

Master Thesis
in Creative Sustainability

The Growth Fetish Survival. A Critical Discourse Analysis on the Reproduction of the Growth Discourse in Italian Newspapers

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Abstract

As in the last decades the human population on Earth kept growing and developing at a constantly increasing pace, concerns about the threatening impact of human activities on the wider socio-ecological system started to arise within various academic fields. The emerging unsustainability of a societal model based on an infinite economic growth paradigm within a world characterized by finite resources, lead a variety of economists, environmentalists and sociologists to question its long-term viability, legitimacy and social entrenchment.

Despite the advancement of many hypothesis and an ongoing discussion about the topic within the academic field, no empirical examples and practical insights have been given on how growth maximization (as measured by GDP) sustain itself as a primary national objective in many countries, how the beliefs behind its efficiency are spread and constantly re-established within societies and how GDP acquired through time a symbolic value (measure of social welfare) that transcends its initial purpose. This paper aims to provide such empirical example.

With my research, starting from a social constructivist epistemology, I investigate how the discourse around economic growth is constructed and reiterated by a popular media (written newspapers) within an example of western society (Italy). For the purpose, I sampled 140 growth-related articles from the four most read newspaper in the country within the time-period Jan-April 2016 and analyzed them by using a properly adjusted Foucaultian three-dimensional framework for critical discourse analysis.

The findings of this paper show the emergence of two antagonist discourses, one fostering a development paradigm based on economic growth and another challenging it. The main insights of this research show how a strong authoritative faction employs a direct, vague and well-established homogeneous linguistic register to deliver its preferred (pro-economic growth) meaning on the topic. Furthermore, control over public discourse access, as well as legitimization strategies such as authorization, marginalization/derision of alternatives and rationalization of causal connections are exercised to foster the faction's mental model of the economic system. On the other side, the persuasion strategy of the opposing faction utilizes a heterogenic linguistic register and seems to revolve around storytelling, exemplification, moralization and the creation of a systemic picture to foster curiosity within the reader. Overall, the strategy can be regarded as an attempt of "cracking" the well-established and socially agreed symbolic power of economic growth as well as showing the discrepancies and contradictions between actions and beliefs fostered by the opposing faction and re-negotiating established meanings.

Keywords: Growth, Economic Growth, GDP, Growth Discourse, Foucauldian analysis, Sustainability, Wellbeing, Newspapers, Italy, Legitimization, CDA, Discourse Analysis

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1. Introduction

In this first chapter, I will briefly introduce the background to my research and illustrate the academic, practical and personal motivations of why it is important. Moreover, I will present my research question(s) and objectives and discuss its limitations. In the latter part of this chapter, I will introduce the core terminology used in this paper and agree on precise definitions to ensure a common ground of understanding. Lastly, a brief overview of the whole thesis structure and content is presented.

1.1 Background

Since the Neolithic's agricultural revolution (approximately 12.000 years ago) humans have been living in a fairly stable natural environment: the Holocene. Nevertheless, starting from the first industrial revolution, something started to change as the impact of human activities over the Earth's natural ecosystem and life supporting systems has been growing exponentially. In the last two centuries, human population increased tenfold (Crutzen 2000), fifty percent of land surface has been transformed by mankind (Crutzen 2002), the extinction rate increased from up to ten thousand fold in rainforests, the nitrogen cycle has been altered and CO₂ emissions reached a level never attained before (Crutzen 2002). The global impact of humanity in the last 200 years on the atmosphere composition, on the terrestrial and on the marine environment even brought many geologists to theorize a new geological era: the Anthropocene (Crutzen 2002). In 2009, the Stockholm Resilience Center proposed nine thresholds called "planetary boundaries" (Rockstrom 2009) to define a safe operating space for humanity. Planetary boundaries represent scientifically estimated limits that humanity should not cross in order to avoid changes that may be irreversible. At current times, three boundaries (biosphere integrity, biogeochemical flows and climate change) have been already trespassed.

Today more than ever, the impact of humanity on the Earth system is undeniable. Modern economies and societies, forming our anthropological system (Gallopín 2003), are intrinsically embedded within the natural environment and therefore play a key role in shifting what we currently define our socio-ecological systems (Gallopín 2003). Yet, something humanity seems to be often forgetting at current times, when commodifying nature and raising itself above it, is its vital dependant relationship with the natural environment: our human system is only a part of the wider socio-ecological system and clearly could hardly survive without a liveable natural environment (Doppelt 2008). A change within the whole human system toward a more

sustainable path, including production and consumption processes, seems nowadays absolutely necessary and overall urgent. And here let us make it clear: sustainability does not mean constancy, it is not only about preserving. Sustainable development, as the word “development” implies, necessarily involves change, dramatic change given our current situation. As Gallopin (2003) brilliantly points out, change is part of living systems and should be embraced. Yet, a key point to keep in mind is that, within a complex system, it is vital to prevent the destruction of the sources of renewal from which the whole system can recover from the unavoidable fluctuations that come with it being an open system (Gallopin 2003). Understanding how to lead the current global system toward a desirable and sustainable equilibrium point and avoid catastrophic areas (Gallopin 2003) where sources of renewal may be irretrievably compromised is therefore one of the most pressing challenge of our times.

By observing the current global situation through recent scientific evidence (Rockstrom 2009), it is hardly arguable that the current dominant capitalistic model failed to protect the sources of renewal within the natural environment, and biosphere especially. Measuring human development by its ability in achieving endless growth, appears nowadays not only inefficient, but also tremendously dangerous (Van den Bergh 2009). In addition to the terrific impact that ever-expanding economies have on the natural environment, the effects of economic growth on human happiness and wellbeing seems to have vanished (at least in the first world) since sixty years ago already (Layard 2011). Furthermore, interesting to underline is that many influential economists in the past fifteen years explained how measuring development through GDP may be misleading for the purpose of achieving greater societal wellbeing (Van den Bergh 2009), it may actually decrease living standards (Stiglitz 2009), it does not account for harmful externalities (Kallis 2011) nor human wellbeing (Layard 2011), it flattens cultural diversities and because of all the previous, it is not self-sustainable (Latouche 2009). Even politicians started recognizing the limits of GDP and of the endless economic growth paradigm and started sketching alternatives objectives to pursue. For example, David Cameron in 2006 (Stratton 2010) declared that it is time to admit that there is more than money to improve wellbeing (and proposed to measure GWP – general wellbeing product) while, as another example, in the small Bhutan the gross national happiness (GNH) is a concept that already emerged in 1972.

Nevertheless, although proofs of the social inefficiency and environmental dangerousness of the capitalistic economic model based on endless growth are nowadays available and generally known in the academic world; the vast majority of economists, politicians, medias and

individuals keep behaving in the same unsustainable manner (even when aware of the consequences – Van den Bergh 2009) and keep reiterating the “growth fetish” discourse (Hamilton 2004). A widely accepted discourse supporting economic growth maximization as the best development way out there within first world societies is still more actual than ever (proof of this can be for example the vital European agreements based essentially only on the GDP measure such as the Fiscal Compact). Relevant to underline, is that economic growth and GDP are not born out of nothing, but instead are humanly constructed concepts that survived a long history, through which they acquired and muted plentiful of uses and symbolic meanings and which ultimately arrived to occupy their today’s actual role within western societies (Coyle 2015). Understanding how the growth discourse reproduces its hegemony within the social body of our societies should therefore be the first step to start changing our inner selves as humans (the way we think, perceive the world and build our social reality) and consequentially our current global system (Kallis 2011). According to social constructivist epistemology (Von Glasersfeld 1981), language and discourses have the power to shift the power balance between societal actors and alter subjective realities. Analysing how the growth fetish discourse is built from different actors of our societies may be relevant for both individuals and policy makers willing to create lasting changes and shift our current socio-ecological system toward a more sustainable socio-environmental equilibrium.

1.2 Research Gap and Problem

According to the World commission on Environment and Development (1987), living sustainably means “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Despite the incredible volume of pro-sustainability declarations within the political and business world in the past 20 years, the basic needs of the Earth’s poorest are not met while through environmental devastation, the ability of future generations to meet their needs is being compromised (Spangenberg 2010). In order to shift human’s current way of living toward a sustainable path, dealing only with the effects of our current system is not nearly enough, but we should comprehend the causes that allow the current system to persist (Spangenberg 2010).

Two of the most important aspects of “economic growth” are recognized within its cultural and psychological dimensions (Costanza 2009, Van den Bergh 2009) that, by being inherently social, manifest themselves through the discourse phenomenon (Duranti 1985). Discourses are extremely powerful tools within social reality and understanding how they develop and reproduce their dominance leads to the understanding of how individuals think about a specific topic. Although the existence of a dominant pro-growth discourse within modern societies has been widely recognized in the academic world (Friman 2002, Van den Bergh 2009, Spangenberg 2010, Kallis 2012, Wanner 2015) and may appear obvious at the eyes of any attentive observer, a systematic research on how this discourse develops, constructs and reiterates itself in practice is still missing. The extant academic sources interested in understanding how the growth phenomenon and discourse spread and persist within societies (Stern 2003, Hamilton 2004, Costanza 2009, Landefeld 2009, Stiglitz 2009, Van den Bergh 2009, Dickinson 2011, Jacobs 2012, Bryniolfsson 2011, Costanza 2014, Coyle 2014, Pilling 2014, Coyle 2015 between others) discuss them mainly from a macro-economic perspective, providing essays and hypothetical explanations that keep building the theoretical academic discourse. On this front, academic research surely moved rapidly forward in the last decade; yet, a practical understanding on how the growth legitimization process works on a smaller scale within the social dimension, seems still underdeveloped. With my research, I plan to focus on a human scale and try to describe how, in practice, the discourse around “growth” emerges from newspapers on a daily basis and constructs/maintains its capillary-established symbolic legitimation within modern societies.

In fact, from the study of Van den Bergh (2009 - p.120-121) clearly emerges a picture through which not only politicians, but the vast majority of citizens in our current societies are influenced by GDP predictions, even if they do not fully comprehend the meaning of this measure. As media play a major role in the reconstruction of social reality (information gatekeepers) and impacting individuals' behaviours; analysing their effect in this specific context is not only intriguing but appears necessary to move forward. With my study, I plan to contribute to the academic research by adding a practical, real case example (currently missing) of how the growth discourse survives and spreads within a modern society (Italy) through the media.

The main, most pragmatic, motivation for this research is based on the idea that reaching the awake consciousness of the practical process that sustains the current economic system through a critical discourse analysis may be relevant for policy makers and any citizen as it would empower them to start deviating from the current system by being consciously political either during their job or in their everyday choices. My research may thus offer insights on how to challenge the established hegemony of the endless growth narration by showing a real-life example in which the reiterative and reproductive mechanisms of the growth discourse are explicitly shown.

In addition to contributing to the extant academic literature and provide some practical insights that may help to progress beyond the current economic system, a third reason that brought me to conduce this research are my own motivation and ardent curiosity. In fact, on a personal level, investigating the development of the growth discourse in Italian newspapers allows me to unite my expertise in sustainability with my passion for journalism, press freedom and political activism (not intended as related to politics but as citizens being intrinsically political). From my side, one practical goal that I aim to achieve through this paper is to push the boundaries of the discussion on economic growth to a new, more conscious, meta level.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

With the aim of filling the research gap presented above, I decided to start from the following question asked by Kallis (2012) in his paper “Ecological Economics” under suggestions for future research:

“If economic growth does not increase wellbeing, and is uneconomical and anti-ecological, what is it that sustains it as a primary national objective?” - *Kallis 2012*

From here, in order to provide a valuable real-life example that could potentially answer the previous question I structured my study around the following research question:

“How is the growth discourse built by mainstream newspapers in Italy?”

→ “Do more than one discourse emerge?”

→ “Did the uses, meanings and symbolic values of “GDP” and “economic growth” evolved since their creation? If so, how?”

The objectives I will try to achieve through this study are the following:

- Collect an extensive data-set of text materials from major press sources and provide insights regarding how the growth discourse is constructed and how it reproduces its heterogeneity today
- Contextualize micro-linguistics and meso-structures (Fairclough 1995) of newspapers’ articles within the larger Italian picture and investigate the impact of those links within the construction of social reality
- Understand how media may relate growth to citizens’ everyday reality and accordingly influence their ideas and behaviors
- Investigate the current magnitude of the relationship between the larger growth discourse and the sustainability discourse in traditional media
- Verify whether the social meaning of economic growth changed since when the concept of “economic growth” as we know it today was conceived

In my thesis I will observe contemporary growth-related articles from four of the most influential Italian newspapers. By employing a specifically modified version of Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional theoretical framework for critical discourse analysis, I plan to

decompose the growth discourse in its different pieces (along all the micro-macro dimension) and from here re-compose the whole picture while making sense of the fragments and their connections between each other. With the aim of helping the reader to better comprehend the interpretation of the collected data and to contextualize it, literature about the history of economic growth, criticism to GDP, socially constructed reality, the phenomena of discourses within modern societies and specifically about the growth discourse within the academic world are presented.

4. Limitations

The actors that contribute to reproduce and constantly re-legitimize the growth discourse are various and, between them, we may distinguish politicians, economists, medias and individuals (Van den Bergh 2009). Furthermore, it is of key importance to understand that within any communication process there are always at least two actors: an information emitter and an information receiver. A message conveying information is normally emitted by one source and processed by another. The receiver makes sense out of the message by scanning it using its pre-acquired knowledge/education and inserts the result in its precedent mind-framework that constitutes his/her subjective reality. Therefore, a degree of partiality of the researcher in highlighting some information deemed relevant while omitting others may apply.

The aim of my thesis is not to give a totally comprehensive answer to how the growth discourse persists in modern societies: it would be impossible to do as well. Instead, I decided to focus on specific actors that, as gatekeepers of communication, with extremely high probability influence the growth discourse (written newspapers) and to contextualize them within a specific environment (Italy). Furthermore, I decided to focus only on deconstructing the “emitter’s side” of the communication and leave the “receiver’s side” open for further complementary research.

My aim is to provide a practical example that could improve the readers’ consciousness about the way written media may craft and shape reality and play a key role in maintaining (or changing) the current economic system. The sample, as discussed more in depths in the methodology chapter, has been thought to be a fairly acceptable representative of written media within Italy and includes a wide diversity of source ownerships and political views balanced with a long-reach of the sources. Yet, exactly because of its nature of case example, the results of my study will be quiet leaned toward a specific context and therefore, generalize them for

other contexts would be potentially misleading if similarities and differences are not properly analyzed beforehand.

Last but not least, the time-frame of the research is traced between January 2016 and April 2016. The thesis' finding will provide a "snapshot" in time of the growth discourse situation and not an historical timeline of its evolution in the past decades. This time-frame choice has been undertaken consciously for two reasons. First, because the interest of my thesis falls in understanding how the situation presents itself at contemporary times. Second, because extensive discourse analysis requires a vast amount of time and effort; choosing a representative sample of articles published over a longer period of time would be rather challenging and dispersive, the results would be hard to contextualize within the wider socio-economic environment and the findings would overall defy the core scope of my study.

5. Definitions

In this paragraph, important concepts for a correct understanding of my study are defined to avoid misunderstandings.

Communication: process of sharing meaning on the basis of information transfer (J.Curran 2010)

Contemporary Society: belonging to the present time (Oxford Dictionary) In my thesis I will refer as "contemporary" to societies between years 2015-2016.

Development: increasing the quality of life of human beings (Gallopini 2003)

Development Paradigm: Framework containing basic assumptions, ways of thinking, set of meanings and symbols, mental models and practices socially agreed, accepted and established within a certain group of actors which may be reiterated through discourse. (Thesaurus + Fairclough 2003)

Discourse: culturally constructed representation of the reality, not a copy. A discourse is an instrument of power that governs what is possible to talk about and what is possible to exist (Foucault from Pat Thomson, University of Nottingham 2011)

Happiness: feeling good, enjoying life and wanting the feeling to be maintained (Layard 2011)
I will be using this term as the measure unit of wellbeing and therefore when talking about “sustainable development” because, as explicated by Layard (2011), it comprehends all factors impacting humans’ “quality of life”.

Power: Relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actors (J.Curran 2010)

Social Efficiency: the optimal distribution of resources in society, taking into account all external costs and benefits as well as internal costs and benefits. Social Efficiency occurs at an output where Marginal Social Benefit (MSB) = Marginal Social Cost (MSC) (Pettinger 2010, from Economics Help)

Social Welfare: The well-being of the entire society. Social welfare is not the same as standard of living but is more concerned with the quality of life that includes factors such as the quality of the environment (air, soil, water), level of crime, extent of drug abuse, availability of essential social services, as well as religious and spiritual aspects of life. (Business Dictionary)

Read more: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/social-welfare.html#ixzz4J0vLxe92>

Sustainability: meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (WCED 1987)

Sustainable Development: Increasing wellbeing of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to improve their own (WCED 1987 + Gallopin 2003)

Wellbeing: the state of being comfortable, healthy and happy (Oxford Dictionary)

Welfare: will be used with its Synonym of Wellbeing significance (Oxford Dictionary)

6. Thesis Structure

Now that the main objectives of the thesis and the key concepts have been explained, in the next chapter I will move forward to review a different array of literature relevant to my study. Firstly, in order to contextualize my research, I will discuss the modern history of economic growth and the foundations of what today is often defined as the endless growth paradox. From here, I will move forward by introducing the socially constructed concept of GDP and reviewing the defensive arguments and criticism toward this economic measure. Correctly understanding how the GDP has been conceived, what it measures and what are its drawbacks will reveal itself useful in the discussion section of my thesis, where the discourses around growth (socially built reality emerging from newspapers) will be compared against academic literature and the eventual divergence will be analyzed.

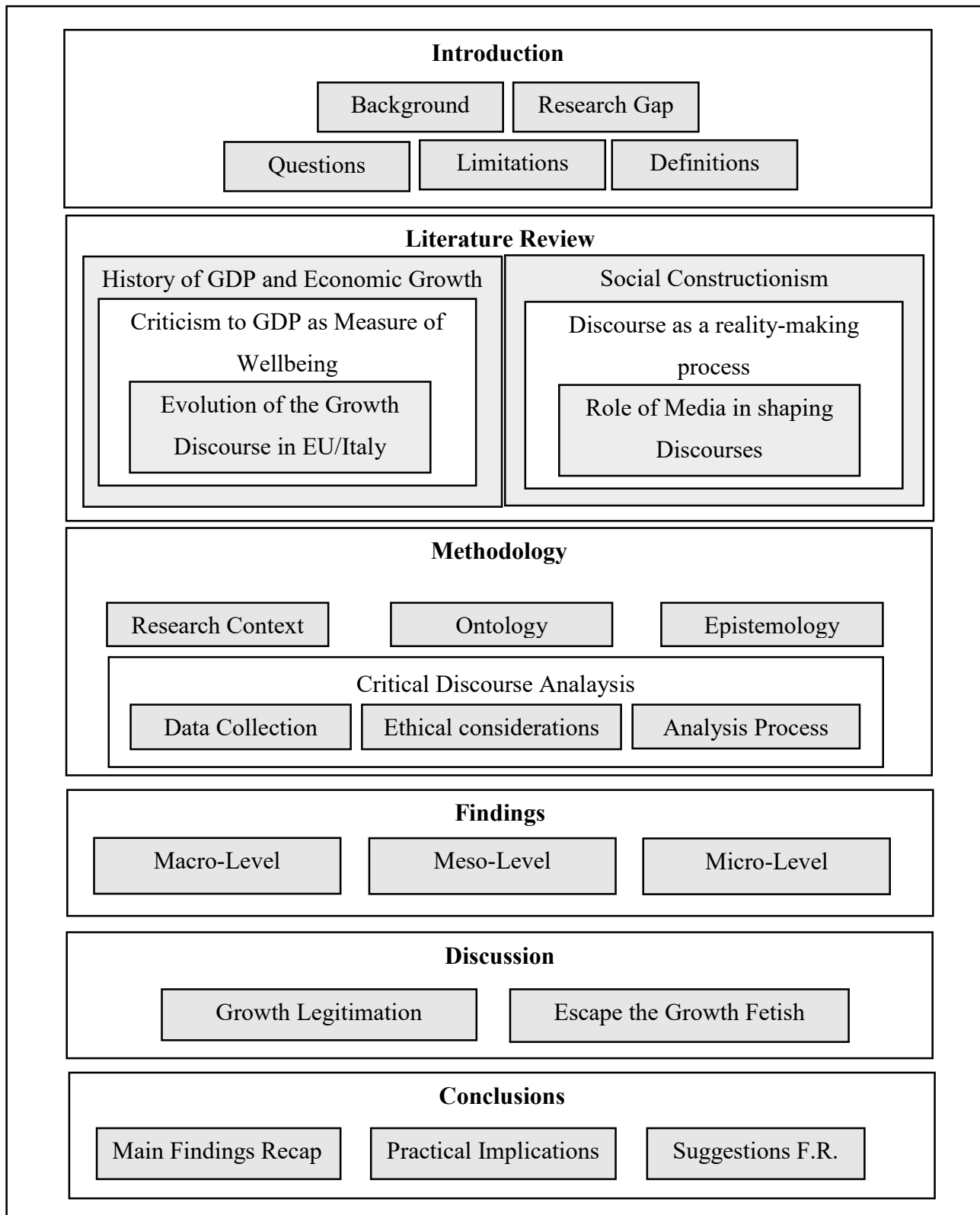
Afterwards, a review of previous literature about socially constructed reality, discourses and the process of text-production from the media is presented. Lastly, I propose a brief academic overview of the current situation of the growth discourse within contemporary societies as well as previously hypothesized theories about what may be supporting it.

Following the theoretical review, in chapter 3 I will complete my theoretical framework by illustrating the methodological choices I have made for my study. More specifically, in this section I introduce the ontological and epistemological standing on which my study is based, the articles sampling process and the critical discourse analysis framework I will employ as methodology.

After the methodological part, in chapter 4 I will introduce my findings following the theoretical framework described in the previous chapter. In this sections, all data about micro, meso and macro levels of the discourse analysis are reported and translations properly explained.

In the discussion section (chapter 5), I will interpret the data by comparing them against the previously discussed literature about economic growth and the nature of discourses, investigate what are the leading discourses within contemporary growth-related articles and connect them to each other. Lastly, in the conclusion section (chapter 6) I will reassume all the insights acquired, draw a comprehensive image of the situation, highlight practical implications this study suggests and open up the space for further research. visual overview of the whole thesis structure is showed in Fig.1.1.

Figure 1.1 Thesis Structure



2. Literature Review

2.0 Content

In order for a critical discourse analysis to be understandable, descriptive and relevant to advance academic research and provide useful insights to interested actors, contextualization is the first and most important step. In this chapter, I will review the theoretical literature from which my research draws on and which helps me to insert my paper into the wider picture. The red thread of the theoretical framework is structured following a double zoom approach that simplifies the overall understanding of the topic (Figure 2.1).

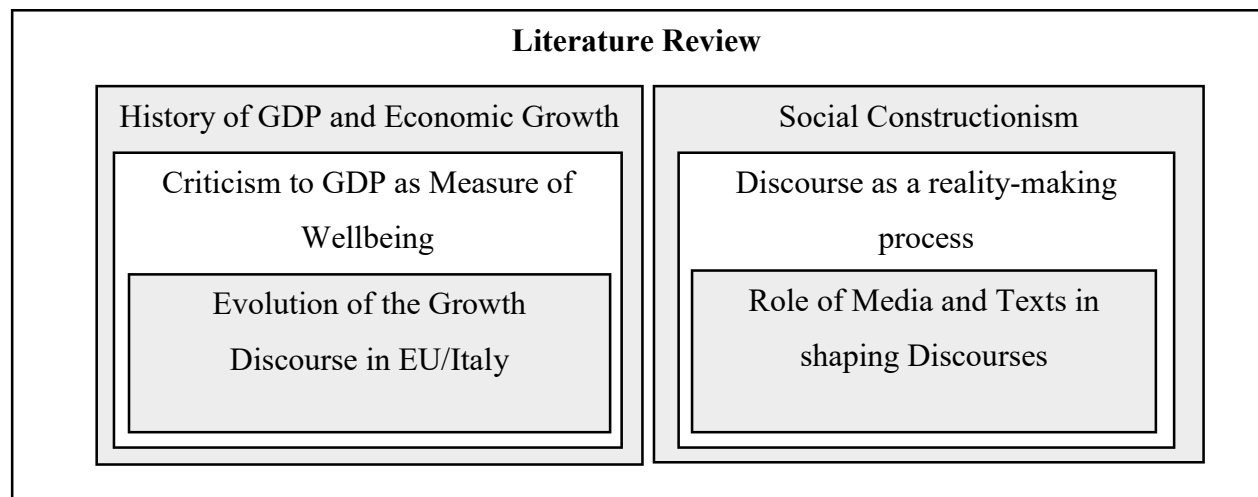
First of all, I propose a brief historical introduction on the origins of GDP as a measure of economic growth and discuss how this indicator's use spread across any country in the world and started acquiring the legitimation and power it retains today. From here I review the main critical arguments moved against the use and misuse of GDP in the past decades; namely the failure to properly account for social inequality, environmental sustainability, quality of production, informal economy and happiness. This sections aims to show the reader the meanings and symbolic values attributed to GDP (and therefore economic growth) when created and the reasons why does concepts are so harshly criticized today.

Starting from the insights gained by the criticism, I discuss the incongruences between the initial social purpose of GDP and its actual use in contemporary societies. From here, I move forward and contextualize the current discussion about economic growth and GDP firstly in Europe, and then more specifically in Italy.

Afterwards, I move onto the second “zoom” of my literature review and introduce the epistemological ground of socially constructed reality on which my thesis is based upon. From here, I present the phenomena of discourses as reality-shaping processes and discuss the role of texts and medias in influencing societal discourses. The literature review ends by discussing the symbolic dimension of GDP and extant academic hypothesis behind its legitimization within the realm of socially constructed reality. This second part of my literature review is meant to smoothly guides the reader into the methodological section of my thesis by building the basis to fully understand my methodological choice: critical discourse analysis.

In the following page, a visual showing the structure of my literature review is presented.

Figure 2.1 Contextual Framework



2.1 Measuring Economic Growth: the History of GDP creation and development

The concept of “Economic growth” is the result of a human, socially accepted, agreement and is generally defined in macroeconomics as “*an increase in the capacity of an economy to produce goods and services, compared from one period to another*” (Investopedia). To compare an economy’s output and growth between periods of time, economic growth is measured through national GDP (Gross Domestic Product) while, to compare economies across countries, GDP per capita is calculated in order to take population differences into account. Gross Domestic Product is a man-made indicator defined simply as “*the monetary value of all finished goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time*” (Investopedia) and includes private consumption, government spending, investments and net exports.

From the previous definitions, it shines undoubtedly clear that economic growth and GDP are concepts related exclusively and narrowly to economics. Yet, for decades now, modern societies have been considering the GDP measure as an indicator of *Social Welfare* (Van Den Bergh 2009 – see definition of “*Social Welfare*” in definitions’ page); of becoming more prosperous in a wider sense (Coyle 2015). As Van den Bergh (2009) explains, this approach does not have roots in any economic theory about GDP as a measure of wellbeing but simply evolved to be like this within the course of time, through many social interactions. The way this change of meaning occurred over time within modern societies is surely something that appears curious and relevant to investigate. In order to understand why GDP is so central in today’s political discourse, to comprehend the contemporary criticism to this measure and why it appears so widely misused, a brief historical analysis appears absolutely crucial (Costanza

2009). The main reference sources I draw on for deepening the historical aspect of GDP are the review on GDP history “*A short history of GDP*” from ecological economist Robert Costanza (2009) and the recently published book “*GDP: A brief but affectionate history*” from economist Diane Coyle (2014,2015) between others.

Measuring national economies’ outputs started becoming a pressuring need around the 30’s and 40’s of the past century, in a time-frame ranging from the Great Depression to the Second World War (Coyle 2014). President Roosevelt, in the United States, widely utilized statistics to justify its economic policies and explain how they had the potential to draw the US out of the depression. From here, economic statistics got momentum. On both sides of the Atlantic, as the shadow of a second world war was approaching, major concerns arose about whether national economies could provide sufficient armaments and fighting supplies while sustaining an adequate output of basic consumer goods and services (Marcuss 2007). To address this question, almost simultaneously in both US, under economist S. Kuznets (around the year 1937), and in UK, under the supervision of J.M. Keynes (around the year 1940), the GDP measure has been born (Dickinson 2011, Coyle 2014). The main purposes meant for this statistic were first, to understand the pattern of national spending on goods and services; second, to acquire a clear picture of how much of national income was used for consumption, savings or investments; and third, to evaluate the growing pace of economic output while monitoring for inflation (Costanza 2014). The specter of a world war at the horizon clearly required nations to strategically prepare and, in this aspect, information about economies were of key importance. Estimating the potential material output of national economies within different industries revealed itself to be a winning move for UK and US as it contributed, among other factors, to reaching victory and ending the war.

One of the key factors that lead to the outbreak of WW2 has been a high degree of economic instability within a number of nations, caused by unstable currency exchange rates and international discriminatory trade practices (Costanza 2014). To prevent this economic-political scenario to happen again, the state-heads of the forty-four allied nations organized a meeting in Bretton Woods (New Hampshire, US) to design a plan that could accelerate economic growth, promote political stability and foster cooperation and peace anywhere in the world (Costanza 2014). Following the indication from Keynes’ (1940) “*The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*”, the Bretton Woods Conference proposed a world vision focused on fostering employment (Coyle 2015), which would help citizens all over the world to secure a

safe source of food, housing, health care and overall improve their quality of life. The underlying assumption of this vision was that improving general economic well-being through the opening of new jobs would be the crucial starting point to secure long-lasting world peace (Costanza 2009). With the privilege of observing history from our contemporary days, we can safely say that, in the post-war context, that underlying assumption revealed itself correct. Nevertheless, important to note is that, already at this point, a man-made measure (GDP) created with different purposes started to being use for measuring something for which it was initially not intended (employment) but only happened, in that historical moment, to be highly correlated with (Coyle 2015). The practical outcomes of the Bretton Woods Meeting have been the establishment of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD – now component of the World Bank) (Costanza 2009). Although those institutions where created with the purpose of representing all state members equally, the influence of war winners (UK and US) on their policies has been, especially in the first decades, definitely stronger. As a result of the Anglophone countries domination within the WB and IMF, after the Bretton Woods conference the GDP measure has been introduced in all UN countries around the world and raised as the primary indicator of *economic progress* (Costanza 2014). In the aftermath of WW2, a soaring GDP (economic progress) has been accompanied with an effective increase in societal well-being: societies rebuilding from war's ruins faced a dramatic increase in purchasing power, education, health and security; all this paired with important conquers in the field of civil rights. At that time, a growth in GDP within nations was usually reflected by citizens satisfying previously unaddressed basic needs and therefore by an increase in overall wellbeing. Today still, after more than seventy years from its introduction, the GDP statistics persists within modern societies and its centrality for the vast majority of business decisions, political choices and financial investments is hard to deny (Van den Bergh 2009).

