

CITY VERSUS METROPOLIS: THE NORTHERN LEAGUE IN THE MILAN METROPOLITAN AREA

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Abstract

Metropolitan areas are often seen as increasingly important components of the emerging global space-economy. The national and global roles of central cities, however, may lead them in fundamentally different economic and political directions from their hinterlands, if the functions of the cities are decreasingly complementary to those of their surrounding areas. In particular, the political complexions of city and hinterland may come to reflect different cultural and economic orientations as a result of divergence in political-economic trajectories between the two. This possibility is explored using the example of the northern Italian city of Milan and its hinterland, taken as the provinces of Bergamo, Como, Lecco, and Varese, with respect to geographical patterns of support for the regionalist/separatist movement, the Northern League, over the course of three national elections: 1992, 1994, and 1996. Putatively a movement representing the interests of northern Italy as a whole, the Northern League's stands on issues tended increasingly to represent the identities and interests of the small manufacturing firms that dominate the fringe of the metropolitan area, whereas Milan itself has an economic base of advanced services and national-oriented manufacturing firms that would lead to the expectation of a very different political orientation. Analysis of election returns suggests a divergence between city and hinterland that is in large part accounted for by their distinctive economic trajectories. There is no simple identity between a city and its metropolis.

MILAN AND THE NORTHERN LEAGUE

Introduction

Nowhere does the cosmopolitan character of a city as a node in an international network of cities stand so clearly in contrast to its role as the center of a territorial economy as with Milan. Located in the “city studded center” of Europe, to use Rokkan’s (1975, 576) evocative phrase, Milan has always been embroiled in the “entanglements of European cities and states” (Tilly 1994). For centuries a city-state and then, under Austrian rule, connected to central Europe more than to the peninsula to the south, since 1861 it has served as both an economic center for Italy as a whole, a service center for its surrounding region, and, increasingly, as a global center for the fashion and design industries. As its European and global roles have deepened, therefore, the tension between this city’s role as a central place for a hinterland and its wider network role have become increasingly apparent.

In this paper we want to tell a story about the tension between the two roles of Milan by focusing on the recent history of a new regional political party in northern Italy, the Northern League, that emphasizes the difficulties that face new regionalist movements in mobilizing voters and supporters across a range of places from large cities to rural areas within their chosen region. In this case the difficulty is that posed to the League by the city of Milan, the most important city in northern Italy and a most vital place for the League to capture if it is to either achieve its avowed goal of an independent northern Italy or “Padania” (as the League calls it) or maintain its influence in Italian national politics. We suggest that contemporary political-economic trends are producing in the case of Milan and its hinterland an increasing political cleavage between the two,

with the Northern League colonizing much of the hinterland and more national- and class-oriented parties dominating the city (Dente 1997, 178-79; Bull 1997).

City and Metropolis

Today, Milan is the center of the largest metropolitan area in Italy by population and it still appears to be very much the economic capital of the country. But it has turned increasingly outwards, beyond the boundaries of its immediate region. It is widely spoken of by Italian academics and political commentators as Italy's economic and cultural "bridge" to Europe as a whole with its stock exchange, banks, manufacturing firms, fashion and design industries, and insurance companies closely tied to allies and markets elsewhere in Europe and beyond (see, e.g. Bonaverò 1999).

With a population of 1,400,000 in an urban region of 5.8 million, Milan is in the middle of a great "spider's web" of smaller cities and urban sprawl on the Lombard Plain to the north of the river Po and to the south of the pre-Alpine Belt of mountains and lakes along the Italian border with Switzerland (Bartaletti 1996, 175). The architectural image of the city is very much that of the late 19th century when the city was transformed by large-scale demolition. Some tree-lined grand boulevards arc out from the city center into the main middle-class neighborhoods and others separate these areas from the periphery in which the old heavy industries, most now dismantled, such as the steelworks at Sesto San Giovanni, were located. The historic center no longer has a mediaeval character to it, having been reorganized and rebuilt in the 1880s and then the subject of major monumental interventions during Fascism. An entire constellation of small preexisting cities was swallowed up by the expansion of the central one. This outer periphery

includes such major cities as Monza as well as later garden cities such as San Donato, San Felice and Milano Due. Much of this expansion has been to the north and east.

