

## ***Neverland: Sardinia and the independence project of ProgReS***

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## **Introduction**

Among the Italian regions, Sardinia certainly stands out as one with very a distinctive identity, cultural and historical traits. Since the post-war period, a wide number of ethno-regionalist parties have attempted to exploit such distinctiveness, seeking some for of autonomy from the Italian Republic – drawing in particular on the experience of the *Partito Sardo d’Azione*. However, none of these political forces has managed to gain much public support or political clout either at regional or national level, especially due to the intrinsically divisive and exclusionary nature of their political message and organisation.

Within this context, the attention of this paper is focussed on ProgReS (*Progetu Repùblica de Sardigna*) – one of the ‘youngest’ ERPs in Sardinia. Although born only in 2011, ProgReS has immediately stood out in the Sardinian political context, especially for its ambition to open a new way for independentism based on a new rhetoric of ‘sardismo’, which finds its strength in the grassroots, rather than in the political elite (as in the experience of PSD’Az, for example).

Hence, the aim of this article is shed light on this new political actor, in order to understand its structures and organisation, and the way in which it seeks to politicise Sardinian identity. This, we argue, will allow us to understand what kind of ethnic entrepreneur ProgReS is within the category of ethno-regionalist parties in general, and in the context of Sardinian politics in particular.

This is achieved by means of a multi-layered analysis. Firstly, we examine the literature on ethno-regionalist parties, so as to understand the key dimensions that characterise this party family. Secondly, we place ProgReS within the narrative of *sardismo*, briefly reconstructing the history of autonomy/independence movements and parties in Sardinia, with a particular emphasis on the role of the *Partito Sardo D’Azione*, which is the oldest ethno-regionalist actor in the region and, indeed, in Italy. Thirdly, after having set the theoretical and historical framework for this research, we move on to an empirical analysis of the case of ProgReS. Here we focus on a content analysis of ProgReS’ official documents and political manifestos, so as to assess the key claims and dimension that define its agenda. Then, we use the data of a unique survey conducted among members and militants of ProgReS, as well as the findings of a elite interview with ProgReS’ regional co-ordinators<sup>1</sup>, to test and complement the content analysis. In this way, we can offer a detailed explanation of the structure, organisation, strategies of ProgReS and of the claims it endorses. Finally, comparing the theoretical stances with the empirical findings, we are able to assess that ProgReS is a *sui generis* ethnic entrepreneur, and stands out therefore from the cases studied so far within the ethno-regionalist party family in general and Sardinian ERPs in particular.

It is found that ProgReS has radicalised the Sardinian Question, by endorsing full independence and overtly exploiting the narrative of a distinctive Sardinian culture, identity and language in its claims. In this context, the centre-periphery cleavage has been reinterpreted by ProgReS, and the territorial and ethnical fracture has taken a new dimension in its rhetoric. Another element of innovation concerns the relevance of post-materialist values in ProgReS’ agenda. Moreover, unlike other ERPs parties in Sardinia, *ProgReS* has a strong link with the grassroots, promotes participation ‘from the bottom’, has no specific party-political leadership (drawing instead on the leverage of public figures endorsing its activities) and favours in its communication strategies the use of the web and new media – evoking, therefore, more the structure of a movement rather than that of a party.

### ***Theoretical Frame: the Ethno-regionalist party family***

Until a few decades ago, ethno-regionalist mobilisations were considered as a residual aspect of European politics, and ethno-regionalist party were therefore defined as belonging to the category of 'losers in the historical game' (Urwin, 1983). In short, ethnic and nationalist claims were seen by the scientific community as obsolete, and doomed to give way to more modern social and political demands such as class conflict, within a view of the nation-state as the ultimate form of political organisation (Tronconi, 2009).

However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, such perspective has been subverted. As a matter of fact, territorial cleavages have not only failed to disappear, but have instead gained a renewed prominence and a strong visibility in the European context. Scotland, Wales, Catalonia, the Basque Countries, to mention just a few examples, are cases that clearly illustrate the magnitude of the ethno-regionalist phenomenon in the contemporary political scenario. This, in turn, has created a new interest within scholarly research on the case of ethno-regionalist mobilisation (De Winter, 1998; Grilli di Cortona, 2003; Elias and Tronconi, 2011; Sandri, 2011).

Indeed, ethno-regionalist parties<sup>ii</sup> (ERP) are now considered as a specific party-family, with distinctive characteristics and many sub-categories. In general, ERP can be defined as political actors who claim to represent the interests of a distinctive national community (based on historical, cultural and linguistic specificity – or any combination of the three) within a state, and who demand for greater political autonomy for their territory (De Winter, 1998). Arguably, the conceptualisation of the socio-political phenomenon of ethnic mobilisation within territorially concentrated areas, encompassing both aspects of ethnic conflict and nationalism, is based on the idea that parties stand for goals and support ideologies that are rooted in the cleavage that define their identity (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan and Urwin, 1982; Sandri, 2009, p.1). Hence, as Türsan (1998) aptly underlines, ethno-regionalist parties stand for the empowering of the ethnic groups they represent and the subversion (although to varying degrees) of territorial power structures and the *status quo*.

Political parties are mainly defined by two interrelated elements, i.e. cleavages and issues (Türsan, 1998). Within this frame, ethno-regionalist parties are characterised by a particular emphasis on the centre-periphery cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan and Urwin, 1982), because they defend the interests of the periphery against a dominating centre; and by claims for a substantial reorganisation of the national state structures within which they are currently inscribed – which is *the* issue of ERPs (De Winter, 1998; Dandoy, 2010). In short, ERPs demand a political reorganisation of the state territorial structure and base these claims on the existence of ethnic cleavages, representing a clear fracture between the centre and the periphery.

Hence, ERPs deal with two, interrelated dimensions: a community/membership space (based on some common cultural/social/linguistic features and a shared history) and a geographic space (i.e. occupation of a territory and identification with it) (Urwin, 1983, p.237). The territorial dimension and the presence of an exclusive group identity are key to the discourse of ERPs, and are at the core of their electoral platforms (Muller-Rommel, 1998). ERPs convey “the effort of geographically concentrated peripheral minorities which challenge the working order and sometimes even the democratic order of a nation-state by demanding recognition of their cultural identity” (Muller-Rommel, 1998, p.19). This means that ERPs aim at

modifying their relations with the stated there are inscribed in (Türsan, 1998), challenging its boundaries and the distribution of power between the centre and the periphery – and therefore they question and oppose the foundations of the existing political system (De Winter, 1998).

In this sense, ethno-regionalist parties enshrine a particular form of nationalism – one that does not refer to the most common meaning of the term as a sense of belonging and affection of a specific people towards their State. Instead ERPs' nationalism refers to as a sense of 'hostility' towards the (host-)State, mixed with a sentiment of belonging and affection towards a different (i.e. *sub-State*) territorial entity (Tronconi, 2009), more or less imagined (Anderson, 1983). Thus, ERPs integrate the dimensions of ethnicity and regionalism (De Winter, 1998) – or, better, they combine the notion of 'ethnos', meant as a community defined by some kind of cultural boundaries, with the idea of territorial concentration at sub-state level (Gellner, 1983; Connor, 1994; Sandri, 2009; Tronconi, 2009), because their identity claims are rooted in a view of ethnic distinctiveness, and their nationalism is characterised by territorial demands within established states (Türsan, 1998). However, in practice, the type of demands for control over 'their' territory moved by ERPs may vary greatly. This implies that not all the ERPs aim at achieving full independence and sovereignty for the territory they represent (Tronconi, 2009; Dandoy, 2010).