2.2 Criticism to GDP as a Measure of Societal Wellbeing

“GDP: measures everything except that which makes life worthwhile”

Robert F. Kennedy (Speech at University of Kansas in 1968)

The criticism to the GDP measure has a long history starting back in the 60's of the past century and continuing in contemporary times. Understanding why criticism exists and what are argued to be the shortfalls of this measure is of key importance for contemporary societies to reflect on the social meanings constructed around the concept of economic growth and to move toward a more sustainable development and socio-ecological equilibrium. In this paragraph I will review the main criticisms moved to GDP through the years from both academic and political exponents in order to provide the reader with a critical eagle-eye perspective of the concept of economic growth. Being aware of the following criticism is also crucial to understand the discussion chapter of my thesis in which a critical discourse analysis on contemporary media's coverage of the topic “growth” is presented and what emerges from newspapers' articles is compared to academic discussions.

To understand whether an indicator is good or bad, useful or not; the first step to do is to determine what is the phenomenon the indicator is meant to observe and describe. As we have seen in the previous paragraph, GDP was a measure created in a war and post-war period to monitor economic activity and the production of adequate basic needs for sustaining citizens' standard of living while producing armaments. As one of the architects behind the ideation of GDP, Nobel prize for economics Simon Kuznets, already clearly stated before the UN started requiring nations to collect data and calculate national GDPs, *“the welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred by a measurement of national income”* (S. Kuznets in “Report to the Congress” 1934). Furthermore, when setting goals for higher levels of growth, it is crucial to bear in mind distinctions between quantity and quality of growth, analyze costs and returns, set a time-frame and ultimately specify *“more growth of what and for what”* (Kuznets 1962). This observation from Kuznets expresses in a concise nutshell the limitations of measuring wellbeing through economic growth and is the root of every criticism that came in the decades after. GDP is a measure that since the beginning has been conceived for narrowly measuring economic output and was never meant for measuring wellbeing (Kuznets 1934). Yet, with time the association between wellbeing and economic growth became incredibly sturdy (Coyle 2015), widely spread across the globe and still persists in contemporary societies adopting

neoliberal economic systems (and non). Although a robust correlation between the GDP and living standards may have been true in the post-war period, in today's contemporary societies it seems to fall short on many sides. As I will explain more in depth when talking about socially constructed reality, the fact that socially attributed meanings constantly change over time through human interactions can be one of the major factors behind the biased use of GDP and criticism to "economic growth". Hereafter, I will review the main limitations of the GDP measure and the critical issues that arise when societies utilize this parameter as a thermometer for addressing national wellbeing.

By sorting the major critiques toward the GDP measure and its use, I mapped five major groups of criticism that revolve respectively around the indicator's failure in measuring 1) social inequality, 2) environmental sustainability, 3) quality of production, 4) informal economy and, ultimately, 5) societal happiness.

2.2.1 Social Inequality

The GDP per capita indicator emphasizes average income and ignores the distribution of income (Van den Bergh 2009). In fact, the inequality in the distribution of resources within a society and the consequent uneven opportunities for pursuing personal development and wellbeing are, for the exact nature of GDP calculation, totally overlooked (Van den Bergh 2009). A massive quantity of recent empirical studies from many different fields ranging from psychology to sociology, suggest that a huge inequality in resources distribution mines societal overall happiness and fair re-distribution of starting resources should be implemented to foster greater happiness (Layard 2011) and wellbeing. The marginal utility that poor individuals or families gain from an additional increase in income is generally recognized as greater than the same utility that a rich individual/family would get from the same amount (Van den Bergh 2009, Layard 2011, Coyle 2015). Nevertheless, defenders of economic growth (intended as measured by GDP) as a way to help the poor, still persist even in the academic world. Arnold (2010) argues that interpersonal utility comparison is not possible, in other words it is not possible to know who values more an extra dollar between a millionaire and a homeless. Although we cannot enter into people's minds and compare utility scientifically in every situation, as Arnold (2010) argues "a homeless may not be interested in money while a millionaire may be interested only in amassing money"; we can state that, in most cases, Poors' wellbeing is way more sensible to small changes in income or resources' prices (Kallis 2011) than Richs' one. Another defense for economic growth generally comes almost yearly from the

World Bank showing how the income of poors increases steadily as overall economies grow (Dollar and Kray 2000, Dollar and Kray 2013) and therefore argues that the trickle-down effect is still in place. Those argumentations clearly forget that poors, exactly as every other human, are pursuing wellbeing that is different from narrow economic safety or increasing purchasing power. As Layard (2011) suggests, and Van den Bergh (2009-2011) remarks, humans compare their own status against neighbors and from empirical studies on happiness emerges that relative income is, in many cases, more important than absolute income to reach wellbeing. Following this red thread, it is no wonder that high rates of economic growth may actually increase poverty if the magnitude of negative impact deriving by an increase in inequality outweighs the economic benefits of extra income (Bhagwati 1988). Because GDP totally omits the effect of relative income on wellbeing, it generally overestimates social welfare and progress (Van den Bergh 2009). The GDP paradox grows stronger when observing the UN's Department of economics and Social Affairs discussing whether inequality is good for fostering economic growth (by motivating people to work more) or it hurts economic growth (as it impedes the building of human capital) (Akhtar 2013). Economic growth measured by GDP, is raised by UN still today as it was in the post-war period as the ultimate human goal to pursue and the inequality issue is treated as a step to reach further levels of "growth"; the paradigm is upside-down. Blindly seeking growth for the growth's sake without aiming at tangible return in societal wellbeing (or social welfare) is the phenomenon referred to as "growth fetish" (Hamilton 2004), and the fact that it still persists in our societies today has been addressed as the "GDP Paradox" (Van den Bergh 2009). The UN vision appears today stunningly acritical and totally out of time as it does not answer Kuznets's (1962) basic question of "more growth of what and for what".

In paragraph 2.2.4. we will come back to the UN vision, but as of now it appears remarkably interesting to underline how major defensive arguments to growth as an instrument to address inequality come mainly from economists linked to global institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations (created at almost the same time after WW2 with the aim of fostering economic growth) while in the academic world the consensus that GDP does not provide a good measure for human progress and bears potentially harmful effect on wellbeing (Van den Bergh 2009), is increasingly spreading and being accepted (Stiglitz 2015).

2.2.2 Environmental Sustainability

A second major area of critics toward the GDP indicator concerns its failure in measuring the environmental impact of economic growth, and therefore the true costs of economic progress

(Kuznets 1962). Gross Domestic Product is simply obtained by summing up all market prices of goods and services paid by either the final consumer or governments within a specific nation and the value of total investments. The presence of externalities in production processes implies that current market prices do not sufficiently reflect the true sum of private and external costs (Van den Bergh 2009) and therefore are unreliable basis for constituting a reliable social wellbeing indicator.

Paradoxically, damages to the biosphere integrity, natural resources depletion (fish stocks, forests etc.) and pollution are not measured by GDP while on the contrary, trying to address those problem is (Van den Bergh 2009). I make an example: let us suppose that a factory is emitting a thousand liters of toxic chemicals in a river during one month. The GDP, as it has been conceived, does not measure the environmental damage provoked. If the factory then, cleans the banks of the river and recovers a hundred liters of chemicals, GDP will grow by the amount employees have been paid for recovering those liters. In this case, economic growth increases; yet our ecosystem would have been way better off if no toxic chemicals were released in it in the first place. It is relevant to underline that this is not only a theoretical example, but it reflects exactly what happens in practice: proof of it may be the contributions toward the US GDP that have been provided by the British Petroleum Gulf Spill in 2010 or the repairing's costs after Katrina's hurricane, outweighed only by the destruction of job places they provoked. Because of this distortion in the measuring system, we tend to consider ourselves "better off" than what we really are (Atkinson 1997, Van den Bergh 2009).

During the past half century, several influential neoclassical economists (Beckerman 1974, Lomborg 2001, Meadows 2004) have been agreeing that resource constraints are not a limit to growth and warmly supported the existence of an Ecological Kuznets Curve, as theorized by Grossman (1991). The EKC is a hypothesis that correlates income per capita with environmental degradation. which states that at a certain point during their development history, countries will eventually start considering the environment as a normal good, or even more, as a luxury good and investing heavily to protect it. This idea is essentially an empirical phenomenon that, although it may make sense in theory ("more growth may produce more resources for saving the environment"), has never thoroughly being encountered in reality, with the exception of narrowly-framed exceptions, and its supported by a set of literature rather weak from an econometrical perspective (Stern 2003). In fact, the EKC seems nevertheless limited to few indicators all partial in nature and many times uncorrelated with long-term sustainability

(Van Den Bergh 2009). Furthermore, in most cases, where a EKC is observable on a national scale, it is not equally observable on a global scale as outsourcing and externalization of costs to less developed countries are a widespread reality (Stern 2004). Because of those reasons, GDP appears also in this case seems to construct a biased perception of the degree of environmental protection employed by national countries.

Environmental sustainability remains a central topic in the critics to GDP as contemporary societies often fail to remember that GDP is an artificial construct and not a natural object nor objective (Coyle 2015). For societies aiming to achieve sustainable development, it appears totally counterproductive, if not ridiculous, to measure progress through an indicator that does not take into account the damage to the Earth system's sources of renewal that would ensure future generations with the possibility to survive and meet their needs. Criticism, as well a social phenomenon, emerges in this setting with the aim of changing the symbolic values, use and meanings attributed to economic growth within the social body (more on 2.4), with the ultimate aim of altering human behaviors.

2.2.3 Quality of Production

The whole concept of economic growth since its beginning has been constructed following the GDP measure, which in addition to environmental externalities, fails to weight the real benefits of different goods and services within a society. The GDP indicator measures the *monetary cost* of goods/services but it does not measure whether those goods/services are beneficial to societies (ex. Weaponry, tobacco, divorces, drugs are arguably not) and, if they are, to what extent (what they give to us in terms of wellbeing, how much value they add to our quality of life, to the social welfare of our nations). Like natural disasters, also crime and man-made accidents, by triggering production may contribute positively to GDP growth; yet, it is undeniable how those factors do not add to societal wellbeing (Messinger 1997).

Although we can easily agree that GDP was roughly monitoring progress in the post-war period, characterized by a heavy increase of basic material products (food, housing, streets, standardized consumer items etc.) and human-intensive labor; we cannot say it does the same within contemporary complex economies, characterized by a huge variety of services, intangible goods and rapid technological innovation (Coyle 2015). In fact, although it was relatively easy to count the number of primitive TVs or PCs (or any other fast-evolving thing) when they first came to light, today seems extremely challenging to understand how new more-

performing versions of the same items (ex. a faster and lighter PC with better graphic, a more effective painkiller etc.) contribute to the consumers' utility (Coyle 2015). Accounting for quality enhancement is such a challenging ordeal for GDP because the technological advancement reached such an extremely rapid pace in almost any industry that makes it physically impossible to follow. This fact, added to the astonishing gamma of products/services which nowadays exist and which is also extremely hard to monitor, makes comparing economy's snapshots in time a colossal challenge (Coyle 2015) and poses the question of whether this process is truly necessary.

An additional argument to the already large cauldron of criticism against GDP is also raised by Bean (2016) which explains how the GDP indicator almost entirely fails to consider the value of the myriad of intangible digital services that have been increasingly popping out in recent times. In fact, as GDP evaluates essentially the cost value of things, it dramatically falls short in measuring the benefits and outputs of digital services which are sustained by simple advertising or donation and do not charge the final user (ex. Skype, Digital Music Online, Wikipedia,) (Bean 2016).

Last but not least, the GDP's formula based on the monetary value of things creates the silly paradoxes through which, eco-efficient innovations and durable goods make the indicator to fall instead of growing (because less material resources are consumed in the production) and higher crime rates and a growingly unhealthy population make it grow instead of decrease (because of the higher costs of dealing with crime and increasing public health expense). Moreover, the attachment to monetary value implicates that the same good/service may contribute differently to GDP based on the region of where it is delivered (ex. a haircut in England raises GDP way more than the same haircut in China), and that overpricing is essentially positive for development (ex. inflated medicines) (Pilling 2014).

In conclusion, GDP, as it is calculated today, seems indeed better at measuring quantity rather than quality and, with his easy example, Chang (2014) makes it extremely clear to understand. Consider a table setting composed by a knife, a spoon and a fork. In output terms, a set of three spoons is equally good; in life quality, clearly is not (Chang 2014 from Pilling 2014). It is a simple concept, yet often so neglect by economists and therefore policy makers. Understanding the social process through which this basic idea is often overlooked and forgotten is also one of the questions my thesis is trying to address.

2.2.4 Informal Economy

A fourth major point moved many times against the GDP indicator is its inability to account for informal economy. Anything that has no market value is not accounted in GDP, even in the case it may be essential to improve citizens' lives. A non-marketed activity which is ignored by the GDP calculation is for example housework (cooking, cleaning, washing, raising kids, caring for elders etc.) (Pilling 2014). The reasons may be both because these tasks are undervalued or extremely hard to correctly estimate (Pilling 2014). Yet it is undeniable that they are indispensable for the wellbeing of our societies. Another social phenomenon not measured by GDP which dramatically improves living conditions within societies is the level of volunteering. Volunteers, both individuals and organizations, such as firemen, charity organizations and environmental activists, provide vital services for communities that the state is not able or not willing to provide itself. Some more examples of services often provided by volunteers may be cleaning public areas, restorations, constructions, assistance to kids and disabled, environment monitoring, sustainability education and the organization of cultural initiatives. Volunteering is absolutely crucial to sustain modern societies as it many times becomes the immunity system of communities against environmental destruction and social disaggregation (Hawken 2004). The fact that GDP does not include the benefits of volunteering and housework activities because of the absence of monetary transactions clearly delivers a biased, incomplete picture within which the human economy operates (Costanza 2009).

The fact that the indicator is bound to the monetary value of things, does not only deliver a distorted image of activities and progress within national countries but it also presents a distorted picture of the whole world. As an example of this, I would like to quote the estimation presented by United Nations (2016) from which emerges that roughly half of the world population lives with less than 2\$/day. This fact, does not necessarily mean that half of the world lives in a constant state of deprivation and unhappiness under an imaginary (socially constructed) poverty line. A large part of those individuals defined "poor" by UN may in fact enjoy a shelter, daily food and be able to satisfy their social and human basic needs. The fact that in the third world, goods and services are often traded without attaching them a monetary value, does not absolutely mean that they are of no value for the societal wellbeing; simply they are "invisible" to the GDP monitoring system (as it has been conceived and socially accepted and implemented). Our European perspective that sees Africa as a stagnating continent, suggests Kenny (2012), is a distorted result closely tied to our fixation for GDP. In fact, as he continues, crucial to realize is that *"the biggest success of development has not been making*

people richer but, rather (...) making the things that really matter—things like health and education—cheaper and more widely available” (Kenny 2012). GDP per capita may thus underestimate economic development (Beck 2007) or overestimate it in the case informal economy was negatively related to institutional development (Beck 2007). In conclusion, it appears evident how the current statistical procedures clearly understate the rate of global poverty reduction in the third world (Deaton 2004) and how UN estimations may be broadly inflated.

A last core point to keep in mind, is that GDP is a humanly constructed indicator, a socially agreed mathematical formula, and thus it may be manipulated as we like. As an example, in 2010 the European Union approved a new accounting regulation system (ESA 2010) for measuring the GDP that, between the main changes, counts expenditures in weapon systems as “investments” and includes an estimation of the informal illegal economy (prostitution, drugs trafficking and smuggling) (ESA 2010, Eurostat 2010, 2016). As a consequence of the new European Accounting System, the GDP of the EU-28 rose by 3,7% in 2010. Did this change in the calculation system materially change the current economic situation and development state of national countries? Clearly, it did not. Yet, it arguably changed the way reality is described and therefore perceived. Furthermore, it may be argued that this change increased, in some cases, the level of distortion and confusion around the GDP indicator. As an example, when the ESA 2010 became fully operative in October 2014 it helped Italy, at least formally, to exit the recession/stagnation situation (again, socially constructed concepts) in which it was navigating since 2010. Italy, by being one of the European countries where informal economy is stronger (mafia, camorra, drugs trafficking, abusive constructions, etc.) clearly gained a GDP boost from the implementation of ESA 2010. If citizens were conscious of what GDP is and how it is calculated, clearly changing accounting systems would not change subjective realities because limitations could be discussed from time to time. Yet, in reality GDP is clearly hard to comprehend by most non-economists and, by continuing with the example of Italy, when ESA 2010 became fully operational at the end of 2014, the change in accounting arguably influenced socially constructed reality by fostering psychological safety and provided a temporal boost in the government’s consensus (GDP explains vote in many developed countries as it is perceived, and in part is, correlated with employment and household income – Coyle 2015). Same happened for example in Britain (Pilling 2014), where statisticians acted as “*they had found billions of pounds under their pillows*”. Keeping in mind that GDP is not a natural phenomenon waiting to be measured (Coyle 2014) but it is a socially constructed agreement (as we will see

more in depth in paragraph 2.4) is another crucial issue to held tight in mind that will return in the discussion chapter when a comprehensive discourse analysis on newspaper's articles will be developed.

2.2.5 Societal Happiness

Happiness economics is a fast-growing (MacKerron 2010), relatively new research branch within the academic field that finds its roots not only in economics but also in psychology, health and sociology. The central idea of the studies in this area is to substitute the human goals of monetary income, wealth and profit with happiness, wellbeing and quality of life. The rationale behind this idea, is that income, wealth or profit are only some of the media that may or may not make our life worthy while happiness is the final end that every human is aspiring to reach (Layard 2011). Although the terms “wellbeing” and “happiness” are mostly used interchangeably (MacKerron 2010), the majority of scholars in this sector support the idea that subjective happiness can and should be used as the measure unit for wellbeing and quality of life. Two are the main reasons for this: happiness is an ultimate objective and it is measurable (Layard 2011). On the one hand, happiness can be defined an ultimate objective because it is not questionable: you can question why somebody wants to learn more, work more, earn more, buy more, travel more and they would be able to answer. Yet, when you question why somebody wants to be happy, no real answer can be given (Layard 2011). On the other hand, happiness is measurable as a vast amount of studies demonstrated, both empirically (as anybody knows and can answer how happy he/she feels) and scientifically through modern brain scans (Layard 2011).

The nature of happiness includes the sum of everything that makes individuals happy or unhappy and that is only fragmentarily measured by GDP: financial situation, family relationships, work, community and friends, health, personal freedom, personal values and sense of purpose (Layard 2011). Because of this, happiness has the potential to be a comprehensive measure of human progress; something that GDP, by having a narrow and excessive focus on economic growth, fail to be.

The fact that GDP is socially believed to be a fair measure of wellbeing and happiness of modern societies, as we have seen before, it is not necessarily a universal truth (Kuznets 1941). In addition to that, modern research in happiness economics showed that the process of “adaptation”, which is entirely neglected by GDP, is one of the key influencers of human

happiness (Layard 2011). Adaptation is the process by which expectations are created and met. To explain this concept, Layard proposes the following example: a new product such a new dress, gives a boost in happiness when first acquired; yet after some time the level of subjective happiness seems to return to the previous level, although the good in itself is the same as before, and when you open the closet you feel you “don’t have nothing to wear anymore”. Humans tend to get used to things they possess and as they get used, those goods lose value (Layard 2011). Modern societies are currently striving to obtain a constant gratification by increasing their material possessions. Nevertheless, an interesting fact is that, as I will also more widely discuss in the next paragraph, empirical studies showed in the past decade how, after a certain quantity of income (material goods), life satisfaction remains essentially unaffected by changes in economic growth (Layard 2005, Inglehart 2008, Di Tella 2010, Proto 2014).

Observing whether the discourses about happiness and life satisfaction emerges within contemporary discussions on economic growth and if so, to what extent, is also one of the objectives that my research is trying to achieve.

2.3 Contemporary situation of use and talks of GDP within modern economies

In the previous paragraphs we discussed how the GDP indicator (as it is currently socially accepted and implemented) fails to recognize inequality within societies (Van den Bergh 2009, Layard 2011, Kallis 2011, Coyle 2015), how it mistakenly values natural and human-made disasters, pollution, car accidents and divorces as economic growth (Kuznets 1967, Atkinson 1997, Van den Bergh 2009-2011), how it is unable to evaluate the quality of goods and services produced (Coyle 2015), how it almost entirely ignores informal economy that covers a crucial role in modern societies (Beck 2007, Costanza 2009, Hawken 2014, Pilling 2014), how it is not a reliable indicator of poverty (Deaton 2004) and how overall, it absolutely does not take into account human happiness (Layard 2011).

Then the question seems natural: if all of the previous is true, what is the purpose of GDP today? What information it is conveying to us today? Did the social meaning of GDP and its symbolic value changed since it first has been conceived? As Nobel Prize Josef Stiglitz argued in 2009, before employing an indicator it is first of all essential to decide what it is aimed to measure. In fact, in the performance-driven societies of today, “*if we measure the wrong things we may eventually wind up making the wrong things*” (Opinion, J.Stiglitz Sept. 2009). Because of this, investigating over the presence of discrepancies between today’s societies’ goals (aimed

measure) and the implemented GDP current use to achieve those goals, seems absolutely necessary to reflect upon where we are heading and progressing forward.

Let us start from what information GDP conveys us today. As Stiglitz (2012) brilliantly points out, GDP is a man-made indicator that measures the “busy-ness” of modern economies. Yet, it does not inform us on whether we are busy doing the right things, or in other terms, improving our lives. Employing GDP today, is like *“measuring a building’s energy use and stating that the more electricity is used, the better the quality of life of the building’s inhabitants”* (Costanza 2009). Naturally, when receiving a pricey electricity bill, many of us may be brought to disagree. As the creator of GDP explained since the beginning, GDP has been thought to be a fairly rough measure of national economic activity but it never aimed to become the only measurement of the health of our economies, let alone a measure of societal progress (Kuznets 1934 from Costanza 2009). As we have seen, GDP, had his own initial purpose in preparing countries for war (Coyle 2014). Yet, from the criticism of the past 50 years (of which Van den Bergh 2009 provides an extensive summary on p.2 of “The GDP Paradox” paper) clearly emerges the inappropriateness of GDP as a measure of human happiness, wellbeing and therefore of sustainable development (defined as an increase in overall subjective societal wellbeing).

The previous paragraph’s discussions seem to provide a picture in which the red thread that connects all areas of criticism toward GDP twirls around the social meaning that is given to this indicator, rather than the indicator itself. In fact, relevant to recognize is that GDP is not inherently bad (Costanza 2009), it simply measures what it measures. Critical voices have been simply contesting the global system’s misuse of an indicator for monitoring something it does not measure and was never intended to measure (Costanza 2009). When criticizing GDP in all the previous areas, authors have been arguing for the inappropriateness of using Gross Domestic Product as a measure of national wellbeing and human progress; a process that has spread like oil, from the economical to the political to the finance sphere, in the last 70 years.

As Coyle (2015) points out, to clear the mist of confusion around the issue of development and how to achieve it, it is tremendously important to keep distinct the two concepts of economic activity and wellbeing. Furthermore, at this point, after observing the expectations of public institutions and private citizens toward the GDP in the past decades, Coyle (2015) considers advisable to eventually start focusing more aggressively direct policies toward the latter. In fact,

she continues, measuring wellbeing of people is what really matters, not how many products or hours they work to get that well. This difference between concepts is extremely crucial to keep in mind as it is necessarily bound to be at the core of my critical discourse analysis and will return handy in the discussion section of my thesis.

An ironic fact that may leave a bitter grin on many faces, is that most economists realize the inappropriateness of GDP as a measure of wellbeing as soon as they study it. Yet nobody never truly and loudly raised his/her voice enough to argue against its implied symbolism and overly extended use outside of the academic world. Many economists seem to accept the criticism to GDP, yet they systematically deny its relevance (Van Den Bergh 2009). As Coyle (2015) states in her milestone book *“economists have always known in theory that GDP does not measure social welfare in any sense, nevertheless we, and therefore policy makers, have always ignored that caveat in practice”*. Perhaps, after reading the last reports on planetary boundaries (Rockstrom 2009, Steffen 2015) and natural resources depletion, it is time today to answer Hamilton’s (2004) call and question what kind of growth are we aiming for and whether this kind of growth benefits or not the majority of our societies. Aiming for a blind economic growth based on GDP (the growth fetish – Hamilton 2004) seems nowadays not only senseless, but can also be misleadingly dangerous (Van den Bergh 2009). An absurd note in this panorama, given the context, seems the approach that the United Nations are employing to tackle the problem. In facts, starting January 2016, the UN set “17 sustainable development goals” for the next fifteen years and, between those, we find also solving poverty and inequality through “sustainable economic growth”. Given the definitions that the same UN gives for “sustainability” (United Nations 1987, see definitions page) and the previously discussed socially accepted (also by UN) calculation and use of GDP, the expression “sustainable economic growth” results in an oxymoron in itself (Daly 1993, Fullerton 2010). Indeed, improving poor’s conditions by measuring it through an indicator that clearly does not take into account inequality nor environment depletion nor a sense of trade-off between present and future (Coyle 2015), cannot be defined by any mean “sustainable”. Detaching the concept of “quality of life” from “economic growth” and at the same time decoupling “progress” from its environmental impact are likely the most compelling challenges of our time (Gallopini 2003, Hostetter 2014).

By having in mind all of the previous criticism, the informative power and the relevance of GDP and economic growth to measure wellbeing noticeably deflates quiet dramatically when

observed through the commonly agreed academic perspective. Yet, the importance and legitimization that GDP enjoys in today's societies, politics, economics, newspapers and finance, seems all but deflated (Van den Bergh 2009) and the measure seems to be widely considered and accepted as a relevant thermometer of human wellbeing and therefore placed as a primary societal goal. Most economists, when accepting the fundamental shortcomings of GDP, take a position of not worrying too much about it (Van den Bergh 2009) as the indicator is still somehow useful for understanding economic trends and in reality it does not have a large impact on real economies (Van den Bergh 2009). However: there is no denying that reality outside of the mainstream economists' bubble, seems to narrate another story. Most companies are still considering GDP when deciding where to expand (Costanza 2009), all governments invest big money in the UN System of National Accounts to calculate GDP and may fall if GDP falls, financial institutions invest by following economic trends, banking institutions decide the loans' rates also based on GDP and most newspapers dedicate news daily to its predictions and fluctuations. A major concern for governments to stress a growing GDP is the belief of its negative correlation with unemployment, that if it were to grow excessively, it may result in civil turmoil (Van den Bergh 2009). The same somehow goes for citizens that fear to lose their jobs due to economic recession. Interesting fact is, that although the correlation between employment and GDP may have been true in a post-war heavily manufacturing economy (Coyle 2015), it is not anymore true into a technologically advanced society such today's (Stiglitz 2009). The phenomenon by which, starting from the beginning of the 80's, has seen the real GDP steadily growing but employment and average household's income not closely following but even decreasing, has been denominated the Great Decoupling (Bryniolfsson 2011, McAfee 2012, Krugman 2012, based on US economic data) and appears as an extremely loud alarm bell against utilizing GDP at all to measure the level of employment. A fair redistribution of resources among and within societies in the next decades looks today a way larger challenge than fostering further growth, yet it seems the only viable solution (given the technological progress pace and its cannibalization of jobs) to foster greater societal wellbeing and overall global peace.

One last point I would like underline, against a common argument that states that GDP is used because of its easiness to measure, is that there is plenty of alternative indicators for assessing the progress of modern societies, developed by different international institutions, that may be likewise easy to measure and that may provide a much more solid solution to obviate to many of the GDP's deficiencies. For example, some of those measures may be the Genuine Progress

Indicator (GPI) and the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) from ecological economics (Lawn 2003) which try to address the major shortcomings of GDP. Furthermore, questioning whether having an overall comprehensive index that measure progress is still necessary for today's societies may be also something useful to do (Van den Bergh 2009). Following this line of thought, several have also been the reports proposed by different international organizations which try to provide a wide gamma of societal parameters that may allow policy makers to have a deeper dashboard-perspective into issues. Some examples may be the UN attempt of creating a World Happiness Report (in which GDP is only one of the several metrics), the OECD's Wellbeing Report and NEF's National Account of Wellbeing between many others. From those extensive reports it is possible to realize the magnitude of the opportunities that advancement in statistical techniques and technologies have provided to improve our metrics (Stiglitz 2009). Using those opportunities to achieve a sustainable human progress, that transcends narrow economic growth, seems to be in fact, one of the pressuring challenge of our time.

Understanding all the previous discussions on history, social formation, acceptance, use and critique discussion in regards of GDP contributes both to increase the relevance of my wide research question ("What sustains economic growth as a primary national objective?") and to create the historical and theoretical framework into which my narrower research will be inserted. Zooming from the previous macroscopic review, in the next paragraph I propose a brief summary of the situation of the growth discussion within Europe and more specifically in Italy. Afterward, I will introduce the concepts of discourse and socially constructed reality that will guide us into the methodology chapter, where my approach to the wider question will be narrowed down and discussed in depth along with my research choices.

2.3.1 Situation of the discussion and use of GDP in Europe

The attitude of the European Union toward economic growth and GDP at current times appear somehow ambivalent and confused, in line with the general picture previously described. In the past decade, some European leaders already expressed perplexity over GDP and questioned the purpose of using it to measure economic growth. All EU had plenty of discussions about the limitations of GDP.

English prime minister David Cameron stated in 2006, during the annual Google Zeitgeist conference, that *"it's time we admitted that there's more to life than money and it is time we*

focused not just on GDP but on general wellbeing” (Stratton 2010, on The Guardian). Furthermore, he underlined that wellbeing cannot be measured by money or traded in markets (Stratton 2010).

Toward the end of 2007, the European commission released a memorandum of an ongoing discussion regarding the usefulness of GDP (Memo/07/472). In this press release, the EU commission states clearly that “GDP does not measure wealth nor welfare”. Furthermore, it underlines the “implicit link” between economic growth and aspects of wellbeing such as employment and consumption and discusses its limitation in considering environmental sustainability and other parameters that influence human happiness (ex. such as social relations, health etc.) (Ibid.). The idea that emerges from this memorandum suggests that the academic criticism did already reach in 2007 the European institution, or at least the EU commission, which sketched a road to move beyond GDP by 2010. As a result of the discussions, with two years of delay and by closely working with other international institutions (United Nations, FAO, International Monetary Fund, OECD, World Bank), a new statistical framework has been created: the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA). The framework has been born with the aim of providing a wide range of useful parameters to policy makers to enable them to improve their legislative process with regards of humans and the environment (SEEA 2012).

In the beginning of 2008 the former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, unsatisfied with the present state of statistical information about society and economy, opened a commission guided by the Nobel prize Joseph Stiglitz, and economists Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, to investigate current measurement of human progress and move beyond GDP. The final report of the commission, strongly underlined the marked distance between standard measures of important socio-ecological variables, such as the GDP, and their widespread perceptions (CMEPSP 2009). In addition to that, it further re-expressed the spread criticism about inequality, environmental damages and quality of production (Ibid.).

Around the same time, also the German Bundestag, following the belief of GDP being an outdated measure, started a commission (Enquete Kommission) with similar objectives (Giesselmann 2013). The commission interviewed different actors and citizens and ultimately, stressed the non-urgency of improving GDP (compared to other more pressuring objectives

such as “maintaining democracy” or “reducing inequality”) and provided a dash-board of different parameters to account for sustainable progress and human wellbeing in the country.