Beyond this immediate suburban ring, at a distance of 45-60 minutes travel time to the north lie a series of smaller cities, Varese, Como, Lecco and Bergamo, historically in the political-economic shadow of the great metropolis of the North (De Bernardi 1991). These centers long had distinctive economic profiles but depended upon their links to Milan for a multitude of services. Varese has had perhaps the greatest degree of economic connectivity, given its historic reliance on large-scale industry with corporate headquarters in Milan. They all, but Como, Lecco, and Varese in particular, have had strong commuting links to the central city. With the collapse of large-scale industries in Varese and elsewhere and the assertion of flexible manufacturing production associated with small-scale firms and their workplaces, the ties between the central and the peripheral cities have weakened (Dalmaso 1971; Zanzi 1976; CEDOC 1988).

Milan, however, has long developed as a *poli-centric* metropolis, one based on a local economy that is open, multi-firm, linked together by many “weak” ties rather than a few strong ones and relatively lacking (by Italian standards) on central government mediation. These attributes have made Milan and its region more open to influence from beyond established boundaries and less dependent on particular sectors for its growth. Turin, for example, is a much more *polarized* regional setting in which the automobile sector has remained dominant, there are relatively few independent actors and manager-employee conflicts still have a major impact on local social and political life (Bagnasco 1986, 69-81; Locke 1995, 25-28, 123-135).

With Milan as its center, northern Italy is obviously a macro-region of enormous importance in contemporary Europe: it has over 25 million inhabitants, 54% of the Italian GNP and about \$17,000 per capita income (Mainardi 1998). Milan itself has a local gross product of over \$73.5 billion and 11.3% of Italian industrial production. Its urban region, extending mainly to the north and east of the city for about 50 km., has about 5.8 million inhabitants and 21% of all Italian industrial production (Bartaletti 1996; Mainardi 1998). After a long period of growth, the population of the city began to decline in the 1970s. This continues, partly because of the low rate of natural increase, but also because the amount of immigration has been much reduced compared to the immediate postwar years (Bianchini 1994).

Milan has been the historical provider of transportation, banking, business services, research and education to this area (Dalmasso 1971, 185-265). Of course, many of these functions remain. But their relative weight within the economy of the city has declined. The growth sectors have been in financial services, fashion and design, information processing, and publishing (Borlenghi 1990). Many of these have significant national, Europe- and world-wide markets. Consequently, the city depends on the distinctive long-distance or external ties that have been become decisive for its growth in the current world economy, more than on its dominance over or service to its contiguous hinterland (Bianchini 1994, 134-5). This, of course, includes Milan's provision of a wide range of goods and services to places all over Italy.

In other words, in contemporary conditions, every locality, including big cities such as Milan, must find its own market niche. The "guaranteed" market of the hinterland is no longer the key to economic growth of either the city or its surrounding

area. The old heavy industries of the city and its fringe have been replaced by such new sectors as electronics, finance and business services and fashion and advertising (Cipoletta 1991, 228-9). The city is the milieu in which agglomeration economies are realized for new, innovative, high-risk, and capital-intensive sectors (Camagni 1999). At the same time, the manufacturing industries of the peripheral hinterland have become ever more based on tiny firms with limited connections to the core (Pagetti 1989; Bianchini 1994). Tiny firms have increasingly replaced the large and medium size firms that were once dominant employers in such provinces as Varese. As a result, the hinterland is now fragmenting economically without a common focus on the city historically at its center (Mainardi 1998, 120-121). If Milan is any guide, city and metropolis are now different in new ways: the former as a distinctive local but cosmopolitan society, the latter as a conglomeration of local economies less integrated than during the urban-industrial age but still occupying contiguous space. It is now particularly misleading to describe one in terms of the other, as if the city was now buried in an undifferentiated metropolis or the metropolis was still the servant of the city (on the continuing importance of the city-metropolis distinction, see Bagnasco and Le Galès 2000).