Within scholarly literature, there is a wide range of classifications of ethno-regionalist parties depending on the intensity and radicalism of their territorial claims and the type of *ethnos* they endorse/aim at protecting (Strmiska, 2005; Tronconi, 2006; De Winter et al, 2006; Dandoy, 2010) and the extent to which they want to reorganise the distribution of power between the centre and the periphery. From this angle, ERPs can be defined based on whether they endorse soft demands (i.e. protectionist ERPs), mild demands (i.e. decentralist ERPs), or radical demands (i.e. secessionist ERPs) (Dandoy, 2010). In short, protectionist ERPs do not overtly challenge the existing structure of the state, but aim instead at gaining recognition of linguistic, religious, or cultural identity by means of participation to the national political life. Decentralist parties demand a structural reorganisation of the state, power, institutions and internal borders. Secessionist parties, instead, demand full separation (i.e. and exemption from social norms) from their host-state – hence, they demand to change the 'ownership' of a territory and they aim at becoming independent nations, challenging in this way not only the national but also the international order. An alternative distinction along the same lines (i.e. the degree of intensity and radicalism of the territorial demands of ERPs and their relationship to national identity) leads to a further categorisation of ERPs either as 'regionalist-nationalist' parties or as 'regional-regionalist' parties. The former refers to ERPs that claim to represent the interests of a specific ethnic minority which is territorially concentrated and constituting a separate nation within the host-state (Sandri, 2009). The latter, instead, refers to ERPs that are territorially concentrated but do not integrate either autonomist demands or nationalist identity features (Sandri, 2009). Finally, as Tronconi (2009) underlines, ERPs can also be defined either as purely ethnic (i.e. parties that express only the representation of their ethnic community which, in turn, is their only basin of consensus); or as challengers (when they aim at changing the structure of power of the host state attracting votes also from outside the basin of their ethnic community, by endorsing clear 'anti-system' stances, which can attract protest voters).

Furthemore, ERPs can be defined based on their specific ideological stances. Gomez-Reino et al. (2006) conceive of ERPs ideology based on four dimensions: self-government; their

position on the left-right spectrum; attitudes towards European integration; and post-materialist values. The first dimension has been explored at length in the previous paragraph. The second, third and fourth dimensions, however, require further explanation. For what concerns the location of ERPs on the left-right axis, some scholars (Muller-Rommell, 1991; Keating, 1998) argue that ERPs are 'small detached parties' and, therefore, cannot be classified based on traditional left-right categories. Others (Urwin, 1983; Delwit, 2005) argue that such classification is possible, but point in the direction of an inherent limit to it – because the positions of ERPs on the left-right axis can be so disparate to defy any generalisation. Some authors have tried to get to grips to the vagueness of this frame, and have argued that at least some patterns of ideological position can be found for ERPs (De Winter, 1998; Dandoy and Sandri, 2008). This strand of scholarly research recognises that ERPs can be widespread on this dimension, but notice a general tendency that sees ERPs being often closer to the centre-left area of the axis. In spite of the wooliness of these arguments, the most interesting trend concerning the ideological positioning of ERPs on the left-right axis, and that defines them in contrast with other mass parties, is the fact that ERPs can change their ideology over time, by shifting the bases of their identity features and the conceptual framing of their ethnic claim according to their contextual political and strategic needs (Sandri, 2009) – i.e. altering at different points in time the dimension of ethnicity on which they build their political identity, and becoming politically more 'closed' or more 'open' accordingly. In short, as Tronconi (2006, p.138) aptly summarises, ERPs appear to be much more dynamic and ready, if necessary, to modify their collocation in the political space as well as their objectives, short and long-term strategies.

For what concerns the European dimension, ERPs ideological positions towards Europe depend on the view they have of the future of their region. As De Winter (1998) puts it, the demands of most of the ERPs are situated in the framework of a 'Europe of the regions'. In this sense, ERPs seem to favour a form of integral federalism, in which European integration is seen as a basis for achieving the claim of regionalist movements, especially for what concerns their autonomy or independence goals.

Values also help to explain the ideological stances of ERPs. Although, as previously analysed, the main issue that characterise ERPs refer to their demand for empowerment challenging the structures of the host-state, in recent times other issues have gained salience within the rhetoric of ERPs. In particular, some ERPs seek to exploit issues that do not directly refer to the centre-periphery cleavage or to nationalism, so as to appeal to a wider electorate (Tronconi, 2009). Hence, it can be noted that ERPs often embrace also post-materialist values (Inglehart, 1977) and claims, with a particular emphasis on the rediscovery of tradition, self-expression (which means also to be able to choose one's own language or community of belonging), freedom of speech, gender equality, environmental protection, and quality of life. This links to the point previously raised about the ideological flexibility of ERPs, because they can combine traditionally ethnic and territorial issues, with post-materialist ones. In this sense, ERPs are sometime associated with 'new social movements' as an expression of a growing attention in the western society towards post-materialist issues and values (Melucci and Diani, 1992; Tronconi, 2009).

Summarising the key points analysed so far, it is possible to get a clearer idea of the ER party family. The centre-periphery fracture as well as a sense of exclusive group identity are central to ERPs' ideology and political demands for the reorganisation of power structures of

their host-state. However, most recently, post-materialist values have also been embraced by some ERPs, so as to widen their 'appeal' to the electorate. In practice, then, ERPs are usually self-contained political actors participating in electoral competitions, whose ideological and programmatic area includes ethnic, identity and territorial motifs, as well as, sometimes, economic and post-materialist ones. Their specific focus on the territorial and ethnic dimension means that their political activity is concentrated on their 'homeland', because their core mission is that of defending the interests and the identity of their territory by gaining some degree of self-government. However, much less is known about the organisation of these type of parties. In general terms, it would seem logical to think that ERPs are parties with a distinctive territorial organisation based on strong ties, and a tight and direct relation with their territory and people. But their specific party structures, organisation, themes and activities deserve further investigation. This paper will allow us to broaden the scholarly research on these aspects, using the case study of the Sardinian independentist party ProgReS. Following Tronconi's (2009) suggestion, in this work we will focus first on a content analysis of official documents and programmatic proposals (so as to understand the issues that constitute the core of ERPs political proposal), and then we will complement this with survey data so as to understand who votes for this ERP and why.

### ***Contextualising the case study: ProgReS, the Sardinian Question and the narrative of sardism***

Although often overlooked by the scholarly literature on ERPs, Sardinia provides a very interesting source of cases of ethno-regionalist claims. The region, in fact, has a long history of territorial struggles based on ethnic and territorial demands against a number of external 'invaders' (Mazzette, 1992; Pala, 2009). Over the years, many political actors have espoused and promoted the ethnic cause of territorial autonomy for Sardinia. However, none of them has been successful in posing a major threat to the territorial integrity of the Italian State or to catalyse constitutional reforms in Italy (Hepburn, 2009, p.595).