Despite the position taken by few leaders and the ongoing discussions within the EU commission, the harsh austerity measures that have been adopted in recent years in several European countries (of which also France, Germany, Britain and Italy) necessarily pose the question of how serious leaders were when talking about moving beyond the bottom line (Jackson 2012). The European Fiscal Compact agreement, signed in 2012 by 25 of the 28 member states, which mandates strict parameters for the national deficits based on GDP, may be in fact elevated as a major example of the never-faded centrality of GDP on the European level of policy making and shows how criticisms about the meaning and symbolic value of the measure, have been heard but never seriously taken into account. As Stiglitz (2009) noted, there seems to be a discrepancy between expected information that GDP delivers and the information that it can deliver. Costanza (2009), in response of a constant misuse (or “over-use”) of the GDP indicator, has been stressing the importance of an *“aggressive campaign to change the indicators that decision makers are using to guide policies and evaluate progress”*. Following his line of thinking and after observing the variety of alternative indicators already developed, the picture to an external observer may seem that in which the main issue resides not in the GDP indicator itself, but in the comprehension and attitude of policy makers toward it. I believe important to keep this point in mind, as I am confident that my research may help to further dig into this proposition and cast some light over its degree of veracity.

2.3.2 Situation of the discussion and use of GDP in Italy

The Italian situation, in terms of relationship with economic growth and GDP, seems to reflect quite closely the one of the rest of Europe: the National Statistical Institute (Istat) conducted a research to individuate a dashboard of wellbeing indicators that could reach beyond the scope of GDP (Istat 2012) and proposed, as other commissions did, a set of parameters reassumed in the “Benessere Equo e Solidale” Report (Bes 2013). Yet the suggestions seemed to have been largely ignored by the governmental actor for which GDP still remains the most relevant and decision-influential of all wellbeing indicators (as it is possible to realize by observing the key parameters in the stability laws and documents of economics and finance 2014/2016 – *“legge di stabilità”* and *“Documento Economia e Finanza”*- in which GDP is essentially at the center of any fiscal and budget decision).

Despite that, outside the institutional political sphere, small initiatives guided by self-organized grassroots movements seems to be start emerging, trying to move beyond GDP and shift the discourse around economic growth in practice. Between those, for example we may cite the “Happy Degrowth Movement” (“Movimento per la Decrescita Felice”) founded in 2007 or the larger Five Star Movement (“Movimento Cinque Stelle”) founded in 2009 which, both openly influenced by theories of economists Serge Latouche and Joseph Stiglitz (Pallante 2013, Grillo 2013), support sustainable mobility, auto-production, permaculture, energy saving policies and critical consumption between other topics. The interesting insight, is that those movements both work for a conscious individual cultural change before than a societal one and focus on being the example through small practical initiatives rather than trying to firstly influence the whole system (Pallante 2013, Grillo 2015). Although the initiatives may for sure be considered a step forward a change in paradigm, the impact of those movements’ voice on the growth discourse within the larger society remains somehow almost unheard and for sure requires to be investigated further.

2.4 Socially Constructed Reality, Discourses, Media and GDP Symbolism

In the previous paragraphs I provided an overall picture of the phenomenon commonly referred to as “economic growth” and reviewed previous discourses about the perception, usefulness and limits of GDP by different speakers from both the academic and the political sphere. First I inserted the concepts within a historical context to understand how and why they came into being. Then I analyzed the limits and possible dangers of employing those measures to monitor human wellbeing and ultimately, I discussed how and to what extent those concepts are currently being discussed within Europe and Italy. Still, many questions open and remain unsolved: after noticing the existence of a vast degree of criticism toward the current use of GDP within modern societies it appears natural to wonder why. To what extent did the “current use” of GDP actually become a “misuse” as the critique argues? Did the social meaning and symbolic value attached to economic growth changed over the past decades? How is the excessive stress on economic growth being constantly legitimized and reiterated today, even when proven harmful for societies and the overall socio-ecological system we live in? Those are exactly the pieces of the large questions that I am, in part, trying to address through my paper. For the purpose of finding answers to them, I will adopt critical discourse analysis as methodology for running my research.

In the remaining part of this chapter, I will build the basis to the methodological section by first, introducing the key concept of “socially constructed reality”, which will help the reader to fully comprehend the ontological and epistemological positions on which my findings and discussion section is based upon; secondly, my paper’s interpretation of “discourse” as a reality-shaping process; thirdly, I will discuss the role of media and actors in reiterating, constructing and legitimizing discourses within modern societies and ultimately, I will discuss existing academic theories that point out how human interactions, social constructs and practices may have helped GDP to transcend its initial meaning and achieve the status of “symbol”.

2.5 Socially Constructed Reality

Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge deriving from sociology, cultural and communication studies which focuses on understanding the social world (symbols, concepts, meanings, processes, practices) constructed through human interactions that forms the ground for basic assumptions about reality (Leeds-Hurwitz 2009). The main action undertaken by a social constructionist approach is to move personality out of the individual and position it within a social, interpersonal context (Gergen 1985). According to theory from sociological and cultural studies, *“many things around us are real only when we agree that they are real”* (Searle 1995). For example, a cocktail party exists only when a group of individuals meet and agree that they are having a party in that right moment (Searle 1995). When people decide that something exists, it suddenly exists, like magic (Taylor 2010). Social agreements about what exists and how it works are all around us (ex. Governments, elections, marriages, football games, progress, markets etc. - Searle 1995). Those agreed meanings influence our human behaviours, they impact the way we think and ultimately, they form the multi-layered social reality we live in (Searle 1995), drenched with countless levels of meanings and significance (Carreira 2010). Economic growth and GDP are not exception: the criticism and the defense to them both in fact belong to the social dimension and share the same aim of regulating how those social agreements work and how they impact our lives. In short, we can define social reality, as Carreira (2010) suggests, as *“that part of reality that only has meaning and significance when humans agree that it does”*. According to Bockting (1995), social reality may be also considered as *“the union of all accepted tenets of a community, involving thereby relatively stable laws and social representations”*.

Focusing on social reality and trying to understand how facts become legitimized and institutionalized within societies as well as consciously observing how meanings persist and

evolve through time is, following a social constructionist approach, a key activity in understanding why certain phenomena exist instead of others and why many times they behave in unexpected ways that part from previously crafted theory. As Searle (1995) suggests, in any social context, language is a key factor in forming social reality as *“language is precisely designed to be a self-identifying category of institutional facts”*. Understanding consciously how we talk about things and how this process influences our subjective reality may have the power to unleash powerful revelations about the ongoing subtle mechanism that rules our socially constructed world and furthermore, to reveal us an alternative progress path where social meanings and symbolic values may be re-negotiated or created anew. For this exact reason, I decided to face my research question by employing a critical discourse analysis framework (that will be fully introduced in the next Methodology chapter).

2.5 Discourse as a Reality-Shaping Process

As we have seen before, socially constructed reality is the common perceived dimension built through continuous human interactions and agreements. In any modern society, countless layers of meanings and therefore power relations are created, reiterated or transformed every day and are constantly in the process of re-shaping and characterizing the “social body” of which all of us social beings are part of (Foucault 1980). According to Foucault, the widely regarded “father” of discourse analysis, relations of power between humans and between different ideas *“cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse”* (Foucault 1980, P.93). A discourse is not understood, by Foucault and therefore by this paper adopting his definition, as a simple “discussion” (term commonly employed in everyday life) but it gains a deeper meaning: a discourse is a culturally constructed representation of reality; an instrument of power that governs what is possible to talk about and what is possible to exist (Foucault from Pat Thomsom 2011); a reality-shaping process that involves all forms of communication (Schneider 2013). One of the most accepted definition of discourse across multiple disciplines is the one found in Foucault’s (1973) *Archeology of Knowledge* which describes discourses as *“systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, and courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak”*. Because of its nature, being it necessarily the result of multiple actors and interactions on countless levels of understanding, a discourse can manifest itself through different forms (such as novels, poems, plays, speeches, articles, interviews, literature, advertising, academic writing etc.) at different sensorial levels of communication and abstraction (Steen 1999).

From the previous definitions, we understand how discourses are processes that permeate the social world and help humans to make sense of the world around them; to construct their “social reality”. In the methodological chapter (Ch.3) I will dig deeper into discourses, the different levels to which they may manifest and how they can be analyzed through the running of a critical discourse analysis. For now, in the next paragraph I will discuss the importance of texts as one of the most prominent ways for discourse crafting and reiteration within the social world and the role of media in their capillary diffusion.

2.6 Role of Texts and Media in Shaping Societal Discourses

Between the different ways a discourse can manifest and establish itself within today’s society, text is surely one of the main means. Text may include both spoken and written language and it usually refer to “*a stretch, an extract or a complete piece of writing or speech*” and normally “*adheres to broad conventions and rules which determine the language and structure used in particular text types*” (Cornbleet & Carter 2001, p.3). Within the realm of social reality, texts should be defined as “*symbolic forms of representation*” (Maguire 2009, p.150) which intervene between actors, influence actions and establish discourses (Munir 2005). Texts mediate the relationship between information emitter and receiver by reinforcing, questioning or subverting it (Koller 2009). In order to consciously understand the complexity of a discourse and its permeation within a society, the first step to undertake is surely to explore the text-formation process (Phillips 2004).

To conduct my research around the “growth” discourse, I decided to source my data from written texts (news articles) created and published by the media (Italian newspapers). Hereafter I will provide a literature background on those specific matters, while a deeper discussion on the analysis process (CDA) is left for the methodological chapter (Ch.3).

First of all, written texts are easier to trace and faster to access compared to oral speeches. These facts dramatically increase the texts’ persuasive potential in the long-term as everyone has the power to retrieve them, interpret them and re-distribute them (Phillips 2004). Furthermore, written texts may be arguably easier to audit from an external point of view. Nevertheless, as Van Dijk (2009) stresses, it is important to underline that written texts, as any other mean through which discourses are reiterated within societies, enable the observer to grasp only the “*tip of the iceberg*” of the meaning, discourse and communicative event taking place between

information emitter and receiver. Therefore, understanding the historical and socio-cultural context in which the communication is taking place, as well as not considering participants as mere talkers but as “*social actors*” coming into the conversation with shared knowledge, personal experiences, goals, opinions and emotions; shines absolutely necessary to fully comprehend the hidden dynamics driving the discourse within the texts as well as the researcher’s point of view on analyzing them (Van Dijk 2009).

On the other side, many are the factors that suggest media have high discursive legitimacy (Phillips 2004) and strong influence in creating, reiterating and modifying societal discourses through the diffusion of texts.

First, an undisputable factor that dramatically increase the chance of a piece of text to be embedded in a wider discourse and acquire a degree of legitimacy is surely its origin (Deephouse 2008). The vast majority of users of the media are nowadays already educated in acquiring information and classifying it following specific text rules historically employed by traditional media (ex. organization/order of news, function of headlines, leads, background information etc.) (Van Dijk 1995). As the users (in the case of written newspaper the readers) are familiar with the source (newspapers) and the way it structures and presents the texts (articles, pages), the media hold a power that may be defined both “*symbolic and persuasive*” (Van Dijk 1995) in the sense that they have, to a certain extent, the potential to control the minds of readers (by displaying more or less prominently the different components of texts as well as different, alternative perspectives), although not directly their actions.

Another solid point, when justifying media’s power in shaping discourses is that of access. As Van Dijk (1995) argues, it has been shown that “*power is generally based on special access to valued social resources*”. One of those which is surely possessed by mass media, can be identified in the access to the public discourse. In fact, on the contrary of ordinary individuals which have access to generally small social circles (family, friends, acquaintances etc.) and can eventually make use of the media but not strongly influence its content, mass media (and Italian newspaper between those, as we will see in Ch. 3) have access to an extremely wide audience and therefore own the potential power to influence (and sometime impose) the focus and direction on societal discourses (Van Dijk 1995). In this fashion, important politicians, scholars or relevant private or public actors and professionals enjoy a majorly controlled access (to different degrees) to different forms of talk and text (such meetings, conferences, press releases)

which grants them the ability to carve more space in the media for themselves (Van Dijk 1995). Furthermore, the degree of power those elites enjoy in controlling this access (time, place, text, audience, setting, language style etc.) should be considered a good indicator of the influence they have over the media (ibid.). Relevant to underline, as Happer (2013) remarks, is that the power of the media as influencer of public beliefs and attitudes toward social change increases in the fields in which audiences “*do not possess direct knowledge or experiences*” of the events and are therefore forced to become particularly reliant on media (Happer 2013). My thesis specific case, the growth discourse, can easily be inserted in this category of topics.

Deephouse (2008) divides legitimacy sources in two fundamental categories: one, including those actors owning high status, authority and power, deriving from their legitimating intrinsic importance (the “state” body or supranational politico-economical institutions), and the other, containing those actors possessing collective authority over specific subjects/matters considered the norm/standards by the general public (ex. economists, doctors, environmentalists, professors etc.). Important to note is that the power structure within those legitimacy sources is not rigidly determined and therefore can be attributed to different participants within the discussions’ domain (Deephouse 2008).

Acting between the general public (common citizens) and those specific legitimization-granting actors/authorities as intermediary are the media (Deephouse 2008). In countries where information is free (in Italy is “partially free” according to Freedom House 2016, but still re-enters in the category), journalists have, through their reports and interviews to more or less influential sources, the power to introduce opinions, news and speakers through their lenses to the public audience through the news reports (Happer 2013). The role of media, can be therefore defined as the one of a “*facilitator*” (Happer 2013) or “*legitimacy mediator*” (Deephouse 2008) as media have the power to grant privileged, authoritative and truthful status to certain knowledges, facts and opinions and negate it to others (Fairclough 2003). Furthermore, the way media exercise their power in legitimizing and shaping societal discourses (complex agglomerates of social symbols, values, identities, relations etc.) moves on two different but linked fronts: on one side, media confer legitimacy and reinforce the authority of the presented events/perspective they talk about, while on the other, by filtering and presenting reality through the lenses of an already established social knowledge, media also own themselves a complementary power to jointly shape and co-create discourses (Deephouse 2008). Wielding this double-edged sword, media held the potential power to both lead users toward attitudinal

and behavioral commitments in favor of change (Happer 2013) or toward the inhibition of those.

A further point crucial to underline are models. Models are mental representation of an experience (single or multiple events) which people witness, participate in or read about (Van Dijk 1995). Each time people read news report, they form in their mind a new model of a specific event, they construct their reality about it (Van Dijk 1995) and although subjective understanding, they generally embody particular instances of socially shared knowledge. By knowing the mental models of readers, media (and powerful actors having influence over them) retain the power to deliver, through manipulation of text/newspaper structure, a “preferred meaning” or “preferred understanding” (preferred model) aimed at legitimizing their own view of issues/events (Van Dijk 1995) and negotiate in their favor the collective identity (beliefs, knowledge, norms, values, expectations and attitudes) in regards of that issue (Koller 2012). Furthermore, by providing or not truthful and complete information about certain events, elites and media may limit the readers’ view of problems and bound their rationality (ibid.) out of the larger picture, preventing them from deviating from the mainstream narration.

In conclusion, as Foucault (1981) underlines, *“in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed through texts according to a certain number of procedures”* whose role is to establish power relationships, avoid dangers for the actors involved and cope with the course of the events. In this context, media appear in essence as a “contested space” in which most powerful groups/actors can establish the dominance of specific messages (Happer 2013), and where journalist have, depending on the degree of press freedom in the country, the power to mitigate, re-elaborate and re-address public discourses.

Summing everything up, the power that media wields in establishing, reiterating, shaping, legitimizing and delegitimizing discourses and therefore in creating our socially constructed reality through far-reaching texts is ultimately what moved my curiosity and brought the focus of my research on media. Coming back to my specific case, the concept of “growth” is nowadays something that transcends single societal fields (economy, finance, politics etc.) or single groups of stakeholders (bankers, politicians, businessmen etc.) as it represents a way of societal development that influences the lives of nearly every world citizen. Focusing on the *“information gatekeepers”* and trying to generate a conscious awareness of the quality, quantity

and direction of the information flow within societal discourses can be surely a first step to understand how social reality around this topic is built and how it may eventually be changed.

2.7 Discursive Legitimization Strategies

Legitimization strategies are tools which different actors utilize to justify and normalize their opinions, ideas and points of views within a discourse and which are also widely utilized in the texts published by the media. From the work of Wodak (1999), four main categories of legitimization strategies emerge. Hereafter, I will briefly introduce them.

First in line, is authorization, a strategy that tries to construct legitimacy of a discursive text by referencing (directly or indirectly) a relevant authority (which as seen before, can be both an expert holding power over a specific matter or an actor enjoying high status and legitimate power – Deephouse 2008).

Secondly is the normalization strategy by rationalization. This strategy tries to attribute legitimacy to a piece of text by connecting the message to the utility of a peculiar largely accepted social practice or belief (common sense) in respect of a specific culture and social body.

Thirdly, we encounter moral evaluation; a strategy that pursues legitimation by inserting the confronting the text against particular sets of values, ethical principles and social etiquette common and shared within the local social environment.

The fourth legitimization strategy proposed by Wodak (1999) is mythopoesis (also called narrativization) which tries to obtain legitimization of the text by creating and pushing toward the reader an interpretative narration (storytelling) of real experiences and events.

In addition to those four strategies, Vaara (2006) proposed a fifth one which takes the name of exemplarity: this legitimization process is exercised by quoting similar practices and events (as examples) which happened or are expected to happen in a similar context within possibly different periods or space.

Furthermore, when talking about legitimization strategies I believe important to also quote the work of Cialdini (2010) on persuasive strategies which may help to widen the understanding of

the previous. Between Cialdini's persuasion strategies, relevant for my research I identified three major points: authority -people believe to those who show authority- (which is contained by authorization), consistency -people tend to comply with their previous commitments- and social proof -people tend to follow the behaviour of similar others as shortcuts to complex decisions). Important is to keep in mind the mechanisms of Wodak's discursive legitimization strategies and Cialdini's persuasion techniques as they will come in hand to fully understand the development of the growth discourse within Italian newspapers.

2.8 Previous Research and Hypothesis around Growth in the realm of S.C. Reality

Now that concepts such as socially constructed reality, discourse, text and the role of media have been discussed, before moving to the methodological part of my theoretical framework, I propose a short paragraph that reassumes previous studies and hypothesis about the phenomena of growth within the realm of social reality.

With the aim of explaining the importance and legitimacy enjoyed by GDP in modern societies, Van den Bergh (2009), in his paper "The GDP Paradox", advances four major hypotheses: *bounded rationality* (the natural process through which humans tend to simplify complex issues), *historical accidents* (GDP brought benefits and received positive feedback in some historical contexts which helped spreading its influence), *increasing returns* (factors that perpetrate and reinforce the belief of the indicator being relevant, such early economic models based on GDP, a-critical macroeconomics textbooks and researches assuming growth as final goal, adoption as core indicator by a variety of international institutions, conformity, imitation etc.) and *lock-in* (as everyone uses it, it is hard to deviate; without a correct exit-strategy it would seriously delegitimize whoever supported it in the first place (Costanza 2009). Fascinating to observe, is how those hypotheses (historical accidents, increasing returns, lock-in) deeply revolve around the power of human interactions in building social reality and therefore find roots in a deep social constructionist ontology. In addition to Van den Bergh, Crosby (2014) remarks how the process through which GDP has been and is routinely interpreted as a measure of national wellbeing changed its status from indicator to "symbol" and moved its perceived value beyond its initial purpose/meaning and gave to the measure new cultural (tacit and explicit) significance. The cultural, symbolic meaning of GDP is observable in a myriad of social phenomena, communication events and interactions which constitute and feed the public discourse around economic growth. An example of those brought to light by Coyle (2015), may be seen in the "*regular fandango*" and "*public rituals*" that accompany

quarterly releases of GDP data in the vast majority of modern countries, most of the times vastly amplified by media. Indeed, sometimes GDP and economic growth is invested with as much meaning as a priest does with his liturgies (Pilling 2014). Knowing that culture cannot and should not be considered a simple epiphenomenon as it entails real strong effect on the everyday life of modern societies (Geels 2008), a thoroughly analysis of societal discourses and legitimization processes practiced by different actors, entailing the metaphors, symbols and cultural struggles around a certain topic, seems necessary to understand the perceived role of GDP today and to draw a conceptual map of the situation around the topic. In facts, after retracing the history of economic growth and GDP, discussing his initial purpose, its current legitimacy in modern societies and the vast criticism it raised in the past decades; it seems that somehow and somewhere along the line the meaning attributed to those social construct has been re-negotiated and altered. With my paper I am trying to uncover how the discourse and symbolic values around growth emerge today and compare them with the initial meaning attached to the same concept. By recalling the previous literature (history, context, criticism and socially constructed reality) my plan is to discuss whether an eventual change in meaning may have brought modern societies (in this specific case Italy) to unconsciously support and reiterate the legitimacy of economic growth and GDP even if its practical use is limited and potentially dangerous for the wider socio-ecological system (Van Den Bergh 2009).

As Van den Bergh (2009) points out, the actors that are involved in discourses around GDP are several and may be grouped in four large categories: public politicians, private citizens (and businesses), economists and media. In my research I decided to focus on the discourse emerging from the latter, being media the gatekeepers and essential nodes of modern communication, in a contextualized set and time-frame.

In the next page (tab.2.1), I recap the salient points composing my theoretical framework and the important insights to keep in mind for an optimal understanding of the findings' discussion.

Table 2.1 Literature Review Synthesis

THEME	KEY POINTS	REFERENCES
History of GDP (use and perception as indicator of economic growth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GDP has been created for preparing countries to war times Architect of GDP underlines that it is not meant to be a measure of wellbeing nor progress GDP has been correlated with increasing wellbeing in the post WWII period, due to increasing access to basic goods/services and conquers of civil rights United Nation and World Bank have been created to foster economic growth everywhere in the world as mean to secure peace 	Kuznets 1941, Marcuss 2007, Van den Bergh 2009, Costanza 2009-2014, Dickinson 2011, Coyle 2014-2015,
Critique to GDP (measurement limits)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inequality → unfair re-distribution of wealth → higher marginal benefits to the Poor 	Bhagwati 2008, Van den Bergh 2009-2011, Layard 2011, Kallis 2011, Akhtar 2013
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Sustainability → resource depletion → environmental damage → no proof of EKC 	Kuznets 1962, Atkinson 1997, Van den Bergh 2009, Stern 2003-2004
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of Production → difference between useful and harmful goods/services → digital intangible services → great contemporary variety of goods/services → benefits of innovation/quality enhancements → efficiency is a minus rather than a plus 	Chang 2014, Pilling 2014, Coyle 2015, Bean 2016,
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal Economy → volunteering and housekeeping → true poverty and wealth differences among countries → GDP index is artificial and can be manipulated 	Deaton 2004 Hawken 2004, Beck 2007, Costanza 2009, Pilling 2014, Coyle 2014-2015
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Happiness → everything without monetary value (social relationships, family, purpose, health, security, trust) 	MacKerron 2010, Layard 2011
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall → GDP is not inherently bad, it may be useful if its limitations are considered and weighted → divergence between what GDP is and what is employed for → sustainable economic growth is an oxymoron → Great Decoupling places GDP as a bad indicator for level of employment → alternative Dashboards of parameters to measure progress already exist 	Kuznets 1934-1941-1962, Costanza 2009, Fullerton 2010, Van den Bergh 2009, Stiglitz 2009-2012, Coyle 2014-2015
Situation of GDP (use/discussion in Europe/Italy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country leaders/government recognized in the last decade some limitations in GDP → commission where open almost simultaneously to create dashboard of parameters to employ for more sustainable policy making To date, the framework have been hardly ever taken into large consideration for important fiscal reforms In Italy, informal grassroots movements are emerging and trying to change the discourse; still the impact of their voice on societal discourse remain debatable 	Costanza 2009, EU commission memo 07/472 Stratton 2010, , CMEPSP 2009, Istat 2012, Giesselmann 2013,
Social Constructionism and Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social constructionism → theory of knowledge deriving from sociology, cultural and communication studies → focuses on understanding the social world (symbols, concepts, meanings, processes, practices) Socially constructed reality is the result of continuous human interactions Many things around us are real and carry significance only when we agree that they are Language → self-identifying category of institutional facts 	Gergen 1985, Bocking 1995, Searle 1995, Leeds-Hurwitz 2009, Carreira 2010, Taylor 2010,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourse → reality shaping process, an instrument of power built by continuous human interactions and agreements that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which actors speak 	
Role of Texts and Media (<i>in shaping Societal Discourses</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts → symbolic forms of representation, adherent to socially agreed rules → contribute to form societal discourses • Contextualizing information is necessary to analyzing texts beyond the “tip of the iceberg” • Media → offer degree of legitimacy that boost texts’ reach and influence → special access to public discourse • Medias are the middleman between public and legitimization-granting authorities/actors → privileged position to influence societal discussions 	Foucault 1981, Cornbleet & Carter 2001, Phillips 2004, Munir 2005, Deephouse 2008, Maguire 2009, Van Dijk 1995-2009, Happer 2013,
Legitimization Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorization → referencing to authoritative figures • Rationalization → referencing to accepted social norms (common sense) • Moral Evaluation → referencing to set of values and ethical principles • Mythopoesis → establishing legitimacy through development of narrations • Exemplification → referencing to similar examples • Social Proof → people tend to follow actions of similar others • Consistency → people tend to align their actions with previous commitments 	Wodak (1999), Vaara (2006), Cialdini (2010)
Socially Constructed Reality and GDP Symbolism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth discourse is socially constructed by many actors (politicians, economists, privates and media) • Growth and GDP are not only economic index but embody many symbolic values visible in rituals • Hypothesis on how GDP acquired legitimization: Bounded Rationality, Increasing Returns to scale, Historical Accident and Lock-In Effect 	Bockting 1995, Searle 1995, Leeds 2009, Van den Bergh 2009, Costanza 2009, Taylor 2010, Carreira 2010, Pilling 2014, Coyle 2015

3. Methodology

After having presented and reviewed the extant literature on the history of economic growth, the criticism to the GDP measure and the current academic material on the growth discourse within modern societies; in this chapter I explain the methodological choices I made for conducting my research. In the first place, I briefly remind the aim and context of my research. Secondly, I discuss the ontological and epistemological bases of my research and explain why critical discourse analysis fits my study. Afterwards, I will explain the data gathering process, discuss the trustworthiness and potential limitations of the methods adopted and lastly, show a brief overview of my coding and analysis process.

3.1 Recap of Research Aim

The main aim of my research is to find an answer to the following question(s):

“How is the growth discourse produced by mainstream newspapers in Italy?”

➔ *“Do more than one discourse emerge?”*

➔ *“Did the uses, meanings and symbolic values of “GDP” and “economic growth” evolved since their creation? If so, how?”*

My interest falls specifically in understanding how the concepts of “economic growth” and “GDP” emerge from newspapers on a variety of different levels and dimensions.

I am interested in understanding the power relationships within the actors of the discourse, how and what connections are made (or not) to support/legitimize/reproduce the current “endless growth” economic model in the eyes of the readers and eventually make it a primary national objective (Kallis 2011). Important to underline, I am not only interested in the structure of the discourse, but I also want to move beyond linguistics to map a more general picture. Carefully analyzing how the discourse is built, presented and reproduced may help to comprehend what factors contribute to foster the “growth fetish” paradigm within an example of capitalistic society. By conducting this research, I aim to also investigate whether more than one growth discourse exists within Italian newspapers, how economic growth is linked by newspapers to everyday reality and whether there is a discrepancy between how GDP/growth have been initially conceived (as discussed in the previous literature section), how they are employed and the symbolic meaning built around them by the written media.

3.2 Research Context

This section aims to place the study within a specific geographical, cultural and socio-political context and to provide some basic, yet important concepts for the reader to better understand the contemporary Italian panorama in which the researched discourse takes place.

3.2.1 Choosing the Country

As discussed in the introductory paragraph of the thesis, I decided to narrow my research area down to one single first-world country currently adopting a fairly loose capitalistic liberalism approach as economic model: Italy. The reasons from this choice were mainly three: time constraints, representative power of the specimen and personal motivation.

First, one of the basis to give the necessary depth to a discourse analysis is to realize the inescapable importance of the cultural context. Culture is a vital aspect to understand in order to infer what is truly occurring in a conversation (Takahashi 2010) as all humans' verbal and non-verbal communication strategies are ruled by social norms (Gumperz 1982). Without fully comprehending the researched cultural context, misunderstandings are likely to arise. Therefore, I decided to allocate my limited time toward one specific example and examine it in depth with plenty of background/context information, rather than execute a general cross-national research that may have resulted "all over the place". As Gumperz (1992) points out: "all understanding is framed understanding (...) and it rests on contingent inferences made with respect to presuppositions about the nature of the situation". The process of framing is therefore both linguistic and cognitive, but even more importantly social and cultural-specific (Blommaert 2005). My specimen choice fell on Italy because of my familiarity with the local context, it being my motherland, and therefore because of the possibility of accessing data more easily.

Furthermore, by having signed the European Fiscal Compact in 2012, Italy undeniably shows how the GDP is still perceived in the country as a primary national objective, making it a relevant example for the purpose of my study. With this research I do not aim to find results that could be extended to every other country currently raising economic growth to a "holy cow" level (generalization), but rather present a solid example of how the discourse around growth is constructed, reproduced and constantly re-negotiated within a first-world capitalistic country and leave the analysis of similarities with other contexts to further researches.

3.2.2 The Local Italian Context

In order to understand how the growth discourse is currently socially constructed and reproduced in Italy, my research turned to written texts by major Italian daily newspapers. In this section, I will briefly contextualize the Italian situation within an economic, social and informational framework for readers to have a wider picture.

First, from an economic standpoint, Italy has been ranked in 2016 as the 3rd largest economy in Europe and 8th worldwide by World Bank. Yet, after the 2009 financial crisis, the nation's public debt skyrocketed to unprecedented levels (2300 billion, 132% of PIL in 2015, ISTAT 2015) and forced the last three governments (Monti 2011, Letta 2013, Renzi 2014) to enforce a strong level of austerity and devastating correcting measures to reassure financial markets; cutting safety, education and health budgets between others. The fact that the last three governments have not been elected through democratic elections, jointed with the highest actual and perceived level of corruption in Europe (Transparency International 2015) and a soaring youth unemployment rate (38% in 2016) have thrown Italy in the past five years in a constant state of semi-quiescent civil turmoil. The impact of the economic sphere tremendously shook the country's socio-political situation which balance is currently fast-changing and potentially unpredictable as it sees the rise of new self-organized civil movements (such the Five Star Movement) and the fall of historical traditional parties (such Berlusconi's Forza Italia). Understanding the instability of the social context may contribute to gain further insights during the analysis of the growth discourse and the meanings attached to it.

