



Department

SEMINARS

"Cartels as a crisis management institution? The Italian experience (1900-1960)"


MARIO PERUGINI

University of Catania

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A B S T R A C T

Even though cartels are today a condemned practice under national and international law, until the eve of World War Two they were the framework in which entrepreneurs operated and on which companies built their strategies. Outside the United States, where an antitrust law was promulgated in 1890, in the rest of the world there was either a tacit acceptance by local institutions or even an explicit support of cartels as tools of economic coordination. In the European case, as the business historian Harm Schröter (Schröter 1996) pointed out, cartels came to represent the “normality” in economic activities during the 1930s. Italy was not an exception in this sense. A small number of “consorzi” – i.e. the Italian word for “cartels” – had already been created prior to World War One. These cartels were basically similar to the ones that arose in the rest of Europe from the last decades of the 19th Century, even though in the Italian case the development of these private agreements among companies was slower than elsewhere also due to the Italian backwardness in the industrialization process.

This work aims to study cartels in Italy between 1900 and 1960 in terms of sectoral diffusion, reasons behind their establishment, their concrete functioning system and their duration. The research is based on a new quantitative database, State and companies' archives, and published sources. Based on these sources, it also offers an in-depth analysis of the impact of cartels in terms of technological development, corporate strategy, organizational change and public policy. In this sense, important differences between the cartels that were established before the economic crisis of 1929 and those that were created during the 1930s emerge, affected by the fact that a new law on the establishment and functioning of cartels had been approved by the fascist government.

For information: francesca.daldegan@unipi.it