region.

The first section addresses the cultural assumptions embedded in the long period of ‘Lombardist’ historiography. The following sections consider images of Lombardy, from the point of view of economic, political, cultural and administrative history.

### **An interpretive paradigm**

Every territory, every community, imagines its origins by constructing myths, which, despite their ideological origin, are not automatically meaningless for the historian. The social imaginary, in fact, allows the historian to weave scattered clues into tighter patterns, to gather the persistence of and discontinuities in particular stories to find solid ways of interpreting the past, which may sometimes hold up against detailed investigation.

The original paradigm for the concept of contemporary Lombardy is based on a small number of great texts from the mid-nineteenth century. First and foremost is the *Schizzo storico* inserted by Cesare Cantù in the front of the collection *Milano e il suo territorio*, published for the Congress of scientists gathered in Milan in 1844. The *Schizzo storico* aimed openly at establishing the natural existence of a cultural and ethnic Lombardy dating back to a pre-Christian era.

Carlo Cattaneo’s *Notizie naturali e civili su la Lombardia* was Cantù’s main editorial rival and presented a different interpretive analysis. Cattaneo’s work argued for an image of a Lombardy devoted to progress, moved forward by the impetus of urban centres and their interaction with the countryside. In Cattaneo’s model there was a fragmented yet compact sense of a Lombard civilisation that was based on land development, on commercial exchanges, on municipal institutions and on the development of technology. The model that Cattaneo proposed was, however, complex and his methodological approach challenged an acritical acceptance of the imaginary understanding of a region of Lombardy as having formed naturally over the centuries thanks to the spirit of enterprise of its people. His attention to the urban, his way of moving between micro and macro analysis, forged a Lombard historiography that paid particular attention to smaller contexts (productive, administrative, social) and to their overall contribution to the fabric of the region, whether real or imagined.

Cesare Correnti built on Cattaneo’s premises in his work *L’Austria e la Lombardia*, published in 1847, as well as in his article ‘Finis Langobardiae’, which appeared in the Milan publication *Perseveranza* on 12 January 1860.<sup>2</sup> These works formed the central elements of a canon and are still often cited in historical bibliographies on Lombardy. Very different in structure and presentation, some of these interpretive works were born as explicit contributions to political battles. As often happens out of respect to *auctoritas*, these works have tended to be used as sources rather than as working hypotheses.<sup>3</sup> Cattaneo in particular has had a lasting influence in this way (Balzani et al. 2003).

Following the cyclical waves of historical fads, and by necessity also the patterns of political ambitions, one also encounters the influence that city administrations, local associations and businesses in today’s Lombard region have had on the financing and the promotion of historical studies in their respective smaller contexts.<sup>4</sup> Out of all these studies

comes the confirmation of the power of Cattaneo's method, against some of the more foregone conclusions on the autonomy and essence of 'Lombardism'. These conclusions have often been drawn from the writings of those three great Lombard writers of the mid-nineteenth century in an over-simplified manner. What emerges is the multiplicity of forms and feelings of belonging but also their vitality, a willingness to interact with broader contexts than the regional one, within constantly changing hierarchies inside Lombardy, the Italian state, the European context and the global economy. In particular, from this local historiography of the past 20 years we see emerge the complexity of *stories* of Lombardy as well as the fluid complementarities of its territorial hubs.

The Austrian Restoration drew the first borders of contemporary Lombardy in 1815, along lines not too dissimilar to those of today (established in 1947). Its borders encompassed the ancient State of Milan, expanded so as to include a part of the old Visconti and Sforza dominions, together with western territories previously belonging to the Republic of Venice. The Novarese, however, which had historically been the homeland of a significant part of the Milanese aristocracy, was excluded. It was thus in the western part of the Lombard-Venetian kingdom that the Austrian public administration successfully worked to dissolve local differences up to 1859, by creating a regional identity centred on the pole of attraction of the 'partial' capital of the kingdom, Milan (also the capital of the ecclesiastical Lombard province from 1835). At the same time they focused on making the University of Pavia into the almost exclusive site for the formation of a cultural elite, from the Alps to the Po River, from the Ticino to the Mincio (Rumi 1998).

Within this administrative container, the culture of the time constructed the paradigm of historical interpretation that is still upheld in its most problematic and sensitive form today. The paradigm reads roughly as follows: the regional history of Lombardy rests, from the economic standpoint, on a series of changing interdependences; the political history of Lombardy reflects a constant rivalry between the various urban centres and between them and Milan, the dominant one. This rivalry is seen as the cause of the failure by the Lombard ruling classes to fulfil a positive role in the modernisation of the Italian state. Furthermore, the social history of Lombardy is characterised by great moments of social participation, the importance of associations, of pious works, of charity and solidarity organisations as well as cooperatives. All these charitable enterprises and associations were always perceived as local occurrences, at most as affecting the province, only rarely the region, perhaps more easily reflecting links across regions and almost never having any bearing on the nation (Vigezzi 1980).