Within this context, ProgReS can be seen as a new, and to some extent alternative, political actor and ethnic entrepreneur, which has emerged onto the Sardinian political scene in 2011. Politically, ProgReS' first test has been the regional election of February 2014<sup>iii</sup>, in which the party competed as part of the coalition *Sardegna Possibile*, together with two civic groups (*Comunidades* and *Gentes*). For the purposes of this research, however, we are not so much interested in the electoral performance of ProgReS but, rather, in identifying what type of ERPs it is.

As it has often been the case in the history of Sardinian ERPs, ProgReS was born from an internal split within another regionalist political movement, i.e. *Indipendentzia Reppublica Sardignia* (IRS), which was itself an offshoot of a satellite of the *Partito Sardo D'Azione* (PSd'Az). Hence, in order to understand ProgReS it is important to put it into perspective, placing it within the context of the many ERPs and movements which have flourished in the Sardinian island especially after the second world war. To achieve this, it is necessary to provide a brief, and yet essential, overview of the most salient events linked to the (failed) politicisation of the 'Sardinian Question' and the so-called sardismo<sup>iv</sup>.

In particular, the scholarly literature on ERPs has often associated the 'Sardinian Question' to the political highs and lows of an ethnic entrepreneur that is often considered the

symbol of sardism: the *Partito Sardo D'Azione* (PSd'Az, Sardinian Action Party). PSd'Az gained prominence on the Sardinian political scene in the 1920s, benefitting from the charismatic leadership of the ex-soldier Emilio Lussu, and the surge of mass popular nationalism in the island in the post-WWI period, especially from soldiers, peasants and miners (Hepburn, 2009). As Melis (1982) underlines, the war had provided the first collective experience for the Sardinian people as a whole, and for the first time ever they engaged in contact with the reality of the national vision. In the wake of these feelings, PSd'Az demanded a form of political and administrative self-determination so as to protect the identity, language and culture of Sardinia (Hepburn, 2009). In the 1921 election, PSd'Az successfully mobilised Sardinian autonomist claims, gaining 36% of the popular vote. Thereafter, the party clarified its ideological position in respect to territorial claim, declaring itself as a republican-federalist party (Melis, 1982; Hepburn, 2009), aiming at achieving a clear federal Italian pact.

What was less clear, however, was the ideological position of PSd'Az on the left-right axis. Over the years, in fact, the party shifted from socialist claims to centre, left, right, and even far-right positions – showing lack of ideological coherence. Such 'ideological ductility' was justified in the rhetoric of PSd'Az by arguing that autonomy (and *not* ideology) was at the core of the Sardinian Question. Nonetheless, such ideological flexibility constituted a double-edged sword for the PSd'Az. On the one hand, making electoral and government coalitions with parties both from the left and the right gave PSd'Az experience in government (Hepburn, 2009). However, ideological incoherence also resulted into divisions, splits and loss of support (Hepburn, 2009). Paradoxically, in this way, PSd'Az had to face competition with new parties in Sardinia that emerged from its own internal splits, and had more radical autonomy or even independence goals. This divisive character eventually became a defining factor of ERPs in the island – tarnishing the narrative of sardism, and tainting it with a negative connotation, as a sort of 'unaccomplished' and inherently incoherent cultural and political identity, endorsed by a wide number of micro-ERPs, unable to communicate with each other or to create a unitary front in defence of Sardinian cultural heritage. At the same time, the regionalisation of state-wide parties meant that Sardinian branches sought greater autonomy from Italian party organisations, and adopted stronger territorial goals to compete with Sardinian ERPs (Hepburn, 2009, p.603). Furthermore, from the 1990s onward, smaller parties like PSd'Az and its 'satellites' suffered also from the electoral system change which opened the way to bipolarism in Italy (Hepburn, 2009). Finally, PSd'Az's attempt to integrate strategies on the Sardinian, Italian and European fronts also ended up in a failure, to further detriment of the party's image and electoral weight (Hepburn, 2009). As a result of these many flaws, PSd'Az, as well as its 'satellites', never gained any real political clout.

This short, and necessarily oversimplified<sup>v</sup>, excursus over the history of PSd'Az shows how the party never managed to find a political and programmatic synthesis able to mobilise in a coherent way the support of the Sardinian population. In spite of the (very short) relative political success of the 1980s, PSd'Az was never effective in its role as a ethnic entrepreneur, playing instead an ancillary role of mediation in respect with the other political forces in the island and, most notably, stamping a negative connotation on sardism, as a 'splintered identity' and a political discourse unable to emancipate from the 'original sin' of autonomism – which became a synonymous of *dependentism*.

The fractiousness of PSd'Az had also a clear impact on the view of the Italian government of the Sardinian Question, which was never taken seriously. Tellingly, PSd'Az

proposals for a special status for Sardinia within the Italian constitutions in the mid 1940s were considerably watered down by the government before being accepted in 1948. Granting Sardinia the status of Special Statute region ultimately strengthened the role of the Italian government in the region – and altered in a most profound way the nature of Sardinian autonomy within Italy, relegating this to the “request for material concessions and modernisation” (Clarke, 1989), sealing Sardinia’s future *dependence* on the Italian State. As a result, PSD’Az autonomy claims turned into a political disaster: from State’s perspective, they prompted an attempt to ‘Italianise’ Sardinia and its culture; whilst, at regional level, the ‘autonomous’ institutions of Sardinia were run by an entrenched regional political class, strongly linked to and depended on Rome (Melis, 1982; Hepburn, 2009). Besides, from the point of view of the Sardinian people, the (very atypical) autonomy claims endorsed by PSD’Az had the most negative effect of leading to a stigmatisation of their identity as incapable of developing independent of the helping hand of the Italian state.

By refusing to articulate a clear set of ethnic, territorial, social values, PSD’Az as well as most the other satellite parties emerged from its internal splits have excluded themselves from the on-going dialogue on the future of Sardinia either as an independent nation, or as part of Italy and Europe – relegating themselves, in this way to a very marginal role in Sardinian political life (Hepburn, 2009) whilst also stigmatising sardism as a ‘lost cause’.

The birth of new political movements like ProgReS (as well as others, i.e. *Sardigna Nazione*, or IRS) grafts precisely onto PSD’Az inability to politicise in a coherent way the Sardinian Question within the perspective of a collective mobilisation or a shared vision of the future of the island. As a matter of fact, ProgReS was created with the precise aim of distancing itself in a critical manner from the experience of PSD’Az both in terms of claims, and of political internal organisation and mobilisation.