From a social perspective, it is relevant for this study to understand how Italians acquire information about the world that surrounds them. From an Agcom research of 2015 (the Italian public entity for monitoring and correcting the national communication environment, namely telecommunication - TVs, Internet- and publishing industry –newspapers-), we may notice wide differences between different segments of the population. It has been estimated that up to 72% of the younger generations (18-30 years old) navigates daily in the internet to acquire information counter posed to only 14% of elders over 55 (Agcom 2015). The situation results inverted when talking about written newspapers: 76% of elders against less than 30% of youngsters with the percentage of middle aged in between. Yet, 87% of the Italian population reads at least one newspaper page within a month time (Agcom 2015). Understanding who reads which source, is deeply important for any writer, journalist and discourse researcher. It appears that the public of traditional newspapers (which, through the online copy I am going to

research) is skewed toward an older age, while younger citizens prefer social media and google to get informed (yet 35% of them shares online versions of newspapers on social media and therefore work as amplifiers). In fact, technological advancements in the field of media communication and internet access in particular, changed the position of common citizens within the information industry by enabling them to join debates, bring specialized information to the conversation and work as amplifiers of news (Agcom 2015). Although my study does not focus specifically on how the discourse is interiorized and reproduced by readers, I thought important to share this brief contextualizing information as, as Fairclough (1995) explains, in contemporary times, where culture and society are constantly and rapidly evolving, “media both project and stimulate the wider societal change process by crafting discursive practices” (Fairclough, 1995). Understanding who is likely to read which news may surely offer some food for thoughts to improve reasoning in the latter discussion section.

In addition to the differences in behavior of different population segments, it is also tremendously important to notice the Italian level of literacy. Following a recent research from OECD (2013), it appears that Italy scores last in terms of literacy and numeracy amongst European countries, with a functional illiteracy rate scratching 40% of the entire population. By “functional illiterate” is meant a person “who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development” (United Nations 1984). In other words, functional illiteracy is the condition in which a person is not able to process complex written texts (such economic news researched in this study) and therefore bases its judgement on simple heuristic cues.

Third and last point: informational perspective. Press freedom in Italy has been ranked in the past ten years as “partially free” by House of Freedom, reaching the 73th position as a country in 2015. Although HoF’s press index is not perfect and on many sides arguably biased, from the country-report emerges an undeniable truth that plagued information freedom in the country for the past decades: media ownership concentration. Traditional media (TVS and major newspapers) are either owned by the wealthy Berlusconi family or by the current leftist government and allies, which most of the time in the past have shown of working together both in politics and in business (legal and illegal). Therefore, a pluralism of discourses may sometimes struggle to emerge.

3.3 Ontological and Epistemological Grounds

In this section, the basic ontological and epistemological foundations on which my study is built upon are thoroughly presented. A brief personal epistemology of the researcher is presented at the end.

3.3.1 Ontology

In philosophy, ontology is the study of what exists (Lofgren 2013), of the basic elements that form our world and their relationship between each other. In order to build a solid and understandable qualitative methodology, an agreement on a common ontological denominator between the writer and the reader appears definitely necessary. In my research, I look at the world starting from a critical realistic perspective. Realism ontology's belief simply states that there is a real world, which includes also a real, social world, "which exists independently of our knowledge about it" (Fairclough 2013). Critical realism is an evolution of the realism ontology, mainly related to the works of Bhaskar (Bhaskar 1978, Archer 1995) which argues that although on one side the natural world exists and is independent from human knowledge, on the other side the social world is dependent on human actions in order to exist, and therefore is socially constructed (Fairclough 2013). The ontological assumptions on which my research will be based on are the subjective reality of social phenomena and social reality. In other words, as clearly explained by Fairclough (2005), I start from the idea that people's actions and interactions about the world they live in "contribute to its reproduction and transformation" and therefore that social phenomena (ideas, thoughts, visions, etc.) are socially constructed through discourses. The (critical) realist discourse analysis finds its basis within a dialectical-relational social ontology, which observes discourses, objects, individuals, entities (etc.) as "socially constructed permanences" which appear from relations and connections between actors (Harvey 1996) and which form a predefined reality that individuals utilize as a base for further discourse development (Fairclough 2013).

3.3.2 Epistemology

In philosophy, epistemology is the study of knowledge and addresses the questions of how knowledge is created, how it is acquired by individuals and what are the basis for common social knowledge to exist (Logfren 2013). One of the most recent currents within epistemology is constructionism, pioneered by Ceccato and Piaget in the last century and considered an alternative to traditional rationalism and empiricism approaches, which views all human knowledge as socially "constructed", contingent on human perception, social experiences and

conventions. By following this philosophical thinking, truth and meanings are socially constructed and the same goes for subjective realities. Although we humans are for the vast majority of the time unaware of the reality-creating process we constantly engage with (Von Glasersfeld 1981), we constantly shape our world and influence the reality of others when engaging in social relationships. Inserted in this context, the possibility for a researcher to elaborate and report neutral observations while engaging within a socially constructed reality has necessarily to be rejected (Syman 2012). Starting from this belief, I hereby state here that the foundations of the theoretical framework I will employ to develop my discourse analysis will embody the epistemological standing of social constructivism, which considers language both constitutive and constructive of our common social reality instead of merely reflective and representative (Gergen 1999, Munir 2005). Such approach enables the researcher to study the process through which socially constructed ideas (and therefore discourses), which craft our social dimensions, become established and reproduce themselves through interactions within the society (Philips 2012). In other words, social constructivism is for me a fundamental philosophical starting point that enables me to research the social phenomenon my thesis is about.

3.3.3. Personal Epistemology

Personal epistemology has been defined by various researchers (Hofer & Pintrich 1997, Sandoval 2005 from Elby 2006) as the sum of an individual's views about the nature of knowledge, knowing and learning.

My personal belief in regards of individual subjective knowledge, is that what we “know” or believe to know, is the result of our own cognitive and always-ongoing process of integrating information coming from the outside with the education (intended in broader sense: scholastic, behavioral and cultural) we acquired through our lives. Aware of this belief, in my research I will try to employ a sophisticated evaluativist personal epistemology (Kaartinen 2012) by offering reflective and analytical ideas on the matter researched while staying coherent with my academic knowledge, skills and developed practices (ibid.). For this reason, I embrace critical realism as ontological position (the world exists independent of humans) and social constructivism as research epistemology (meanings, ideas and concepts about that world are socially constructed). This does not mean that nothing is considered real (ex. actions, events, happenings, measures, indicators etc.) but that something may considered real only when a

broad negotiation has been taken place within the social body (the agreement or disagreement can be perceived as real although not unanimously its result).

3.4 Research Method: (Critical) Discourse Analysis

Based on the previous philosophical viewpoints, the study approaches the “economic growth fetish” phenomenon (Hamilton 2003, Kallis 2011) from the perspective of discourse analysis. A discourse in the academic world is not what is commonly referred to as “discussion” in everyday life but is a process that involves all forms of communication, which, as all theories behind discourse are based on a strong social constructionism episteme, has the power to shape the world and reality we live in (Schneider 2013). Discourse analysis is a qualitative research methodology that allows to shift the observer’s attention from an already established legitimacy to the sense-making process through which the legitimacy of the discourse is created (Vaara 2010). Furthermore, in contrast to other more traditional qualitative approaches which explore the common social reality as it appears, the discourse analysis methodology provides the tools to observe and explicate the establishment and development of socially produced phenomena (Munir 2005) and therefore helps to explain how reality has been socially crafted and constructed.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one of the most recognized “schools” in discourse analysis (although if we define it a “school” it is necessary to admit that the boundaries are quite fuzzy) which has been pioneered by N. Fairclough, R. Wodak and P. Chilton between others. Critical discourse analysis is an approach that crosses many different disciplines (linguistics, sociology, psychology etc.) that studies a social phenomenon (Vaara 2008) and which purpose, as illustrated by Wodak (1995) is to analyze “opaque as well as transparent relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control manifested in language”. CDA starts from the assumption that “discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned” (Blommaert 2005) and its critical approach offers a peculiar perspective as it first, focuses on the relationship between language and society, and second, it analyses the “relationship between the analysis and the practices analyzed” (Wodak 1997). Although CDA’s starting points are clear, the methodological diversity may vary greatly based on the study in question and it should be embraced (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). Following this advice, in my study I will employ a traditional CDA framework and enrich it with some salient Foucaultian insights, in order to not only focus on linguistics but move further beyond that, to the larger power-relationships’ context.

In fact, important is to underline that discourses are instruments of power; which importance have increasingly grown within our contemporary societies. Discourses make sense of things and attach specific meanings to the subjective realities of the actors taking part within it; they craft experiences and therefore have the power to modify perceptions. Yet, how those instruments work is challenging to understand without a conscious perspective (Blommaert 2005). CDA is a research methodology structured exactly with the aim in mind to make the hidden relationships of power embedded within discourses more transparent and easily understandable (Blommaert 2005) and this is one of the main reasons that suggested me its appropriateness to answer my initial research question.

The analysis of text data-sets, which I am going to employ for this study, is a branch of discourse analysis which focuses on how texts' messages, symbols and meanings are constructed by relating them to other texts and events, by the way they are presented and distributed and by the methodology of production and final users' consumption. In this specific case of CDA, the focus of my analysis falls on the way the actors' (journalists) actions (producing texts) produce meanings and consequently build the social reality (Phillips 2004) within the growth discourse. For my study, I will employ Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional theoretical framework for discourse analysis in order to combine micro and macro aspects of the growth discourse and generate an eagle-eye perspective of it as large as possible. The framework analyses the discourse from three levels:

- **Micro-level** (linguistic dimension): focuses on studying the texts' syntaxes, metaphoric structures and rhetorical devices. This level mainly focuses on the linguistic aspects of the text and their influence on the delivered message.
- **Meso- level** (power relationship dimension): mainly consists in observing the texts' production processes and the way they are consumed to understand which power-relationships are involved and how those factors influence the hegemonic power of the discourse. As Luke (2002) argues, a solely linguistic approach, no matter how comprehensive, cannot provide a critical discourse analysis by itself as it cannot provide an overlapping of social theoretical discourse, context, concomitants, and consequences of any given text which is absolutely necessary to define a discourse analysis "critical". Hence, the need to add more layers to the basic micro/textual approach.

- **Macro-level** (macro-themes dimension): is concerned with inter-textual and inter-discursive relations between texts, writers, readers, event and conventions and focuses mainly on how the texts affect and are affected by external factors. It is the level that most includes the Foucaultian vision of discourse and its impact on the wider society, as it presupposes that discourses exist in a net-like relationship with other discourses (Foucault 1989) which have the power to constantly influence each other. In addition to that, intertextuality plays a major role in CDA (Vaara 2008) and especially in media, by positioning the news with respect to already existent articles (Leitch 2010).

This framework choice seems the most appropriate to my study as, being the growth discourse extremely wide and deeply entwined within other discourses (economical, political, cultural etc.), a simple linguistic analysis of the texts would not deliver a great understanding of the situation. To understand how the growth discourse is built and whether discrepancies between symbolic meaning, actions and actual use of the concept are in place (Van den Bergh 2009), working on the whole micro-macro specter of the analysis seems the best option, as focusing on a single aspect would not grant to the results the necessary contextualization conditions to answer the initial question which investigates a broad national level.

3.5 Data analysis

In this paragraph, the practical methodological choices employed in this thesis, are thoroughly explained and justified. In the first part, the data collection methodology is explicated. Afterwards, following some ethical considerations about the sample, the theoretical framework employed for data coding is presented.

3.5.1. Data Collection

The starting data employed for this study consists of a collection of extensive media material deriving from a single geographical area (Italy) and specifically a dataset of complete newspapers' articles related to the subject of economic growth. My choice fell on this dataset because, as Fairclough (1995) explains, in contemporary times, where culture and society are constantly and rapidly evolving following technological development, media both project and stimulate the wider societal change process by crafting discursive practices (Fairclough, 1995). The Media are not only a reflection of societies but they also take an active role in shaping societal discourses and therefore reality (Layard 2011).

The data-set I am going to analyze consists in 140 newspaper articles, from four different newspapers. To investigate in depths, the messages, links, mental images and symbolic meanings related to the growth discourse that the media send to the wider society, taking into account different editorial perspectives appears definitely necessary. In my newspaper selection I opted for four amongst the most popular/influential Italian newspapers (reach is a key factor of the power of a discourse – Van Dijk 1995) and tried to integrate a wide diversity of political views and newspaper ownership. The following has been the selected newspapers: LaRepubblica, CorriereDellaSera, IlSole24Ore, IlFattoQuotidiano. The online archive for each of them (which includes online copies of printed articles) has been scanned for key words related to the growth discourse and the most influential recent articles selected as material for the study. As the four newspapers' search engines offered different sorting options, the selection process for each newspaper is explained in the following table (tab 3.1), along with a brief background of the newspaper themselves. After the table, ethical considerations regarding the sampling process are discussed.

Research Keywords: Crescita, Crescita Economica, PIL, Ripresa, Recessione, Italia

(in English): Growth, Economic Growth, GDP, Economic Recovery, Recession, Italy

Tab 3.1 *Information on Data Sources and Collection*

LaRepubblica	<i>Brief Description</i>	<p>“The Democratic Party newspaper”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founded in 1976 • Copies sold in 2015: 256k daily (2nd position) • Estimated Daily Readers in 2015 (digital + printed): 320k (3rd position) • Political view: moderate progressist, governmental • Ownership: Gruppo Espresso of Swiss entrepreneur Carlo De Benedetti • The newspaper is publicly financed <p>I have chosen this newspaper mainly because of its popularity and to include a vision from a governmental perspective.</p>
	<i>Selection Process</i>	<p>Relevance/Anti-Chronological from 30 April</p> <p>The search engine is the most efficient one amongst the chosen newspapers: it offers an advanced search option that allows to scan precise periods of time, sort results</p>

by relevance/anti-chronological order and choose between using one or more research keywords at the same time. Furthermore, it reports the date and page number of the written newspaper where the news was first published. I decided to collect the first 35 topic-related most relevant articles (according to Repubblica) going back from 30 March 2016.

CorriereDellaSera	<i>Brief Description</i>	<p>“The newspaper of the middle class”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founded in 1876 • Copies sold in 2015: 284k daily (1st position) • Estimated Daily Readers in 2015 (digital + printed): 380k (1st position) • Ownership: RCSMediaGroup Corp; minor stakeholders are Italian multinationals, banks and a handle of wealthy families • Political View: moderate right • The newspaper is publicly financed
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I have chosen this newspaper because it is the most diffused newspaper in Italy at the moment.

	<i>Selection Process</i>	<p>Anti-chronological from 30 April</p> <p>The search engine offers all results in anti-chronological order, from the most recently published to the oldest. It was possible to filter “only Italy-related”, but as no more research options were available, I decided to take the first 35 topic-related articles from the 30th of March 2016 going back.</p>
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IlSole24Ore	<i>Brief Description</i>	<p>“The newspaper of the industrials”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founded in 1865 • Copies sold in 2015: 134k daily (4th position) • Estimated Daily Readers in 2015 (digital + printed): 374k (2nd position) • Owned by Confindustria (Italian confederation of manufactory industries and services) • Political view: liberism (right-left balance) • The newspaper is publicly financed
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I have chosen this newspaper mainly because of its relevant diffusion and its specifically economic perspective.

	<i>Selection Process</i>	<p>Relevance/Anti-Chronological from 30 April</p> <p>The search engine offers results in anti-chronological order. It allows to search for “at least one keyword”, making it simpler to compare dates. Furthermore, it</p>
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allows to separate “daily small news” from extensively written articles and sort them by relevance (space given on the written newspaper). Of course, I decided to focus on extensively written articles, as they offer more material for analysis, and take the first 35 going back from 30th of March, following the proposed relevance parameter of the search engine.

IlFattoQuotidiano	<i>Brief Description</i>	<p>“The independent newspaper”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founded in 2009 by independent journalists unsatisfied with the constrained freedom imposed by other newspapers • Copies sold in 2015: (19th position) • Estimated Daily Readers in 2015 (digital + printed): 49k (17th position) • Owned by many independent journalist, by statute nobody can hold more than 16% of shares and any relevant decision is to be agreed with journalists • Refuses public subsidies
		<p>I have chosen this newspaper mainly because of its alternative ownership composition and because is the largest newspaper self-sustained by the copies sold and not publicly financed.</p>
	<i>Selection Process</i>	<p>Most Relevant in Period January-April 2016</p> <p>The search engine is extremely basic as it is based on a simple Google search algorithm. The engine allows for multiple keyword search but it sorts automatically results based on their relevance (established by Google) without an automatic sorting in anti-chronological order (that therefore has to be done manually). In this situation, I decided to collect the 35 most relevant articles published in 2016.</p>

3.5.2 Ethical Considerations about the Sample

The different search engines and related options offered by different newspapers prevented me to employ the exact same systematic sampling method across all four newspapers. Nevertheless, I am confident to say that slightly different sampling processes are not an insurmountable obstacle if transparently discussed and explained.

Five were the key elements that absolutely I wanted included in the articles’ sample:

- Growth as one of the central topics (as it is the research topic of interest)

- High Reach of the article (as I want to investigate the discourse on the widest level)
- Text-richness (not interest in simple numeric reports but articles that contextualize growth)
- Cultural and Political Diversity (to observe whether more than one discourse exist)
- Recent publication (I am interested in a contemporary time-frame: 2015-2016)

First of all, it is relevant to state that the choice of newspapers and sampling process, although designed to assembly in the most representative and neutral way a collection of press-released material around the topic of “growth”, does not include the totality of the editorial panorama and therefore to a certain level my choices may be defined political. In selecting thirty-five articles from each newspaper, a degree of discretion has been necessarily applied (for example, when deciding to exclude from the sample an article that was only marginally quoting one of the keywords in an unrelated context). Nevertheless, by selecting the articles by following either the publication anti-chronological order or the newspapers’ proposed degree of relevance I was able to drastically reduce the level of discretion and therefore increase auditability.

Overall, the different search methods/criteria all provide articles that satisfy the five key elements cited above and therefore provide comparable and extensively-written material that is consistent with the research topic. The limitation for “IlFattoQuotidiano” to articles written only in the first four months of 2016 has been arbitrarily made to maintain the time-frame similarity between articles.

3.5.3. Analysis Process

Qualitative researchers face two alternatives when choosing the type of data, they want to employ: naturally occurring or purposefully generated data. My study, which employs a critical perspective, aims to monitor the growth discourse within its typical every-day environment and thus utilizes naturally occurring data (Ritchie 2003). Said that, it is necessary to underline that the nature of critical discourse analysis is greatly abductive and it implies a steady reassessment of both the theoretical framework and empirical data. Furthermore, we should also keep in mind that no uniform or only-right way procedure for conducting a CDA exists, and thus providing a punctual definition of all the different analysis passages turns out to be rather difficult (Vaara 2006). Stated that, in the following paragraphs I will outline the key preliminary stages of my analysis process.

A) Ordering the articles

The 140 articles will be coded utilizing a letter and a number to ease the analysis process and will be accompanied by data that contextualizes them within the larger picture (source, publisher, date, link for auditability etc.). The code is composed by the initial letter of the newspaper's name (C, F, R, S) and a number between 1-35 attributed to articles from the same newspaper in anti-chronological order.

B) Macro-Level: Coding through Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis operates on the macro-level and helps to organize the information from an extensive data-set into meaningful groups, and sort it out by a shared theme or "code". Codes are defined by Symon (1998) as labels attached to portions of texts to index them as belonging to a certain issue/topic which the researcher believe relevant to his/her own interpretation. Thematic analysis is a core step of my research as it helps me to visualize what themes are discussed in newspapers and what major connections are made. In order to avoid any pre-conceptual bias (knowing already what I am looking for), in this situation I decided to adopt an inductive approach, which draws common themes from the empirical data (newspapers' sample articles) instead of adopting pre-constituted coding categories. This process is regarded as "open coding".

C) Meso-Level: Examining the structure of Texts

Examining the structure of texts operates on the meso-level and focuses mainly on how the discourse is built and emerges within the texts. With "structure" we intend how texts are built (titles, headers, paragraphs, visuals, the role of introduction/conclusion, etc.) as well as how those elements impact the communication of the message, the power relationships between actors and the different meanings.

D) Micro-Level: Coding Discursive Statements

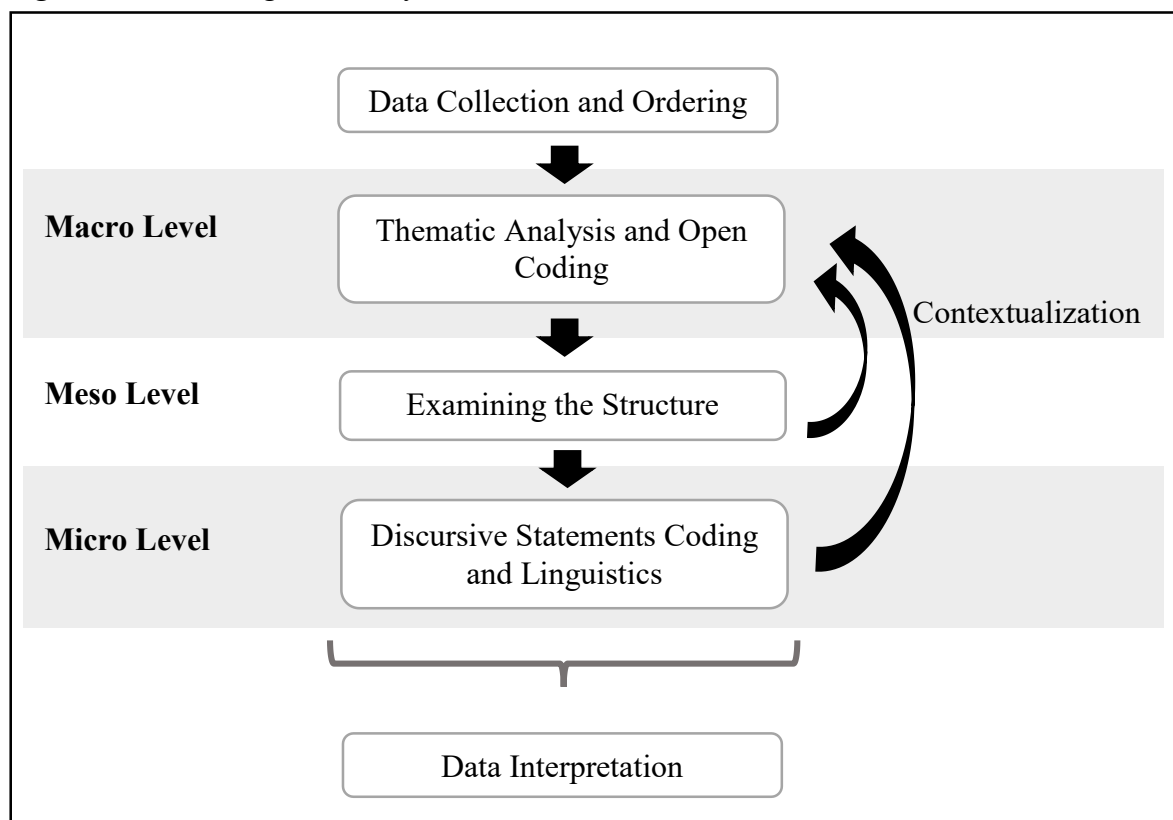
Once the macro-features of the texts have been cleared, it is possible to zoom-in and code individual statements and discourse fragments. The micro-level analysis allows me to map what "truths" the text tries to establish (Schneider 2013) in regards with different themes. Furthermore, on this level it is possible to analyze and code also recurring linguistic features (such word groups, rhetorical/literary features, modalities, evidentialities, etc.) that may surely contribute to the general understanding of the delivered message.

E) Back to the Macro-Level: Interdiscursivity and Contextualization

As stated before, empirical data become meaningless if not properly contextualized. Inserting the findings within the larger picture, analyze how texts are positioned in regards to previous material and how cultural meanings influence the message is therefore absolutely necessary. After this step, the analysis may either move back to another codes-revision cycle or, in the case the results are satisfactory, move forward to the interpretation process.

The golden rule to keep in mind when conducting a discourse analysis is that the process is highly re-iterative and circular. Categories and sub-categories constantly need re-adjustments, information needs to be contextualized, relationships need to be steadily revised and therefore it is very unlikely for only one round of coding to be enough. In the following picture (Fig. 3.1) I reassume through a self-made visual my analysis process based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional theoretical framework influenced by the tips of Schneider (2013) and properly adapted to fit my specific data-set and thesis topic.

Fig. 3.1 Data Coding and Analysis Process



4. Findings

In this chapter, after a brief explication of the translation process and referencing system employed, the findings of my research on all the macro, meso, and micro levels of the discourse are reported. From the macro-level perspective, I introduce the most recurring themes linked to growth, the relationship between each other and interdiscursivities that emerged from the analysis. Afterwards, from the meso-angle, I will report the actors which emerged from the sample and their positions on the topic. Furthermore, I will delineate the power relationships between them and how those are transmitted through different newspapers and articles. Lastly, from the micro-level point of view, I will discuss the most relevant metaphors and discourse fragments that help to contribute to the discourses building process and the messages' delivery.

4.1 Translation and Referencing Clarifications

As the articles employed for my research have been sourced from Italian newspapers they are also written in Italian language. To reduce at minimum information loss and possible misunderstandings linked to the idiom, the coding process has been conducted almost entirely in Italian and only as last step, results have been converted into English. On one side, for explaining both macro and meso perspectives, translation is fairly easy and straightforward as those points touch mainly inter-discursivity, major themes and power relationships. On the other side, the Faircloughian micro-level of analysis find its root strongly anchored to linguistics and therefore translation is to be considered a crucial point in order to enable proper understanding. For this reason, when necessary I will report also literal words from text close to my translation to allow a higher degree of auditability for the analysis process. English translated sentences and expressions will be quoted using inverted commas and cursive, whereas Italian textual words will be quoted using square brackets and cursive as in the following example:

Ex. *“This is my translation in English” [here I report the Original Text Fragment in Italian]*

For quotes excessively long, that could potentially disrupt the reading flow (micro-level fragments), the original Italian version and English translation are reported in the Appendix [4.1 – 4.2].

In addition to that, as different newspapers contribute to constructing the discourse in different ways depending on the topic, articles have been numbered in a clever way that facilitates referencing and newspaper recognition. Each article identification code is built by the first letter of the newspaper name (C- Corriere, F- FattoQuotidiano, R – Repubblica, S – Sole24Ore) and a number between (1-35) assigned to articles of a specific newspaper in anti-chronological order. It follows that as an example:

Ex. The 3rd oldest article from Repubblica will be referred as [R3] and the most recent from IlCorriere as [C35].

A full list of all articles employed, comprehensive of identification code, source, date, title and link to the online newspaper version is attached on Appendix [7].

4.2 The Two Fronts of the Growth Discourse

From the set of data I have been analysing, two harshly contrasting discourses negotiating the symbolic meanings and use of the concept of economic growth emerged: a dominant (from a quantitative perspective – 123 articles) “*Growth Legitimization*” discourse which reiterates beliefs, structures and values considered well-established and accepted within the current socio-economical system from an historical standpoint, and a more “underground” discourse (17 articles), named by me as the “*Escape the Growth Fetish*” discourse, which challenges most of the those socially constructed pillars sustaining the current socio-economical system built around economic growth measured through GDP. In the next paragraphs, the development of the two discourses are thoroughly illustrated from a macro (recurring themes), meso (actors, factions and power relationships) and micro-level (rhetoric, metaphors and linguistics) perspectives. At the end of the chapter, the levels are jointed to create a deeper picture of the whole discourse and after that, I will move onto the discussion section.

4.3 Macro Level: Macro-themes Interdiscursivity

The macroscopic aspect of discourse analysis focuses on understanding the most recurring major themes that are employed in the discourse, as well as the connections that are made between discourses. Through open coding, I have generated two sets of recurring themes, one for each of the two antagonist discourses.

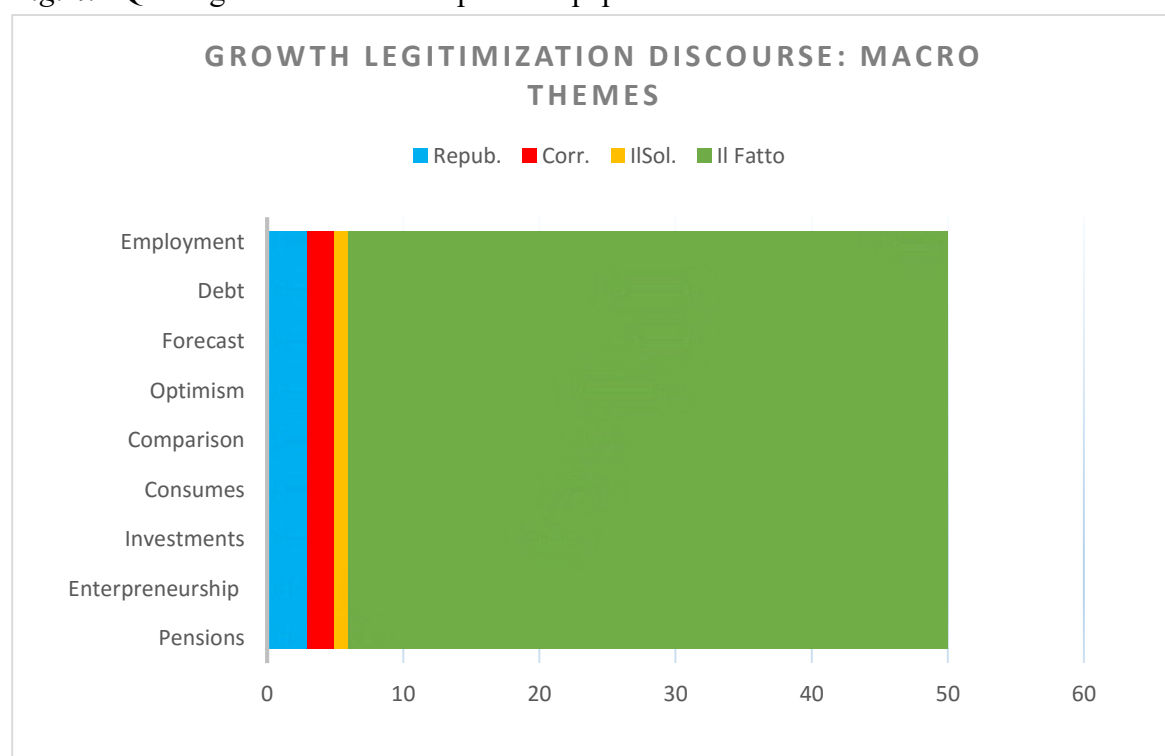
4.3.1 Themes of the “Growth Legitimation” Discourse

From the 123 articles that report positions that, to different extents, support a model of societal development based on economic growth or are at least inclined to reiterate the current economic paradigm (intended as packet of widely agreed and historically established meanings, symbols, certainties and mental models) 10 major themes emerged: Employment, Forecast, Debt, Optimism, Comparison, Consumes, Investments, Pensions and Entrepreneurship. Following is a recap of those themes (Tab 4.1, Fig.4.1) and a brief macroscopic introduction to the main discourses behind them, which will be analyzed more in depth while adding the meso and micro layers of analysis and ultimately by contextualizing the whole picture.