Milan and the Northern League

In the late 1980s and early 1990s a new political movement with roots in the northern hinterland of Milan, particularly around Varese, arose to prominence in both local and national politics. This was the Lombard League led by Umberto Bossi, which when unified with other northern leagues from Piedmont, the Veneto and elsewhere in 1991, formed the Northern League (*Lega Nord*). Initially based on a combination of hostility to

existing parties and the Italian state with an appeal to local traditions and dialects, this movement has gone through a number of ideological mutations, moving from its oppositional origins to a form of macro-regional federalism, participation in national government in 1994 and, from 1995 to 1999, to a secessionism based on independence for Padania, the name that Bossi gives to a large swath of northern and central Italy.

In the 1992 national elections the League demonstrated considerable inroads in Milan as well as in its hinterland. This was further demonstrated in the elections for Mayor and Council in 1993 and, to a much lessened extent, in the national elections of 1994. This led to some speculation that the League was as much a movement on behalf of the interests of Milan as those of its hinterland. The League's rhetoric in the early 1990s representing itself as the agent of the "North that produces" against an Italian South "that consumes" at the North's expense, seemed to indicate that the erstwhile economic capital of Italy might be on its way to becoming a more fully-fledged capital of something else. Politically, Rome was to be exchanged for Milan, at least symbolically if not substantively, as the title of one book suggested (*Milano a Roma*, ed., Diamanti and Mannheimer 1994, a title that also alludes to the success of both the League and the Milan-based *Forza Italia* of Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian Rupert Murdoch, in the 1994 national election). As the editors of that book expressed the connection between Milan and the League: "At bottom, the League represents the Italy of producers, whose capital is Milan, in counterpoint to Rome, capital of the old party system ("*partitocrazia*") and of state centralism" (Diamanti and Mannheimer 1994, ix).

In fact, the connection between Milan and the League has proved much more tenuous than early reports suggested. To illustrate this point, Table 1 provides the average

level of support obtained by the Northern League within each of the main provinces of the Milan metropolitan area for the last three national elections. Though there is a region-wide upward trend in support, the province of Milan consistently shows the lowest levels relative to the other provinces. The box-and-whisker plots in Figure 2 provide a vivid display of this tendency. Looking more specifically at shifts in League support between elections, Figure 3 reveals a retrenchment across the region in 1994 with a resurgence in 1996. Provinces have distinctive profiles: in Bergamo League support increased on average by a remarkable 73.1 per cent whereas in Milan average support by commune went up by “only” 17.8 percent over the period 1992-96.

The 1994 election revealed the electoral emergence of “two norths,” as Diamanti (1994) termed them in his chapter on the League in the same book in which he and Mannheimer portrayed “Milan” as taking over Rome, in the persons of Bossi (of the League) and Berlusconi (of Forza Italia). In 1992, the League was one of the few alternatives to the established parties as the old system of parties began to disintegrate under the twin pressures of the end of the Cold War, that reduced the Communist “threat” that the Christian Democrats had always used to advantage and led to a reformulation of the old Communist Party in two new formations (PDS and Rifondazione Comunista), and the emerging corruption scandal centered in Milan (which became known in Italy as *Tangentopoli* or “Bribesville”). In 1994, however, Berlusconi invented his Forza Italia party and this drew off a considerable proportion of the vote that the League obtained in 1992 and in the 1993 local elections. This was much more the case in Milan itself than in the hinterland of the city. The more conventional center-right ideology of Berlusconi, based primarily on his own celebrity and reputation as a savvy businessman, was more

attractive to the average Milanese voter than the localist/regionalist message of the League. But there was more to it than that. Ricolfi (1996, 275), using evidence of electoral turnout and participation in referenda, in which League strongholds have, respectively, lower and higher levels than the “urban North,” suggests that the “territory of the League” in the “Deep North” is marked by much greater “concrete particularism” in political attitudes than the more “civic” and “universalistic” cities. Be that as it may, the League has retreated across the board from the areas into which it had penetrated in the early 1990s (Milan and other metropolitan centers such as Genoa and Venice, traditionally leftist areas such as Mantua) while deepening its support in areas of historic strength, such as Bergamo, Como, Varese, and some of the communes in the north of the province of Milan.