Firstly, ProgReS overly discards any autonomist view, and strongly endorses a form of non-violent, ethnic and post-material independentism. In this sense, ProgReS’ strategies reject any mediation or negotiation not only with the Italian state, but also with the regional branches of the Italian parties that have long governed the island under the auspices of ‘*sottogoverno and clientelismo*’ (Melis, 1982). Thus, unlike PSD’Az, ProgReS demands an institutional recognition of the Sardinian nation as fully independent from Italy. Furthermore, ProgReS has an unambiguous ideological dimension – i.e. a support for leftist values, such as cooperation and equality of opportunity, yet combined with an overt rejection of the traditional political labels which link to the Italian political system. Hence, and most interestingly, ProgReS seems to embrace also anti-political (if not populist) ideological stances – whereas the overt rejection of traditional ideological labels coincides with a willingness to distance itself from a specific way of ‘doing politics’, typical of the parties that, in the view of ProgReS, have long exploited the ethnic, social, cultural and economic capital of Sardinia for their own interests, and facilitating *dependentism*.

Within the wide constellation of ERPs in Sardinia, ProgReS stands out for its ambition of being a different ethnic entrepreneur, able to politicise effectively the centre-periphery cleavage by giving a new impetus to Sardinian identity, mobilising it from the bottom. In the following, we provide an in-depth analysis of ProgReS so as to clarify its demands, the issues it endorses, as well as its structure and organisation. This is achieved by means of a content analysis of ProgReS’ official documents and manifestos, complemented by the data of a unique survey conducted among ProgReS membership and elite interviews.



## **ProgReS – a new way to achieve independence?**

ProgReS should not be considered just as another political movement claiming independence for Sardinia in continuity with the previous autonomist political experiences. Ostensibly, ProgRes emerged on the Sardinian political scene in a period of economic crisis – which is affecting the whole Italy, but has an even stronger impact on the weak economic system of Sardinia. On the one hand, at time of crisis it is certainly quite common to see the birth of ‘antagonistic’ political movement that challenge mainstream politics and its institutions, and demand for a new political order. However, it would be very limitative to see ProgReS’ experience only from this angle, without taking into account the considerable changes brought up by the movement regarding both the issues it endorses and brings onto the political debate, its organisational structure and also the changes in the rhetoric and discourse adopted in to support the independence of the Island.

As previously underlined, the Sardinian Question is not a new issue. Within the Italian institutional system, Sardinia has been recognised the status of ‘Special Statute Region’ and some form of autonomy, due to its peculiarities both on cultural and economic level. What makes ProgRes profoundly different from the other Sardinian political parties is its attempt to take distance in a clear and radical manner from their traditional rhetoric, which revolved around claims for independence or political autonomy. More specifically, ProgReS attributes the failure of the self-determination of the Sardinian nation mainly to the political line followed by the PSD’Az after the Second World War – which was based on autonomy claims that were never fully achieved. From this angle, ProgReS interprets autonomy as a synonymous of *dependence* (from the Italian state and parties) – an attitude that has long prevailed in the island and that, crucially, failed to bring any advantage to the Sardinian people. Thus, from the perspective of ProgReS, PSD’Az and the whole Sardinian political élite are criticised for their connivance with Italian politics. The idea is that behind the label of autonomy the Sardinian political élite reached a detrimental compromise aimed just at preserving their role and privileges, siphoning off resources for their own interests, and jeopardising in this way the possibility to create real development (from the bottom) for the region both in economic and cultural terms.

This stance is clearly reflected in the ProgReS’ official documents. For example, in its political manifesto, ProgReS asserts the need for a “[Sardinian] *political emancipation defined and recognized at the international level on the basis of its geographical, historical, cultural, linguistic, social and economic prerogatives*”. Such position is not too distant from the type of rhetoric usually endorsed by ERPs. However, other hints can be found in ProgReS’ manifesto, which make it stand out from the ERPs panorama. When stating “*our identity does not rest in any essence, but only on our ability to identify with a history and a culture in the making*” a new element is brought into the game, which seems to overcome one of the *tòpos* of ERPs.

Interestingly, in ProgReS view, Sardinian independence is not based on the heritage and imagery of a ‘golden age’ which should be newly achieved – instead, independence is seen as a ‘forthcoming claim’, in that it requires the *construction* of a shared identity projected towards the future. Thus, identity is not perceived as something that Sardinians had in the past, but was subsequently usurped by ‘invaders’ and needs to be re-gained now. Rather, in the rhetoric of ProgReS identity has to be *actively* constructed and developed within Sardinian citizens through a collective and dynamic process. Being Sardinians, in the political manifesto of ProgReS, means “*acknowledging the historical community that inhabits the island of Sardinia*”, but at the same time it also entail to “*rejected any form of cultural ‘essentialism’ supporting instead a sense of*

*belonging and cultural identity which derives from a dynamic process of collective identification, addressing the present and future*". The past, here, is not even mentioned – which suggests how such dimension has only a marginal relevance in the narrative of the party, whilst the crucial frames have contemporary and future breadth.

This is a very interesting point, because it differentiates ProgReS both from the categories typical of ERPs, and also from the experience of its predecessor 'autonomist' parties in the island. Crucially, ProgReS overtly recognises the intrinsic 'fracturedness' that has characterised Sardinian cultural identity throughout history, and explicitly states that the main fault of the other ERPs Sardinian parties has been the attempt to unify an identity that rejects any type of generalisation. For them, Sardinian identity is not a myth confined to the realm of the past – but something that should be achieved by means of a collective experience which is firmly rooted in the present, and can only flourish in the future. In this frame, diversity within the Sardinian identity has to be considered as an 'added value' to exploit, and not as something to 'even out'.

### **Words of ProgReS**

The public statements given by ProgReS' National Executive help to understand the further nature of this party and the way in which stands out in the context of Sardinian politics<sup>vi</sup>. ProgReS political line states – very clearly – the need to rebuild the Sardinian Question on a different perspective from the one adopted in the past. Again, the past is not identified as a 'golden age' but, rather, as an 'age of blunders'.

The very name of ProgReS, which stands for *Project for a Republic of Sardinia*, clarifies its complete dissonance in respect with the autonomist culture described above, which is accused of having tainted the so-called Sardinian Question in a most profound way. If, for parties like PSD'Az, autonomy means 'dependence' and represents the compromise with the Centre, then for ProgReS full independence is the answer. In this sense, the centre-periphery cleavage is taken to its extreme consequences – in that ProgReS disputes and challenges the institutional structure of its host-nation. But – and here we find the main peculiarity of this political movement if compared to ERPs – the goal of independence does not have to be reached simply by extorting institutional separation. On the contrary, independence is intended as the ultimate result of an active process of construction of a collective consciousness and identity.

Thus, the aim is to build independence by means of a bottom-up process rather than through purely institutional processes. In other words, ProgReS aims to bridge the gap left open by Sardinian politics. There is no golden age to re-gain – the political past of Sardinia looks gloom and imbued with *dipendentismo*, *clientelismo* and *malapolitica*. So ProgReS looks at the future rather than the past. Independence does not mean to redeem a 'lost' identity, but the possibility of building a new one based on a shared awareness, and civic as well as cultural values.