Tab. 4.1 Growth Legitimization Discourse – Macro-themes list

Growth Legitimation Discourse	
Employment	50
Forecast	32
Debt	32
Optimism	30
Comparison	26
Consumes	25
Investments	23
Pensions	8
Entrepreneurship	8

Fig. 4.1 Quoting of macro-themes per newspaper



From a quantitative perspective, the most recurring element in “growth-supporting” articles seems without any doubt the *employment*. From a great variety of articles, jobs appear strongly linked to growth and, in the same fashion, growth to jobs. Entering into the merits of the discussion, we may observe past cases in which growth has been correlated with more jobs (ex. recently in the US – [R4], last year in Italy - [R26]) and others in which recession caused unemployment which brought people to flee their countries ([R33], [R34]). In addition to that, we also see cases in which economic growth (as measured by GDP) skyrocketed (ex. Ireland +9,5% [R17], China +6,7% [C28]) but employment descended because of high levels of inequality. Nevertheless, overall, employment seems both explicitly and tacitly regarded as a by-product of growth in the same way as growth is regarded as a by-product of higher levels of employment. “Jobs” are arguably marked, even unconsciously, as the essential and most important basis for prosperous living, although nowhere a distinction between different jobs (part-time vs fulltime, including social benefits vs not, beneficial vs detrimental for society) is made.

Following in the quantitative rankings (that, important to underline, do not necessarily convey specific information about the deep content of the discourse which is instead analyzed on the micro-scale, but I reported to give an overall macro impression of the whole interdiscursivity situation) are forecasts and debt.

Forecasts about GDP are used by governments to allocate future resources, by businesses to taste the temperature of the economy and by financial institutions as a barometer to estimate the risk of their investments. From the articles, it is observable how forecasts are provided by a myriad of different actors and most of the time the projections differ amongst them. As an example, estimations for this year’s Italian GDP (2016) have been released by the IMF (+1,0%) [C28], OCSE (+1,0%) [S6], Fitch (+1,0%) [F24], S&P (+1,1%) [F24], EU Commission (+1,3%), S&P revised (+1,3%), Bankitalia (+1,5%) [F6] and the government (+1,6%) at the beginning of the year [C28], then revised with in the DEF (Document of Economics and Finance) to (+1,3%) and then (+1,2%) in April [S27]. Forecasts are also not only made forward-looking but also backward-looking: as GDP is extremely manipulable from an accounting perspective (any given year’s GDP can be changed “a posteriori” as new data emerge or through creative accounting), casting deflated forecasts for past year’s GDP helps making current year’s GDP higher [R5, C7, S21, F17, F33]. Lastly, GDP estimations often appear to be proved wrong or excessively “creative” after just months or sometime days from their publication [C2].

In the micro-level of analysis, I will report the perceived importance of those small decimal differences that emerges from the texts and in the meso-level we will observe how those decimals seem relevant for different actors. For now, it is sufficient to understand how forecasts link to the next macro-theme: *Debt*.

Most modern national countries, Italy included, finance themselves through *Debt*. Governments emits bonds to finance public expenditure and sustain social welfare and therefore have an interest to keep interest rates as low as possible. Knowing this aspect, it is no wonder observing a strong link in discussions between debt and public finances [C4-R34]. As we have seen before in the background section, Italy has one of the highest debt in Europe (132% of PIL, 2.2 billion Euro) and also signed the European Fiscal Compact Agreement in 2012, which bounds national countries to steadily reduce debt year by year while keeping the ratio deficit/PIL under 3%. From the articles, the European deficit roof seems at the center of most conversations between EU, IMF, BCE and Italian government [R23-C21-C4-C17-C24]. Furthermore, the theme of debt is often described as a perceived deterrent that inhibits higher levels of consumption amongst the population and therefore it results strongly linked to *optimism* and *consumes*.

Optimism is a theme that clearly emerges from most of articles interviewing or reporting governmental exponent's declarations [C6-R9-R32-S21] and which is often contested by other actors, mainly independent journalists [C11-F1-F5-F28]. From the texts, emerge clearly the efforts of the national governments in trying to boost consumes by constantly forcing a climate of optimism.

Consumes, on the other side, are linked to growth in a quiet curious way. In facts, consumes are constantly referred to as a "step" to achieve in order to *sustain* growth [C9-S2-S20-R1-R-11-R12-F1-F6] and boost *Employment* and *Investments*, while hardly ever are connected to increases in wellbeing. Important to underline is that, in no article within the "growth legitimization discourse", the concept of consumes have been discussed in depth: the word "consumes" includes everything, without distinctions of quality, without specifying what is being consumed and what benefits it brings.

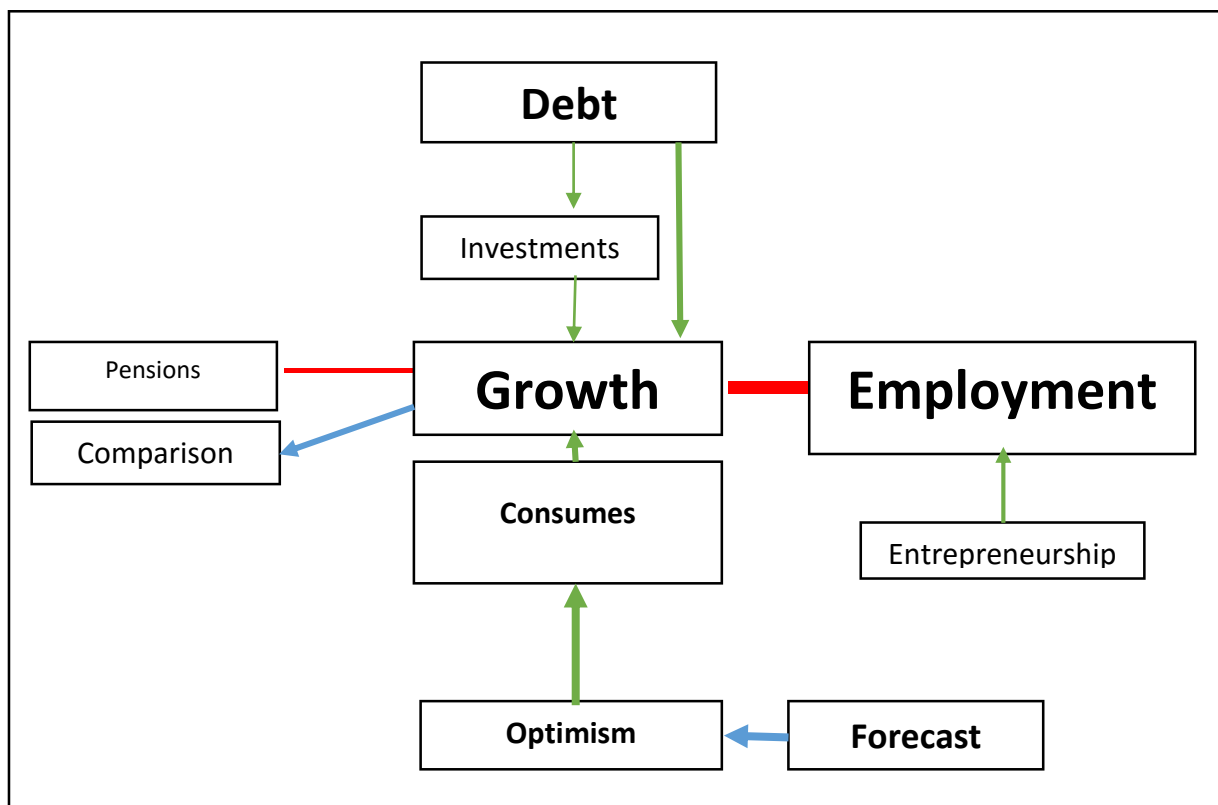
Investments and *Entrepreneurship* are both strongly perceived as a cause of employment and positively correlated to both GDP and consumption level. The security of *pensions* in the same

fashion appears to be strongly dependent on sustaining increasing growth levels year by year [R27-R29-C32].

Lastly, a widely recurring element in growth-related articles (26 times) seems undoubtedly *Comparison*. GDP is used to compare the performance of countries against each other countries (ex. European countries), the performances of macro-regions (ex. US vs EU vs China), different regions (ex. Northern vs Southern Italy) and of course to make comparison across time periods.

Hereafter in (Fig.4.2), I tried to sketch all the macro-themes and the tendencies of their relationships to give the reader a visual overview. With green arrows I suggest a link of causality (A leads to B), with red line I highlight a tandem (more of A means more of B and the opposite) whilst with the blue arrow I indicate a scope (A is used for achieving B). The thickness of the arrows and words symbolizes the relevance they gain within the texts.

Fig. 4.2 Overview of connections between Macro-themes



4.3.2. Interdiscursivity within the “Growth Legitimation Discourse”

In addition to the macro-themes quoted above, another important macro-aspect encountered within the “Growth Legitimization discourse” is interdiscursivity. As seen in the methodological chapter, interdiscursivity is the fact of connecting the main discourse with other underlying or external discourses. Within the articles supporting or reiterating (consciously or unconsciously) beliefs, meanings and symbols of an historically well-established economic model built around the pillar of growth, I individuated three mayor links to other discourses: geopolitical tensions (27), global slowdown (22 articles), petrol crisis (5 articles). Although the articles generally do not enter specifically in the topics, the fact of recalling the events happening on a wider global scale and connecting them to the local Italian context gives solid insight of the inter-linkages between countries operating in a global context following a neo-liberistic economic model based on growth and adopting open economies. Following, I briefly present how the three inter-discourses emerge from the articles and the message they convey.

- **Geopolitical tension:** Analysts (ex. Bloomberg, Nomisna etc.) stated multiple times in the analysed timeframe how geopolitical tension in the international environment may compromise growth in Italy [R6]. Geopolitical tensions are individuated within the European Union [R24, R33, S5] and the “right parties” on the rise [C33], in Greece [C23, C27, R34], in UK with the upcoming “Brexit Referendum” [F16, C20, C24, C25, C27, C28], within the “ghost of Donald Trump” in US and the Russian recession [C8, R14], within the middle East and with the coming hordes of refugees migrating to Europe [S8, F29, C9, C27] and dangers linked to terrorism [C20]. Economically harmful tensions are often utilized many times by Italian institutions (ex. ministers, Bankitalia etc.) to justify the absence of a previously forecasted growth percentage [R28, R29] while positive geopolitical dynamics are sometimes employed by independent journalists to criticize the government’s actions [F5]. The picture that emerges from the article is that geopolitical tensions contribute to creating a climate of fear that impairs growth (not specified “of what” but arguably as measured by GDP) through impacting the financial markets and, this climate cannot be mitigated by the national government, even with all the possible good will.
- **Global Economic Slowdown:** [Rallentamento Globale] The concept of global slowdown is one that constantly emerges in a great variety of articles. Analysts predicting the Italian growth rate for the next semesters often quote global economic

issues as causes of stagnation which promote an unfavourable climate for the country to start running once again. Sometimes, the US slowdown is quoted [S23], other times the braking of the Chinese economy [R5] or Russia and Brics [F6]; yet most of the time the argument is quoted in general terms, as something that is obviously there under the eyes of everyone and should not be explicated further [F3, F16, F30, S6, S7, S22, S27, R4, R7, R10, R11, R18, R22, R23, R26, R30] Here again, the slowdown refers to the pace of GDP growth within different nations and the biases, limitations and potential dangers of employing that specific indicator are not discussed.

- **Petrol Crisis:** The fall of petrol prices in the last periods caused Europe to experiment a lower rate of inflation and therefore is reported from many sides to have put under danger the restart of the growing process. In fact, as western countries tend to measure economic growth through Nominal GDP rather than inflation-adjusted real GDP, a decrease (or not so strong as expected increase) of goods and services prices causes the GDP to be lower than expected [C20, F21]. The risk of defaults of large companies and national countries [F8, R15] moved the IMF to invite the global community to increase the demand of petrol to make the prices rise once again [R15]. From my perspective, within this situation it is possible to see how attributing an arguably excessive importance to the GDP measure (also through legal regulations) without considering the indicator's biases, may place the achievement of higher level of GDP at the level of a national objective (as many factors become legally, economically or cognitively linked to it). The meaning and importance given to GDP by modern society are two of the topics that were negotiated within the academic discourses in my literature review (Van den Bergh 2009, Costanza 2009, Kallis 2011, Coyle 2015) and which I found constantly debated also within my sample articles (between reiterative and alternative growth-related articles).

From the previous three connected discourses it is possible to note how, the current Italian national system appears extremely frail and is dependent by many variables outside the reach of its national institutions. Because of how the economic and the financial global systems are built and regulated, political or economic happenings in one country (especially first world and large developing ones) hardly ever do not influence the rest of the globe. Financial markets seem to play an enormous role in building or impairing growth in an open market economy such Italy.

4.3.3 Themes of the “Escape the Growth Fetish” Discourse

Interesting fact is, how the 17 articles arguing against the established construction and social understanding (goals, regulations, symbols, meanings, practices etc.) of our current economic model constantly aiming toward unlimited growth presents macro-themes extremely different from the previous discourse. Here the effort of the actors involved in trying to escape the economic dimension and creating a systemic picture involving also the larger human society and the environment clearly emerges. In *Tab 4.2*, as for the previous discourse, macro-themes are ranked based on their quantitative appearance in the sample and following is a brief macroscopic introduction to them.

Tab. 4.2 Escape the Growth Fetish Discourse – Macro-themes list

Escape the Growth Fetish Discourse	
Inequality	9
Critique to GDP	8
Sustainability	7
Cultural Change / Education	7
Environment	6
Sense of Community	4
Happiness / Quality of Life	3
Systemic Thinking	3

Starting from the most recurrent, the discussion around *Inequality* seems to play a major role in the “Escape the Growth Fetish” discourse. Being inequality in the resource distribution [C18] one of the most socially visible and therefore hated failures of a societal development path based on economic growth, the fact this macro-theme scores first on the list does not excessively surprise. When discussing inequality, the texts highlight the imbalance between the added value created by workforce against capital and its actual unfair compensation [F13], the “fake” wealth and distortions created by finance [C18] and overall the general frustration (seen in the increasing number of protests and growing use of medicaments and antidepressants) that derives from an increasing inequality brought by excessive and unregulated economic growth [F26].

Following inequality, the second macro-theme in quantitative order is the “*Critiques to GDP*”. Here, many shortcomings of this measure (some of which I also discussed in my literature review) are explained and criticized. On this side of the discourse, the uncounted value of

voluntary work is underlined, the unacceptable fact that GDP calculations includes prostitution and illegal or harmful production (drugs, smoke, unnecessary sanitary expenses etc.) is exposed [C16] and also its inability to account for the effects of social inequality and loss of basic rights on human wellbeing is cited [F9]. Overall GDP results from many parts strongly attacked and defined as “a measure totally out of the world” [F2] which measures little or nothing [C16]. The benefits of finance in truly benefitting the “real economy” are once again questioned [C18] as well as the sense of following a paradigm aiming at unlimited growth within a world characterized by limited resources [F32]. Within this macro-theme, it appears absolutely evident the willingness of journalists and professional experts in opening a discussion to re-negotiate the symbolic values and meaning widely associated to economic growth and consequently the current use of GDP.

After the critique to GDP, three macro-themes closely bound between each other emerged from the texts: *Sustainability*, *Cultural Change* and *Environment*. The necessity for our societies to grow more sustainable is stressed in many texts; sustainable from an environmental perspective [R3, C12, F3, F23, F26] a social justice perspective [F2, F24], an energetic perspective [F2, F26] and from a consumption and production perspective [R3]. Sustainability, which here re-appears after having been neglected in the opposite growth narration, is accompanied by a discussion on the necessity of a drastic *cultural change*, starting from schools [F15, C18] and touching every aspect of human lives: from the way we live [C18] to what we eat [F26], how we produce [C18] and how we consume, to what we value and set as our societal goals [R1, F13]. This necessity is then justified by the effects that our human societies are having on the natural *environment* and other living creatures.

The *sense of community* incarnated in values such as solidarity, empathy, sharing, sense of belonging and social inclusion, is another recurring theme [R1, C16, C18, F13] when describing a hypothetical society not ruled by the currently established and socially accepted market practices but by a net of inter-related human beings exercising sovereignty on their own lives. Interesting is that, although the concept of cultural change including the way we live and relate to each other are also at the core of the degrowth philosophy, the word “degrowth” is never used but instead is substituted by the words “*growing together*” [*crescere insieme* – C18] which enjoys a much more positive/reassuring light.

Concluding the list of macro-themes touched by my texts' sample, are *happiness*, *quality of life*, and *systemic thinking*. Differently from the previous discourse, other factors that impact human life are taken into consideration (relationships, sense of purpose, culture, spirituality etc.) in addition to the economic one (employment). Furthermore, all of those factors, together with the previously discussed macro-themes (inequality, sustainability, environment etc.) and other major world issues (poverty, wars, violence etc.) are brought together to form complex systemic pictures of the socio-ecological systems our societies live in [R3, F2, F13].

4.4 Meso Level: Actors, Power Relationships and Differences amongst Newspapers

The meso level of CDA is the dimension meant to provide depth to the research by connecting macro-themes and micro linguistic strategies to the actors behind them, by creating conscious awareness of the power relationships between actors and provide an overall contextualized image of the field on which a discourse grows. I divided this paragraph in three main parts: first, a focus on the actors involved in the process of texts creation, secondly, an overview on the relationship between them based on their explicit beliefs and lastly, a brief contextualized analysis of the difference between newspapers in text creation, presentation and potential fruition.

4.4.1 Actors participating in the Growth Discourse

Following is a brief list of all actors that, directly or indirectly, have been spoken their opinion, ideas or perspective on growth-related topics within my 140-articles sample.

- *Italian Government*: Mainly represented in the articles by the persons of Matteo Renzi (Italian prime minister) and Pier Carlo Padoan (Italian minister for economy). This actor is the one that most of all tries to spread optimism [R30] (as for example by constantly releasing overestimated GDP expectations – F20, F28) with the aim of increasing overall consumption amongst the population [C6] and therefore fostering growth. From those actions arguably transpires a Keynesian view of the economy by at least the Italian prime and economy ministers. Pensions' funds [R29] and the level of employment are clearly concerns for the Italian government which has a sure interest in avoiding excessive demonstrations and maintaining a level of credibility within national borders even more than outside.

- *International Monetary Fund*: Quoted are the IMF's outlook reports on global economy and most of the times the words of its managing director Christine Lagarde. The stress this actor applies not only on the necessity of growth but also on a strong degree of global growth transpires evident [C25] and sometimes brings the IMF to exploit its role and spread fears to override or condition democratic decisions [F16, C28]. From most statements and reports, it is possible to evince the IMF's belief of growth as the panacea for every issue [S25], yet barely never the effects of growth on the real economy are discussed in detail (usually unemployment, poverty and an overall decrease in quality of life are given for granted). In addition to growth, the attention of the IMF seems also focused on maintaining national debts within safe parameters in order to prevent distress within the stock markets and the financial world [C24]. Last point, the IMF seems to hold the authority to feel in a position where it can "lecture" national countries on the best fiscal reforms they should implement [C24-C25].
- *Istat*: The Italian national statistical institute is quoted by both governmental actors to justify the executive results as well as from journalists to support or contest them. Although formally an independent organ, from the articles emerges the ability of the government to partially manipulate statistics to a certain extent (especially about GDP forecasts and therefore economic growth [F10, F17, F33]) to improve the country's economic outlook. Nevertheless, except for isolated contested cases, it appears evident the high degree of social legitimacy this actor enjoys in the media (between journalists in particular) as most statistics both related and not to economic growth (such as about life expectation, the differences between north and south [S26, R20], unemployment [F3], fiscal pressure [F17] etc.) are considered close to hundred percent trustworthy by most and hardly ever contested.
- *Other statistical institutes*: *Wiesbaden statistics* [R7], *Statistica Brazil* [S10], *Eurispes* [R2], *Eurostat* [R32]. Numbers from statistical institutes are being used in the articles to legitimize the speakers' line of thoughts through rationalization processes. Same as Istat, all the previous institutes enjoy total legitimization and seem to be fully trusted by both authoritative powers (governments and supranational organizations) and journalists (both supporting or arguing against a development paradigm centered on economic growth).

- *OECD*: the organization for economic co-operation and development is an international institution uniting 34 countries (mainly first-world western nations) that formally adhere to a development paradigm based on democracy and market economy. This institution enjoys a high level of authority between first world countries as it is mostly funded and run by them (therefore all countries that to different degrees, based on achieving growth their development and wealth). In the articles, the OECD is often quoted when discussing about GDP forecasts (as it regularly releases its own) [F14, S6]. Founded with the same aim of the IMF (preventing peace by fostering employment through economic growth), the OCSE also seems from the articles to perceive economic growth (as measured by GDP) as the only viable and safe development way. To spread its view within the wider discourse, the organization periodically launches warnings and suggestions (that sometimes sound like intimations, given the strong use of imperatives) to national governments but also to European Institutions [F30, S7].
- *EU political Institutions (ECB, EU Commission, Eurostat)*: First of all, it is important to state that all EU institution enjoy a high degree of legitimization in the eyes of governments, businesses but also general public. The European Central Bank is a non-elective institution, formally independent from EU institutions (although some members are appointed by them) which scope is to set the European monetary policy to maintain a stable level of inflation and a constant level of purchasing power within EU borders. As businesses, governments and lives of common citizens are strongly influenced by this actor decisions, it is natural for it to enjoy strong authority recognized by all parties. From the words of its president Mario Draghi, the ECB sends periodically warnings to national governments and pushes for bold reforms aiming at growth [C20] and stability. The EU commission as well enjoys great authoritative power (being it composed by governmental representatives from all EU countries) and the ability to influence national politics through its reports (especially on macro-economic themes [C3]). Eurostat is the official organ for statistics for the European Union and the trustworthiness of its statistics have never been contested in any article of my sample.
- *World Bank*: The world bank is an extremely recurring actor in my sample which is strongly supporting the growth development paradigm (see definitions for more info). Partially constituted alongside the IMF after the second world war (before IBRD), it is

now part of the United Nation system and its main objective is to fight world poverty, foster international trade and foreign investments.

- *Bankitalia*: Once the Italian central bank, today it is still to be formally considered by law a public institute and not a commercial bank. Nevertheless, in practice, Bankitalia is currently managed and owned as a corporation where all shareholders are constituted by the major Italian commercial banks. From the sampled articles, it emerges the worry this actor bares against turbulences on financial markets and of an overall global slowdown [F6]. The suggested “medicine” to those situations appear extremely similar to the one proposed by the Italian government: spread optimism to keep high the trust of consumers and enterprises in a future economic growth [F6]. The effort in spreading optimism even by this actor may be recognized in the always overstated GDP forecasts [F6, R28] but most of all on the comforting messages directed to consumers [R30].
- *Confindustria*: Is a voluntary industrials’ confederation counting today approximately 150.00 enterprises and currently owning the newspaper *IlSole24Ore*. Because of this, its perspective on growth and influence within the public discourse is not only visible in the articles in which are explicitly stated its positions (usually through post-meeting press releases or by the words of its president Giorgio Napolitano) but also from the editorial line of its own newspaper. In fact, *IlSole24Ore* (owned by Confindustria) has been the only newspaper amongst the four taken into analysis over the period Jan-Apr 2016 which did not published any critical article in contrast with the currently accepted and established western development paradigm based on limitless growth and excessive consumerism. From the words of its president, it is possible to see how Confindustria sees entrepreneurship as the basis of the economy and society [C22] and how its work is oriented to improve the labor market, to make it more “fast and modern”, to solve harsh relationships with syndicates and reduce bureaucracy. Following this line, a certain degree of lobby power of Confindustria on the government is evident [C35] (as it is naturally supposed to be, representing over 5million employees), as well as its strong support to it (the confederation seems to wish stability and predictability over drastic changes asked by emerging social movements). Interesting point, is that the confederation, which is ruled by a group of industrials, defines itself “satisfied” and “optimist for the future” as long as revenues and GDP grow, even if the overall employment level is declining [R15]. In fact, Giorgio Napolitano’s statements reveal an

underlying assumption that a higher level of industrialization [S17] jointed with stronger and sustained growth [S18] will with certainty cause an increase in work places and overall wellbeing in the long term.

- *Journalists:* As seen already in the literature review, journalists play the role of the middle-man (Deephouse 2008) between authoritative powers and the general public, they are the doorkeepers of information and depending on their level of independence, they have the power to re-direct the focus of the public discourse, adjust the access of different actors to it and ultimately inserting reading lenses on issues for the general public (Happer 2013). Journalists are at the base of the communication industry (especially in traditional medias such newspapers) and in my sample, their opinion in favor of one or the other discourse, as well as their background, often transpires clear. Last point is, that they may be partially limited in their ability to structure the overall text, but of this I will talk in paragraph (4.4.3).
- *Other relevant actors appearing in the sample:* Dutch premier M. Rutte [S3], Chinese prime minister Li-Keqiang [C13] economic-chief of IMF M. Obstfeld [S31], FGV economist H.H. Sheng [S33], ex-Brazilian president F.H. Cardoso [S33], economist J. Sachs [C12], EU think tank Bruegel [C17], center for wellbeing and development BES [F4], Wall Street Journal [C8], exponents of American administration [R19, C21], rating agencies Moody's, Standard&Poors and Fitch [F1, F24, C34] between others.

4.4.2 Relationships between Actors: Factions

Two factions, consciously and unconsciously working toward either the reiteration of a discourse legitimizing a societal development paradigm (framework of basic assumptions, ways of thinking, set of meanings and symbols, mental models and practices socially agreed, accepted and established within a certain group of actors) revolving around economic growth or toward an alternative one trying to re-negotiate societal priorities and symbolic meanings by placing economy within a wider socio-ecological system have been individuated within my research sample. In the following table (*Tab 4.3*), the actors belonging to the two factions are divided based on the discourse they contribute to nourish and put into perspective.

Tab 4.3 The opposite factions expanding the two discourses

Discourse	Growth Legitimization	Escape the Growth Fetish	Neutral
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Italian Government (Prime + economy minister) • EBC (European Central Bank) • IMF (International Monetary Fund) • OECD (Org. For Economic Cop&Dev.) • World Bank (UN) • EU Commission • Bankitalia • Confindustria • IlSole24Ore • Rating Agencies • Classical Economists • Two Foreign prime ministers • Journalists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalists • Economist J. Sachs • Intellectuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Istat • Eurostat

What immediately shine to the eye when starring at the previous table, is obviously the huge imbalance of actors and power between the two factions. On the left-hand side, under the “Growth Legitimization discourse”, we find almost all political institutions, financial institutions and historical businesses. Political institutions (Italian Gov, EU Gov) formally gain legitimization through elections (the degree of it could be nevertheless widely discussed) and they seem to often be put under pressure from the same financial institutions and markets they contribute to legitimize through formal regulations (BCE, Bankitalia, Commercial Banks). The interests of both political and financial institutions seems therefore to align in favor of the growth development paradigm. Major businesses, which line of thought is expressed both by Confindustria and its newspaper “IlSole24Ore”, appear to be preferring to “play it safe”, go with the flow and focus mostly on maximizing returns rather than take a larger view of the situation and clashing against political institutions or markets. Classical economists, as well as most quoted politicians, seem to follow a traditional Keynesian view of the economy and in according to this view, they stress and contribute to increase the importance of aiming for growth. Following a consolidated, widely legitimized and accepted set of practices, theories and socially constructed agreements, as well as the position covered in prestigious institutions, gives those actors’ opinion strong power and the ability to impact the public discourse. Overall, it may be argued that the actors reiterating and constantly re-legitimizing a development model based on growth are the ones that historically contributed to construct the current system in the

first place (Politicians, IMF, World Bank, Banks etc.). The authority owned by the actors pushing the public discourse toward a need for economic growth comes both from their history and from the actual power they wield to impact everyday lives of entire societies. Focusing on the physical persons inside the cited institutions, it may be advanced the hypothesis that they cover those positions exactly because they were followers of the current system in the first place and therefore have been promoted following a value scale which perfectly fits the needs of the current economic system.

On the next column of the table, we find the actors which contributed to form the counter-discourse emerging from the 17 articles challenging the mainstream axiom of economic growth. The vast majority of them are journalists. Other personalities found in the sample are one economist (J. Sachs), a historian/philosopher (I. Illich) and a physicist (F. Capra). The authoritative power those actors own is undoubtedly microscopic (especially compared against the previous faction): journalists are nameless on a large scale while physicists or historians usually hardly ever influence debates in the business and financial worlds. Nevertheless, they all found their space on newspapers (on the independent newspaper “IlFattoQuotidiano” most of all – 8/35 articles) and therefore their access to the public discourse.

Lastly, on the last column we find statistical institutions (Istat, Eurostat, Eurispes), which are regarded as “neutral” most of the time: they provide data which are trustworthy and which is used by both factions to justify their own reasons and actions.

4.4.3 Differences in Delivering the Message between Newspapers

Following the modified Fairclough’s tri-dimensional framework for CDA, another important part of the meso-level of the discourse, in addition to observing the actors taking part in the discourse and the power relationships between them, consists in analyzing how the texts gets presented and how the message is codified for the reader. Hereafter, I will therefore briefly discuss the text structures and patterns I have noticed in my article’s sample as well as highlight the differences between the four newspapers.

First of all, starting from the linguistic register adopted in the four sample newspapers a first insight comes to the eyes: while LaRepubblica (the “governative” newspaper), IlCorriereDellaSera (the middle class’ newspaper) and IlFattoQuotidiano (independent newspaper) utilize an easily comprehensible, everyday register (even when trying to explain

hard economic principles); *IlSole24Ore* (the businessman's newspaper) adopts an highly qualified economic and financial jargon, full of economic terms, numbers and definitions which are given as known by the reader (some more obvious examples may be found in [S13, S15, S21, S23, S28, S30, S33] . The choice of a more prominent economic register, on one side allows "*IlSole24Ore*" to reach deeper and in more detail certain macro-economic dynamics, while on the other side it may arguably have the effect of setting a barrier of understanding for non-economic/financial experts and therefore create an auto-referential discussion between single-disciplinary members (the fact that not a single article putting into discussion the economic growth paradigm has been found in the four-months timespan, strengthens this hypothesis). The business world, from this point of view, seems to follow its own rules and schemes with only blurred attention on what is happening beyond the economic sphere.

A second point I would like to make, is about the use of data and graphs to explain points. On this side, a peculiarity of "*IlFattoQuotidiano*" emerges, where its journalists more than everybody else utilize graphs, tables and pictures (whereas others generally utilize only one picture under the title, if any) to ease the communication toward common citizens and explain their reading of different situations [F8, F12, F17, F25, F27, F31]. Making use of data by showing them in an understandable manner improves communication, makes the overall articles more enjoyable and key points more memorable and trustworthy.

A third point I noticed, is the degree of influence that journalists have on the message. On this side, a special focus falls on "*LaRepubblica*" (governative newspaper) which many times reports verbatim the version of the government's bell without any journalist voice making notes or objecting any detail [R9, R18, R22, R23, R26]. Although this is not true for every article on this newspaper, an often acritical way of reporting the governmental exponent's statements let transpire a certain degree of "softness" from journalists in regards of the governmental operate. Acritical reports in favor of the national governments has been found only in one article on "*IlSole24Ore*" S27, while on all articles of "*IlCorriere*" and "*IlFatto*" the presence of the journalist is always visible.