The works on Lombard history over the last decades have also given precedence to this reading of the past, starting from the tendency to consider the province over the region. Many and important editorial ventures have chosen this territorial perspective, certainly dictated by the needs of those promoting them, but nevertheless entrusted to important historians. Amongst the more recent studies that fall into this category are the *Storia di Pavia* and that of *Cremona*,<sup>5</sup> and starting in 1997 the work of the series *Province di Lombardia* (Rumi-Mezzanotte-Cova 1995–2007), which echoes the name of its prestigious sponsor, the Cassa di Risparmio delle Province Lombarde, an institution founded and imagined from its inception in 1823 as a regional entity. In the title of the single volumes, furthermore, this series explicitly hints at its allegiance to the work of Cantù in *Milano e il suo territorio*.<sup>6</sup> These historical studies are reminiscent of the largest editorial project of this kind, the *Storia di Milano* by the Treccani Foundation and are similarly subdivided

into three sections describing: the urban architectural evolution of the city; arts and sciences; politics and economy. The studies above further expand on local and administrative history including the financial and institutional history of smaller municipalities.<sup>7</sup> The Lombard region is thus not studied in and of itself but as a sum of its administrative parts; perhaps this tendency too is amongst the reasons for the relative delay of the publication of *La Lombardia* in the Einaudi series dedicated to Italian regions (Bigazzi and Meriggi 2001).

Marco Meriggi, one of the editors of *La Lombardia*, found a convincing argument to the long debate over the question of the coherence of the regional dimension as an object of study – to answer the question more than once reiterated by Lucio Gambi (Gambi 2004; Treves 2004) as well as the question of how the division into regions had stimulated research and the projection backwards in time of identity elements. Meriggi articulated the focus of his study on Milan as a ‘city-region’, the fixed element in changing alliances caught between interests, strategies and development directives (Bigazzi and Meriggi 2001). He thus privileged Milan as the most stable and best articulated element, a sort of ‘State of Milan’ with a changing geography yet a central nucleus of extraordinary stability, the city-metropolis, ‘a space of initiative’ within which new economic and social compatibilities were redefined and from which new identity politics could emerge (Consonni and Tonon 2001).

Fundamentally similar was the argumentative structure of the only other history of the region, the one edited by Antonielli and Chittolini (2003) for Laterza and designed as an overview for university teaching. This work researched into the past, as far back as the tenth century, and found in the economy and culture of Lombardy an overview of the region that found elements of unity exclusively around the concept of Milan as a ‘city-region’.

Lombardy – as Cattaneo had already pointed out – is a region where nobody ‘in his domestic and spontaneous use ever gave himself the geographic and historic name of Lombard’.<sup>8</sup> At the time of Unification, 1400 people made up a municipality, in other words a community of interests with its own territory; it is therefore impossible to expect historical research into a regional identity to go much further than the sum total of the studies on local communities, by their very nature more attentive to continuities than to changes or hybridity.

The region exists, it is the artificial space of an administrative reality by now consolidated and from which one can start to concentrate on social and productive structures, as a territorial fragment of broader processes whose consequences go well beyond the scope of that restricted space. In that sense, Lombardy could go back to being used as a statistical point of reference for national or trans-national comparisons, allowing for the opinions of those who have always suggested that the region was conceived primarily as a statistical compartment.<sup>9</sup>

To make sense of the use of an ‘entire’ Lombard region, it would be necessary to look at the history of its politics as an entity, starting from the Region as an administrative and political organism capable of imagining and developing its own identity politics. A new phase of historical research with a regional focus could emerge, to address the processes of *regionalization* (including stages and instruments for consolidating a regional identity) (Massullo 2006) as well as to examine the historical roots of the culture of *regionalism*, which is pressingly relevant to today’s politics, but has yet to reconsider its own myths and the mechanism behind their reception and proliferation.<sup>10</sup>