*"The disavowal of common belonging to a shared historical destiny is the core foundation of our collective weakness, it is the poison that weakens the ability to discern the contours of the situation, its causes, its motives. (Chain reactions, 12 September 2012 –reported within ProgReS website).*

*We should begin to ask ourselves questions about the poverty of our collective memory, the lack of historical reference points, which are essential in order to define our story over the centuries and find a way, an underlying theme that gives us an account of our 'today'. (Recordamus sa Batalla, 30 June 2013 - reported within ProgReS website).*

*What Sardinia needs today is, first of all, a new vision that takes into consideration a common sense of belonging and is no longer subordinate, a historical perspective, a new confidence in our strength and together and, in this view, a serious political project destined to establish solid foundations for the development of our island. [A serious political commitment leading to] a large-scale project that is capable of engaging the healthy forces of our community, for the reconstruction of our manufacturing base and capital, for the recovery and revitalization of the network of relationships that historically holds together our community as a whole and in its local joints. (Re-build Sardinian politics, 1 March 2013 - reported within ProgReS website).*

The political affiliation to the Italian state is interpreted as a 'historical accident', which failed to instil any shared cultural unity. Instead, the strong connection with the Italian state, which resulted from the weak attitude of PSD'Az and its satellites, generated only a progressive impoverishment of Sardinia – especially in cultural terms, but also at the economic level.

The view that ProgReS has of the relationship with the political centre (i.e. Italy) is controversial. Obviously, there is a recurring criticism of the political and economic choices dictated by Rome, which gave rise to the aforementioned Sardinian *dependentism*. In particular, Italian governments (without any distinction) are blamed for having set up military bases on the island – which are considered as a symbol of coercion without any real impact on the economic development of Sardinia.

*Since many decades, Sardinia bears the weight of more than 60% of the military contingent of the entire Italian state: this fact limits the sovereignty of the Sardinian people within their territory and it generates concerns among the population (given the experimental nature of some military trials that take place in these areas), [due to] the resulting uncertainty for public health and the submission to the threat of unemployment and the lack of economic alternatives for affected communities. (Libyan Crisis. Sardinian is not at war, 23 March 2011 - reported within ProgReS website).*

Furthermore, ProgReS raises other criticisms against the Italian government for what concerns its policy choices on taxation and fiscal issues. In particular, ProgReS takes ownership of an issue which emerged during Renato Soru's centre-left regional government: the so-called 'fiscal question', i.e. the dispute between Italy and Sardinia concerning the re-fund of taxes paid in excess by the Sardinian regional government to the Italian central government.

*The fiscal-question is not a request, rather it is the certification of the damages caused and perpetrated by the Italian government against us. This and other must be answered. (Talk and badge, 4 February 2012 - reported within ProgReS website).*

In spite of these rather strong claims, overall the criticisms moved by ProgReS towards the central state can be considered as rather limited. Interestingly, in the view of ProgReS, the main focus of criticism is the Sardinian political élite, considered responsible (and guilty) of being 'dependent' from (and to connive with) the Italian political class.

*Sardinian politicians have a duty: to respond to Sardinia in the name and on behalf of our collective interests, our needs, our aspirations. To merely claim aids from Italy does not match this duty. (Little to laugh about, 1 February 2012 - reported within ProgReS website).*

*Sardinia does not need politicians who cries for government cuts, wasting public resources, who only 'make requests' all the time. Sardinia is in need of politicians who do things. (The consistency and fairness of the separatists, 30 November 2012 - reported within ProgReS website).*

Sardinian politicians involved in Italian parties are not considered reliable or trustworthy because they are entangled in the political logics of the centre – which in ProgReS' vision is far away from the real interests of the Sardinians.

*We know that the Sardinian candidates in the Italian parties respond to the orders of their leaders – which are certainly not aimed to meet Sardinians' interests, especially if these diverge from the Italian ones. There is no issue, including the very fundamental ones, that the Sardinian political class had the strength to solve bargaining with the Italian state: infrastructure, transport, industrial and military servants, schools and universities, cultural and historical heritage, agriculture and livestock, tourism. Whatever Sardinian representatives of those political forces say, none of these issues have found positive responses in the Italian political scene [...] This also means that being an inevitably small group in the Italian parliament, Sardinian parties could only act as a witnesses, with no hope of actually influencing the decision making process within Italian politics. (Who needs the Italian elections?, 14 January 2013 - reported within ProgReS website).*

This is a very interesting point, because it shows how within ProgReS rhetoric, the centre-periphery cleavage shifts to an internal level, and the main line of conflict targets the ruling class of Sardinia, responsible of having recognised (and subdued to) the Italian state as a partner-in-crime.

This rhetoric seems to bring ProgReS closer to the dimension of anti-politics and anti-party. As aforementioned, times of economic crisis usually facilitates the emergence (and success) of populist parties – but in ProgReS, this kind of rhetoric could be understood as a means to reinforce their message of separatism, in order to keep distance and trace their difference from the way in which Sardinian politics has been perceived (and developed) in the past. The anti-political discourse is re-arranged in order to underline the Sardinian Question and to stress the inability of political élites to address Sardinian interests. Hence, anti-politics becomes a mobilising rhetoric, aimed at gaining new supporters among 'disillusioned' citizens, who see ProgReS as a novelty, and as an alternative to 'traditional' Sardinian politics. Thus, it is not surprising that such kind of anti-politics discourse emerges mainly in the periods close to local or regional elections, or in the periods of pre-election campaign.

*The only bond that still bears consent to the Italian parties power apparatuses is accustomed by patronage and by the vote by proxy in accordance with the logic of the lesser evil. (Collàbora pro fàghere sa Repùblica de Sàrdigna, 23 February 2013 reported within ProgReS website).*

*Waste, the reshuffles, the loss of time related to a vulgar way of doing politics that is typical of the Italian parties (The consistency and fairness of the separatists, 30 November 2012 - reported within ProgReS website).*

Or, referring to Sardinian migrants, and the ineffective policies put in place to develop and preserve their relationship with the Island:

*It is in fact the same attitude that the Sardinian political class reserve anything from a exiles, always focused on itself and very little on the rest, especially if this 'rest' does not bring votes or patronage. (Best wishes to the newly elected president of FASI- Italian Federation of the Sardinian Associations Serafina Mascia – 27 October 2011).*

So, the last message from the National Executive of the party before elections is entitled:

*In Sardinia Italian politics is dead (Best wishes for a possible 2014, 1 January 2014 - reported within ProgReS website).*

But the target is not the Italian politics of the Peninsula, rather the criticism is against Sardinian politics and its relationship with the central government, devoted to preserve its privileges rather than to support Sardinian interest. Such fault is considered as extremely serious – as a sort of betrayal.

## **Structures of ProgReS**

Looking inside ProgReS adopting the organisational point of view provides some interesting insight to understand the way in which this party represents a novelty among ERPs. Significantly, this helps to understand how ProgReS moves away from previous Sardinian political experiences – because it combines a flexible organization geared towards a maximum level of inclusiveness in the party's internal life.

The main organisational trait characterising ProgReS is the absence of a charismatic leader. Indeed, since its birth ProgReS seems to refuse a 'leaderised' organization of the party, adopting a frequent turnover of leaders and providing for a very complex system of internal offices devoted to control and define its political line. This is a deliberate and instrumental choice – i.e. there should be no leader in charge able to shadow the message of independence. This is a very peculiar trait, which marks a difference from other ERPs in Sardinia.

