

# Chapter 8

## Between Tradition and Transition: The Academic Career in Italy

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### 8.1 Introduction

Several changes have affected the Italian university sector since the Second World War. Political and societal conditions have impacted the system, which have challenged not only its structures and workings but also the main actors working inside it: The academics.

In this chapter, I focus on a particular and crucial aspect of the academic profession – the recruitment and career system and how it has changed through time. The civil servant status enjoyed by academics means that access to and career development in the profession is regulated by the State. Thus, the main source of change originates with centrally located policy making activities. At the same time, access and career decisions within the regulative framework are largely dominated by the academic community, in particular by full professors. These two structural features create a particular type of structure of coordination, where the academic oligarchy is able not only to influence the State and its regulative activities (Clark 1983), but also to de-couple substantive decision making processes from regulations which work as a legitimating formal framework for decisions, or in Meyer and Rowan's (1977) terms as a ceremony. This, in turn, is due to the organisational nature of the university as a professional bureaucracy. On the one hand, the university depends on formal mandatory rules of operation (the bureaucratic and formal side); on the other hand, given its professional-based organisation, actors enjoy quite a large degree of autonomy in their decisions and operations; as professional organisations, they are necessarily based on a logic and practice of members' cooptation.

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Special attention is given here to changes affecting the recruitment and career system between the late 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s. This period saw the institutional framework governing the recruitment and career system changed several times, significantly altering its conditions and dynamics. This, in turn, has produced a challenging environment for academics and for the logic and the practice governing recruitment and career advancement that characterises the academic profession. I will show how the academic community responded to those changes and alterations in the period between 1999 and 2014, albeit the effects and responses of 2010 reform cannot be fully assessed, since the recruiting procedures are currently ongoing (August 2014).

The chapter is organised in five sections. In the first section, I will sketch out a historical perspective of how the Italian professoriate has evolved between the Second World War and 2010. The second section will deal with the changes to the institutional framework regulating the recruitment and career system in the same period, highlighting the various regimes regulating and governing the academic profession and identifying their distinctive features. The third section considers the process of institutionalisation of non-tenured and fixed-term academics; while various precarious roles have always characterised the academic profession (especially for new entrants), new regulations institutionalised this *de facto* state of affairs, creating an academic periphery and a highly stratified profession. The fourth section will focus on the academics' responses to recruitment and career system reform in the period 1998–2014. Here I will show how the traditional guild-type structure had been combined with the new regulative environment and the financial constraints introduced by the law. I will also discuss the effects this combination produced, which were used as a legitimating argument to introduce a new wave of reforms. Finally, in the last section I will deal with how academics perceive and evaluate the conditions affecting their career opportunities and perspectives, drawing on the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) survey.

## **8.2 The Historical Evolution of the Professoriate – 1946–2010**

The end of the Second World War allowed Italy to become a democratic republic. On the 1st of January 1948, the republican constitution came into force and a process started of dismantling the fascist era norms and administrative apparatus.

In 1958, a new law governing academic staff meant that professors were recruited through a national public competitive exam and they were granted freedom in their teaching and researching duties. Every detail of academic staff matters was regulated centrally, bestowing civil servant status on the professoriate. The Italian university system was able to preserve its historic elitist structure for the whole of the next decade. Access to university at this time was reserved for those students coming from academic oriented upper secondary schools (Lyceum) and strict limitations

were placed on students coming from professional upper secondary schools (like commercial schools) who could only enrol in study courses like economics and agricultural science. This elite feature is reflected in the number of academic staff: 1809 full professors. Full professors were aided by various non-staff academics (appointed by the Ministry of Public Education), some hired on fixed-term contracts, some collaborating on a voluntary base (appointed by rectors) and others under precarious forms of employment. The academic staff, appointed by the ministry and hired on fixed term contracts, that comprised the professoriate amounted to less than 4000 up until the early 1960s, while enrolled students totalled some 335,000 (source: ISTAT 1997).

Although there were limits on intake, university enrolments kept growing constantly over the decade, as the result of the expansion of upper secondary students. The younger cohorts of society exerted growing pressure for an open-door system for university access, which was finally instituted in 1969. This point marked the beginning of the massification of the university system, albeit only in terms of access and without changing its organisational features. This law affected university and the academics dramatically: while the teacher/student ratio was 1/45 in the academic year 1966–1967, the ratio reached at 1/60 in the academic year 1970–1971 (ISTAT 1997). The response to this situation was to increase the number of full professors and other academic non-tenured roles. However, the non-staffed and precariously employed academics were adding increasing pressure to be employed as staff, backed by unions that exerted strong pressures on political and governmental structures.