**1881, 1906, 2015: Lombardy on display**

These dates mark three key moments (two from the past and one yet to come but already influential) of the celebration of the Lombard region, starting from its centre. The *Esposizione Nazionale* of 1881 and the *Esposizione Universale* of 1906 symbolically celebrated invention and later the consolidation of Milan as a showcase of Lombardy and of its productive and civic pride and moral superiority in relation to other Italian regions. This sense of Lombardy's civic and productive supremacy over the nation inevitably stimulated the writing of political and socioeconomic history, which traditionally concentrated on Lombardy's entrepreneurial heritage of associations, trade unions and interest groups, as one of Lombardy's greatest strengths (Chiesi and Martinelli 1995).<sup>11</sup>

It is precisely from economic history that we get the most solid integrated view of the Lombard region and of its development. This approach is present in traditional economic historiography from Gino Luzzatto to Bruno Caizzi, Mario Romani and Sergio Zaninelli, who all highlighted the subtle balances between the primary and secondary sectors (small, medium and big industry) and between production and market, highlighting the ways these sectors complemented each other on precisely the regional level.<sup>12</sup> These studies contributed to an image of Lombardy that, as Cafagna pointed out, appears a little 'artificially rounded' but that is not unfounded and could justify several of the smaller myths about Lombard identity (Cafagna 1992, 12–15). The privileged angle for studying economic development, however, has also been that of the province or smaller localities tied to 'diffused polarities', i.e. those diversified territorial and geomorphologic contexts that characterise the processes of industrialisation and the formation of an industrial society in Lombardy. The region, therefore, appears to be a dynamic and flexible space, strongly characterised by the complementarities of its productive sectors and development hubs (Carera 2000).

Having to consider a more restricted territorial analysis, the economic historian finds him/herself forced to expand his/her view on the often solid links between different areas and on the changing form of the borders drawn on the map of northern Italy. Between the late 1700s and the First World War, for example, the provinces between the Alps and the line drawn between Milan and Brescia appeared to be integrating on the regional level. It is still unclear, however, how the southern agricultural territories of Mantova, Pavia and Cremona fit into a regional integration, rather than working within interregional areas different from the statistical and administrative plan of the Lombard Region (Zaninelli 1991). During the same time period, nevertheless, the financial system was being given a more and more regional orientation, with its organisational centre firmly placed in Milan (Piluso 2001; Cafaro 2007).

The view of an economic region is persistently seductive. Carera (2002) re-established its validity as a subject, while insisting on the importance of maintaining an awareness of the fluidity of the borders used to define the economic region.<sup>13</sup> He stressed that the Lombard territory cannot be distinguished easily, in terms of physical and environmental discontinuities, from the geographic region found south of the Alps. Even with this view of flexible borders, however, there is a long-held view of the unity or at least complementarities of the economic forces attributed to an 'internal region' corresponding roughly to the dry plane of Lombardy as having a unified 'milieu', a culture of innovation capable of spreading within an 'external region' encompassing the Verbano, the Novarese, the Cantone Ticino or the area around Piacenza (see for example Macchione 1991;

Romano 1991). The economic Lombardy, then, would be made up of the dynamic fusion of two sub-regions with Milan as the glue for the entire system. Milan, however, would not be the main centre in terms of demographics and employment, because of the persistent vitality and particularity of the other sub-centres. There still need to be detailed studies of the contributions that these other centres made to the productive innovation, to the dynamics of employment and to the mobility of the workforce in the region, especially in the twentieth century.

Somehow, then, economic and social transformations anticipated and promoted the integration of the region around Milan, seen as the geographic centre of a transformation of the territory (and of the social relations that existed within it) ever since the nineteenth century, when it acquired the main traits of a 'diffused metropolis'.<sup>14</sup> Milan was then the catalyst for technical, commercial and financial services, while industry developed along paths of urban expansion that incorporated larger towns and centres, where the great factories were concentrated in particular areas, but where small and medium-sized businesses were spread out in the greater part of the landscape.

The real persistence of a regional character for Lombardy is thus made up of dual tendencies in the dry plain and in the areas at the foot of mountain valleys. One finds a thick network of smaller industries and settlements largely disconnected from each other that, on the one hand, softened the gigantic expansion of Milan, but also constituted the element needed to sustain big industry in the creation, during the years of the economic boom, of a complete industrial cycle in the region.<sup>15</sup> The coexistence of companies with high concentrations of capital for the production of investment goods, alongside a highly decentred production of consumer goods thanks to the affordability of labour, was unique in Italy.<sup>16</sup>

The picture I have just drawn points to the need for analysis on the lines of interconnection in this diffused metropolis. For the moment, however, there have been very few studies on municipal services (Bigatti et al. 1997; Varini 2001; Romano 2004). Despite extensive research on the expansion of small urban centres, especially from the perspective of municipal politics (Berselli, Dela Peruta and Varni 1987; Bolchini 1999), there has been very little work done on transportation (especially public transport and the transportation of goods) and on infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> This lack of attention may perhaps derive from the indifference shown by economic historiography towards systems of territorial interdependence and interrelation.