One last point I want to make, is about the use of visuals under the titles. As seen in the literature review, titles do enshrine the messages of an article and alone may push the reader to read it or move forward. Traditional media know this, as they have educated users through the years to act in this way, and therefore try to make titles as strong and catchy as possible. What got my

attention while scanning my sample, have been the strong links that are made between title and the images just under it. For example, when a title talks about recession (absence of growth) there are images of revolts [F13] or sad/disgusted political faces [R25], whilst the title talks positively about growth, under it are often positioned reassuring pictures of smiling/secure politicians, handshakes or employees at work [S3, C13, R9, R11, R29]. Little examples which help to uncover a mental connection “growth is good, absence of growth is bad” that seems to exist within part of our society and on which I will focus further when discussing the fragments of the “Growth Legitimation Discourse” in the micro-level of analysis.

4.5 Micro-Level: inside the Legitimazion process

Now that I analysed the macro-themes touched by the two antagonist discourses, the actors constructing the texts which have access to the public discourse, the factions that seems to exist as well as the differences in message delivery between the sample newspapers; it is time now to dig deeper into the articles and focus on the micro-level of analysis and the process of meanings negotiation. Hereafter, I focus on how the core of the discourses are constructed in practice through linguistic and syntactic strategies. First, I will discuss the metaphors (more and less recurrent) I found within both discourses, then I will move onto analysing the most relevant fragments and digging into tacit assumptions. Afterwards, I will combine the three levels of analysis together and through contextualization, I will create the big picture depicted by both faces of the discourse.

4.5.1 Metaphors

Between the linguistic elements composing the micro-level of critical discourse analysis within the three-dimensional Faircloughian model, metaphors are surely one of the most relevant. The actors/factions developing either of the two somehow antagonist discourses I have pinpointed (“Growth Legitimation” vs “Escape the Growth Fetish” discourse) seem to make great use of metaphors to visualize, spread, foster and negotiate their ideas of world, society and economy, both consciously and arguably also unconsciously. In the following two paragraphs, the findings on the metaphor side are illustrated.

Growth Legitimation Discourse: The Speed and the Engine

Economic growth is an engine, it is speed, it is racing. In a great number of articles, economies are depicted as man-made engine-powered machines and the theme speed is extremely recurring and, for connecting to the meso-level of analysis, utilized across all the board of actors

constructing this discourse (Government, Fmi, Bce, Ocse, Journalists, Analysts etc.). Example of this metaphor are countless: Germany is described as the “*Locomotive of Europe*” [C9], US economy the same [R4], Italy is visualized as a “*Car that moves*” [*Macchina che gira* – C6] when consumes are increasing, China is “*The engine with more horsepower*” [*il motore con più cavalli* – S32] and the “*Economic engine of the planet*” [*Motore economico del mondo* – S32]. Economic growth emerges from the discourse as an entity with “*many engines*” [C1] being those consumes, investments, policies and anything else that could impact the GDP growth rate. The metaphor of velocity becomes even more evident when observing the choices for verbs and metaphors for elements surrounding the concept of “growth”. To give a comprehensive picture: economic recession is depicted as “*mud*” [*pantano della recessione* – R2] slowing down the car, increases in the GDP growth rate are referred to as “*accelerations*” [R29-C9-F27-S2-S27] while decreases as “*decelerations*” [R11-F21]. A mildly strong decrease in the growth rate (so even when an economy is still growing) is referred to as “*hard breaking*” or “*stoppage*” [(*brusca*) *frenata* – R4-R15-S35] while an economic crisis in terms of GDP would be “*crashing*” [*schiantarsi* – F12] or “*to sink*” (*sprofondare* – S10). A positive stimulus/happening to economies’ growth rate appear to be “*towing*” the economy [*Trainare* – S8] or behave as “*fuel*” [*benzina* – C32] whilst negative stimuli are defined as “*deadweight*” [*zavorra* – R15-S27] and external impacting trends (such as falling petrol prices, political instability and global economy slowdown) are referred to as “*turbulences*” [R4-R15].

In addition to that, also macro-themes related to growth are spoken of through the use of metaphors that foster the speed/vehicle mental image. Keeping introducing fiscal reforms that promote growth is being referred to as “*Holding the helm straight*” (*Barra a dritta* – S28), innovation is the “*burning fire*” alimending the engine and should be constantly stoked [F31] or the “*accelerator*” [C22] which should “*be pressed stronger*”. And more: hopes from Confindustria (union of entrepreneurs) are that enterprises could “*catch the recovery at maximum speed*” (*agganciare la ripresa a tutta velocità* – S29), a recovery in global growth is depicted as “*going back on track*” (*tornare in carreggiata* – S32) and when making comparison between countries, the hope for the one behind to catch up is described as “*accelerating to recover the lost ground*” (*accelerare per recuperare il terreno perso* – S17).

For summing up the previous insights about metaphors, it is interesting to observe that whether locomotives, cars, boats or planes, economies are pictured as rushing vehicles with many

engines and which require constant fueling in order to maximize speed, one of the most relevant symbols employed by the actors fostering the development paradigm based on growth.

In addition to the previous, less recurring metaphors complete the picture. Between those, we find how economic growth becomes *“The path to follow”* (*il sentiero della crescita* – R24), GDP is a *“magic number”* (*numero magico* – S4), debt and inflation are *“pincers”* [C4] and national countries, differently from economies, are sometimes referred to as houses while crisis as rain: an example of this comes from the Italian prime minister depicting Italy as an *“house which roof has been repaired, and where it does not rain anymore”* [S5] to symbolize that Italy is not the epicenter of the Euro crisis. Opposing journalists challenge this view by fearing that *“all may crumble down”* (*far venir giù tutto* – F5).

Escape the Growth Fetish Discourse: Picturing a world

The first thing that shines to the eyes when observing the emersion of the “Escape the Growth Fetish” discourse is that there are no recurring metaphors employed but many, mostly unrelated between each other, which complexity is quite considerable compared to the immediacy of the engine/speed metaphor employed in the antagonist discourse. Second, connecting again to the meso-level of analysis, it is relevant to point out that all alternative metaphors seem to be proposed by journalists alone (of which 5 out of 6 from the independent newspaper “Il Fatto Quotidiano”) instead of by a group of actors. Following, are the six most relevant/curious metaphors that I have encountered in my sample (17 articles).

1. GDP is depicted as a “Maelstrom”

“A maelstrom that breaks into pieces the environment, that justifies disasters, abuses and corruption, that steals life time, that traps ourselves in traffic and that makes us unlearn what is pleasurable to do”. [F26]

2. GDP growth as an “Erection”

In commenting the governmental fandango of rituals that took place at the end of 2015, the journalist discussed the concept of “growth” by depicting the “GDP race” amongst European countries as an *“Erection race”* (*erezione del PIL*) to symbolize that the relevance of such competition is only in people’s mind. Furthermore, the efficacy of GDP in measuring economic health is also portrayed as *“measuring pressure with a ruler”*. [F2]

3. GDP as the “*Naked King*”

The journalist compares the GDP to the king in Andersen’s fable “The Emperor’s new clothes”. In the fable, the king is cheated by two swindlers which sell him a dress made of “invisible fabric” that results invisible to foolish and unworthy people (in reality it did not exist). The king, being scared of seeming an idiotic for not being able to see this “new fabric”, ordered a new dress and wore it on the city’s streets where everyone, even not being able to see the clothing, was applauding and complimenting the king for its new “dress”. The fable ends when a kid, opening his innocent eyes, says: “The king is naked!”. Yet, nobody cared about the kid and the parade of the king proceeded between applauses and congratulations.

The complex metaphor of the “*Naked King*”, is used by the journalist to represent the fragility of the “*castle of cards*” that are the mainstream symbolism and legitimization built around GDP, in an article that reassumes most of the criticism area around this indicator as measure of wellbeing. [C16]

4. Humanity as the “*Buridan’s ass*”

In commenting the results of COP 21 in Paris, the journalist compares the international community to the famous Buridan’s ass, in the way that it rewards scientists researching climate issues and showing the limits of growth, but then writes policies that systematically ignore the issue (and as an example, the raising of CO2 emissions limits for helping auto manufacturers is brought). The metaphor of Buridan’s tale is used to show humanity’s immobility between what should be likely useful to do (safeguarding and preventing the destruction of our socio-ecological system) and an old and potentially dangerous self-referential system. [F34].

5. Economy as a “*Tree*”: Slowness and kindness

This metaphor is used to counter pose the journalist’s idea of what another economy could be with what he perceives to be the economy described by the dominant public discourse (made of engines and speed). Economy, in the picture of the journalist, is depicted as a “*Tree, growing slow and kind*” [*crescita lenta e gentile*] which set its “*roots*” in the local, produces few “*quality fruits*” instead of many and takes care of the biosphere. [F32].

6. “*Templars of Growth*” and a “*Neoliberalistic Binge*”

The journalist critic the supporters of “*GDP at any price*” which see “*growth as the only possible development destiny*” by depicting them as “*Templars*” fighting a war following a

belief that cannot be rationally explained except by faith only. Furthermore, another metaphor used to argue against the same principle is the “*Neoliberistic Binge*” [*sbornia neoliberista*] that, in the same fashion, creates the picture of a man believing in something only because altered by the alcoholic grade in his blood. [F13]

4.5.2 The Fragments of the Discourses

In this section, the most relevant, meaningful and curious linguistic fragments composing both discourses are reported. The gathered data has been ordered in clear tables in which, in addition to the relevant fragments, a link to the meso-level of analysis (actors) is made (to connect the fragment to the person writing/generating it). Furthermore, the tables have been structured with the aim of facilitating the quoting process within the findings and discussion chapters, and therefore offer also the source-article code and the Italian original version of the fragment. Lastly, I added a column reporting the potential tacit assumptions that emerge from the writer’s perspective. This last column is what emerges from the article’s overall text and which in some cases the quote may help to suggest.

Because of the extensive width of the data-set I gathered for this section, I decided to leave the full tables available for consultation in the Appendix [4.1-4.2] while here, to improve readability, I discursively report the most relevant findings and explain them with greater detail.

Fragments of the Growth Legitimation Discourse

From the fragments gathered within the articles supporting the currently well-established development path based on economic growth, two main points shine remarkably important to the eye: the way the discourse around the necessity of economic growth is constructed and the authoritative power of the actors constructing it. Let us go with order and start with analyzing what the most topical discourse fragments say and imply. Hereafter, I propose a summary of the main insights, while to get a full understanding of all selected fragments I suggest the reader to redirect his/her attention toward the table in Appendix 4.1.

First of all, a tendency that transpired from the articles defending the role, use and symbolic value of economic growth is the one of cutting out the discussion of any alternative ideas [C1, R23, S22] by treating them with derision. On the opposite, economic growth is pictured as the only viable development way [C13, C20, F17, R29], it appears bound to exist [R29], it should be sustained [S17] and similarly to a monotheist faith [F31] it auspicates for only one united

voice from all actors in favour of it [F14]. A low degree of growth is repeatedly defined as an “exceptional circumstance” [R23], [S18] which should be avoided.

Interesting is how in practice growth supporters are trying to convince information receivers of their line of thoughts: mainly by spreading worries [C1, C2, C8, C20, C24, F1, R19, R30, S7] and fear [C1, C14, C27, F16, R16, R20]. The worries deriving from an absence of growth range from the specter of impoverishment [C1], to a skyrocketing national debt [C2, R19], dangers of secular stagnation [C8, R30] and risks of economic shocks [C20, F1]; while perpetrated fears move from a drastic reduction of salaries [C1, R20], to a global slowdown [C27], an absence of recovery [F16] and a fall in large corporations’ revenues [R16]. Taking aside the danger of salaries reduction (which is also not deeply discussed and justified) I believe tremendously important to move the reader’s attention to what is being said and what is left between the lines within those fragments. In fact, the message implying that “the reader, as a citizen, should worry and fear the absence of growth or a slow growth pace” is left implicit: no large picture is proposed of what an absence of growth could cause, for whom, why and in what measure. For example, global slowdown, an absence of recovery, a fall in large corporations’ revenues (etc.) all seem to imply that employment safety will be at risk, and therefore, following the axiom “employment equals the right to belonging to a community”, quality of life will also be at stake. In no article defending and reiterating economic growth, the systemic picture around this topic seems to have been deepened. Nevertheless, the mental link “growth equals employment, equals buying power, equals improved quality of life” transpires in many ways from the sampled articles [C26, C35, F29, R28, R29]. In [C26] we observe a journalist reiterating the tandem growth-occupation and suggesting to increase employment by not allowing workers to retire before time; in [C35] is the president of Confindustria G. Squinzi to reiterate the same tandem, in [R28] Confindustria’s center of study, in [F29] is the Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi while in [R29] is the economy minister P.C. Padoan. The objectives of those actors, which transpires from the fragments, of aiming at a higher level of both growth and employment, without setting a causal order between the two and without discussing the reasons to them, emerge somehow shady and confused.

If, on one side, the reasons behind the strive toward economic growth, the aimed tangible objectives and goals are repeatedly glossed and often omitted at all (left implicit); on the other side we cannot say the same about the grounds that will ensure success in achieving economic growth and the unreasonableness of alternatives.

First “dogma” (set of beliefs that is accepted by the members of a group without being questioned or doubted) that repeatedly appears in the fragments: to support and live in a society built around economic growth, the first and main command that every citizen should follow is to believe this to be the best way of progressing: *“believe it works, and it will work”* [F5, F6, F8, S4, S16, S32]. This view of the situation seems to be mainly boosted, on top of journalists, by the national government [F5] and directly [S29] and indirectly through its newspaper [S4, S16, S32] by Confindustria. The fact of putting on top of the political agenda the goal of fostering an even more excessive consumption amongst the population [S4, S9, S32] by artificially create a climate of optimism, arguably denotes a view of the economy by major authorities (government and economy minister [F5]) and business world (Confindustria) still vastly Keynesian.

When somebody tries arguing against the Keynesian mechanisms of the modern global economy (usually independent journalists, discipline experts or civil activists), they are often accused of demagoguery [C26], populism [F29] and are labelled as “owls” [C6, F5] (in Italian, “owl” is a person that wants everything to go bad and wishes others to fail) by actors far more authoritative than them, which have stronger access to the public discourse (mainstream newspapers) and therefore have the power to override their opinions.

Furthermore, it also emerges from the fragments how the fact that a country is growing (does not matter whether in a virtuous way or through a skyrocketing debt [R24]) gives it the “moral ability” to teach others on how they should set their economies and development paths. In the sample, the case of Finland is quoted, where the fact that the country is not growing is seen as a failure of the social equity the nation is trying to achieve, a warning of a crumbling country and a shame [R24]. Same goes for Japan, which has been not growing for more than a decade and is therefore portrayed as a country suffering a “chronic sickness” [R4]. Without depicting the whole pictures in terms of social welfare (see definition), ranging from every aspect impacting human life, but instead focusing strictly on economics; actors propose a societal view in which the achievement of economic growth is raised as main national objective. A suggestion gained from the analyzed articles is in fact, that the meter used by growth supporters to measure development is not quality of life but finance: the importance of growth of financial markets is stressed [R4], the credibility in front of them presented as the key for national wellbeing [S5] and finance is seen from the governmental side (P.C. Padoan) as a way to create “growth” in

the real economy [S24]. Growth as measured by GDP (independently whether deriving from improvements from the real economy or merely financial) is described by the Italian prime minister as “*the difference between moving or staying still*” [R6], and from Confindustria’s newspaper as “*doing the good against the bad thing*” [S12]. The fragments deliver a message extremely simple, direct and understandable by everyone by using straightforward mind categories such, exactly, what is “good” and what is “bad”. For whom and for what is not even minimally discussed but left to the readers’ imagination. The case of Ireland, mentioned in the article [R17] is surely interesting, in which, although an extremely high degree of growth is celebrated (over 9%, highest growth in Europe) is also narrated how common people drink without toasting as no benefits of this growth (all financial) has been felt by the population. This narration surely helps to put into perspective the usefulness of GDP forecasts and decimals in impacting societal wellbeing.

Zooming out of the country, it is possible to see how Italian national convictions about the Keynesian behavior of the economy and the necessity of growth are backed up by EU institutions. From the voice of EU vice-president Dombrovskis [C23] it transpires the stress that European institutions are putting on fostering economic growth while from Confindustria’s newspaper emerges the pressure to follow the BCE decisions as representatives of certainty and stability [C22].

In all of the previously quoted articles, “growth” is intended as “that thing that is measured by GDP”, nothing more, nothing less. Then, it is itself tacitly assumed to be a reliable measure of the level of social welfare (quality of life) within national countries. Interesting is the use of the word “sustainability”, which instead of being used to describe a fair and respectful societal development within a socio-ecological system is meant to describe a “constant and limitless growth”: the sustainability is the one of the growth’s pace, which should be sustained [S17].

From here, I would like to introduce a list of tacit assumptions that I personally felt emerging between the lines of the fragments/whole articles, not explicitly stated but left to be intended. As the communication of a discourse through texts is not only the text in se, but also the interaction between the actors’ cognitive systems, I believe a thoughtfully made analysis could not leave out of the larger picture implicit assumptions. Of course, the risk of personal biases cannot be entirely erased and for this reason I added a column to *Appendix 4.1* which links the tacit assumption I gained from every article to the specific article itself, in the way that every

reader could consult, audit and make his/her own opinion about it. Moreover, from the table is also possible to connect the assumption to the actors adding it to the overall discourse.

A first line of underlying assumptions as a base of the growth legitimization discourse is that salaries are the basis for living in a community [C1, S22], employment is necessary for growing and living better [C10] and therefore as a society we should aim to a state of full employment (at current working hours and conditions) [R28, S31]. Growth is still believed to have the power to lead to full employment [S18] and therefore is presented as the way to follow.

The fear and worries about an absence of growth (before already presented) seems to be related more to the financial market than the real economy [C14] and seems oriented to justify deregulations and foster an overall climate of laissez-faire [C22, R19]. Furthermore, growth is believed to be good “in se” [C23], sustainable in the long term [F16] and lead to overall wellbeing [C35, F14] as more consumption is believed to equal higher wellbeing [R19, R20, S9].

As it already emerged from the fragments, contesting the norm is not allowed [F30, R23] without being labelled as a populist, which, for this reason itself, should be prevented to gain power [F29] as it could compromise stability. Without growing, a country is in no position to teach others [R34] and therefore, a moderate damage to the real economy and national social fabric may sometimes be acceptable if useful to reassure financial markets [R4] and lead to further growth (as measured by GDP) [R4]. Stretching from here, lower levels of consumptions are assumed to be bad no matter what [R6] while an increase in GDP is pictured as good, no matter what [S17]. Last point to underline, is the interesting way that the words “consumer” and “wellbeing” are repeatedly used: maximization of “consumer’s wellbeing” instead of “human’s wellbeing” seems to be more often at the center of the discourse and portrayed as its ultimate goal.

Overall, to reassume all insights of this paragraph in a sentence, we could say that the central message the growth legitimization discourse fosters is that “quality of life (measured by level of consumption) depends on whether countries will be able to achieve growth or not”.

Fragments of the “Escape the Growth Fetish” Discourse

Differently from the “Growth Legitimization Discourse”, the actors constructing the “Escape the Growth Fetish Discourse” do not enjoy the authoritative power of the previous, being them for the vast majority experts in non-economic fields, intellectuals or simple journalists trying to make sense of the modern society they live in. Nevertheless, the fact that their opinions were found in my articles’ sample means that they found their own way to access the public discourse and therefore, given the reach of their ideas, they also enjoy a certain extent of power in influencing it.

Emerging from the fragments that now I am going to review (full list including translation, actor and code is, as before, available in *Appendix 4.2*), is, as seen also in the macro level of this same discourse, the strive of actors in producing a systemic view of the contemporary societal and economic situation. In contrast with the “Growth Legitimization Discourse”, here reasoning and assumptions are almost always explicated and clarified, sometimes at the expense of easiness of understanding. For this reason, I decided to not include a column for tacit assumptions in *Appendix 4.2*. Simply, I found none that was not thoroughly explicated.

Starting with the most relevant insight, the word “sustainability” re-acquires in the “Escape the Growth Fetish Discourse” the meaning as given by the UN definition also used in this thesis [C12, C18, F13, F15, F23] (meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own). Many are the fragments that remark the link between sustainability, society and the natural environment [C12, F13, F23, R3] which magically re-appears in the public discourse, in contrast with the articles expanding the opposing discourse in which it was never mentioned. As economy is placed within society and society is placed within a larger socio-ecological system [C18], the texts show focus on concepts such “wellbeing”, “social welfare” and “happiness” [C12, F23], this time of the person instead of the consumer, which are relocated at the center of the discourse (in the place occupied by the GDP indicator in the “Growth legitimization discourse”).

From here, harsh critics are moved toward GDP and its biased calculations [C16, F2, R17] which is described as *“an indicator that to measure the health of an economy has the same efficiency that a ruler has in measuring pressure”*. The aim of the critiques appears evident to be a re-negotiation of the legitimization, high importance and symbolic value that GDP enjoys within modern societies. The inability of GDP to account for the quality of production as well

as the easiness of manipulation and partial randomness of the measure are highlighted [F2] and therefore, the benefits of its growth on the quality of human lives are heavily challenged [F2, F23]. Zooming out from GDP, the overall development paradigm (see definition) based on unlimited growth within a world offering limited resources is attacked [F32] and addressed as the “waste economy” [R3]. The wider discourse constructs in fact a strong critique against the excessive consumption (“hypertrophic consumerism” [F2]) fostered by the current dominant and established economic model, sarcastically addressed as “consume ergo sum” [F2] and as a “collective consumeristic hypnosis” [F13]. Modern marketing, which penetrates in every aspect of our lives, is depicted by some articles as one of the factors that leads citizens to the “maelstrom of chronic dissatisfaction” [F2, F13] which reduces happiness and wellbeing. Lastly, the overall systemic unsustainability of excessive consumption is highlighted [F13] and the main dogma of the opposing discourse directly attacked (“consume more does not mean living better” [F23]). Interesting to note, is that, through a documented analysis, some of the articles in fact attack one of the tacit assumptions that stays at the core of the “Growth Legitimization Discourse” which, as we have seen before, is that “higher consumes lead to wellbeing”. Complementing this critique, is an attack to financial markets [F34] and their ability to “extracting value” instead of “producing value”.

Another critique moved to the current economic model is the fostering of an overall cultural impoverishment, apparently moved by the “cunning laws of the market” [F15] which contributes to the vicious circle of dissatisfaction. Ignorance is portrayed as a cause of societal decay and the school system is criticized as it supposedly does not anymore generate curiosity in pupils in a wider sense but narrowly focuses on preparing them specifically for the job market [F15]. The on-the-other-side untouchable tandem “employment = wellbeing” is here separated and analyzed [F23, F32] and journalists express their opinions on how employment could enrich a person’s life without enslaving her/him and steal her/his limited time is analyzed [F32].

Lastly, from the text fragments it is possible to see how the actors constructing this discourse try with huge effort to bring all macro-themes discussed before in their texts (such as democracy [C18, F23], inequality [F2], fairness [C12], the power of sharing [R1], but also wars, violence, poverty and sustainability [R13]) and to create a unified systemic view. This is, in synthesis what appears to be the key point behind the “Escape the Growth Fetish” discourse: creating a systemic picture that comprehends more factors than mere economic values and which locates human wellbeing and meaningful lives at his center.

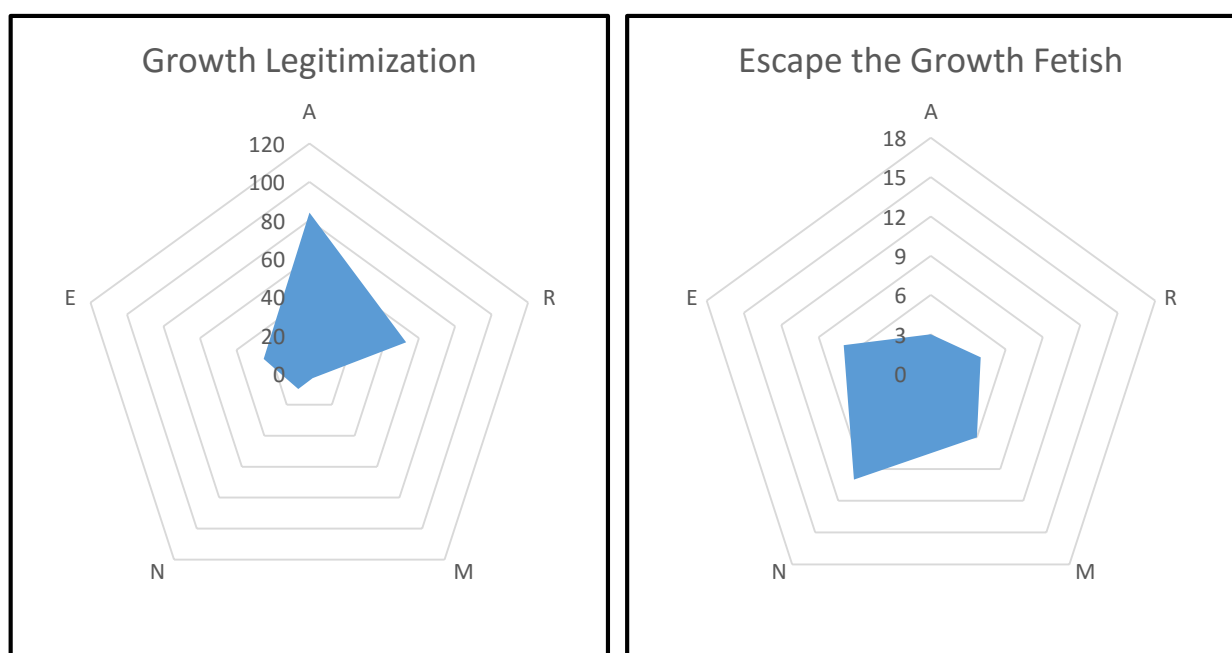
One last point to note is that, in most articles, an aggressive stance and a challenging tone are main constants. Attacks to the opposite narration, meanings, practices, uses and symbols are omnipresent and usually well-justified (through rationalization and moralization); yet alternatives on how to escape the paradigm are only rarely discussed (the exception is the one of voluntary simplicity [F23] and a reduction of personal consumption), explained fragmentally and partially left to the reasoning of the reader.

For having an ampler, more personal or more objective perspective of both discourses, as well as fully comprehend the points made in the two previous paragraphs, I suggest the reader to consult Appendix 4.1 and 4.2 before proceeding.

4.5.3 Legitimization Strategies within the two Discourses

Within my data-set, the recurrence of legitimation strategies (as defined by Deephouse 2008) has been analyzed. Following are two graphs showing the utilization of those in constructing the two antagonist discourses (scale is adapted to give a percentage perception of the use of the normalization strategies related to the total number of articles composing the sample 17-123). The strategies have been sorted by “how they help the article’s author to deliver and strengthen their point of view”, focusing on whatever small or large detail constructing the wider macro-discourse.

Fig 4.3 Use of Legitimization Strategies in constructing the two discourses: (A – Authorization, E – Exemplification, N – Narratization, M – Moralization, R – Rationalization).



From the previous graphs, clear differences in legitimization strategies employed shine to the eye. On the growth legitimization side, the use of authorization (84 times) and rationalization (53) are the most recurring whereas the use of exemplification (25) is fair and the use of narratization (10) and moralization (3) only marginal. As seen in the literature review, people defer to experts and authorities (Cialdini 2010) and therefore it makes no surprise for actors enjoying this power to use it (directly or indirectly through journalists) to legitimize their view. Rationalization, is instead generally used to explain and justify parts of the larger picture (ex. relationship between employment and growth, between investments and debt, between pensions and productivity etc.); although, jointed with the previously seen strategy of closing the discussion with alternative views, it can be perceived as a “bounded” rationalization strategy.

On the antagonist side, authorization (3) and rationalization (4) strategies are only barely used. After analyzing the meso-level and the access to the public discourse enjoyed by different actors, it seems quiet natural for proponents of an alternative view to move away from authorization and look for alternative strategies to legitimize their ideas. Rationalization could have been a choice, but it does not seem widely employed. Instead, narratization (10), exemplification (7) and moralization (6) seems to enjoy a higher degree of popularity. Actors, either journalist or people mediated by them (no un-filtered statements as in the previous discourse) try in this case to propose their own narration of “how the world could be” without the growth development paradigm (ex. [C16, C18, F13, F26, F34]). Furthermore, their try to appeal to people’s value and ethics, make them think explicitly about them and question their own morality (ex. [F13, F32]). Lastly, examples of virtuous and sustainable realities are presented and utilized to show how an alternative, more gentle economy, is possible (ex. [F13]), as well as the dangerous effects of a development paradigm based on growth alone (ex. [R17, C18, F15]) are shown to de-legitimize the opposing discourse.

Because of the vast amount of data, I thought not meaningful to report every single strategy used but instead I propose in *Appendix 4.3* an example of one article (translated in English) for each of the strategies employed.

4.6 Contextualizing the levels of the discourses: the overall picture

At this point, I collected and reported all the different pieces necessary to consciously reconstruct and analyze the process through which the wider discourse around “economic

growth” is being constantly re-shaped and re-framed at current times in Italy. From here, the last step before discussing the results of my findings, is to join the three levels of the discourse (macro, meso and micro) together once again and contextualize the emerging outcome within the local Italian situation.

Overall, by combining all the previous insights together, a clear yet amply debatable picture appears. The two discourses emerged from the articles, one defending and one challenging the currently established rules, meanings, symbols and practices of a development paradigm based on economic growth as a primary societal objective, are constructed by following two different line of thoughts. The first mainstream discourse constantly tries to re-establish and legitimize the growth paradigm’s dogma (growth brings employment, which in turn leads to higher levels of consumption and therefore of social welfare/quality of life) through persuasive arguments backed by authorization, social consensus and rationalization within historically socially-agreed boundaries. The second, trying to blow up the entire table and re-negotiating widely accepted social meanings by persuading the readers with “systemic” rationalization arguments and moralization processes. Both line of thoughts seems to have their founded reasons and convictions to justify their social constructions.

Starting from the “Growth Legitimization Discourse”, the focus here is clear: economy and consumption are at the base of a solid society and a superior quality of life; growth is necessary to improve those. The macro-themes are in fact all strictly related to economy: employment, GDP forecasts, debt, optimism, comparison, consumption, investments, pensions and entrepreneurship. The faction of actors supporting this view (countless times more authoritative and powerful than the one supporting the alternative discourse) is composed by members which have clear interests in the success of the economy (as many times responsible for its efficient operation) as well as a strong power to influence it top-bottom (governments, banks, international legislative institutions, large businesses etc.). The narrow focus on economy as major source of social welfare emerges also from text fragments, where the necessity of an even stronger consumption is stressed and justified with the need of creating employment and boost international credibility, while alternative development paths are swiftly discarded. Overall, the maximization of the consumer’s wellbeing seems the goal that those authoritative actors are aiming to achieve through growth.