This state of affairs quickly became unsustainable, and by 1973 a law had been passed resolving the problem of non-staff academics. This law was poignantly entitled ‘Urgent provisions concerning academic staff’. Notwithstanding its stated urgency, the law was implemented slowly and in a piecemeal fashion. This was a result of ministerial delays in issuing the competitive exams for career promotion. Thus, the few cases where upgrading to full professor took place made little change to the situation. Only in the 1980s did things noticeably start to change.

In that year a limited university reform was approved instituting the doctorate and departments as organisational units for research, alongside the faculty structure. More importantly, it resolved the academic staff issue, which could no longer be contained. This was tackled using two measures:

1. The academic career gained two new levels. The ‘associate professor’ was a new level hierarchically below full professor and the category of ‘researcher’ represented the first step in the academic career. Researchers were not supposed to have teaching duties, or where they did, they were very minimal. Both positions were permanent. The professoriate was, as such, structured over three levels;
2. Law stated that the 15,000 full professors, 15,000 associate professors and 16,000 researchers would be hired, to be staggered over the following 4 years after publication of the law. Moreover, this law stated that competitive exams for recruitment and career advancement should take place every 2 years.

At the end of the decade, the professoriate had reached around 41,000 academic staff, while about 1,300,000 students were enrolled. Yet over this same period, the number of competitive exams for both recruiting academics and career advancement started declining and at the beginning of the 1990s they become notably infrequent. Two factors affected this trend: first, recruitment and career advancement grew very quickly until the second half of 1980s, saturating the available positions as fixed by law; second, university funding constrained the number of competitive exams for new positions.

Thus, the 1990s saw the career dynamics of academic staff stagnate. Between 1990 and 1999 the professoriate grew only 4 %, reaching 49,000 academics by 1999. Meanwhile, student numbers grew remarkably in the same decade, registering an increase of 21 % (from 1,381,361 to 1,685,000) (source: Ministry of University and Research-Statistics Office).

Between 1996 and 2000, a centre-left government embarked on an overarching university reform aimed at widening the institutional autonomy. As part of this reform, a new law was passed in 1998 regulating the academic career and recruitment process. Competitive exams were devolved to the institutional level: each university was free (within its financial limits) to open a competitive exam for a position; those who qualified for that position (up to three qualifications were awarded for each position, except for the research position which awarded just one) could use it to be hired by a national university. This law stimulated the sector (especially in terms of career advancement) and between 1999 and 2007 academic staff became more dynamic. Academic staff growth over the period reached 22 % (rising from 50,901 to almost 62,000), while student growth over the same time was less than 6 %, (rising from 1,685,000 to 1,781,659) (source: Ministry of University and Research-Statistics Office).

In 2001, the centre-right won the general election. The new government sought to repeal the previous university reform. This goal was never to be fully accomplished, but over the next 5 years something did change, and that constituted the starting point for what was to happen between 2008 and 2010. In general terms, university sector policy-making became increasingly centralised and most university issues were de facto governed by the Ministry of Economy. This represented a new form of dirigisme and centralisation, leveraging control over public financing and diminishing institutions' autonomy.

A new reform of the juridical status of academic staff in this period – career and recruitment system, duties and rights and salary – was issued in 2005 at the end of the government's term in office. This law, although never fully implemented, nonetheless had consequences for the evolution of the professoriate. A first consequence was the reduction in the qualifications awarded by the competitive exams, from three to two. Secondly, and more importantly, no competition exams had been held since 2007, awaiting the full implementation of the new regulative framework for recruitment and career advancement. As a result, the growth of the professoriate turned negative, except for research positions which witnessed a small but quite constant growth. From 2007 to the end of 2010, full professors decreased from almost 20,000 to less than 16,000 (–24 %); assistant professors decreased from

19,000 to about 17,000 (around  $-10\%$ ); and researchers grew from just over 23,000 to almost 25,000 (around  $+6\%$ ). In total, the professoriate decreased in this period from almost 62,000 to less than 58,000, a decrease in percentage terms of  $7\%$  (source: Ministry of University and Research-Statistics Office).