The League’s problem with Milan in particular, and urban centers in general, is evident in the following series of scatterplots. In Figure 4, League support is plotted against the logged number of voters in a commune, the latter is used as an indicator of urbanization; high numbers of voters correspond to more urbanized areas. Because some heavily urban communes have much larger numbers of voters than the average, the number of voters were converted to logarithms to facilitate graphing. In order to provide greater precision to inter-election comparisons, summary statistics for pooled data are reported in Table 2.. Within each scatterplot, the areas within the dotted vertical and horizontal lines represent the inter-quartile range of the pooled, logged number of voters and the pooled vote share of the Northern League, respectively, and the solid lines mark the median values for each pooled variable. These lines and the scales on the y- and x-

axes remain constant across the plots so each inter-election plot can be compared to the others and to the pooled plot (1992-96).

Two items of interest emerge from a visual perusal of the scatter plots in Figure 4. First, there is a strong negative correlation or inverse relationship between League support and urbanization. This is verified statistically using a simple correlation between the two variables across the Milan metropolitan region as represented by the five provinces of Bergamo, Como, Lecco, Milan, and Varese (Table 3). Second, there is significant provincial variation in the correlation between support for the League and degree of urbanization across the urban region. Figure 5 shows the plots of the relationship in 1996 for the selected provinces of Bergamo, Como, and Milan. The negative correlation between the two variables in the provinces of Bergamo and Como is -0.54 and -0.53 , respectively (both statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level). Within the province of Milan, however, there is no statistically significant relationship between support for the Northern League and the logged number of voters (i.e. $r = 0.007$, $p = 0.920$). Closer analysis suggests that the distribution of the data may account for this difference between the province of Milan and the others. For the overwhelming majority of the communes of Milan the logged number of voters is above the pooled region median of 7.64 and League support is below the pooled region median of 29.38. By contrast, in Bergamo and Como there are more communes with fewer voters (i.e. more data points to the left of the pooled median line) and League support tends to be above the pooled median. The more urbanized province of Milan, therefore, has a much lower prevalence of support for the Northern League than the less urbanized hinterland areas of Bergamo and Como.

These scatter plots give a general indication of the differences in support for the Northern League between greater Milan (represented by its province) and its hinterland. A sequence of bivariate maps for the three national elections underscore the difference between Milan and its surrounding area (Figure 6). The summary measures for the pooled data (Table 2) guide the classification scheme used in the maps. They are thus directly analogous to the scatter plots in Figures 4 and 5. Specifically, the logged number of voters falls along the horizontal axis of the map key (i.e., lower quartile/ left column, upper quartile/right column, inter-quartile range/ middle column) and support for the Northern League is placed along the vertical axis of the map key (i.e., lower quartile/bottom row, upper quartile/ top row, inter-quartile range/middle row). For example, communes falling in the upper quartile of logged number of voters (i.e., greater than 8.38) AND the lower quartile of League support (i.e., less than 24.67) are the largest open circles. Areas represented by the smallest black circles are the communes in which the logged number of voters is in the lowest quartile AND where support for the League is in the upper quartile. Cases in the inter-quartile range of both variables are shaded gray. The classification scheme is consistent across the three election years to allow for meaningful comparison.

Looking at the 1992 map, one of its most notable features is the immunity of Milan and the communes in its immediate vicinity to the allure of the League. The only areas of high voter density with moderate support for the League are in the province of Varese and to the northeast of the city of Bergamo. The entire pre-Alpine belt to the north of Milan has areas of moderate voter density and moderate League support. High support for the League is generally in the most rural stretches of northern Bergamo and

Como. In 1994 two noticeable changes occur. One is that the League consolidates around the city of Bergamo, the other is that it retreats in the northern part of the province of Como. 1994 to 1996 shows the most striking changes within the sequence of maps, as League support expands everywhere in the region, even into Milan and its immediate environs. But with the exception of one commune, the League is stuck in the inter-quartile range of support in the densest populated area of the Milan metropolitan region as support strengthens and consolidates in clusters to the south and west of the city of Varese, in between Como and Lecco, and, above all, throughout the province of Bergamo.