However, in view of the regional election of 2014, the absence of a leader became a problematic issue. Hence, understanding the logics of political personalisation, ProgReS tried to find a candidate able to capitalise the work on the ground developed by the party during the last few years. Here, the aim was to preserve ProgReS' identity as a political party, whilst avoiding being identified only with the figure/image of a charismatic leader. Within this logic, the choice fell on Michela Murgia – a very famous Italian writer, politically active and truly separatist. In this context, however, ProgReS was very careful in avoiding to be overshadowed by the image of a candidate of such relevance, wary of the fact that her fame could have jeopardised the role of the party and its very claims.

From this angle, it can be noted that ProgReS has managed in a very effective way the risk of excessive personalisation. For instance, in the recent regional elections the party worked on several fronts – investing organisational resources to support the candidate of the coalition

list *Sardegna Possibile* (Michela Murgia) as well as public officials close to the party who run for the other two civic list in the coalition (Gentes and Comunità), whilst also presenting a distinctive ProgReS list within *Sardegna Possibile*, so as to ensure that the party would not be ‘swallowed up’ by the coalition. Thanks to this ‘work on the ground’, in the aftermath of the deluding performance of the coalition at the regional elections, ProgReS is now still able to capitalise on the networks it built during the electoral campaign, and is currently undergoing a phase of redefinition, especially in view of the imminent local elections (May 2014) where ProgReS will (most likely) run alone.

For what concerns the organisational structure of the party, the dimension of membership deserves specific attention. Indeed, ProgReS shows a double definition of the membership of the party. This is an organisational configuration which is actually common to other parties (for example, the Northern League adopts a similar structure). The idea is to differentiate the participation in party activities on two levels: one related to support and participation in party life (the so-called supporters); and one concerns a more active form of militancy that requires to play an active role, as stated within the party statute “representing ProgReS on every occasion of public debate” (the so-called activists). Put simply, supporters’ experience of militancy has a personal dimension, while for activist the personal engagement is combined with a public dimension which allows them to participate to the decision making process within the party<sup>vii</sup>.

From the territorial point of view, the party is organized at different level – the highest is represented by the regions (which in practice are the Sardinian districts), plus the so-called “Disterru” representing a sort of constituency of the Sardinians living abroad (either in Italy or in other countries).

At the regional level the activities of the party on the ground are organized by the Activity Centres (TzdA), which vaguely resemble the local branches of traditional parties. These are local bodies of ProgReS which are in charge of organising at local level the discussion on the party line. In addition, ProgReS statute recognises also the role of the Elaboration Centres (TzdE). TzdE are not linked to the ground (i.e. do not have territorial organisation at local level); instead they are issue-centred, and function as forums for thematic discussions. They are appointed by the central office of ProgReS to define political solutions, which will then inform the strategies and agenda of the whole party.

### **Militants in ProgReS**

As a party ProgReS shows a strong vocation towards inclusiveness, seeking the active participation of its members, regardless of whether they are supporters or activists. The fundamental idea recurring in public statements released by the executive committee of ProgReS is that the party builds its political line through an active and on-going discussion developed among its members at local level, and around relevant themes/issues. In particular, the role of the Elaboration Centres is precisely that of including members in the life of the party, involving them in the political discussion about issues to be endorsed and the decisions to be taken by the party. Hence, it is useful to understand how members participate in party activities, defining their attitudes and political opinions. To achieve this aim, we draw on the data collected in a CAWI survey conducted among ProgReS’ members, which looks at their socio-political profile, their media-diet, and their political opinions and attitudes<sup>viii</sup>.

The literature on party membership underlines how the relationship between parties and their members has considerably changed in recent years (van Biezen and Poguntke 2014; Scarrow and Gezgor 2010). The decreasing rates of membership (van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012), the increasing and spreading level of anti-party feelings as reported by opinion polls data as well as by several scholars (Poguntke 1996; Bardi 1996) are just some of the evidence about the changing role of political parties within the society. Parties are no longer recognised as legitimate actors or ‘chains’ in the process of political representation, and this affects their ability to catch new members. Besides, parties’ ability to mobilise and involve members in their activities has diminished. From this angle, the data about ProgReS’ members is interesting because it gives some new insights in understanding what are the features of members within such a recent and peculiar type of party organisation.

The first interesting point emerging from the survey is that 61% of the respondents define themselves as activist (as in contrast with supporters), which implies a thorough engagement in the life of the party on their part. This means that ProgReS can count and draw on the presence of a ‘hard core’ of members who actively support the party’s activities. Secondly, another data that deserves attention concerns the socio-political profile of ProgReS’ members. The political generation of ProgReS’ members is concentrated among the under 40s, and their average age is 38. This signals a relevant difference between ProgReS and other Italian political parties, whose members are usually significantly older<sup>ix</sup> (Sandri, Seddone, Bulli, 2014). Among our relatively small sample, there is a predominance of male militants (nearly 76%) as compared to females (24%). Moreover, ProgReS’ members seem to have a very high level of education – in fact, 66.7% of the respondents hold a university degree, whilst 25.9% has a High School degree. This data shows an education profile of militants which is quite different (i.e. of a higher profile) from that registered within the average Italian population<sup>x</sup>. For what concerns the professional position, it is interesting to notice that almost one third of our sample (31.5%) is self-employed, while the presence of private-employed (14.8%) and public-employed (18.5%) is unusually less relevant.

<b>Table. 1: ProgReS Militants – Social profile</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
16-34	22	40.7
35-44	22	40.7
45-54	6	11.1
55-64	4	7.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<i>Mean: 38 years</i>		
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Female	13	24,1
Male	41	75,9
<i>Total</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>100,0</i>
<b>Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Elementary school	1	1,9
Middle school	3	5,6
High School	14	25,9
University Degree	36	66,7
<i>Total</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>100,0</i>
<b>Professional Position</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Self-employed	17	31,5
Private-employed	8	14,8
Public-employed	10	18,5
Housewife	2	3,7
Student	9	16,7
Unemployed	8	14,8
<i>Total</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>100,0</i>

Interestingly, the data shows that ProgReS is particularly popular among the younger generations. This seems to suggest that, due to their age, ProgReS' members have not previously been 'socialised' in the traditional forms of political participation of mass parties. Besides, 58.8% of the members in the sample were involved in the activity of other parties before joining ProgReS (arguably other autonomist/independentist parties), confirming the idea of a membership which is highly engaged and interested in politics.

Furthermore, the generational profile of ProgReS' members appears to be connected with (and at the same time explains some of) their media diet characteristics, especially for what concerns their focus on (and active use of) the web as source of information and as an arena for political discussion (Table 2). Even if newspapers and TV news programmes are still to be considered as relevant sources of information, the high number of ProgReS' members



visiting websites, blogs and social network every day as sources of information seems to underline their attention on new media.