In 2006, the centre-left won the general election, but it governed for only 2 years. In 2008 a new general election was called and won by the centre-right. University funding had been veritably attacked, with a financial cut of almost 1.5 billion euros in 4 years; a new general reform was issued at the end of 2010 introducing strong centralisation and dirigisme. While the reform changed again the juridical status of academics, introducing a much more centralised as well as very baroque system (with severe limitations) of competitive exams, natural wastage from retirement continues to exceed new recruitments and career advancement: between 2006 and 2013 full professor decreased by  $30\%$ , associate professors by  $17\%$ ; only researcher increased slightly in the period, by  $3\%$ . On the whole tenured academic decreased by  $14\%$ ; if we considered only the senior positions (i.e. full and associate professors) the decrease was equal to  $36\%$  in the period (source: Ministry of University and Research-Statistics Office). In early spring 2014 the first round of national qualification for career advancement was accomplished and currently universities are taken up in local procedures to select and hire qualified academics. Given the enduring financial shortage and the constrains on personnel turn-over, those who will be hired will be far less than enough to compensate retirements in full and associate positions.

### 8.3 Changes in the Legal Framework of Academics

After the Second World War, the legal framework of the academic profession changed over time. Changes affected the structure surrounding the positions, the duties and, above all, the recruitment/promotion system.

From 1946 to 1980 only full professors enjoyed a tenured position, which corresponded to holding a chair in a given subject. As mentioned in the previous section, there were other academic positions, but none of them had tenure. Academics in such positions were subordinate to chair-holders who oversaw all activities (teaching, researching, holding examinations, supervising thesis and so on), as well as career perspectives. Non-tenured academics could gain a chair through a national competitive exam where they were awarded the qualification that made them eligible to be hired by a university throughout the country. The Ministry of Public Education established national competitions and the number of positions in each disciplinary field, according to the financial resources available.

The 1980 law reformed the chair system, introducing a new professorship position – the associate professor. Associate professors had and still have the same duties of full professors (teaching and all related activities, research and organisational/administrative duties). Access to both positions was through national

competitive exams. A third staffed position, the researcher, was also introduced. In contrast to associate and full professors, the law stated that researchers' duties are limited to research activities; only a small portion of their time could be devoted to teaching (small group seminars, practical work, support for laboratory experiments, and similar). The professorship positions were also different in that positions for researchers were awarded by a local competitive exam (rather than a national exam) held by a faculty of an institution. Candidates' were evaluated for the three positions based on their research productivity (publication of articles and books) while a simulated lesson was also included for researchers being considered for an associate position.

All three positions were subject to a 3-year probationary period where entrants had to prove their quality (in particular, research productivity). At the end of this period, a national commission carried out an evaluation; a positive evaluation meant new entrants were 'confirmed'; a negative evaluation meant that the candidate would be granted a 2-year extension to prove their quality. If the second evaluation was negative, they were expected to leave academia whereupon they may accept a placement as an upper secondary school teacher or in a public administration institution as a civil servant.

Apart from the provisions regarding the staff positions, the law also instituted doctoral courses that were, and still are, designed to be training courses for prospective academics. Access to doctoral courses was established by the Ministry, organised by individual university departments and subject to a public competition among candidates.

Now let us turn to look at the economic aspect of the academic career. As civil servants, the law determines academics' salaries and their growth over time. Once they have been 'confirmed', a ladder with different levels determines academics' salaries (a salary scale), with each position linked to seniority. Every 2 years academics automatically shift to the next salary level. Each of the first six biennial rungs on the ladder would increase an academic's salary by 8 %. Subsequent salary points increased pay by 2.5 %. The annual salary consists of 13 salary instalments (that is, Italian academics receive two payments in December).

For full professors there are 24 salary levels (a minority of them reaches the highest levels, because most reach retirement age first); for associate professors and researchers there are 20 levels (it is easier for them to reach the highest levels). Table 8.1 shows the salary scale and the gross salary corresponding to 4 of the total levels (upon entrance, the first year after 'confirmation', after 10 years in the position and at the end of the career. Data refer to full time academics and are correct as of 1/10/2010):

The university reform issued in December 2010 (law n. 240/2010), introduced a major change to academics' salary scale. The biennial automatic salary increases linked to seniority gave way to triennial increases linked to a performance evaluation focusing on research outputs and teaching quality (assessed by students). In this case, salary increases are only awarded to those who have been positively evaluated. Yet, this provision hasn't been operative so far, because of salary increase freezing since 2008 and currently ongoing due to financial laws aiming at reducing the public spending and debt.