By inserting the whole discourse into a local and historical context, the belief of modern economies to behave in a Keynesian way is totally understandable (as classical economics still teaches so in most major universities and historical episodes of political reforms succeeding in healing recessive economies through Keynesian solutions are several and well-documented – also in Italy in the 60's with the big boom). Furthermore, the vast access to the public discourse (through traditional media) and the communicative strategies adopted by the actors to spread their mental model of economic growth (such easy, unified and immediate metaphors ex. speed and engine) are surely effective elements to legitimize the growth-based development paradigm in a country that sees 40% of its inhabitant defined as functionally illiterates and characterized a scarce internet penetration, especially amongst the elder population (14%). Last but not least, the fact that during pre-crisis periods growth was steady and quality of life was perceived higher by the vast majority of the Italian population, clearly is a point that helps strengthening the thesis that economic growth leads to wellbeing.

On the other side, within the “Escape the Growth Fetish Discourse” the focus seems slightly blurrier: the effort of the actors to shift the discussion from a strictly economic field to a larger systemic perspective transpires clear; yet the image resulting from this effort seems hard to deliver. The macro-themes touched by the texts constructing this discourse are various and touch many angles of human life: inequality, sustainability, cultural changes, environment, sense of community, happiness, quality of life, wars, violence, refugees, democracy, climate change and more. The wider focus is probably also linked to the nature of the actors behind the sampled articles which do not belong strictly to an economic sphere of influence: an historian, a physicist, an intellectual and journalists passionate in environmental activism and human rights. Although the multi-disciplinary formation of the faction may surely be considered a strong plus to involve new fresh ideas, from an authoritative point of view, the voices of “externals” in the economic and business fields seems to raise lower resonance and attention.

From the micro-level of analysis, emerges how actors tries to re-negotiate a well-established societal primary objective (consumers' wealth maximization) by promoting and justifying an alternative parameter (human wellbeing maximization) as core goal of societal. Nevertheless, through the texts and fragments it is noticeable the difficulty of authors in delivering the totality of the systemic picture they have in mind to the audience while staying in an average article's length. In fact, the arguments touched may sometimes arguably overwhelm the reader and confuse the message. Critiques to either the current economic system, GDP or the importance

given to this indicator are instead way clearer and almost omnipresent among the sample. In fact, all limitations' categories of the socially accepted and adopted GDP calculation emerge (quality, happiness, inequality, environmental damage, informal economy) and moreover, tacit assumptions and social beliefs attached to them are challenged (ex. full employment as requirement for a happy society, consumption as measure of wellbeing, finance as a value creator).

Examples employed to explain the core points of the discourse are generally extremely clear and the linguistic register is easy and understandable; the main issue encountered in delivering the message is instead that the whole picture portrayed emerges too vast to be narrated in a newspaper article and for this reason, journalists are many times forced to give certain knowledge for granted. By inserting the discourse within its context, we see how complex messages (delivered also through complex and un-unified metaphors) may have a hard time to penetrate in the larger population (40% of functional illiteracy) if not cleverly framed. Furthermore, a legitimization issue deriving from the scarce authority of the actors, as well as from the positioning of the articles in secondary, non-economic columns, can be surely defined a real threat to the overall discourse diffusion.

On the next page, I offer a full recap of all levels of analysis and local context (Tab 4.4). The table is meant to facilitate the reader's understanding of the overall findings picture and to be used as a tool to quickly recap the main insights of the findings' paragraph when consulting the discussion chapter.

Tab. 4.4 Findings' Recap: How is the growth discourse built by mainstream newspapers in Italy?

		LEGITIMATION DISCOURSE	ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE
MACRO	<i>Themes</i>	Employment, Forecast, Debt, Optimism, Comparison, Consumes, Investments, Pensions, Entrepreneurship	Inequality, Critique to GDP, Sustainability, Cultural Change, Environment, Sense of Community, Happiness, Quality of life, Systemic Thinking (wars, violence, refugees, climate change, democracy etc.)
	<i>Interdiscursivity</i>	Global Slowdown, Geo-Politic Tensions, Fall of oil prices	/connects everything in macro-themes/
MESO	<i>Actors</i>	Strong powers: Italian Government, EBC, IMF, OECD, World Bank (UN), EU Commission, Bankitalia, Confindustria, IlSole24Ore, Rating Agencies, Classical Economists, Foreign Prime Ministers, Journalists	Weak authority: 1 Economist, 1 Physicist, 1 Historian, Journalists
	<i>Structure</i>	From Businessmen – IlSole24Ore - exclusive economic jargon Sometimes un-filtered governmental statements Use of pictures to spread faith or instill fears	Few pictures, easy and understandable language
MICRO	<i>Metaphors</i>	Direct and Few: Economy as Engine and Speed, Growth as the magic path to follow	Complex and many: GDP as maelstrom, GDP as erection, GDP as naked king, Humanity as Buridan, Economy as a tree, antagonist actors as templars of growth, current economic system as a binge
	<i>Fragments</i>	Closing and deriding alternatives, growth as the only viable path, spreading worries and fear, quantity of consumption is quality of life, more growth equals more employment, optimism and faith for boosting consumption, growth confers international credibility and respect, finance can boost real economy, believe in growth and it will work, current economies behave following Keynesian model, excessive consumption is good and leads to higher employment	Creating a systemic view of economy and society within socio-ecological system, word “sustainability” regains UN meaning, maximizing human wellbeing, GDP is manipulable and does not account for quality, unlimited growth is the waste economy, excessive consumption leads to chronic insatisfaction, environmental damage and inequality are priorities, financial market create fake value, cultural change beyond markets laws is necessary
	<i>Tacit Assumption</i>	Employment is necessary for a happy life, growth can lead to full employment and societies should aim toward it, higher consumption means higher wellbeing, (maximize consumer's wellbeing)	Societal objective should be to sustainably maximize human wellbeing instead of economic output, while respecting environment
	<i>Legitimization Strategies</i>	Authorization, Rationalization, Closing to Alternatives	Narratization, Moralization, Exemplification, Cracking Certainties and instilling doubts

CONTEXT

8th economy worldwide (by GDP), crisis 2009 hit hard, inequality rose and economy never recovered, last 3 governments not elected, youth unemployment at 38%, highest perceived corruption in EU, political instability: new movements on the rise and old parties crumbling, youth uses internet while elders use newspapers, functional illiteracy at 40%, 73th country for press freedom “partially free”.

5. Discussion

From the findings chapter, I was able to acquire a satisfactory overview of how the discourse(s) around the theme of economic growth is (are) constructed by four of the major newspapers in Italy, which together reach every day an audience of over one million readers. Although my sample does not reassume the totality of the societal discourse around growth, which, as we have seen in the literature review, is continuously constructed by a wide variety of actors in addition to the media (businesses, politicians, common citizens etc.) which are, of course, not entirely included in my sample, many are the insights I can draw from my findings. By having circumstanced my area of research in time (Jan-April 2016), space (Italy) as well as my target of study (newspapers with long daily reach in terms of audience) and side of the communication (text production and diffusion), I gained the possibility to provide valuable insights about how the discursive reality-shaping process is constantly exercised by newspapers and how it, in turn, may construct social attitudes, meanings, symbolic values, mental images, practices and uses of economic growth. Furthermore, by integrating those insights with my theoretical framework, uncovering this process may help readers to grow conscious awareness about the constant social negotiation of meaning they engage with; as well as different societal actors to review their standpoints/beliefs and eventually drive our societies toward more sustainable development paradigms. To proceed with order in this paragraph I will discuss, with critical eye and the help of my theoretical framework, first, the findings regarding the “Growth Legitimation Discourse”; secondly, the findings regarding the “Escape the Growth Fetish” antagonist discourse; thirdly, I will examine the convergences between the two; and fourth, I will draw a picture of where the current situation could possibly head from here.

5.1 The Growth Legitimization Discourse: It’s the economy, stupid!

I named “Growth Legitimization Discourse” the mainstream discourse I have encountered within the articles, which presents “economic growth” as a primary goal for modern societies in order to achieve higher levels of social welfare (quality of life) and therefore, places economic health above socio-ecological equilibriums. Although the concept of economic growth has been around for the past 80 years (GDP has been created around 1940 – Kuznets 1940, Coyle 2015), from the articles emerges a change of meanings (in great part tacit and underlying), symbolic value and mental models linked to the topic.

5.1.1 Consumption, growth and employment: the Keynesian Economy

Two of the most relevant points emerging from the macro-level of the discourse, are without a doubt the process of creating a strong mental connection between consumption, growth and employment; and the way this process is developed. The link between those macro-categories is constructed almost unanimously by the sampled texts as following: “consumption (private or public) drives growth, growth drives a higher production of “things” which in turn helps to create more employment”. Under the surface, it is possible to recognize two underlying ideas that justify this whole paradigm: first, believing that modern economies behave in a Keynesian fashion and second, that increasing employment leads to an increase in consumption, which in turn is perceived as a main driver of quality of life (social welfare). This belief, possessed by EU institutions (commission, BCE), international institutions (FMI, World Bank) and, over everybody else, by the Italian Government (minister P.C. Padoan and M. Renzi) and Confindustria; clearly emerges from those actors’ speeches and actions (exemplification strategies in primis), oriented at creating a climate of faith and optimism toward the economy for boosting consumption and reducing savings (accomplishing the basic requirement for a Keynesian economy to exit recession, from Roosevelt onward).

The reasons of behind this belief and how various institutions arrived to it are several and, between those, my findings reflected and provided practical evidence to support the four hypothesis advanced by Van Den Bergh (2009): historical accident, bounded rationality, increasing returns to scale, and lock-in effect.

First, the fact that consumption, growth and employment have been correlated long decades in the last century (Coyle 2015) surely reinforced the mental link between those elements in the collective imaginary. Thinking by distractingly using common sense, it may seem natural that higher consumption leads to growth (as measured by GDP) and therefore to higher employment: “someone should produce those extra things” we may think. Despite that, the facts that authors supporting and reiterating this mental link seems to ignore are recently emerging trends that may undermine the discourse fundamental assumption: as we have seen in the literature review, an unprecedented pace in technological advancement lead our contemporary societies into what Nobel Prize P. Krugman (2012) and economists Bryniolfsson (2011) and McAfee (2012) defined as the “Great Decoupling”. Although the paradigm may have been true for many decades, starting from the 80’s and at an increasing rate, higher consumption still leads to higher growth but not necessarily to higher employment, crushing in this way one of

the pillars of Keynesian economy. The evidence from the academic world about the situation in contemporary societies talks clear, yet employment still results in the most recurring justification for the need of economic growth (50 articles out of 123) and therefore denotes what Van den Bergh (2009) defined an “historical accident”. The fact that neoliberalism and development through GDP maximization happened to work well for distributing resources amongst different classes of the population (Coyle 2015) and raising quality of life by fulfilling previously unaddressed basic need in the decades following WW2, does not necessarily mean they will work the same for a third millennial society facing different and more global challenges. Yet, it is important to remember that the social actors, entering and shaping the discourse, come into the conversation with a backpack of shared knowledge, personal experiences, goals, opinions and emotions strongly influenced by the historical and cultural period they have been living (Van Dijk 2009) and therefore, from their point of view, their vision may enjoy uttermost legitimization.

From my perspective, observing how the Italian government as well as well-established European and supra-national political institutions are not realizing the deep implications of the Great Decoupling but are still following and reiterating an arguably outdated conception of economy seems surely peculiar. Yet, in addition to an historical accident, explications such as bounded rationality and lock-in effect (Van Den Bergh 2009) may help to justify this phenomenon. As we see from the meso level of analysis, the faction supporting a Keynesian view of the economy consists of a group entirely and exclusively formed by economic actors (governments, banks, entrepreneurs, supra-national institutions, rating agencies etc.), which as well are presumably composed by physical persons that received an economic education at school. The fact that in my sample, only economic actors have been found (differently from the antagonist discourse where experts from other disciplines were quoted), united with findings from the micro-fragments showing how alternative ideas are derided, isolated and ignored; tends to suggest the presence of “bounded rationality” within the discourse. Like-minded monodisciplinary actors seem in fact to cut, consciously or unconsciously, the discussion with innovative, cross-disciplinary and potentially disruptive emerging ideas and by doing so, closing themselves within their “own simplified dimension” where economic growth, and the tandem consumption-employment are raised at the level of “untouchable fundamental pillars”.

In addition to bounded rationality, the lock-in effect seems another strong factor justifying the belief in a Keynesian economy. This point is both linked to the legitimization of the actors

within the discourse and the structure of modern economies. As seen from both literature and micro-level fragments, some actors supporting growth have been initially constituted exactly for that purpose (IMF, OECD, World Bank – Coyle 2015) while others picture themselves as “anchors of stability” (Mario Draghi about ECB – [C20]) and orient their vast arsenal of actions toward the economic growth achievement (Italian Government, EU Commission). Changing vision of the economy from one day to another would definitely delegitimize whoever is currently strenuously defending the current system and deriding the alternatives but not only; it would probably also be not possible from a practical point of view. As it emerged from the whole macro-micro scale of analysis, key elements impacting the way citizens currently live in Italy and Europe have been bounded over time to the presence of growth: pensions, social welfare, national debt, financial system and employment are some examples. The economic systems of western societies account for growth, they are built around it and therefore a prolonged absence of it, without a comprehensive re-designing process of our societies and a strong cultural shift, is likely to lead to terrifying levels of social distress. From the texts’ fragments it is possible to note how growth is many times pictured as “the only viable way”. Indeed, given the containing whole of the “Growth Legitimization Discourse” placed strictly around economy (although the symbolic meaning is pictured wider), growth shines as the only way and the lock-in effect appears real. Nevertheless, by shifting the boundaries outside of the economic sphere to a wider socio-ecological sphere (as in the case of the antagonist discourse), alternatives may arguably gain another, more realistic light.

Strongly linked to the lock-in effect is the last of Van den Bergh (2009) hypothesis explaining the belief of the current first world economies behaving following the Keynesian model: increasing returns. As markets have been initially structured following a neo-liberistic approach structured toward growth, financial markets started following its rules, politicians did the same and so businesses did. The fact emerging from the meso-level of most “economic actors” following the same ideas, economic models (Keynesian), same way of thinking and same complementing way of conceiving the economy necessarily contributes to construct and positively reinforce the paradigm around growth as well as, at the same time, making deviation harder. In fact, without a cluster or a multitude of actors, deviating from the current economic system seems hard if not impossible (examples emerged in the antagonist discourse when talking about voluntary simplicity, where energy or food externalities are still imposed on citizens by the wider society).

After having observed how an example of western society, such the Italian one, may have reached this “economic and discursive equilibrium” around growth, I will move now on discussing the implications of the socially constructed tandem between “growth – employment”.

As we have seen, given the Great Decoupling effect on modern economies brought by technological advancement, the tacit assumption which suggests that growth may lead to societies to a state of full employment lays its basis on unstable mud and, as time passes, looks more and more unjustified. This seems to darken the horizon for growth supporters as, from what the articles let transpire, another tacit assumption is that employment is necessary for living a happy life (same belief as after WW2). For this reason, several political reforms, banks’ monetary policies as well as programs of international cooperation emerged in fact to be directed toward boosting employment. Suggesting that everybody should work and contribute to his own society is not non-sense; it is actually a quiet agreeable belief. Nevertheless, the image emerged from the micro-fragments [C26, R28, R29, S18] of the discourse showed institutions such as the Italian government and Confindustria depicting and legitimizing (mainly through authorization and rationalization) the societal objective of achieving full employment at current or pre-crisis conditions: eight hours a day, forty hours a week. As research in regards of the Great Decoupling (Krugman 2014 & Co.) explains, “jobs” as we know them from the past centuries are disappearing at an increasing rate; furthermore, as we have seen in the introduction, an excessive global production and consumption is putting under pressure the life supporting systems of our socio-ecological Earth system (Nobel Prize P. Krutzen 2002). From this perspective, spreading and reiterating the idea that it is possible and desirable to move our societies toward a full employment at current conditions, while at the same time not providing the wider picture through the texts (and being left unchecked by journalists), denotes great manipulative power of the actors over the media and the message delivered.

One last point partially related to this topic I would like to highlight are the “blurred boundaries” that emerge from the texts when talking about economic growth between financial growth and real economy development. Although the main aim of governments and supra-national institutions should be (and commitment are also taken in this way during electoral campaigns) to improve national real economies (social welfare, employment, overall living conditions), their efforts and discussions seems often to be directed toward reassuring financial markets. The “games” I found in my sample, in which authoritative actors (ex. Italian government)

engage to fake some decimals in the GDP indicator are proof of it (what is else the need of faking an indicator if the economic situation is the same?). From this fact, it is noticeable how the symbolic value of GDP has today surpassed its significance (nominal value is considered more important than the actual economic improvements).

As seen from the interdiscursivity section of the “Growth legitimization discourse”, financial markets own today an incredible amount of power which no institution alone can fully mitigate. As our world becomes more global at an accelerating pace, and the economic slowdown and geopolitical tensions within one area start to strongly affecting other areas, stronger regulations of financial markets seems, from my perspective, to be necessary to stay focused on real economy and human wellbeing instead of falling in the financial trap in which indicators’ maximization are the ultimate goals (ex. IMF pushing countries to increase demand of petrol, which else by dropping would reduce inflation and therefore global GDP). Forgetting, as supporters of a development paradigm based on economic growth showed through their texts, that capital is not a measure of wellbeing and that finance extracts wealth but does not alone create wealth (Rickards 2016) is, in my opinion, something that political institutions as well as conscious citizens should heavily try to avoid.

5.1.2 The Undiscussed Biases of Growth measured by GDP

Starting from the mental link “consumption equals growth” but also from the tacit assumption “higher consumption means higher wellbeing” I want to start discussing about the “hiding” strategy employed by articles supporting economic growth in regards of GDP limitations. Economic growth, is pictured in the articles as something necessary. Yet, what is economic growth is only partially explained (mostly given for granted) which leaves space for various interpretations and potential misunderstandings about the meaning attributed to the concept.

As we have seen in the literature review, GDP is not inherently bad nor an entirely useless measure (Costanza 2009) when aware of biases and when limitations are properly discussed. Nevertheless, if this awareness and discussion are missing (as in the researched articles), GDP as a measure and as a social symbol has the power to become dangerous and, as Nobel Prize J. Stiglitz (2009) suggests, lead our societies to do the wrong things. In my literature review, I provided academic evidence and examples explaining the five most relevant GDP limitations in terms of measurements: inequality, environmental damage, quality of production, informal

economy and societal wellbeing (measured by perceived happiness). From my sample, I found that those categories have been never discussed by proponents of growth.

From the found propositions “consumption equals growth” and “higher consumption equals higher wellbeing”, it emerges how GDP limitations have been not digested within the mainstream discourse and dialogue toward them is closed. In fact, without specifying in any text, consumption of what and by whom, and growth of what and for what (Nobel Prize 1962 Kuznets), the reasoning behind the discourse already falls potentially victim of four GDP biases: inequality (not specifying consumption by whom ignores social distortions in the resource distribution), quality of production (without clarifying consumption of what, the texts overestimate the benefits of an increase in consumption), environmental damages (some “bad production” may end up damaging either social parties or the environment) and societal wellbeing (by narrowly equalizing societal wellbeing to consumers’ wellbeing, the other parameters which contribute to human happiness are ignored – Layard 2011). Examples of how growth is treated as something “good in se” are reported in the text fragments in Appendix 4.1. The hiding process of GDP biases undoubtedly reduces the credibility of the faction’s ideas and standings when watched through a critical and informed eye (not always the case given the local context).

5.1.3 Constructing Reality: A Direct Communication

Coming to how the discourse supporting economic growth as a primary national objective is socially constructed within Italy, three are the key words to keep in mind: directness, vagueness and authority.

First of all, the message is direct, easy, understandable. As seen from the metaphors, common across all newspapers and texts, growth is pictured homogeneously with the image of an engine, a car, a plane or a train; which either runs or breaks, which stops or refuels. Images familiar to everyone, concepts such “moving”, “rushing” or “braking” which any citizen, no matter the level of education, can understand. The repetition of over-simplistic dummy variables employed in the texts (“running/still” [C6], “doing well/doing bad” [S12] “direction of travel is all that matters” [F13]) contributes to construct a social world characterized by only two possible outcomes: growth and wellbeing, recession and poverty. The way alternatives and critiques to the growth paradigm are discarded and placed in a corner functions in the same easy fashion: they are pictured as populism, demagoguery, ideas of the “owls” and therefore become

not worth discussing. Without entering in the merit of the points, non-aligned ideas are put at the door and, as seen in the Findings chapter, worries and fears for an absence of growth are spread. Here again, the dreaded “ghosts” are only quoted (“risk of secular stagnation” [C8, C24, R30], “slowing down is scary [C14], “fear for slowdown of global growth [C27], “worries that growth will be the same as the year before” [S7]) but no discussion is opened on what consequences on everyday lives and human wellbeing those events could concretely have and how they could be countered.

This easy, impactful language leads us to the second word that describes the communication within the “Growth Legitimation Discourse”: vagueness. As seen in the previous examples, the use of a straightforward language comes with a trade-off: the inability to open a wider systemic discussion. This cost to pay, does not nevertheless seem to impact the objective of actors defending economic growth but, on the opposite, allows them to deliver their idea of overall economic system without having to expose tricky minor details. In fact, the basic parameter on which the whole growth paradigm and the whole economic system built around it rest, is GDP. As seen in the previous paragraphs, the faction supporting growth are reluctant at least to expose the limitations of GDP, which in western societies, as remarked by Crosby (2014) is not only a mere economic indicator but reached the level of “symbol” and acquired a major cultural (tacit and explicit) significance. Explaining the GDP biases and account for them with practical actions, would dramatically increase the complexity of governmental work (although also help fixing some economic distortions and increase social/environmental sustainability) as well as communication, and therefore seems to be purposefully avoided. On a side note, the BES (the dashboard of parameters designed by Istat in 2012 on the push of national government to move beyond GDP) has been marginally quoted only once [F4].

Last key word to remember to understand the communicative process of the discourse is “authority”. The direct intervention or referencing of authorities of law (government, supra-national political institutions) and actors institutionally vested with economic power (EBC, WB, IMF, OECD, Banks) confers the discourse a strong degree of legitimization and trustworthiness. From my perception, the level of legitimization those institutions enjoy stands so tall that, most of the time, confers the ability to the actors to be vague but still being convincing. The power relationship in place between the information emitter and the receiver is so remarked that seems to allow the sender to gloss on small (yet relevant) details, which are either given for granted (as the catastrophic consequences that an absence for growth would

have on everyday lives) on the basis of trust, or left to the reader to find out. Furthermore, the normalization strategy of authorization seems to go hand in hand with the strategy of “bounded” rationalization: by quoting authorities’ statements, the following reasoning and speculations of the middle men (journalists) employing and appealing to simple (and therefore sometimes also biased) common sense, also acquire more credibility and trustworthiness. The reader in this case seems “guided” to ignore relevant details while a specific view of the issue is being proposed.

The authoritative power in place, added to the straightforward metaphors and terminology employed within the production of texts, seems therefore to govern what is possible to talk about within the discourse and rule out what is not allowed, and therefore what cannot exist (Foucault from P. Thomson 2011).

5.2 Escape the Growth Fetish Discourse: It’s the sustainability, stupid!

After having discussed some key insights in regards of the societal discourse which contributes to reiterate a societal development path based on economic growth maximization as measured by GDP, now I move onto the opposite side and review some key elements of the antagonist discourse which tries to fight it.

5.2.1 Realization of Biases: Critique to GDP and Complex Communication

The “Escape the Growth Fetish Discourse” finds a starting point in fighting the “good old ways” of the “Growth Legitimization Discourse” with harsh critiques to the current use of GDP. In fact, a common strategy that critical journalists seem to adopt to re-negotiate the excessive relevance given to economic growth and its acquired status of major political goal, is to explain how GDP is currently calculated and therefore, to expose its inability to account for societal wellbeing (bringing the symbolism down to Earth). In contrast with the opposing discourse, here the writers’ auspicated human and societal goals are explicitly explicated (ex. the reach of socially and environmentally sustainable equilibriums, a gentle and respectful economy [C16], a sustainable model linking economy and society [C18], an understanding of the importance of dedicating time to heal social relationships [F2] etc.) and not left tacit between the lines for the reader to be guessed.

As seen in the Findings chapter, discussions about all five categories of GDP biases (illustrated in the literature review) emerged in the relatively small sample (17 articles) of my research. By

openly casting light on GDP limitations and its manipulability, the texts are able to move strong and convincing arguments against the current development paradigm and cracking the symbolic aura of “there is no other viable way” constructed by the opposing, mainstream discourse. Some examples of those arguments are: accounting for illegal or immoral activities (such as drugs trafficking, prostitution, inflated medicine prices etc.) is defined an insult for honest EU citizens [C16]; the price for growing being a higher degree social inequality raised the point of who does growth truly benefits in terms of wellbeing [F9]; the fact of our economies aiming to unlimited growth in a limited world is exposed to show the unreasonableness and unsustainability of the system [F32].

Another common strategy encountered in the articles criticizing GDP, is the one of shocking the reader into realizing the presence of a discrepancy between the inflated symbolic value given to the indicator against the actual use made of it by different actors. For this purpose, rhetorical figures such exaggerated metaphors (GDP as maelstrom [F26], GDP as erection [F2], GDP as naked king [C16], neoliberalistic binge, collective hallucination [F13]), hyperboles (ex. GDP is good to measure economy as a ruler is to measure pressure [F2]) and strong sarcasm (“when there is a problem, forecasts “*ad minchiam*” -totally random- [F2], “who cares about environmental destruction? Who cares about raising inequality? Who cares if the use of antidepressants is skyrocketing? Raise your chalice to toast to a triumphal +0,7%” [F2]) are employed.

The choice of presenting all GDP biases paradoxes in their crude “brutality” and inserting them into a wider systemic picture is arguably aimed to pierce the symbolic barrier that has been constructed over time around GDP in the mind of the reader and instill in him/her a small, yet revolutionary attitude: the doubt. The journalists are advancing a new narration (preferred meaning – Van Dijk 1995) to re-negotiate the socially established mental model around economic growth. The complexity of the task appears nevertheless of titanic difficulty, especially from a communication perspective.

Now I will move onto discussing the systemic picture emerging from the “alternative” articles, while in paragraph 5.2.4 I will return on this topic and discuss the communicative issues that prevent or may help this antagonist discourse to spread amongst the wider public society.

5.2.2 A Systemic View: Sustainability comes into the Picture

Moving on the sides the critiques toward GDP, the macro-themes of analysis showed a discourse crafting a systemic thinking of modern societies, rather than a linear, narrowly economic one, as in the previous discourse. The focus on environmental issues, inequality, cultural progress, social cohesion, future perspectives of production and consumption, rights and democracy makes the “Escape the Growth Fetish” discourse revolve around a simple, yet currently excessively neglected objective: sustainability.

Inserting humans into a socio-ecological system, where economy is presented as a slow and gentle growing tree instead of a rushing car, and reviewing academic research on what are important sources of human happiness (ex. social relations) and what are marginal (ex. marketing-induced excessive consumption) breaks the containing whole set by the opposing mainstream discourse: it shifts socially accepted mental boundaries in the reader’s mind and therefore the boundaries of the discussion. Separating the mental model connecting employment to wellbeing (ex. “the economic growth dogma and the employment extortion are used to justify environmental disasters” [F26]) allows to think open-mindedly about what can more benefit societies and individuals. Accepting the reality of the Great Decoupling (as explained by Bryniolfsson 2011, McAfee 2012, Krugman 2012) allows to formulate alternative development solutions while investigating the most impacting sources of happiness through scientific evidence allows the actors to question and re-negotiate societal goals.

In the same fashion, the process of bringing into the discussion topics apparently ruled-out by market laws, such as fairness, equality, justice, sustainability, cultural impoverishment and ethics clearly downsizes the previously established supremacy of economy on societies and allows to put into perspective the legitimization strategies (authorization, bounded, rationalization, exemplification Wodak 1995, Van Leeuwen 2007) employed by the faction representing it.

After having observed the picture depicted by Crutzen (2002), Gallopín (2003) and Rockström (2009) as well as other important environmental activists and ecological economists in regards of the situation of our socio-ecological system; observing a faction trying to re-size the role of economy and re-think societal priorities, is from my perspective, a positive fact that should be welcomed and which may help our societies to move toward a more inclusive and sustainable development paradigm.

5.2.3 A Faction's Fraction: Access Barriers to the Public Discourse

An overview of the actors constructing this “alternative” discourse can surely be eye-opening to understand the symbolic systems currently fostered around the topic of “economic growth” in Italy. As seen in the literature review, media acquired through history a high discursive legitimacy (Philips 2004) and the four Italian newspaper analyzed reach an incredibly vast audience of over 1 million daily readers. The ability of accessing and influencing the public discourse through media is a valued and scarce social resource that not everybody can enjoy (Van Dijk 1995), and therefore it constitutes by itself both a symbol of power and legitimization. The fact that only 17 articles over 140 have been found challenging a well-established and accepted economic paradigm that, from an academic point of view and by many Economic Nobel Prizes (Kuznets 1960, Stiglitz 2007, Krugman 2012) has been recently shown all but solid, surely underlines the power system in place. As Foucault (1980) underlines, discourses indeed are instruments of power, from their production to their assimilation. Following this line of thought, it seems natural to wonder why the faction constructing this “alternative” discourse through the texts finds itself in such an inferior position in terms of number of actors, exposition and legitimation.

First of all, I believe important to point out how the actors found in the sample are indeed likely to be only a “faction’s fraction”. As reviewed in the literature when contextualizing the Italian socio-historical period, many are the grassroots movements emerged in the last years supporting alternative, more gentle and systemic views of the economy: two examples are the Happy Degrowth Movement [*Movimento per la Decrescita Felice*], or the larger Five Star Movement [*Movimento 5 Stelle*] (currently first political movement in Italy). In addition to those national movements, countless are also the local citizens’ initiatives promoting an economy based on sharing and social cohesion rather than market rules. Still, although those movements enjoy supports of millions of citizens, not a single trace of their views has been found within my sample: they seem not to have access to major newspapers. The “contested arena” (Happer 2013) of newspapers is clearly dominated by one faction which seems to allow sporadic alternative reflections but never from politicized actors. In fact, if we look closely to the actors constructing the “Escape the Growth Fetish” discourse in my sample, we find that all of them occupy a position distanced from active politics or relevant economic positions (physicist, historian, intellectual, simple journalist) while the opposing faction is for the vast majority constituted by active political institutions and influential economic powers.

The ownership of newspapers and the amount of articles contesting the mainstream paradigm in them also gives an insight of the power relationships in place: *IlFattoQuotidiano* (independent newspaper: 9 articles), *LaRepubblica* (governmental newspaper: 4 articles), *IlCorriere* (middleclass newspaper: 4 articles), *IlSole24Ore* (financial and business newspaper: no articles against economic growth). This diversity in content distribution between newspapers (especially the 9-0 between a supposedly independent newspaper and a financial one) surely instills the doubt that journalist may be chosen in the latter newspaper based on their economical viewpoints. In a country such Italy, that scores 77th in the Freedom House ranking for Press Freedom and which freedom of press is defined as “partially free”, such hypothesis surely gains an acceptable degree of credibility, given also the political standing of the newspaper’s owner (Confindustria).