The original nature of the Lombard model of industrialisation also influenced the phase of deindustrialisation, starting in the 1970s. After the relative decline of large-scale industry, more convenient and agile factors were brought into being, with the strengthening of smaller units of production (Biffignardi 1987; Fumagalli 1996; Vergallo 2006). 'Intermediate capitalism' was consolidated, allowing Lombardy to host almost 20% of Italian manufacturing industries in the new millennium. Lombardy also holds almost a third of the medium-sized companies, whose strength lies in their commercial nature (techniques and sales networks, advertising, design) as well as in more immaterial factors such as brands and patents (Berta 2007).

Overall, when looking at the socioeconomic studies focusing on 'internal Lombardy' and on its model of persistent and diffusive industrialisation – according to a spatial directive that moves south-east from the north-west – we find two main tendencies from the historical perspective.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand there is a tendency to reconfirm and reinforce the partition of Lombard space and its history going back a long way in time. On the other



there is an increased marginalisation of the focus of analysis of areas of the lower plains, which had instead been at the very centre of social history in the 1970s.<sup>19</sup> The partition to which I am referring is basically that analysed in 1857 by Stefano Jacini in his *Proprietà fondiaria* (now Jacini 1996), where he identified three distinct territorial areas within the region, from north to south: the alpine and pre-alpine area, the dry plain (the ‘middle belt’ or ‘manufacturing region’ in Greenfield 1944) and the irrigated Bassa.

These three areas had their own internal topographic, demographic and productive coherence, which over the last two centuries were modified in complementary ways.<sup>20</sup> These changes should all be seen in relation to human intervention on nature and reconnected to the expansion of the diffused metropolis (which may be seen as a ‘fourth area’ in the centre). This internal coherence must at the same time be seen alongside resistance to interdependence and the productive vocations of the regional outskirts (Mainardi 1998). Paradoxically, however, to go back to the ‘Cattanean’ influence on Lombard historiography, the area that most resists regional analysis is precisely the wet plain area, due to the great agricultural leasing and to the *cascina*, instruments in the transition to capitalist agriculture in the nineteenth century (Della Valentina 1987, 1990; Crainz 1989; Della Peruta 2005). This happens despite the fact that this region provided over 10% of Italian agricultural production in the last two decades of the twentieth century, and even though the agricultural contribution to regional income had by now gone down to about 2% (Mainardi et al. 1979, 138).

Interest in this area has been concentrated, over the last few years, on the loss of the field-hand workforce, which occurred between the middle 1920s and the economic boom in the entire area of the Po Plain (see for example Crainz 1994; Cazzola 1996). Recently Petrillo (2004) has worked on the society of the lower Milan area in the first 60 years of the twentieth century and Battilani and Bigatti also conducted some studies on the dairy and cheese industries (2002). That said, with the exception of Maria Malatesta’s 1989 overview of the interests of landowners (in the nineteenth century) there are no studies on those renting and on the great landownership in the Bassa.<sup>21</sup> There are no case studies, which would allow for a more articulated illustration of the sharing of land rent responsibilities and of their impact on the regional economy.

Socioeconomic history has, to be fair, always privileged structures over people and case studies, and not only in the Lombard context. In the last 20 years, furthermore, there has been a further weakening of interest in labour history. Farmers and blue- and white-collar workers have become unpopular subjects for contemporary historians.<sup>22</sup> The opposite can be found in the historiography on the great entrepreneurs, which is dynamically engaged in looking for new sources and methods as well as new interpretive frameworks.<sup>23</sup> These works share an attempt to find the historical roots of Lombard entrepreneurship from different perspectives; they have done so in order to shed light on Lombard economic enterprise, one of the long-lasting components in the imaginary of regional identity.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, studies still need to move beyond the models of ‘democratic capitalism’ of industrial districts, to a study of the middle classes and of industrial labour, despite renewed interest in the ‘Lombard production’ on the small and micro scale and in the political orientation and lifestyles of the region.