**Table 8.1** Salary scales and gross salary by position and seniority

Position	Salary level	Gross salary (€)
<b>Full professor</b>	Upon entrance	56,840
	First year after confirmation	60,158
		80,173
	Ten years after confirmation	120,000/133,000 <sup>1</sup>
End of career		
<b>Associate professor</b>	Upon entrance	43,023
	First year after confirmation	45,549
		59,519
	Ten years after confirmation	83,000/91,000 <sup>1</sup>
End of career		
<b>Reseracher</b>	Upon entrance (first year)	24,135
		24,481–24,827
	Upon entrance (2nd/3rd year)	34,897
		44,982
	First year after confirmation	63,000/67,000 <sup>a</sup>
	Ten years after confirmation	
End of career		

<sup>a</sup>The two values indicate the minimum/maximum salary at the end of career (25 years or more in a given position)

The recruitment/career system underwent three major reforms in 1998, 2005 and 2010. The 1998 reform changed the recruitment/careers system from being national/centralised to local/decentralised making institutions responsible for their own personnel policy, according to the goal of widening institutional autonomy. This entailed institutions advertising competitions (on the request of their faculties and within their financial limits), for each academic position; the responsibility for organising exams and evaluating candidates fell to the individual faculty. The new system awarded up to three qualifications for full and associate professors, while the same system was used for researchers as defined in the 1980 law. Qualifications allowed the holder to be hired by any Italian university.

The new system had been criticised for having created an excessive ‘localism’ in recruitment and career promotions: It was almost always the local candidates that were called by the institutions which opened the competition and those who gained the qualification were hired by their ‘home’ institutions. Later, data and explanations will be provided in respect of this phenomenon.

In 2005, a new reform of the juridical status of academics took place under the centre-right government. Although this law was not fully implemented, it is nonetheless important because the changes it introduced to the system for recruiting and promoting academics served as the basis for the 2010 reform. A first element of change altered the system of competition exams for full and associate professors. The new framework for career advancement was structured in two phases. The first phase was a qualifying round, consisting of national competitive exams (participa-

tion in the qualifying competitive exams was not subject to any restriction). Qualified candidates from the first phase become eligible to participate to the second phase; this was a comparative evaluation of eligible candidates carried out at the institutional level. Thus, the new framework was a mix of national and local mechanisms to evaluate and select those who aspire to promotion. Notably, universities continued to be allowed to hire eligible academics within their financial constraints (see note 5).

The position of researcher underwent a major change. The old, permanent position of researcher was abolished and a fixed-term position was introduced. Those who enter the career are hired on a 3-year contract, renewable for a further 2 years. If within 3 or 5 years a researcher has not gained the qualification for associate professor, they have to leave the university for a post in public administration or the school sector. To gain entry to the competitive exam for a research position, the candidate needs a doctoral degree or to have been awarded a research grant, in addition to authoring an adequate number of scientific publications.

In December 2010, the centre-right government passed a new general university reform. This reform had been carried out aggressively since 2008, when the Ministry of Economy decided to dramatically cut university funding by an amount totalling 1.5 billion euros, (equal to 15 % of the total funding). This cut was to be progressively implemented over 4 years. With a few exceptions, the reform of the recruitment/career system for academics was largely based on the previous law from 2005.

The position of researcher was left relatively unaltered by the 2005 law, with one new aspect: institutions could directly hire fixed term researchers (if their financial resources allowed) once they had passed the national qualification. In other words, the reform introduced something similar to a tenure-track system. On the contrary, the 'old' researchers have to go through the national qualification process and then pass the local evaluation and selection exams to be accepted for a position as an associate professor, and thus they cannot enjoy the tenure-track system. Since 2011, the recruitment of new researchers almost exclusively occurs with fixed term contracts, while the 'old' researcher position exams have been abolished. The career advancement procedures for full and associate professors continues to be covered by the 2005 law. Another change introduced regulated the salary increases of professors and 'old' researchers, as mentioned above, with the biennial automatic increases according to seniority being replaced by triennial increases linked to an academic's performance evaluation. Finally, the law states that a doctoral degree is a mandatory prerequisite for entry to the academic career.

These are the main changes and features of how the status of academics has changed over time. A synopsis presented in Table 8.2 shows the main events from 1980 to the present day:



**Table 8.2** Changes to the juridical status of Italian academics 1980–2010

Time period	Positions	Juridical status	Formal requirements for entry	Recruitment/career formal system	Salary	
<b>1980–1998</b>	Full professor	Civil servants	None	National competitive exams, evaluating publications.	Determined by law.	
	Associate professor			Number of available posts fixed by the Ministry.	Biennial salary increases defined by a scale linked to seniority.	
	Researcher			Teaching abilities were assessed only for those researchers wishing to become an associate professor.		
				A competitive exam for researcher positions, held locally		
<b>1998–2005</b>	Full professor	Civil servants	None	Local competitive exams held by university faculties evaluating publications.	Determined by law.	
	Associate professor			Number of available posts fixed by each institution.	Biennial salary increases defined by a scale linked to seniority.	
	Researcher			Teaching abilities were assessed only for those researchers wishing to become an associate professor.		
				A competitive exam for researcher positions, held locally		
				Recruitment/career linked to universities' budget limits.		
<b>2005–2010</b>	Full professor	Civil servants	Doctorate or research grant holder (up to 2010)	National competitive exams evaluating publications to qualify for associate and full professor positions and local choice based on comparative selection of eligible applicants.	Determined by law.	
	Associate professor				Contracted public employees	Doctorate (from 2010 on)
	Researcher	Triennial increases linked to each academic's performance evaluation (from 2010 on).				
	Fixed-term researcher					

## 8.4 Non-Tenured Academics: From Patrimonialism to Institutionalised Precarization

Italian university academic staff had historically been characterised by the presence of non-tenured and non-staff positions. As noted in Sect. 8.1, these academics served a support role to full professors, depending on them for all their activities and for their academic career perspective. Following Weber ([1922] 1968), this system of dominance has been labelled as patrimonialism by Giglioli (1979). Giglioli described it as the personal and discretionary power of full professors, whom non-tenured academics completely depended on: from the ‘call’ of the master to enter the first step of the profession, to their socialization to profession, to their duties and tasks, up to their career perspectives. In this sense, the patrimonialistic system was a combination of the traditional guild system (Clark 1977) and personalism (Weber [1922] 1968). It is manifest that these academics were exposed both to work exploitation and to a high degree of uncertainty regarding their career. Non-tenured and non-staff academics were increasingly hired through this system to cope with the growing number of enrolled students since 1969 when the university system started mass expansion. It is worth noting that this job and career insecurity was ‘regulated’ by the tacit norms of the profession based on the power of the chair-holders and the principle of loyalty to the master.

Besides reducing precarization, the 1980 reform also sought to reduce the perverse effects of patrimonialism. Yet, the reform also allowed some auxiliary positions to be hired on a fixed-term contractual basis. Although this provision in the law was not widely used, it is worth noting that it represented a first step towards the formalisation and institutionalisation of non-permanent and precarious positions inside academia. In other words, for the first time the law formally regulated this kind of contracted academic position, which from the late 1990s grew more common, leading to the most recent developments.

Since the 1998 reform – which introduced grant-financed researchers –, the number of such fixed-term contracts for young academics has grown. These fixed-term researchers also had some teaching functions, (albeit generally not formally recognised), widely considered to be part of their socialization with the profession. This growth was largely due to financial reasons: Universities can save money by hiring these contracted academics whose costs are far less than tenured academics, and at the same time, they are able to rely on this low-cost and flexible work force for research and teaching purposes. Since 2008, the figure of a fixed-term researcher has been added as a new academic position, reflecting the 2005 and 2008 reforms as discussed above.

Table 8.3 shows this growth since 2003. It must be noted that contracted positions have been present since 1998, but ministerial data are not available for years before 2003. The most recent report of the National Committee for Evaluation of the University System (CNVSU 2011), highlights how about 50,000 young academics were hired since 1998 as grant-financed researchers.

**Table 8.3** Number of young academics with research fixed-term contracts

<i>Type of contract/years</i>	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Post-graduate research grants</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3221	4649	6450
<b>Post doc-grants</b>	984	801	737	754	894	572	734	735
<b>Research grants</b>	9795	9872	9537	10,012	11,349	11,721	15,748	17,459
<b>Fixed -term researchers</b>	–	–	–	–	–	481	457	792
<b>TOTAL</b>	<i>10,779</i>	<i>10,673</i>	<i>10,274</i>	<i>10,766</i>	<i>12,243</i>	<i>15,995</i>	<i>21,588</i>	<i>25,436</i>

Overall, a growing academic periphery has been formally created and regulated. This is bound to grow in time, with the abolition of the ‘old’ stable researcher position and the introduction of the new fixed-term position. Data drawn from CNVSU for the first half of 2011 show that 1094 fixed-term researchers were recruited, representing a 38 % increase on the 2010 level over a period of 6 months. In 2010, this academic periphery accounted for 44 % of all academic personnel. This state of affairs is also generating a stratified structure in the academic profession, which can be illustrated as follows:

1. tenured academics with a stable position (researchers, associate and full professors);
2. new fixed-term researchers looking to attain a tenured position, although not linked to a real tenure-track system;
3. grant-financed researchers, looking to attain a fixed-term researcher position.