<b>Table 2: Sources of information</b>		
<b>How often do you read newspapers?</b>	Frequency	Valid %
Never	-	-
Less than one time in a month	-	-
Few times in a month	2	3.9
Few times in a week	10	19.6
Every day	39	76.5
N	51	100.0
<b>How often do you watch news programmes on tv?</b>		
	Frequency	Valid %
Never	1	2.1
Less than one time in a month	2	4.2
Few times in a month	6	12.5
Few times in a week	11	22.9
Everyday	28	58.3
N	48	100.0
<b>How often do you visit websites or blogs to get information?</b>		
	Frequency	Valid %
Never	-	-
Less than one time in a month	-	-
Few times in a month	-	-
Few times in a week	16	31.4
Every day	35	68.6
N	51	100.0

The data on the political profile of the militants involved in the research helps to detect other interesting peculiarities. For instance, Table 3 clearly shows that ProgReS' members have a strong interest in politics: on a scale of 1 to 10, the average stands at 8.7. The data in Table 4 illustrates that militants are characterised by a high degree of commitment in the political activities of the party. In fact, over a third of respondents claim to invest up to 10 hours per week engaging in party activities. The involvement in the internal life of the party is accompanied by a participatory attitude that is expressed at different levels in the social life of members. Besides party activities, respondents also claim to participate in activities of social and political mobilisation, such as protest activities and political demonstrations, voluntary activities and initiatives in the local area. The local community dimension is also very important

in the system of values of ProgReS' membership – even more than the commitment in local party initiative promoted on the ground in order to defend local interests. In this respect, it is interesting to look at the data reported in table 5 – as they show the reasons why members formally joined the party. These are to be found in particular in the presence of a collective incentive which drives ProgReS' militancy, such as the aim to change the society or to defend the interest of the Sardinian community.

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dvt
Interest in politics	54	5.00	10.00	8.7222	1.23497
Ideological Self-placement (1-10 scale)	41	1.00	10.00	3.0976	2.10719

	Never	One/two times	Three/five times	More than five times	N
Activities of my local section	3.8	9.6	3.8	82.7	52
Political events organised by ProgReS		9.6	15.4	75.0	52
Signing petitions	10.2	42.9	26.5	20.4	49
Events related to my neighbourhood	17.3	32.7	26.9	23.1	52
Political events related to the environment	11.1	37.0	66.6	74.0	51
Protest activities	32.7	44.2	15.4	7.7	52
Social volunteering	30	28	22	20	50
Professional associations activities	65.4	19.2	7.7	7.7	52
Cultural associations' activities	15.4	28.8	15.4	40.4	52
Ethic buying products	14	8	22	56	50
Political discussion on the web	4	4	2	90	51

<b>Table 5: Militancy, incentives and activity</b>		
<b>Q: Why did you choose to adhere to ProgReS?</b>	Frequency	Valid %
In order to have a political career	1	1.9
Because I knew another militant of ProgReS	1	1.9
To be political informed	1	1.9
To change society	13	25.0
To be committed for my community wellness	30	57.7
To defend a specific interest	6	11.5
Total	52	100.0
<b>Weekly hours devoted to party activities</b>		
	Frequency	Valid %
None	1	1.9
Less than 2 hours	6	11.5
Between 2 and 5 hours	15	28.8
Between 5 and 10 hours	17	32.7
Between 10 and 20 hours	7	13.5 building
More than 20 hours	6	11.5
Total	52	100.0

Moving on to the issues endorsed ProgReS' militants, Tables 6 and 7 present data on members' views both on general issues and on more specific (i.e. Sardinian) policies. The comparison among data allows us to see the presence of a sort of double line of values. On the one hand, there seems to be a degree of heterogeneity in members' opinions about general issues. On the other, items related to local policies show the presence a higher confluence of consensus among militants. Issues related to immigration and the role of politics in the economy, show the presence of a wide range of opinions among militants. Such heterogeneous positions, however, almost disappear looking at militants' views on Sardinian policies (Table 7) – which sheds light on how a ProgReS' members have a very clear and critical view of recent political choices promoted by what they consider as “dependentist” parties. In other words, ProgReS' members do not share an individual and consonant line on general subjects, but they rely on a solid foundation for what concerns those issues more strictly related to the Sardinian politics. Focusing on data reported in Table 7 it is easy to understand militants' policy preferences. They seem to appreciate those policies aimed to preserve environment (especially the safeguard of the Sardinian coast) preventing the development of new buildings, and consequently they target the policies promoted by previous Sardinian governments (ostensibly aimed at boosting the local economy through incentives to build, e.g. Regional Programme for building houses). Interestingly, this data indicates the presence (and predominance) of post-materialist values among ProgReS' members, which in turn suggest how such stances play a role in the ideology of the party.

Furthermore, very positive evaluations are given by members for what concern policies on Sardinian language promotion in schools and institutions, and for those policies aimed to promote scientific research. This shows how ProgReS militants value, actively promote and are proud of their cultural identity.

<i>To what extent do you agree with following statements?</i>	Not at all	A bit	Quite	A lot	N
Environmental safeguard is a priority even if this means to limit economic development	6.0	10.0	38.0	46.0	50
There is the need to teach catholic religion at school	56.0	26.0	14.0	4.0	50
Personal use of “soft drugs” must be punished by law	80.4	13.7	3.9	2.0	51
For women it is difficult to reach positions of power in the workplace and in politics due to discrimination	8.3	6.3	56.3	29.2	48
Homosexual marriages should be prohibited by law	90.2	3.9	3.9	2.0	51
Immigrants must adapt to the culture of the country in which they live	11.8	45.1	37.3	5.9	51
The power of trade unions is too much	11.1	8.9	46.7	33.3	45
It is right to cut taxes even at the cost of reducing services	30.6	53.1	12.2	4.1	49
Freedom of press is under threat	8.0	18.0	26.0	48.0	50
Politics should intervene less in economic management	28.0	38.0	22.0	12.0	50

<i>How do you evaluate the following policies? (scale 1-10)</i>	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dvtn
Ban on building at 2 km from coastline	51	1.00	10.00	7.8235	2.46338
Ban on building in the countryside if not owning an adequate quantity of land	50	1.00	10.00	6.2400	2.80350
Master & Back <sup>1</sup>	51	1.00	10.00	6.9804	2.50990
Funding Sardinian language courses in schools	50	2.00	10.00	8.6200	2.13704
Promotion of Sardinian language within public institutions	51	2.00	10.00	9.1373	1.84412
Creation of a Sardinian fleet so as to ensure territorial continuity	51	3.00	10.00	8.4314	2.13780
Funding scientific/ academic research	49	3.00	10.00	8.8571	1.82574
Regional housing plan <sup>2</sup>	46	1.00	10.00	5.6304	3.24112
Programme for buildings’ expansion in coastal areas	51	1.00	10.00	2.5490	2.30055
Funding cultural activities	51	1.00	10.00	6.9412	2.42001

1 Policy aimed at funding advanced training programs for Sardinian citizens.

2 Policy aimed at providing economic incentives for the extension, renovation or restructuring of existing private buildings

Lastly, dealing with a pro-independence party requires assessing members' sense of belonging to a national identity. Table 8 summarizes the perception of national and cultural identity of the members of ProgReS. As it was predictable, results confirm the idea of a precise and cohesive cultural identification as Sardinians rather than Italian. The large majority of the sample refuses any identification with the Italian dimension, defining themselves just as Sardinians. This result is consistent with the data collected about opinions on general issues and regional policies, where within a general heterogeneous framework of values there is a common and shared opinion about regional policies. Sardinia is the linkage among members', the sense of belonging to Sardinian culture and history is sufficient to keep cohesive the party and its membership.