More generally, the deconstruction of many generalisations on class could also help sociological studies address the multiple identities in sectors of the professional and productive world in relation to places of birth and residence, as competing elements in the definition of their social, political and ideological placement. These interpretive tools

emerge more naturally in studies of migration, which have traditionally paid attention to the local context and to the link between it and migrants' place of origin.<sup>25</sup>

### **'An industrious people little moved by ideology'**

The subheading refers to the quote by which Guido Piovene (1993, 92) summed up the general character of Lombards towards the middle of the 1950s. His was a witty approximation of reality that was part of a stereotype nourished carefully over the years and which decades later was asserted with similar insistence by Gianfranco Miglio (1989, 16) in the preface to one of the volumes of his *Civiltà di Lombardia*. Miglio wrote: 'the root of the apolitical (or anti-political) vocation of Lombards must be found precisely in the implicit cosmopolitanism of the economic operator'.

If historiography was able to highlight an identity trait common to all contemporary Lombards, it did so on the basis of the absolute pre-eminence of a dense and segmented civil society, shaped by economic interests, and deriving its tendency towards self-organisation and a willingness to function as a subsidiary precisely from these interests. This evokes the characterising presence and continual evolution of social Catholicism (from the end of the nineteenth century) and the traditional charitable propensity of local aristocracies. These characteristics, however, can be found in an area that extends far beyond Lombardy. Furthermore empirical research into the very concept of a 'Lombard' civil society highlights as another typical element of the region the interconnectedness and rivalry between the various Lombard centres, suggesting the need to talk about 'Lombard societies' in the plural.

Economic dependencies and political rivalries between the Lombard provinces are behind the difficulty with which the region and its people have been integrated into the needs of national politics and its compromises. What emerges is a kind of local character that feeds on nostalgia for traditional social balances and which eventually finds a voice in anti-state ideologies of various forms. One clear example of this came in the opposition brought by the so-called 'Stato di Milano' to Crispi's politics of the mid-1890s.<sup>26</sup> The separatist traditions of Milanese civil society also took on a progressive form in the period of the popular town councils in Milan and later of the socialist councils of 1913–1922 when the industrial efficiency of the municipality was countered with to the inertia of the central state (Sapelli 1996; Colombo 2001; Panaccione 2001).

Even during the fascist period, at least until the mid-1930s, there was significant complexity in the relationship between Lombard society and the political system. These neither one-directional nor static relations triggered tension and torsion in the very organisms of the regime (party, mass organisations, pensions and charities), which seemed to bear, rather than control, the polycentrism of Lombardy. The regime, over 20 years, thus failed to change the fundamental conditions behind the rivalry amongst the provinces and within them (Betri et al. 1989).

During the resistance (1943–1945) the spontaneous organisation of the headquarters of the CLN (Committee for National Liberation) happened on a regional basis and this was something new to Lombardy.<sup>27</sup> Despite the prospective of self-government developed precisely during the work of the CLN, political dynamics that still suffered from the rivalries between provinces and tensions were added to the logistical and practical problems of the coordination of the movement (see for example: Borgomaneri 1995;



Lombardi 2003). This may also explain why it has been impossible, so far, to write a complete history of the Lombard resistance.

In the years following the Second World War the ‘apolitical’ prejudice and a persistent lack of will to make Lombardy a site for the development of a political culture with a national perspective (Chiarini 2004) continued to dominate Lombard society. At the time the region was a site for ideological clashes between the major parties – solidly structured and oriented towards a centre – and for around 15 years the parties were able to subsume a good part of the interests present in the region within their agendas.

The encounter between the powerful controlling tendencies of the parties and the multifaceted tendencies towards autonomy of the region led to a brief explicit campaign to ‘nationalise’ the city of Milan. The tensions between Milan’s goals and the political needs of the nation in handling the transformations of the industrial and consumer society opened up in Milan the ‘laboratory of reforms’, which led the city governments of the centre-left to begin a reformist phase, contributing to a model of political coalition embraced on the national level.<sup>28</sup>

There are few historical studies on the following decades (see for example: Bocca 1993; Biorcio 2001; Landoni 2005); we are missing, for example, in-depth studies of administrative politics, as well as on the relationship between politics and economic interests, not to mention the social dynamics and trade union history of the region. Attention has mostly dwelled on the *fin de siècle* developments of those decades, which have tended to be reduced to a rather simplistic view of ‘deindustrialisation’ with its more hedonistic corollary of the ‘Milano da Bere’ (‘Milan: good enough to drink’). The historiography of that time has been primarily drawn to studying the birth and later the electoral triumphs of the Lega Lombarda.