This stratification is not only the result of different kinds of contractual status, but mostly due to different degrees of uncertainty in the academic career paths – both between and within the three categories. In turn, career uncertainty largely depends on financial factors – the ability of an institution to recruit academics to tenured positions (associate and full professors) – and to the still enduring patrimonialistic logic which is still significantly affecting career prospects and paths.

## 8.5 Academic Responses to Recruitment and Career System Reforms

As noted above, between 1998 and 2010 the recruitment and career system has been reformed three times. It is not possible to assess the effects of the last two reforms (2005 and 2010), because the 2005 reform was never fully implemented and the 2010 reform is currently in progress with the hiring procedures of qualified

academics in the first round of national qualifications. As a result, competitive exams for career advancement have been blocked since 2008 and the number of academic staff is decreasing, as new recruits do not replace those that retire. Thus, to assess the effects of and how academics responded to changes in recruitment and the career system, I limit the analysis here to the period 1998–2004.

Considering the periods between 1997 (before the 1998 reform) and 2004 (before the 2005 reform was approved) and between 2005 and 2014 (the period of the two reforms) it is possible to identify four phases in recruitment and career advancement:

1. stagnation phase (1997–1998): This is the tail end of the wave of the hiring and promotion of academics started in the late 1980s, and preceding the implementation of the 1998 reform. All positions show flat growth;
2. thawing phase (1999–2002): In the first part of this phase, following the implementation of the reform (1999–2000), universities favour career advancement from positions as researchers to associate positions, in order to promote those researchers hired during the early 1980s waiting for a career advancement. The second part of the phase (2001–2002) is characterised by promotions from associate professor to full professor, while quite considerable growth also occurred in the two lower-ranking positions. This phase signals full implementation of the reform, both for recruitment and career advancement. In the thawing phase, growth in academics, in overall terms, was as much as 8.6 % (more than 4000 academics), the highest level since the early 1980s;
3. stabilisation phase (2003–2004): The rapid growth of the academic staff in the previous phase meant that universities had to accommodate the expenditure in their budget from promoting and recruiting academics. This meant that many universities reached, or came very close to reaching, the expenditure limit for personnel, thereby limiting further growth. In all positions, the number of retirements still exceeded the new recruits and promotions;
4. shrinking phase (2005–2014): The 2005 reform entailed a strong slow down in recruitment and career advancement dynamic. Figures in academic positions start showing negative values given to retirements not compensated by new recruitment and career advancements. In 2008 the financial cuts and the introduction of severe limits to academic personnel turn-over produce a blockage. The issue of the 2010 reform further worsened the situation: the professoriate has been witnessing a relevant shrinking in number because of retirements. As the first round of academics' national qualification

For the second phase, it is worth noting that the growth of recruitment and promotions in the three positions was strongly concentrated on promotions, none more so than in the case of full professors: Full professors grew by 34.8 %, associates grew by 15.9 % and researchers grew by 5.3 % (MIUR-Statistics Office). These percentages show how the reform was largely used by universities and the academic community to unlock career advancement, which had been blocked for about a decade.

Further, there are two, interrelated aspects that must be taken into account to understand the academic staff dynamic in this period.

Firstly, without doubt, the reform brought recruitment and career advancement closer to the actual development needs of the institutions. However, the reform acted in a peculiar way, affecting organisational features of the Italian university. From an organisational perspective, university had been historically a confederation of faculties inside which there had been hegemonic disciplines with powerful full professors garrisoning them. The institutional level had always been weak in all strategic matters, among which recruitment and promotion were the most important (Boffo et al. 2006; Clark 1977, 1983; Capano 1998, 2008; Rostan and Vaira 2011; Vaira 2008). Thus, personnel policy has always been implemented at the faculty level, while the institutional level serves to ratify decisions taken by faculties through negotiations between powerful academics based on the logic of cooptation. All together this enhanced faculties' power, with the combination of decentralised decision-making for personnel policy and the organisational features of the academe making recruitment and promotions an internal faculties' affair.

Secondly, the reform sought to stimulate the inter-institutional mobility of academics. The idea of the competitive exam for full and associate professors granting three qualifications, allowing the eligible academics to be hired by any other institution across the country, was meant to foster mobility, creating an academic labour market (Rostan and Vaira 2011). Universities responded largely by choosing to promote their own academics (CNVSU 2007). Between 1999 and 2004, most newly qualified full professors were hired by their own institutions (91 %); it is likely that the remainder (less than 9 %) had to move to another institution. New associate professors were slightly more mobile (around 25 %); three quarters of eligible candidates were hired by their own institutions. Associate professors had always been more mobile, although there was a tacit and informal agreement: after 3–5 years, those who moved away from the original institutions were called back by their alma mater, often with the perspective of gaining a full professorship.