<b>Table 8: Identity</b>		
<b>Q: Do you perceive yourself as:</b>	Frequency	%
More Italian than Sardinian	1	2.1
Both Italian and Sardinian	3	6.3
More Sardinian than Italian	2	4.2
Sardinian, not Italian	42	87.5
Total	48	100.0

## **Conclusions**

The main feature emerging from the data is the presence of a common consciousness which define ProgReS members as Sardinians, as citizens engaged in Sardinian politics and with a common and shared idea of what means to be Sardinians or what it is needed to aid Sardinian development. This is very interesting because the findings of this research help to depict the image of a very peculiar type of membership in ProgReS – where members are (very) young; and also sensitive to new form of communication and new media, recognised as a source of information but also as an arena for political discussion within the life of the party. In this sense, the overtly bottom-up and 'light' organisation of ProgReS, with its absence of a charismatic leader and its instrumental use of new media, shows how the party resembles some of the traits of 'new political movements'. This is reflected also in the anti-party/anti-politics rhetoric which ProgReS has declined to the Sardinian dimension, targeting the established political elites in the Island. Furthermore, looking at their opinions and views, ProgReS' members are very close to post-materialist values – an attitude which is reflected in particular in their attentiveness to environmental issues (both for what concerns general issues and regional policies). On the one hand, general issues prompt diversified opinions among ProgReS'party members. However, their views about regional policies show that when the focus moves on to Sardinian policies (and, hence, to their development), we find a common and shared vision, rooted in the sense of belonging to cultural identity. This shared 'sense of belonging' provides a solid and strong basis for the active and consistent militancy of members within the party, as confirmed by the data about their weekly engagement in party activities.

Looking at the organisational peculiarities, it is interesting to notice how the classical cleavage centre-periphery, typical of ERPs, finds in ProgReS a new articulation, and seems to shift into a new dimension. The line of conflict, in fact, is not played against the political centre (Italy); instead, the target of ProgReS' criticism are political parties at regional level – blamed for their attitude of connivance with Italian politics and *dependentism*, and perceived as having betrayed (and sold) Sardinia, its values and its identity. In fact, the political discourse endorsed by ProgReS overtly promotes a new definition of Sardinian Question, based on a harsh criticism of the 'traditional' idea of autonomy, legacy of the role of PSD'Az within Sardinian politics. Autonomy is seen as a synonymous of dependency – as the result of a compromise between Sardinian politicians and Italian governments, which in the view of ProgReS damaged Sardinia immensely. For this reasons, ProgReS clearly states the need to redefine the concept of 'Sardinian Question' and, therefore, also the idea of Sardinian nation and identity – without referring to a lost golden age, which simply does not exist (due to the autonomist political choices carried out by PSD'Az). Interestingly, for ProgReS the future (and not the past) is the dimension in which the Sardinian nation and its identity will find their accomplishment. The Sardinian independence project has to be achieved in the future, actively *building* a common consciousness, and a (new) set of shared values among Sardinian citizens. Such new and 'truly independent' view of the Sardinian nation and its identity, however, needs to take root – and, in the view of ProgReS, this process cannot be pushed or prompted from the top, but needs to be nurtured from the bottom in the long term.

On the one hand, this means that ProgReS is certainly a different type of ethnic entrepreneur, showing characters of difference both from ERPs in general, and from other ethnic actors in Sardinia in particular. On the other, the strong emphasis on the dimension of 'the future' means that it will take time to appreciate the real political impact and the potential success of this new party on Sardinian politics, as its ethnic and independentist project are meant to be, to use the obvious pun, a work-in-Progress.

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### Notes:

<sup>i</sup> Although the qualitative interviews have already been conducted, due to the time constrains that the recent Sardinian regional elections have posed on the data collection and analysis process for this work, we have not been able yet to include the qualitative findings in our investigation. We are set to engage in this analysis and share the relative findings in a revised version of this paper.

<sup>ii</sup> What we refer to as ethno-regionalist parties here have been also called stateless nationalist and regionalist parties (Hepburn, 2010), autonomist parties (Elias and Tronconi, 2009), or minority nationalist parties (Elias, 2008) within the relevant literature. In spite of this wide array of labels, all these actors belong to the family of political parties which are defined by the characteristics outline in section 1 of this paper (i.e. defence of the periphery along the territorial cleavage and demands for a substantial reorganisation of the national state structures within which they are currently confined).

<sup>iii</sup> The results of the election saw the coalition gaining only the third place. The centre-left won with 42.5% of the vote, the centre-right got 39.6%, and *Sardegna Possibile* got 10.3%. Within the coalition, ProgReS gained 3% of the vote. Hence, according to the electoral system of Sardinia, ProgReS did not enter into the new regional government.

<sup>iv</sup> In broad terms, 'sardismo' refers to the recognition of the historical, cultural and linguistic specificity of the people of Sardegna.

<sup>v</sup> For a comprehensive account of PSD'Az, its history, highs and lows, see Hepburn, 2009 and Mazzette, 1992.

<sup>vi</sup> We have analysed 74 statements by ProgReS' National Executive as published on the party website between 4 January 2011 and 1 January 2014. We choose to focus just on National Executive statements because this represent the organisational structure aimed to develop and promote the party political line. Hence, our content analysis attempts to define what are the main issues, communicative frames and rhetoric adopted by the party in mobilising their members.

<sup>vii</sup> To become an activist requires being a member of the party for at least 10 months, while to be charged for an organizational role required to be an activist for at least 6 months.

<sup>viii</sup> It should be clarified that the data collection for this research is still on-going, and so far we have collected only a part of responses – i.e. 54 out of the 200 members of ProgReS that we aim to reach. After the results of the regional elections, the party has been involved in an internal process of political discussion which has delayed the submission of the survey to the members as initially planned. So far the, the survey has been administered to members for about a month, and we are currently waiting for the end of ProgReS' convention to collect the rest of the data.

<sup>ix</sup> As emerged from the data of a similar CAWI survey administrated by Candidate & Leader Selection (standing-group of SISP, Italian Political Science Association), which showed that the average age of Democratic Party's members is 53 years; whilst for Left, Ecology and Freedom's members it is 48; for 5 Star Movement's members it s 41; and for the Northern League's members is 59 years. For further details please see the full research report at: [www.candidateandleaderselection.eu](http://www.candidateandleaderselection.eu)

<sup>x</sup> According to the Italian Institute of Statistic (ISTAT) only 12.4% of Italian population hold a university degree, while 29.1% has an High School Diploma, for further detail see: <http://dati.istat.it/#>.