Historical interpretations of the Lega, as far as concerns the identification of Lombardy, move especially along two points of view that complement rather than contradict each other. On the one hand historiography has pointed out the re-emergence of the traditional apolitical tendencies of the region, finding a strong correlation between the fragmentation of the business world (Berta 2007) and the loss of identity following the disappearance of the dominance of the factory and/or of the land (for the area in the Po valley) in the working experience of Lombards. Such work illustrates the re-emergence of a quite ancient schism between an important part of civil society and state institutions. This division made the concept of ‘Lombardy’ (and later of ‘Padania’) a kind of ‘logo’, upon which to project anti-centralist prejudices and to be used as an instrument to agitate anti-institutional feelings (Biorcio 1997) for, however, eminently political goals. The goals were clearly to build a party capable of controlling the government of the state, in coalition with others (Miglio 1994; Farrell and Levy 1996).

On the other hand another branch of historiography concentrates on the ability of ‘leghismo’ to reinterpret existing local subcultures, redirecting them in an ethnic direction (Cento Bull 2000a; Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001), to reinvent a Lombard identity that feeds on supposed social, economic and cultural homogeneities, which the region nevertheless does not offer. Such an approach brings out the smaller municipal homelands that different regimes and policies since Italian Unification had played on in order to consolidate control of the territory, and nurtures feelings of belonging to a local identity in ways similar to those used to build a sense of national identity (Cavazza 1997; Morandi 2010). The persistence of a sense of belonging culturally to a smaller locality, variously used and reinterpreted by the mass parties as a way of reinforcing the culture of the

nation-state, is then seen as re-emerging in an atomised form at the end of the twentieth century, after the collapse of the big parties, DC and PCI in particular. The Northern League would then make political use of the re-emergence of these local identities, by promoting and interpreting them in political terms not only in Lombardy but also all over Northern Italy (Diamanti 1995, 1996).

It is still difficult to place the political dynamics of Lombardy at the end of the twentieth century into a broader historical perspective, given that events are still so recent. Research so far undertaken has pointed out the recovery (or reinvention) of an element of Lombardism, the ‘myth of civil society’, which nevertheless must be seen in the plural – civil *societies* – perhaps drawn along the same geomorphologic and productive subdivisions of the Lombard territory already highlighted by Jacini in the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> It is impossible to follow in detail all the different pathways taken by Lombard cultural and political identities, just as one cannot grasp their full unfolding in historical discourse. Historians have been most interested and passionate about pursuing the areas relating to the political class, to associations and to charities.

It is not clear from historical studies whether one can talk of a ‘Lombard’ political class, supporting Cesare Correnti’s 1868 view. One of the first Lombard deputies to the national parliament, Correnti said ‘I don’t like to talk about Lombardy, I never spoke of her and I shall be happy for it to be little discussed in this setting, given that of all nobility the one I prefer is the nobility of silence’.<sup>30</sup> It was more ostentation than observation. For the entire era of the right this ‘Lombard fraternity’ (*Consortia lombarda*) would be talked about extensively, often confusing the conservative power networks of the city of Milan (whose voice emerged from the daily *La Perseveranza*) with a more generic gathering of minds that would make itself felt in parliament, with no shared strategy or identity that could clearly connect it to the Lombard territory.

Historical overviews have tended to reconnect Lombard deputies to the conservative agenda of the Milanese deputies, but this still needs to be verified. In order to ascertain whether this is true, studies are needed on the parliamentary activity of the elected Lombard deputies, starting from their electoral colleges, their networks of power and local interests. There are no studies of this kind relating to the nineteenth century, while there are some works on the Giolitti period, relating to the entire region.<sup>31</sup> As for the liberal era, it is most productive to start one’s analysis from the provincial level, where the needs of local communities emerge and we can see the main mediation between local autonomy, parliament and government, leading to the selection and formation of the ruling classes. There are few studies with this spatial perspective and it is therefore necessary to refer to the more common studies on the great provincial capitals and the municipal administrations, or to biographical studies in order to look beyond the fragmentation of local politics and to try to reconstruct a periodisation internal to the ruling classes of Lombard cities (Carusi 2003).

For the moment the periodisations available are linked to national events and decisions (especially relating to electoral, political and administrative laws) affecting the political orientation of those elected and their professional and cultural composition. These studies find a common characteristic of Lombards to be the reluctance to take office on both a local and a central level; this in itself is not enough, however, to interpret this phenomenon as Lombard political sloth, given that this criticism was regularly brought by the prefects against the political class across the entire Italian territory.

The most lively focus of ‘Lombardist’ historiography has been on the early tendency to form associations, which emerged and established themselves in the region during the liberal era, affecting different social classes from the working class (with mutual association and unions – see for example Nejrotti 2001), to the fraternities found in aristocratic and bourgeois circles (Meriggi 1992; Canella and Maifreda 2008) to interest groups (Morris 1993; Bardelli 2007). Special attention has been paid to industrial associations, trumpeted as specific to the region by Lombard entrepreneurs over their national counterpart.<sup>32</sup> There exist many studies on the theme of industrial associations adopting many different interpretive frameworks, although they rarely choose a regional perspective.<sup>33</sup> These studies all agree, however, that associations and interest groups are the main protagonists of the civic history of the region.