This academic endogamy has been interpreted – especially at the political level – as a sign of academic familism based on the patronage system, strengthened by the local competitive exam mechanism. The familism and patronage system is a long lasting feature of the Italian university: for example, Clark (1977, 1983) defined this cultural trait as academic oligarchy based on the guild model, while Giglioli talked of academic patrimonialism (1979). Although true, this is just a part of history, for two important economic reasons: (a) since 2001, public funding of universities has been stable or received modest increases in nominal terms, while decreasing in real terms and (b) the institutions are bound by budget constraints on personnel expenditure. Those economic and financial factors combined make promoting the local candidates more convenient, because their marginal costs are far lower than a new full salary to be paid to candidates not belonging to the institution's academic staff.

On the whole, the aspects dealt with so far produce a particular career pathway, based on an internal labour market (Doeringer and Piore 1971; for the Italian case

see Bianco 2002; Boffo et al. 2004; Costa 2001; Rostan and Vaira 2011). In general, this kind of market works by promoting an organisation's internal human resources to occupy vacant positions instead of hiring them externally.

Although it is not yet possible to ascertain the effects of the 2010 reform on stabilized statistical data, it is possible to forecast its likely effects on the internal career dynamic, pondering whether it will be able to change the current state of affairs. One of the reform's main objectives is to reduce localism, introducing a system evaluating the candidate on two levels. As shown in Sect. 8.2, the first evaluation phase for the candidate takes place at the national level in a qualifying stage; qualified candidates are then evaluated for recruitment at the local level. It is precisely this second phase which raises several doubts about the ability of the reform to overcome localism. This is for a simple reason: institutions having to contend with financial constraints, as well as with funding cuts, find it far more convenient to hire the local candidates because of their lesser marginal costs. In other words, economic convenience will most likely reaffirm localism. Moreover, fixed-term researchers who qualified for promotion to associate professors will be hired directly, without any further evaluation, by their home institutions. Overall, reform will probably not be able to fulfil its purpose.

## 8.6 How Academics Perceive Their Career Conditions

Data from the Changing Academic Profession survey shows how Italian academics perceive their career conditions and how this perception has changed since their first appointment to a stable position. For the Italian case, data was collected between late 2007 and early 2008. This is important to note, because the survey took place before both the 2008 funding cut and the 2010 general reform that significantly worsened the general conditions in Italian universities and recruitment and career prospects in particular. Therefore, if the survey was repeated today, many interviewees' judgments, perceptions and representations on the topic would likely be far more negative than they were at the time.

Before discussing the data on the topic, it useful to present some basic background data related to the sample used as interviewees (shown in Tables 8.4 and 8.5). Table 8.4 shows how the sample compares to the whole academic population (based on data published by the Ministry of University and Research-Statistics Office on 31/12/2006); Table 8.5 provides data relating to the ages of the interviewees at different career points:

As Table 8.5 shows, academic careers take quite a long time to develop, particularly to reach a senior position. Careers also largely progress inside the same institution, confirming on a more general scale what has been noted in the previous section. These two aspects deserve further comment.

Firstly, the length of time needed for career development can be explained mainly by the fact that recruitment and promotion had been severely affected by the reform policies. This not only altered the institutional framework several times but also

**Table 8.4** Comparison between the sample and the academic population

	Sample	Population
N.	1701	61,743
Male	66.8 %	67.1 %
Female	33.2 %	32.9 %
Full Professor	30.4 %	32.0 %
Associate Professor	31.6 %	30.8 %
Researcher	38.0 %	37.2 %

**Table 8.5** Average age and number of years at different points in the career for the sample studied

	Years
Age when surveyed	50
Graduation age	25
Doctoral degree age (only those entering the academic career from 1986 onwards)	32.5
Age when appointed to first stable position	32.5
Age when appointed to the current position at the current institution	41
Years between graduation and current position	
<i>Senior position (Full + associate professors)</i>	20.2
<i>Junior position (Researchers)</i>	10.3
Years at the current institution	16
Years at a different institution	1.5

created long periods when career progression was blocked (the late 1980s, throughout the 1990s and from 2007 to the present). Financial shortages, both at a central and institutional level, contributed to this panorama. Such conditions have made recruitment and career progression a rather fragmented and drawn out process, besides creating a high level of uncertainty. Secondly, the low degree of mobility means that three features characterise the careers of Italian academics, namely: (i) a tendency for in-breeding and endogamy; (ii) the predominance of an internal labour market; and (iii) an engrained loyalty to the home faculty and powerful full professors acting as master and patron.