The League, therefore, even as it improved its overall standing had not woven together the entire city-region. It had become the party of much of the hinterland but not of the city and its surrounding “corona.”. This pattern has been strengthened subsequently as the League lost control of both the city council and mayoral office in Milan in 1997. Milan is now divided politically from its hinterland as it has never been before in post-World War II Italian electoral history.

This is a major challenge to the League’s claim to represent the whole of northern Italy rather than only the extreme or “deep” North. Of course, local populations are always split in electoral affiliations. Left-, center and right-wing parties have all garnered support historically in Milan and its surrounding area (Goio et al. 1983; Rizzi 1986). But not only was there a dominant consensus for many years between the two areas expressed in majority support for the two major parties of national government in postwar Italy, the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, there was, so to speak, *a common political menu from which choice was made*, largely organized in left-right terms and oriented to

national political goals. From the 1950s to the late 1980s the two parties of government dominated Milan and its environs, even though they were faced with effective opposition from the former Communists and other groupings, particularly in the areas of heavy industry in the inner northern suburbs of the city. In the city support for the Christian Democrats was also largely one of individual choice whereas elsewhere, particularly in parts of the northern hinterland, such as Bergamo and Brescia, the Christian Democrats were beneficiaries of a long-standing Catholic sub-culture reproduced by a dense network of associations and affinity groups (Brusa 1984). Now there seems to have been a fundamental spatial break between the city and its hinterland in the menu of real political choice and the economic-cultural orientations associated with it.

We now want to offer some evidence for why the recent political experience of Milan and its region suggests that cities and their hinterlands can follow very different electoral-political trajectories when economic and social conditions change dramatically such as happened in northern Italy, and elsewhere in Europe, over the past twenty years.

The Difficulty of the Northern League in Milan

The Northern League is seen by most commentators as facing considerable difficulty in establishing itself as a permanent political force in the city of Milan. The empirical evidence we have presented certainly suggests a growing divide between the city and its hinterland. We would identify four causes of the growing political difference between Milan and its hinterland, particularly its historically important hinterland to the north. These are listed in order of importance, reflecting the temporality of the putative cause in relation to the growth-trajectory of the Northern League in national elections in northern Italy. The first is the fundamentally different character of the economies of Milan and its

periphery as they have evolved over the last twenty years. The League's increasingly vociferous pose as a voice of small-scale businesses over the course of the 1990s alienated those in the city with broadening horizons or continuing national orientations. This long-term difference in economic trajectories will be difficult to reverse. The second is the population composition of Milan compared to that of its northern hinterland, particularly the presence in Milan of a substantial population of southern Italian immigrants and their offspring, dating back largely to the 1950s, who cannot be expected to support the explicitly anti-southern and anti-Italian agenda of the League. The third is the new symbolism of the League since 1995 which is increasingly oriented to the Venetian element in northern history and the heroic role of tiny businesses and artisans in economic growth, neither of which can have much positive resonance in Milan. Finally, the League has been undercut in Milan since 1994 by the emergence of a conventional national political right associated with the various parties of the so-called Pole of Liberty (particularly Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale). Between 1992 and 1994 the League was really the only voice for those on the right and center-right dismayed by the collapse of DC and the other parties of government and the lack of a viable alternative to the center-left. This changed in 1994 when Berlusconi created his Forza Italia party as an explicit instrument for nationally-oriented business interests and their supporters in places such as Milan. We want to say something about each of these causes in turn before offering some modest conclusions about the relationship of Milan to the Northern League and what it says about the political differences between Milan and its hinterland under contemporary socio-economic conditions.