This theory of the independent mobilisation of society and associations as the primary characteristic of Lombards comes from far away and has been continuously fuelled by different historical studies, which can mostly be linked to two views. The first is Putnam’s view of social capital as an element of civil progress (Putnam 1997) and the second is the tradition in Catholic historiography, which sees the pre-eminence of civil society and its persistence in Lombardy as manifested in the practices of charity and solidarity in the region (Bona Castellotti et al. 2001). Einaudi’s *La Lombardia in Storia delle regioni* (Bigazzi and Meriggi 2001) gathers and basically follows this study trajectory based on the concept of *civicness* as a way of summing up the identity of the region.

What these studies do not fully explain is whether this horizontal activism of civil society is an early symptom of a developed and precocious modernity of the region, according to a Tocquevillian liberal-democratic model, or whether it expresses the persistence of a pre-modern and corporate vision of civil society. Between these two extremes there are many nuances, for example there is the tradition of participant Catholicism, which links the associations in the mountain valleys of Lombardy with that of vast areas of the north-east of the peninsula (Cartocci 1994). Another example is the persistent centrality of the family in directing entrepreneurial inclinations as well as the political views of members of the association towards voluntary work, NGOs and charities (Caltabiano 2002). The centrality of the family can be interpreted in the negative sense as ‘familism’ if compared with the idealised individualism of the Anglo-Saxon model, although from the few empirical studies available it rather shows the ability of Lombard family networks to adapt to the times and the political seasons, finding new ways of expressing civic participation.

## Conclusion

This article has highlighted the difficulty historiography faces when reading or creating homogeneity and coherence in the history of the region of Lombardy. Those who thought they had found it – in enterprise, in politics or more feebly and sporadically from the ethnic standpoint – have mostly reinvented the region, choosing a part of it to make into a symbol of the whole. Studies of the history of ‘Lombardism’ have had better results, particularly those studies that have considered associations as the site upon which different political cultures and social identities have converged in the region over the past two centuries. We are thus invited to further our understanding of associations, perhaps incorporating them more frequently in the history of science and the arts and with studies

of administrative institutions where corporate interests and ideal vocations exercise their power and influence.<sup>34</sup> These studies appear to be the most promising way to make sense of such a complex and diverse identity.

*Translation by Eleanor Chiari*

## Notes

1. This article is a further development of ideas already presented in the special issue of the journal *Memoria e ricerca*, 2006, no. 22, *Storie regionali*, edited by M. De Nicolò extending their focus to the Lombard region.
2. Cantù (1844), vol. 1, 1–78; Cattaneo (1844), XI–CXIII; Correnti (1847). For a critical evaluation of the ‘Lombardist’ narrative also in other texts see Sofia (1988); Meriggi (1996), 3–37.
3. The historical contribution to the regional exhibitions set up at the time of the celebrations of Italian Unification Italia ’61 – Comitato regionale lombardo (1961) – basically reestablished the broad periodisations of the texts on Lombard exceptionalism, trying to find in ‘almost two millennia of history’ the ‘true face of Lombardy’ as Marazzi wrote in the preface (1961).
4. See for example the extensive bibliography of Lombard history gathered by the journal *Storia in Lombardia*, published in instalments from no. 1 in 1987 to no. 3 in 2004, with volumes and pamphlets related to it published in the period 1984–1998 for Lombard provinces, and extended to 2000 for the province of Milan.
5. *Storia di Cremona* (2005); *Società pavese di storia patria* (2000) is more a history of a ‘duchy’ than a province; the recent *Storia di Mantova* (2008) was the provincial capital at its centre.
6. In the series – Rumi-Mezzanotte-Cova (1995–2001), published by the Cassa di risparmio delle provincie lombarde, we find the volumes: *Como e il suo territorio* (1995); *Brescia...* (1996); *Bergamo...* (1997); *Cremona...* (1998); *Mantova...* (1999); *Pavia...* (2000); *Sondrio...* (2001). There is also a series of popular works on the provinces which argues along similar lines as described above without dwelling at all on the institutional or administrative history of the Province. See for example: Di Bari (2006) who looks at the Province of Pavia from prehistory to 1945.
7. *Storia di Milano* (1953–1996); recent volumes pay even more attention to the city’s administrative machine (cf. vol. XVIII, *Il Novecento*, 3 issues, 1995–1996).
8. Cattaneo (1858), 82. This view was empirically confirmed by the data from a survey run by the Consiglio Regionale Lombardo in 1984 where only 14% of Lombard residents interviewed chose their regional identity as their primary identity, preferring professional, class or city or national identifications instead; cf. Biorcio (2004, 80–2).
9. Gambi (1963); sulle matrici culturali del ritaglio regionale Lombardo [about the cultural origins of boundaries of the Lombard Region] see: Muscarà (1968).
10. Galluccio and Sturani (2008). Una operazione di decostruzione di simboli e miti della identità mantovana, e il loro mutare di segno nel tempo [A deconstruction of symbols and myths in Mantua’s identity, and their changes through the times] in Bertolotti (2003).
11. Decleva (1980); Lacaita (1997); Redondi and Zocchi (2006); Audenino et al. (2008). The same arguments on the historical supremacy of Milan as modern city par excellence were used to support the candidacy of Milan for Expo 2015: [http://www.expo2015.org/ht/it/milano/perche\\_milano.html](http://www.expo2015.org/ht/it/milano/perche_milano.html) (official site of Expo 2015, accessed May 2010).
12. In general: Zaninelli (2004); Cafagna and Crepax (2001).
13. See also Cafagna (1995), Avagliano (1988).
14. Consonni and Tonon (2001); for further developments: Turri (2000); Berta (2008).
15. This affected different industrial sectors over the contemporary period: first the cotton sector, then the chemical, electrical, steel and mechanical sectors. See Colli (2001); Bigazzi (1988); Bezza (1991). The question of heavy industry is inevitably intermingled with the banking sector, which we can only hint at here. See Confalonieri (1994).