On balance, Italian academics are largely satisfied with their work conditions: About two thirds show rather a high level of satisfaction; in contrast, only 16 % are not satisfied. This judgement reflects the fact that the academic profession is expressive and vocational by choice. Nonetheless, three quarters of the interviewees perceive a sharp deterioration in the working conditions over time, notably so in the most recent years (in particular, this was the opinion of the younger academics). The financial situation is linked to this deterioration, directly impacting both work conditions (teaching and, especially, research) and recruitment and career dynamics. Those two opposing perspectives are only apparently a contradiction: On the one hand the expressive nature of academics signifies that their jobs are appreciated and valued; on the other hand, working conditions are the main source of frustration among aca-

demics. This is particularly true for researchers who perceive a high degree of uncertainty in their career development and, to a lesser extent, associate professors. In other words, the degree of pessimism is linked to the academic position: the lower the position, the higher the pessimism. This pessimistic outlook is also a result of the continuous waves of reform, constantly changing the institutional framework of the academic profession. Recruitment and career aspects were at the centre of these reforms, creating very unstable, uncertain and unpredictable conditions.

The respondents indicated that control over recruitment and career advancement is primarily in the hands of the faculties, where the main responsibility and decisions are taken. More specifically the faculty dean and the faculty board are seen as the major players in this area (about 33 % for both actors), followed by individual, powerful full professors (almost 25 %). This latter group are seen as influential at both the faculty (77 %) and department (58 %) levels, where decisions about recruitment and career are taken. This confirms the third point discussed in the previous section regarding the role of the faculty system and full professors.

The institutional level actors – the rector, academic senate and board of governors – have almost no role in such decisions (only between 2 and 3 % of respondents assign them a role in academic staff policy). Thus, apical actors – as has been noted in the previous section – act as ratifiers of faculty level decisions (within the university's budget availability and constraints). This reflects the traditional power structure in the Italian university, which has remained largely unaltered despite the various changes that occurred in the university sector and legislation. Although this argument is true, it should be remembered that universities are cooptative organisations everywhere, not only in Italy. As a result, those competent to judge who is entitled to enter the academic profession and to advance on the career ladder must be the academics themselves. This feature cannot be ignored when analysing academic recruitment and career progression.

However, it must be noted that the 2010 reform could potentially alter this state of affairs, because it gives more power to the institutional level for strategic decisions, including academic staff policies. At the time of writing (August 2014), it is not possible to assess whether this is happening, since career advancement under the new institutional framework is currently in its first stage of implementation, with the qualification process for evaluating academics being carried out at the national level. Yet, as noted in the previous section, the new reform will probably not be able to tackle and overcome the problem of localism and endogamic careers, because the financial cuts and constraints represent adverse conditions working against the changes the reform was intended to produce.

## 8.7 Conclusion

Although several changes occurred (both in society and in the regulative framework affecting universities, especially in the last three decades), recruitment and career dynamics still seem to be rooted in the traditional logic and practices of the



academic oligarchy. Nonetheless, changes – particularly those related to regulations governing the recruitment and career system – have been, and are, a source of consternation for the academic profession, which is experiencing a growing uncertainty and instability as well as deteriorating general conditions under which it operates.

Italian academics – and the university as a whole – are currently in the middle of the ford, between tradition and transition. In other words, they find themselves in a liminal situation (Vaira 2014), where they experience a set of conditions which are neither like those they were used to, nor are they so changed as to represent a new and different environment. This is mainly due to the several reform waves characterising the last decade, producing very unstable and ever-changing conditions, recently aggravated by the dramatic funding cuts accompanying the reform policies.

As far as recruitment and career issues are concerned, reform waves, especially those between 2005 and 2010, and the adverse financial conditions, since 2008, have produced not only instability, but also and more importantly, a blockage in the recruitment and career dynamics. As mentioned, between 2006 and 2013 the professoriate decreased by as much as 14 % with a peak equal to 36 % in the senior positions, while the current financing situation makes it likely that institutions will not be able to compensate this loss in the academic ranks with new qualified recruits.

In this perspective, the real and most dramatic challenge that universities and academics face is how to carry out their institutional goals effectively: education, research and knowledge transfer to society.

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