(1) The Spatial Economy of a Polyarchic City-Region

Historically, Milan and its hinterland have been thought of as part of the famous “industrial triangle” of northwestern Italy, stretching between Milan, Turin and Genoa, in which large firms led the industrialization of Italy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This industrialization grew out of an older diffuse pattern in which factories emerged in the countryside and often employed people who lived nearby and still maintained some part-time agricultural activity (Romano 1990; Macchione 1989). Beginning with Fascism and continuing during the 1950s and 1960s, agriculture and manufacturing became much more separated in the immediate region of Milan. Factory jobs in the cities, particularly Milan, grew at a higher rate than did the urban population, indicating the concentration of manufacturing industry in city settings in relatively large units (Pagetti 1984; Macchione 1991). In the 1950s and 1960s Milan grew in both manufacturing jobs and population at the highest rate of all cities in Lombardy as a whole. Since the 1970s this pattern has been reversed in the sense that the internal economies of scale of large factories have lost much of their advantage and the accessibility and transportation advantages of large cities in industrial production have weakened considerably (compare Dalmasso 1971 with Bonomi 1997 and Mainardi 1998). These trends have had a number of decisive effects in dividing the large city from its hinterland.

In the first place, small-scale production that adjusts readily to rapid shifts in demand has found a new role. It is in the small cities and “urbanized countryside” to the north of Milan that the small-scale producers have come into their own (Bull and Corner 1993; Bonomi 1997). In such settings, industrial districts have appeared with similarity to the ones previously identified in central and northeast Italy in which local external economies of scale (local banking, labor pool, technological support, etc.) substitute for

the internal economies enjoyed by larger businesses (Bagnasco 1996). Meanwhile, and in the second place, Milan has gone through a massive restructuring with the destruction of many large factories and the emergence of a much shrunken large-firm sector (Carozzi 1991). One important political consequence has been a large decrease in the number of blue-collar workers and a significant increase in the number of professional and managerial employees. This transformation has been particularly marked in the historic center of the city and the immediate suburban ring (Petsimeris 1998). Business owners, professionals, and managers are concentrated there. But perhaps more importantly, a tertiary sector with relatively weak links to existing manufacturing industries in the region has become the main generator of jobs in the city. Involving such expanding markets as advertising, marketing, show business, computer software, healthcare and finance this sector is largely free of the social linkages of manager-worker that characterize the factory economy but, unlike the local horizons of the small businesses in the hinterland, the horizons of these businesses and their employees are national and international (Borlenghi 1992; Bianchini 1994; Scaramellini 1992). On a daily basis they connect to people in other cities and in their own lives partake of a social world that is without the precise territorial limits of the small-scale entrepreneurs and artisans in the hinterland. The old urban-industrial model of city-hinterland relations, therefore, is in crisis as the city experiences an expansion in higher-level (or quaternary) service activities without strong ties to the surrounding area but intense connections to other cities (in Italy, Europe, and elsewhere).

The Milan metropolitan region can be divided into three segments. First is the city itself and its traditional industrial and residential suburbs forming an arc around the

city but particularly extensive to the north in the direction of Como. In this zone the League is weakly based, challenged from both left and right by parties that can appeal to the cosmopolitan and traditional industrial interests of its economic sectors. Second is the zone in which small and medium scale manufacturing firms have largely displaced the large employers of yesterday and expanded production into entirely new products. The social character of these areas is very different from those in the first zone. There are both high levels of self-employment and intensive local orientations in the supply of both labor and services. This zone stretches from Magenta through the southern communes of the province of Varese (e.g., Busto Arsizio, Gallarate, Saronno) to southern Como (e.g. Cant¹) and ending south of Bergamo, in the vicinity of Treviglio and other communes to the west of the river Serio. The third zone is the most peripheral one, stretching between the second zone and the Swiss border or the Trento region. This area has remnants of old industrialization, some new small-scale manufacturing, and tourism. This zone has a degree of dependence on regional-government expenditures and infrastructure (road, rail) decisions emanating from Milan that set it apart from the second zone in confidence in its own devices.