16. Mainardi et al. (1979). The most conspicuous manifestations of the industrial boom were found in Turin and its hinterland. Nevertheless it was Milan that was seen as the capital of the economic 'miracle': Petrillo (1992).
17. There are, however, histories of specific companies, see for example: Savaré (1990); Mantegazza and Pavese (1993). For the nineteenth century: Zaninelli (1995), and in general: Tarulli (2001).
18. D'Attorre (1998). It would also be important to consider the phenomenon in the opposite direction, looking at the penetration in the Lombard context of 'Venetian style enterprise' in the last decades of the 1900s: Bonomi (1997).
19. M.L. Betri, G. Della Valentina, C. Fumian, P.P. D'Attorre, A. De Bernardi, L. Faccini, G. Crainz.
20. Already in the work of Romani (1949–1950; 1955).
21. See also Banti (1989).
22. See for example: Antonioli et al. (1992); Soresina (1992); De Bernardi (1993); Maifreda et al. (2006).
23. Garruccio and Maifreda (2004). Another area of Lombard enterprise that has consistently interested historians is the editorial sector: Decleva (2007); Piazzoni (2007).
24. Amongst the many examples see: Borruso (1996); Colli (1999); Maifreda (2000); Bigatti (2000); Romano (2000); Martignone (2001); Polese (2004). See also: Borruso and Silva (2001).
25. Methodological considerations can be found in Audenino (1999, 166–78).
26. The main reference here is Fonzi (1965); see also Meriggi (1996, 76–8).
27. Ziviani Pianciamore (1981), 105–65; also essential Grassi and Lombardi (1981).
28. Fiorini (2006); Landoni (2007); Lacaita and Punzo (2008). On the contemporary role of the 'national' ambrosian church: Adornato (1988); Ferrari (2001).
29. Biorcio (2004). To the three 'regions' of Lombardy one must add the Milanese metropolitan area with its own characteristics relating to political and electoral behaviour.
30. Correnti to the Chamber of Deputies, December 14, 1868, cited by Rumi (2003), 112.
31. Besana (1993). Few studies exist on electoral history. See Comero and Rovati (1999).
32. Fiocca (1994); Ceruti (2000); Petrillo (2001). A similar development has affected agriculture ever since the agricultural society became regional in 1862 in open opposition to any project of national association: Brianta (1994).
33. Choices of this kind can be seen in relation to more recent studies on the structures of the workers' movement, especially in the labour chambers, which adopt a perspective of history internal to the agency and are therefore more provincial, a perspective almost forced by the sources (the archives of the agencies). Recent works include: Torre Santos (2005); Granata and Romano (2006); Antonioli (2001).
34. See essays by G. Acerboni, A. Visconti, O. Selvafolta and R. Riccini, in Bigazzi and Meriggi (2001); and also Robbiati Bianchi (2007); Canadelli and Zocchi (2008); Raponi (1991).

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