

Self-employment. Reflections on a model of representation for an emerging collective interest

SUMMARY: 1. Position of the problem. – 2. Self-employment associations. – 3. Current features of a representation system being constituted. – 4. A possible reference model: employer associations. – 4.1 Comparative experience. – 5. Concluding points.

1. Position of the problem.

In the current historical phase, the self-employed represent a category of particular interest, as not only has it increased numerically, but has also undergone a sort of "revolution", leading to a notable and unexpected change for the category. It is a heterogeneity of male and female workers, ranging from the advanced tertiary sector (the so-called *Knowledge Economy Cognitive Capitalism*) to the professional associations and those who are unregulated.

For a clearer framework, it is considered appropriate to retrace the evolution of self-employment working backwards. A first phase can be placed from the second post-war period to the end of the 1960s, when the growth of self-employment is attributable in particular to the proliferation of small craftspersons and retailers since, during the period of reconstruction, trade and crafts constituted key sectors of the Italian economy, as well as forming a strong attraction for workers who were low skilled but typified by ambitions of social mobility. In this context, therefore, a large number of workers is created, who make up what has been called "autonomous petit bourgeoisie", supported by a protectionist public regulation and with reduced access barriers. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, the component of self-employment increased due to the proliferation of small and micro enterprises, linked to the spread of industrial districts.

The current phase began, however, in the 1990s, and is characterised by a strong expansion of the tertiary sector. In this way there has been a growth of professional activities and highly specialised occupations, both of an intellectual nature and with high technical qualifications. The growing number of people who have moved towards self-employment can also be traced back

to the high rates of unemployment on the one hand, and the increasingly felt needs of work-life balance on the other. Moreover, it is the self-employed, not the dependent workers, who are the main users of the new job opportunities put in place by the platforms, in the dual form of intermediation of "physical services" and "virtual services".