The political consequences are distinctive in the different zones. On the one hand, the intense competitiveness of the small-firm sector in the central hinterland induces a strong identification with “work” as defining of life and a constant worry about next year’s “bottom line.” This generally produces support for a party such as the League which appeals to the values and the worries of the small business owner in an increasingly globalized economy to which the small business owner is increasingly beholden. This has a spillover effect into the entire local community as fear of the effects

of globalization leads to a retreat into an identification with the provincial (Beirich and Woods 2000). On the other hand and in Milan, in place of the class relations of Fordism there is now a much more fragmentary social structure. This is already producing a fluid electoral politics in which no party can rely on permanent support and in which there are dramatic flows of votes between elections. The third zone has undoubtedly drifted towards the League but its continuing dependence on the regional capital means that its residents must still look to Milan rather than see themselves in entirely localistic terms (Bettoni 1998).

(2) The Southern Population in Milan

A second, and less noted, feature of Milan when compared to its hinterland is its more heterogeneous population. Not only is the population made up of migrants and their offspring from all over Italy, particularly the North, there is also a significant “southern”-origin population which arrived in large numbers in the late 1950s and early 1960s to work in the Fordist factories that were expanding at that time (see, e.g., Alasia and Montaldi 1975; Ascoli 1979) and, more recently, a large immigration from Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America (Foot 1997b). This is not to say that there is no southern population in the hinterland, only that there is a sizable southern bloc in the population of Milan and its immediate vicinity that sets it apart from the outer hinterland where the League is so strong. This population was never as segregated residentially as the focus in the 1960s on certain inner suburbs tended to suggest (Foot 1997a). So it is difficult to identify distinctive “southern” enclaves in which voters might vote alike. The advent of more exotic arrivals in the years since makes southerners even less obvious than formerly. Since its arrival, the southern population, particularly the dominant working-class

segment, has tended to support the parties of the left, in particular the Communists and their successor parties, even if other segments, especially those employed by the state, tend to have supported the parties of government or the far right. Though hardly voluble in its criticisms of the League for demonizing the Italian South and southerners as the source of all that ails the North, or speaking in one monolithic voice, this population does provide a core of support for the labor unions and the parties (from Rifondazione Comunista on the left through the Partito Popolare in the center-left to the Alleanza Nazionale on the right) most critical of the League. Leaders of the League sometimes claim that southerners are among the supporters of the party. But, apart from Bossi's Sicilian-born wife, who is one of the founders, no leading figures are southern and the rhetoric and policies of the League are certainly not designed to attract the votes of southerners, however long they and their offspring have lived in the region.

(3) The League's New Symbolism

After the failure in 1994 of its strategy of entering into alliance with other parties in the pursuit of a federal reform of the Italian state, the League has tended to emphasize some new issues in which the identity and interests of contemporary Milan take on little if any significance in the ideology of the party. One of these is the increasing role of the position and problems of small businesses, particularly the small businesses typical of the Veneto. The League has long seen itself as the voice of the small business sector in the industrial districts of northern Italy. But as this sector has become increasingly differentiated between the organized networks of firms in the large and medium-sized cities of Lombardy and Piedmont and the much more localized and independent businesses of the Veneto and rural Lombardy, the League has identified more and more

with the interests and problems of the latter. These businesses are particularly angry at the failure of the state to deliver needed services at the same time that they have lost the intermediary agent that once acted, if unreliably and intermittently, to represent them against Roman bureaucracy: the locally hegemonic Christian Democratic Party.

As if to reinforce this identification, the League has also turned towards a representation of northern history that resonates more with the past of the Veneto than with that of Lombardy. Much of the rhetoric about the new region of “Padania” invented since 1995 relies on symbols from the Venetian past largely because Venice had a distinguished independent past when large sections of northern Italy were under foreign rule or were fragmented among small principalities of one type or another. The League’s actions in setting up its shadow parliament in Mantua, organizing demonstrations along the river Po and in Venice itself, and returning to a logic of cultural separatism after flirting with macro-regional federalism, point to its symbolic withdrawal from the metropolitan North represented by Milan.

(4) The Rise of the National New Right

Finally, since 1994 the League has been challenged on such issues as foreign immigration, the need to liberate the economy from the shackles of state-regulation and the virtues of small business by the emergence of Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party and the makeover of the neo-fascist MSI into the post-Fascist Alleanza Nazionale, both of which have taken votes from the League in Milan. In both the 1996 national election and the 1997 local elections these parties in alliance took over a significant proportion of the League’s prior vote in Milan. In Milan, therefore, there is still support for a right-wing politics that frames issues in national more than in regional terms. This new right became

the main antagonist of the government in the late 1990s. The League's cultural and policy responses to political dilemmas appear too simplistic to achieve a positive response in a large city such as Milan where the everyday reality is too complex for a convinced reaction from a sufficiently large segment of the electorate (Diamanti 1997).

Conclusion

Examining the electoral course of a regionalist party in a city and its hinterland allows insight into a number of merging urban-regional phenomena. In the first place, regionalist parties cannot be entirely successful without conquering their major urban centers. In the city of Milan the Northern League is faced with a major dilemma. To succeed as a party representing northern Italy it needs to succeed in Milan, the North's main city, yet its likelihood of succeeding in Milan is limited by the increasing economic and political divergence between Milan and its hinterland when its rhetoric has increasingly favored the latter. Either the rhetoric and goals of the League must change (once more) or it must write off the city of Milan as a lost cause.

More generally, this example of political divergence between a city and its hinterland suggests that economic change is making localities ever more than city-regions or the metropolis, in the conventional sense of the term, the basic territorial units of account in the modern world. This is particularly the case with polyarchic city-regions such as that of Milan. Those metropolitan areas still dominated by a single industry or a very strong core to periphery pattern of influence, such as Turin, perhaps, still have more of an integrated city-hinterland politics. In general, however, functionally integrated regional economies of whatever sociological character (from polycentric to polarized)

seem increasingly subject to fragmentation as localities within city-regions face distinctive pressures from a globalizing world economy.

Finally, the distinctive political-economic trajectories of localities within the Milan city-region suggest difficulties in readily arriving at a city-regional model of governance for services and development in the region as a whole (*pace* Scott 1998). The recomposition of governance at the city-regional level as national-level regulation faces problems of both efficiency and legitimation is not without its own difficulties (Le Galès 1998; Le Galès and Lequesne 1998). Not the least of these difficulties is the emergence of distinctive political and electoral menus in cities and their hinterlands, reflecting important new differences between them in economic base and social structure.

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Table 1: Provincial average per cent support for the Northern League, 1992-96

	Bergamo	Como	Lecco	Milan	Varese
1992	27.45	30.57	28.64	22.01	30.55

1994	32.45	26.31	28.23	19.32	32.09
1996	47.51	38.26	37.50	25.93	36.11
1992-94	5.00	(4.26)	(0.41)	(2.69)	1.54
1994-96	15.06	11.95	9.27	6.61	4.02
% increase					
1992-96	73.10	25.10	30.90	17.80	18.2

Table 2: Summary measures of the Northern League and logged voter densities in the Milan metropolitan region

	Min	1 st Quartile	Median	3 rd Quartile	Max
%NL 1992	10.95	23.69	27.55	31.03	54.93

%NL 1994	9.58	22.94	27.70	32.49	57.32
%LN 1996	19.46	29.04	36.15	44.80	82.39
Pooled% 92-96	9.58	24.67	29.38	35.76	82.39
Ln (vot dens 1992)	3.18	6.74	7.62	8.36	13.85
Ln (vot dens 1994)	3.22	6.75	7.66	8.39	13.84
Ln (vot dens 1996)	3.37	6.73	7.65	8.38	13.77
Pooled 92-96	3.18	6.74	7.64	8.38	13.85

Table 3: Simple correlations between % Northern League and logged number of voters, 1992-96

1992	(N = 826)	r = -0.351	(t = -10.748)
1994	(N = 826)	r = -0.427	(t = -13.562)

1996 (N = 826) $r = -0.527$ (t = -17.792)

Pooled

1992-96 (N = 2478) $r = -0.382$ (t = -20.587)