The implications of the power relationship in place when accessing the public discourse are multiple: perception of the actual cultural state of the social body toward economic growth is distorted by media, the acquired status of growth as primary societal objective is reinforced, deviators may feel fragmented, isolated and less numerous than what they really are and by reducing social consensus (persuasion technique – Cialdini 2010) this can arguably impact the speed of change within modern societies. By contextualizing the situation in Italy, and observing the different sources different segments of the population use to gather information (youngsters in Internet and elders through newspapers) I would also argue that this situation may increase cross-generational misunderstandings which in turn, may obstacle the cultural advancements in terms of social cohesion auspicated by actors promoting an alternative narration and societal objective.

5.2.4 Constructing Reality: A Complex Provocative Picture

As seen in the previous three paragraphs, the small fraction of actors that is able to obtain a space on major newspapers is not politicized, uses powerful and sometimes exaggerated rhetorical figures to fight the GDP symbolism and tries to promote a more sustainable, systemic view of economies and societies.

The communication is not diagonal, as every actor utilizes its own metaphors and narrative to make his own point. Furthermore, a lack of focus on priorities (promoting the value of humanistic studies [F15], proposing a systemic view of major world societal problems [R3], bashing economic growth as a thermometer of social welfare [R17, C16, F9], promoting

environmentally friendly societies [C12] and human growth [F23], redefining common societal goals [F2], denouncing the dangers incarnated by modern finance [F13, F34], fostering a new consumption model such as the voluntary simplicity [F26] or simply clean production processes [F32] etc.) arguably ends up in a discourse proposing many insights on a great variety of topic but not clear plan on how to proceed and how a change could be helped by the reader. Although common macro-themes are often discussed with the use of a simple language, these lack of common language and lack of mental picture of a path toward a desirable outcome dramatically increase the complexity of the whole systemic picture provided across the texts, which ultimately results hard to deliver. This is even more true, when talking about topics of which people do not have direct knowledge or experience (Happer 2013) such economic growth and when inserting the situation within the Italian context in which 40% of the population results “functional illiterate” [OECD 2013] and therefore is not able to extract meanings from complex texts.

As stated before, from my analyst perspective, the aimed and currently attainable results chased by the writers through their articles seems mainly two: breaking the symbolism and shock the reader into conscious curiosity.

On one side, as GDP acquired through the years a symbolic aura (Coyle 2015) within collective imaginaries and plays today the role of a pillar within western economies which (due to the underlying assumptions explained in the opposite discourse) subordinates the achievement of higher levels of social welfare to higher levels of economic growth; exposing its biases and its practical limitations aims to crack the symbolic barrier around it. In this way, what before was ruled out from the discourse by social custom and not discussable, now becomes questionable and debatable in the mind of the reader.

On the other side, by depicting an alternative systemic picture not only enshrining the economy but integrating the whole socio-ecological system impacting human and non-human lives, although not thoroughly detailed because of the lack of space and sometimes journalists’ knowledge, the texts surely do move the reader into conscious curiosity. The fact of doubting the “only way” presented by the antagonist discourse, challenging established dogmas and sketching (even minimally) possible alternatives may be regarded as “in se”, already revolutionary.

In this sense, the different choice in terms of legitimization strategies employed seems supportive to the aim. Strong focus on narrativization and storytelling (Wodak 1997) allows the journalist to develop and deliver their ideas of what the world could be based on a gentler economy and if human happiness were to replace GDP as a primary societal goal. Here pre-concepts, assumptions and beliefs of the mainstream discourse are purposely left out and the reader is immersed in a totally new reality. Furthermore, not being able to count on their authority, the actors' choice of bringing supporting examples (exemplification – Vaara) on the table seems (although forced) clearly an effective way to create legitimization for their point of view (examples talk by themselves and show that it is possible to live differently). Last but not least, an appeal to moral and ethical values of the reader when advancing ideas of social and environmental sustainability (strategy never employed by the opposing discourse – 35% vs 2% of the times) is used to give depth to the authors' thesis, push the reader to interiorize the concept and to reflect upon it.

In conclusion, although a full, alternative way of living is not delivered through the texts, the facts of cracking the symbolic barrier protecting GDP and instilling doubts in the reader by providing an alternative view of how the world could be; it alone may have the power to alter the balance of the discourse in the long term and bring more actors into accessing the public discourse around growth (even outside of the sphere of newspapers and traditional media).

5.3 How do the two discourses relate to each other?

The two discourses, as in the academic world, are indeed currently co-existing within traditional media. Nevertheless, the power relationship changes dramatically toward economic growth models legitimation and reiteration. The “Growth Legitimization Discourse”, supported by a stronger faction of actors and enjoying a wider public space, tends to close the way to alternative views through derision, worries and fears. On the other side, the alternative antagonist discourse harshly criticizes the current economic system, re-sizes the role of economy but accepts its basic theories and does not necessarily wishes to rewrite them. The first side believes in an economic model that brought prosperity for decades; the other exposes the danger caused by its unaddressed limitations and pushes for reforms to mitigate its biases and achieve a more “gentle” economy. Although views on many points are dramatically different (especially on the role played by finance on improving real economies), I believe that the two fronts are bound to face each other on multi-disciplinary fields (politics, economics, environmentalism etc.) as the development of democratic societies progress and both could bring solid knowledge for a

constructive dialogue. Pity is that, as of now, this dialogue is not happening. As medias do not only reflect the social body but play an active role in shaping it and influencing its actions (Happer 2013) by creating, reiterating and modifying societal discourses through the diffusion of texts (Phillips 2004), the space owned by either faction plays a key role in determining their ability to impact future societal development paths. From my research emerges that, restricted to written press, at current times supporters of economic growth held such a superior authoritative power that allows them to “impose” their ideas of economy and society without necessarily engaging in a dialogue with the opposing faction but instead, ignoring its critiques and point of views (which rarely access the discourse). In this way, without a serious and constructive dialogue between the parts, underlying assumptions and different views are not investigated and societal cultural growth is not achieved at his full potential.

5.4 Key Learnings

After the previous analysis and by utilizing previously revised literature, I am now able to comprehensively portray how the discourse around economic growth is constructed by Italian newspapers on four different levels: linguistic level, message level, symbolic level and power level.

From a linguistic perspective, the different approaches between the two fronts appear evident: an easy, unified and straightforward register on one side against a necessarily complex and vastly heterogeneous vocabulary on the other. Given the Italian context, the linguistic style adopted by the actors supporting a development paradigm based on economic growth definitely appears more effective.

Secondly, on a message level the two discourses propose two different views of development and differentiate each other in the way they try to affirm their own ideas and value schemes. On the mainstream side, the societal picture is fragmented in many small causal relationships (ex. consumption→growth; growth→employment; growth→pensions; debt→investments; investments→growth etc.) presented singularly to the reader and for which, in the great majority of time a preferred reading is suggested (Van Dijk 1995) and made acceptable through referencing to social common sense (rationalization – Wodak 1999) or, as already amply seen in the meso level, to relevant authorities’ positions (authorization). Furthermore, the actors’ ultimate (underlying) societal goals are usually left tacit for the reader to guess. On the emerging alternative side, we see instead a strive toward the formation of a systemic view of the whole

socio-ecological system; social and environmental sustainability as well as culture and human wellbeing are brought back into the discourse. Exposing discrepancies between the symbolic meaning given to economic growth and the limitations it presents in practice (in measuring inequality, quality of production, wellbeing, environmental damage and informal economy) is a strategy utilized to instill doubts within the reader and start re-negotiating well-established social meanings. Here exemplification (Wodak 1999) is widely used to provide examples of how the current widely accepted use of GDP may reveal itself dangerous and not-descriptive of most societal struggles (ex. in Ireland characterized by +9% GDP [R17], in the real “not financial” Italy of today [C16], in Spain where growth is unchecked by no government [F9] etc.)

Coming now to the symbolic level, we see how the negotiations of meanings are at the core of the discourse(s) around economic growth. By starting from the mainstream discussion and the fragments analyzed, it is possible to notice how the meaning and symbolic value of GDP and economic growth have been already drastically changing in the past decades since they have been conceived. If at the beginning GDP has been conceived to prepare national countries to the second world war (Coyle 2015), after the war it became an instrument to foster peace by fostering employment (which at the time had the power of satisfying previously unaddressed basic needs – Coyle 2015) and in our days, it became a primary national objective and a thermometer of wellbeing (Kallis 2011). The model (Van Dijk 1995) of growth as “the only viable way” to achieve full employment, which in turn could lead to greater consumption (emerging tacitly and non as the main driver of human wellbeing) is presented to the reader though the use of authorization (legitimization by reference to relevant authorities – Wodak 1999), rationalization (common sense) and exemplification strategies (showing positive examples of where economic growth brought wealth, ex. in the US after crisis [R4], in Germany [C9,S1], in Sweden [S8], but also Spain [S2] etc.). The symbolic value delivered is empowered by a strongly metaphoric jargon (speed/engine). Moving on the alternative discourse, here the symbolic values previously sponsored and established are thrown into discussion mainly through storytelling (where does economic growth fail – ex. preserving the natural environment [R3]), moral evaluation (ex. what are we humans pursuing [F23, F32]) and exemplification (Wodak 1999). By explicating in details otherwise glossed social agreements (how GDP is calculated, what it is measured, how it is manipulable, what are the repercussions on everyday life etc.), the articles try to free the reader from previously established mental boundaries and “preferred meanings” and to allow them to think more systemic.

Coming to the last point, the growth discourse is characterized also by a strong power game that manifests itself mainly through the access and control over the contested arena (Happer 2013) of Italian newspapers which enjoys and can confer high degrees of legitimacy (Van Dijk 1995). An authoritative factions composed by a great variety of economic and political actors enjoying high status seems in fact able to rule the discourse by limiting the access to opposing voices when politicized and justify its ideas through authorization and bounded rationalization. The faction trying re-negotiating the meanings and practices created by the mainstream discourse is, on the other side, an extremely interdisciplinary and sparse one; un-coordinated and scarcely authoritative. For this reason, mythopoesis, exemplification and moralization are strategies preferred to send their messages through the written media.

Following is a table recapping all major parts of my discussion chapter.

Tab. 5.1 Discussion Recap

	GROWTH LEGITIMATION	ESCAPE THE GROWTH FETISH
REGISTER	Easy, Vague, Straightforward, Common Vocabulary/Metaphors Communication adapt to local context	Complex, Heterogenic, Aggressive, Not polished for communicating ideas within the current local environment
MESSAGE	<p>Growth/Employment/Consumption are correlated and necessary for achieving societal wellbeing. → There is no denying</p> <p>Believing in the system will make it work (as economy is believed to behave in a Keynesian fashion). Economy above society.</p>	<p>There is a discrepancy between how economic growth is presented (causal source of wellbeing) and how nations agreed to calculate it (limitations of GDP). → Discrepancy actions/beliefs</p> <p>Without addressing the limitations, we risk of compromising the balance of our socio-ecological system. Sustainability back in the discourse</p>
LEGITIMIZATION STRATEGIES	<p>Breaking the picture in small mentally bounded pieces, dismissing alternatives, spreading worries and fears</p> <p>Authorization (84/123) 78% Rationalization (53 /123) 43% Exemplification (25/123) 20%</p>	<p>Creating systemic view, pointing out discrepancies and paradoxes in opposing discourse, cracking the symbolism</p> <p>Narratization (10/17) 59% Moral evaluation (6/17) 37% Exemplification (7/17) 31%</p>
SYMBOLISM	GDP and economic growth changed meaning since their creation; higher level of growth are described as panacea for achieving superior social welfare and standards of living, symbolic value overwhelmed actual use and protects established uses/beliefs	Meaning of economic growth is re-negotiated and drastically re-dimensioned, an alternative mental model based on a “gentle economy”, sustainable and rich in social relationships is presented
POWER	Great access and control of public discourse, power to limit opposing politicized actors and opposing own view without engaging in dialogue. Monodisciplinary actors may close themselves in their “bounded rationality”.	Rare access, low actors’ authority, actors try to work on argumentations rather than rely on their position, part of the faction supporting the discourse does not find space in written media

6.0 Conclusions

In this last chapter, I first, recap the main findings and insights of my research, secondly, trace some practical implications for different actors both societal and academic and lastly, I present suggestions for further research.

6.1 Main Findings

From the snapshot gained through my research on written newspapers emerges a picture where two, often antagonist, discourses are constructed by two different factions and co-exist.

On one side, a quantitatively mainstream discourse in favour of a development paradigm based on growth (proportion of about 6:1 articles) is fostered by an authoritative and compact faction of actors closely interlinked one with each other: IMF, World Bank, EU Commission, National Governments, Ministry of Economy, ECB, OECD, rating agencies and large financial institutions. The view constructed by this discourse focuses especially on raising the economic system above the natural environment (which is hardly ever mentioned) and stresses the importance of achieving growth for boosting employment, production, consumption, the creation of new enterprises to ultimately sustain increasing social welfare (quality of life). The discourse emerges through the articles in a reasonably homogeneous way, as the actors draw similar connections within the system's macro-themes, start reasoning from shared underlying assumptions and employ a common direct and vague jargon, common rhetoric strategies (ex. metaphors) and similar normalization strategies to back up their opinions. Between those, we find the rejection of alternative views, the marginalization of those through fears and worries, the use of authority and social proof as sources of legitimacy, the rationalization of bounded pieces of the larger picture and exemplification of "successful" countries enjoying economic growth against "failing" countries facing recession.

The message emerging from the texts often intentionally blurs the border between financial growth and real-economy development. Yet, no matter which texts from which newspaper is taken into consideration, a common mental image of a fast running engine is proposed (a straightforward mental model, although not explicative of what is "running", easy and understandable by anyone). The work of a variety of institutions in providing GDP forecasts and the resonance given to them by legitimization-granting medias further reiterate the level of acceptance enjoyed by a development paradigm based on economic growth and increasingly contributes to constructs its fundamental symbolism.

In the same fashion, the process of hiding the limitations and biases of the GDP indicator can be arguably seen as a fairly manipulative strategy of the readers' perception of the whole system.

On the other side, few actors seem to have found their own space in the written-media contested arena and started developing a counter-discourse. Those actors are mostly non-political and non-economic agents (journalists, environmentalist, physicist, intellectuals etc.) as other faction's actors seem to be prevented from accessing the public discourse through traditional media.

The picture this faction constructs, tries to re-insert the economy as a part (and not above) of the society and the larger socio-ecological system. Here the five categories of GDP biases emerged within academic discussions through the years (inequality, environmental damage, informal economy, quality of production, happiness and wellbeing) are all discussed and limitations highlighted in order to show discrepancies between actions and cognition of the opposing discourse.

Overall, the alternative "Escape the Growth Fetish" discourse, proposes a systemic picture of our globe and challenges the currently established development paradigm through strong narrations, by bringing up examples of real life situations and by choosing to fill-in the linguistic vagueness left by the other discourse (defining things explicitly). Yet, the credibility and reach of this discourse is perceived arguably lower than the previous and the reasons for this are mainly three. First, the actors accessing the public discourse are only a fraction of the totality of societal actors proposing an alternative development paradigm. Second, is their low authoritative power, especially within the business and political spheres (which forces them to adopt alternative legitimization strategies such as moralization, narrativization and exemplification). Third and last, the lack of a common set of symbols, goals and communicative direct language that could strike and stick within the wider audience's imaginary, impairs their persuasive potential. Given the Italian context and the low level of literacy in the country, being consciously aware of the necessity of easing the communication with a straightforward language is absolutely necessary to spread concepts and create acceptance within the larger civil society.

6.2 Practical Implications

The findings and discussion sections, integrated with a literature review presenting the history and advancement of the growth discourse within the academic sphere, aim to provide the reader with a holistic picture of the topic and with the tools to become conscious about the constant reality-shaping process of discourses in regards of economic growth. To ease this task, an example of how economic growth symbolism is socially constructed and re-negotiated from different authors through texts in a real-world context (Italian newspapers) is provided.

For any citizen: becoming a conscious actor within the discourse

From the findings of my research, it emerged how, in the beginning of 2016, a strong, authoritative and homogenised faction of actors constituted by major political institutions, financial institution and large economic entities is able to spread its view of societal development path thanks to a privileged access to the “contested arena” of written media and a well-oiled communicative strategy. By bounding the discourse to the economic sphere, a social reality and societal goals not considering social and environmental sustainability are set in place and constantly reiterated through different strategies (fear, worries, deriding/ignoring alternatives, simple straightforward metaphors, rationalization of small causal relationships, authorization etc.). Consciously realizing the strategies in place and the different levels on which the discourse moves and is constructed may definitely be the first step to help moving forward any citizen willing to unveil the surface of the economic growth topic and start discovering the larger socio-ecological system laying under it. Authoritative national and supra-national institutions are, in fact, composed by physical individuals which likely reflect the consciousness of societies at large. As sustainability issues within all Earth’s ecosystems are on the rise, as human population and human activities keep growing and progressing, creating a base of educated citizens, consciously aware of the discrepancies and paradoxes between negotiated meanings and actions within current western economic systems seems a necessary stage to achieve on the way toward more sustainable, fair and pacific societies. Being conscious of the dynamics of the discursive reality-crafting process in which we all, as humans, engage every day, allows an individual to examine underlying assumptions of different actors (in this case, article’s authors) as well as his/her own thinking path and come to new realizations.

For progressing academic research

In the “suggestions for further research” part of the paper “Ecological Economics”, economist G. Kallis (2012) has been wondering what does sustain economic growth as a primal national

objective when, from an academic perspective, he reached the conclusion it does not increase societal wellbeing, it is uneconomical and anti-ecological. Starting from a social constructivist epistemology, with my paper I provide a real-life case which reflected both economist Van den Bergh's four hypothesis (historical accident, bounded rationality, increasing return to scale and lock-in effect) as well as practical insights on how the discourse is actually constructed through texts by the media (macro-themes, meso-actors and structure, micro-linguistic strategies) and how a certain pattern of social interactions may indeed be a cause that raises economic growth and GDP to primal national goals. Realizing what pushes and sustains economic growth as a necessary societal achievement (a financial system built through the decades around it and left unchecked or even strongly supported/reinforced by politics jointed with a neo-liberal economic system detached from the environment), which actors play the major role in reiterating the discourse (large political/financial/economic institutions) and how (privileged access to the discourse through media, connections and rhetorical devices seen in the findings) can be a solid base for scholar's to move forward and focus on how it could change (if that is the aim). In the suggestions for further research section, I provide further ideas on where research could move from here.

("If we measure the wrong thing, we end up doing the wrong thing" – J. Stiglitz 2009)

For the Italian actors willing to challenge the "only way" of economic growth

Being consciously aware of the different access to the public discourse by different set institutions/individuals may allow Italian actors willing to deviate from the mainstream paradigm to understand the communicative process that permeates society and therefore identify the information sets to which different segments of the population are exposed. In order to formulate an effective counter-strategy and challenge the current flow, it is of key importance to realize which spaces are more dominated and less accessible (traditional media), what rules/conventions they impose on the conversation and eventually which other places may be more fertile and prolific to spread alternative views (social media and internet may be two hypothesis). Understanding which possible "allies" do not possess that valuable and scarce resource which is the access to public discourse, as well as the benefits they could bring to the cause (some examples are the Happy Degrowth Movement, 5 Star Movement, Voluntarily Simplicity Movement etc.); may eventually lead to the formation of a more organized faction currently missing, characterized by a common language, common rhetorical strategies,

metaphors and ultimately a common and well-defined image of future socio-ecological national system.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

My research provided insights on how the discourse around growth is socially constructed on different levels and through different processes by certain groups of actors. My focus on the text-creation process building the discourse has been focused on the “emitter” side of the communication and circumstantial to a specific contested arena (traditional newspapers). Although important insights have been gained through it, to gain the full picture of how economic growth as a cultural phenomenon and as a development paradigm permeates and is perceived within the wider society, surely will require further research. Hereafter, I leave three suggestions I believe important to further deepening the topic.

First of all, to thoroughly understand why the discourse is constructed in this way, it would definitely be fascinating to investigate the level of consciousness that different actors have in regards of the topic, the language/connections/strategies they use and their impact on it. Interviewing representatives of the actors mapped in my thesis (primary data) could surely provide a new, more insightful perspective of the rationale guiding the actions of different actors/factions, of their perception of the wider socio-ecological system as well as the experiences that brought them to believe in their ideas.

Secondly, further research on the “receiver” side of the communication would be highly valuable and complementary to my research in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the whole process that allows the growth discourse to persist, transform and reiterate through society. For a discourse to persist, positive feedback in terms of acceptance and legitimization are of key importance and surely something to be investigated. In this sense, an analysis on the perception of the topic by different demographic categories of media users could surely be an insightful step forward to understand the current situation and build a solid and multi-faced base of knowledge about it.

Thirdly, comparing my findings within the traditional newspapers with other kinds of communication media (TV, internet, public speeches etc.) could surely expand the snapshot of the discourse within different societal spaces and further promote consciousness about it. The different access to spaces and control of timing which a variety of actors may enjoy draws their

sphere of influence within the public discourse, delineates the social body that they can reach and ultimately impacts the influence an actor may expect to exercise through single texts. Because of those reasons, investigating different kind of media may provide a more holistic picture of the permeation of the discourse within different social sectors.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 4.1 Fragments of the “Growth Legitimization Discourse”

Source ID	Fragment	Original (Italian)	Actor	Tacit Assumptions
C1	The alternative (to the engine of innovative growth) would be a drastic reduction of salaries and the impoverishment of active population	Alternativa (alla crescita innovativa) sarebbe quella di una drastica riduzione dei salari e impoverimento della popolazione attiva	Journalist (Zilibotti F.)	Salaries are the basis for living in a community
C2	Weak acceleration of economic growth may compromise a change in trend in national debt toward a sustainable reduction	La flebile ripresa economica potrebbe (...) punto di svolta del debito pubblico e una sua riduzione sostenibile	Journalist (Beni Smaghi L.)	
C10	Annuity positions (income without travelling) slow down economic growth	Le posizioni di rendita rallentano la crescita (Title)	Journalist (Messori M.)	Employment is necessary for growing (and living better)
C13	It is impossible not to reach economic objectives	E' impossibile non raggiungere gli obiettivi economici	Chinese President (Li Kequiang)	
C14	Slowing down is scary , because Chinese growth represented in those year, 30% of global growth	Il rallentamento fa paura, perchè (...)	Journalist (Santevecchi G.)	Fear seems most related to financial markets, rather to real economy
C17	The Fiscal Compact should change: deficit should be bound to growth and inflation	Il patto di bilancio deve cambiare: il deficit deve esser legato a crescita e inflazione	3 Bruegel Researchers	
C20	Low growth increases shock risk	Bassa crescita e rischio shock	Bce president (Draghi M.)	
C20	The Bce won't make any step backward, it won't resign to an inflation too low	La Bce non farà passi indietro, non si « rassegnerà » a un'inflazione troppo bassa	Bce president (Draghi M.)	
C20	In the confusion, the Bce knows to have been an anchor of certainty and stability	Nella confusione la BCE sa di essere stata e di dovere essere un'ancora di	Bce president (Draghi M.)	

		certezze se non di stabilità		
C22	Industry for the economic and social rebirth of the country	Industria per rinascita economica e sociale del paese	Confindustria President (Squinzi G.)	Wishes for more liberalism/laissez-faire
C23	Less debt to grow more	Meno debito per crescere di più	UE vice-president (Dombrovskis V.)	Growth is good “in se”
C24	(<i>absence of growth ...</i>) Danger of a secular stagnation	(assenza di crescita) Pericolo di una stagnazione secolare	Fmi – (Milesi-Ferretti G.M.)	
C26	We need to increase economic growth and occupation, not allowing workers to retire before time	Dobbiamo aumentare la crescita economica e l’occupazione, non mandare in pensione prima i lavoratori	Journalist (Marè M.)	
C26	(talking about steadily raising working age) There is little we can do , who makes demagogy (suggestions to work actually less) should indicate the financial coverage . Do you know the dimension of our public debt ?	C’è poco da fare. Chi fa demagogia (..) dovrebbe indicare le coperture finanziarie (...) conoscono la dimensione del nostro debito pubblico?	Journalist (Marè M.)	Italy needs and is possible to reach a state of full employment (8h a day for everyone)
C27	Fears for the slowdown of global growth	Timori per la frenata della crescita globale	President FMI (Christine Lagarde)	
C35	Enterprises are those who create jobs and growth	A creare il lavoro e la crescita sono le imprese	President of Confindustria “Renziana” (Squinzi G.)	Growth leads to an overall increase in wellbeing
C6	The car is running, despite the “ owl ” (intended as anybody criticizing the growth paradigm)	(la macchina gira ...) alla faccia dei gufi	Italian Prime Minister (Matteo Renzi)	
C8	Danger of secular stagnation	Pericolo di stagnazione secolare	Wall Street Journal	
F1	GDP growth is a factor of risk	Fattore di rischio riguarda la crescita del PIL	Ufficio Commissione Bilancio (UCB)	
F14	Italy and Europe must recover consciousness of their being and speak together with only one voice to support growth and unity	Italia e Europa deve recuperare la consapevolezza del suo essere e parlare con voce unica per sostenere crescita e unità	OCSE outlook on Europe	Growth is necessary to live united, it leads to wellbeing

F16	Fears for a recovery that remains irregular and under the ambitions of a strong, sustainable and balanced growth .	Timori per una ripresa che resta “irregolare e al di sotto delle ambizioni per una crescita forte, sostenibile ed equilibrata	G20 in China – Final Report from Finance Ministers	Growth can be sustainable in the long-term.
F17	Important is the direction of travel , which should lead toward growth	L’importante è la direzione di marcia che è di crescita	Minister of Economy (P.C. Padoan)	
F29	Growth and employment against populisms	Crescita e lavoro contro I populismi	Italian Prime Minister (M. Renzi)	Populism should be prevented to gain power
F3	Unemployment at minimum, still growth slows down . The group of employed people decreased while the group of inactive increased .	Disoccupazione ai minimi. Ma la crescita rallenta. Ristretta la platea degli occupati, si è ampliata quella degli inattivi.	Minister of Economy (P.C. Padoan)	
F30	We propose an ambitious and far-looking plan to stimulate growth	Piano “ambizioso e di ampio respiro per stimolare la crescita	Ocse (Going for Growth 2016 Report)	Growth is the final goal to achieve, contesting the paradigm is not allowed
F31	Intelligence, sustainability and solidarity are the fundamental pillars of European Growth	intelligenza, sostenibilità e solidarietà sono i pilastri fondanti della crescita europea	10-Years EU Commission Strategy 2010-2020	
F5	Renzinomics message: stay optimist and spend your money Every increase of the saving rate is to fight because it is a signal of fear and of the action of sabotage by “defeatist owls” (“gufo” – in Italian – is used to refer to people that wish that everything will go bad, in this case, everyone challenging the growth and optimism paradigm is defined as so)	Messaggio della Renzinomics: siate sereni e spendete Ogni aumento del tasso di risparmio è quindi da combattere in quanto spia di paura e dell’azione di sabotaggio di gufi disfattisti. - Renzi	Journalist (M. Seminerio) Italian Prime Minister (M. Renzi)	
F6	The requirement for growth is to safeguard the trust of families, companies and consumers	Il presupposto per crescita è mantenere la fiducia di famiglie,	Bollettino Economico Bankitalia	

		imprese e consumatori		
F8	Financial system: is it unstable? No, we only need growth	Sistema finanziario: è instabile? No, serve la crescita	Journalist (G. Bianchimani)	
R16	US are growing but there is alarm bell : the profits for corporations have been falling. Fears also for Europe.	Gli USA crescono, ma c'è un campanello d'allarme: gli utili delle Corporations sono caduti. Timori anche per l'Europa.	Journalist (name undisclosed)	
R19	The danger is to be too worried about debt, when we should instead focus on GDP and flexibility to manage the crisis	Il pericolo è esser troppo preoccupati del debito, quando invece ci vuole flessibilità per gestire crisi"	Chief of President Obama economic counselors (J. Fruman)	Need more internal demand, more consumption and therefore more deregulation to help enterpreneurships.
R20	(in North Italy) the crisis has been also a chance for growing , (in the South) claimed victims	(al nord...) la crisi ha anche permesso di crescere ... (al sud) ha mietuto vittime	Journalist (name undisclosed)	Energy consumption is a sign of wellbeing
R23	The challenge of growth Low growth and deflation are " exceptional circumstances"	La sfida della crescita "Circostanze eccezionali" la bassa crescita and deflation	Journalist (R. Petrini)	Growth is the norm
R24	It is known (...) that an increase in taxes reduces the available income	Si sa che (...) aumento delle imposte riduce il reddito disponibile	Journalist (N. Acocella)	More debt is good if leads to more growth
R25	Eventual negative surprises on the front of "real growth" and inflation risk to compromise the dynamic of nominal GDP (...) and with it the lowering of the rate Debt/GDP	"L'eventuale emergere di sorprese negative sul fronte della crescita reale e dell'inflazione metterebbe a rischio la dinamica del Pil nominale - si legge ancora - e, con essa, il percorso di abbassamento del rapporto debito/Pil" -->	Unione Parlamento Bilancio	

		inversione dei ruoli		
R28	The current growth pace is unsatisfactory to restore pre-crisis employment and income levels	(questi ritmi di crescita appaiono insoddisfacenti per ripristinare livelli di occupazione e redditi pre-crisi)	Centro Studi Confindustria (L. Paolazzi)	Objective is reaching full employment at current working conditions
R29	Economic growth will improve, and with it employment	Ripresa aumenterà, e con essa l'occupazione	Minister of Economy (P.C. Padoan)	
R30	Risk of stagnation	Rischio di stagnazione	DEF 2016 (Document of economic and finance)	
R34	(about Finland's negative GDP) The dogma of Nordic strictness crumbles , the hawk invested by the crisis	Si sgretola il dogma del rigore nordico, il falco investito dalla crisi	Journalist (A. Tarquini)	Without growth, the country is in no position to teach others
R35	With respectful climate policies, the GDP may grow up to 1,5%	Con le politiche per il clima, il PIL può crescere dell'1,5%	Journalist (A. Cianciullo)	
R4	The problems/complications to the real economy , may induce expansion policies that could eventually benefit financial markets	Le difficoltà dell'economia reale, possono indurre politiche espansive e quindi fanno bene al mercato azionario	Journalist in New York (F. Rampini)	Damages to real economy are acceptable as long as they bring benefits to financial markets
R4	Japan utilizes negative interest rates to punish banks not lending money to real economy, but it does not grow . (...) it is a desperate move , a chronic sickness	Il Giappone (...) utilizza interessi negativi per punire le banche che non prestano soldi all'economia vera, ma non cresce. E' una mossa disperata, un malato cronico.	Journalist in New York (F. Rampini)	Growth measured by GDP, is more important than benefits to the real economy
R6	Growth means that Italy is restarted	Crescita vuol dire che l'Italia è ripartita	Italian Prime Minister (M. Renzi)	Lower levels of consumptions are bad – no matter what
S12	(US growing) is doing well ...(EU stagnating) ...is doing bad	(...) se la cava bene, (...) se la cava male	Journalist (V. Lops)	
S17	It is required, with urgency, to create a solid system (...) to build the basis of a high and sustainable growth .	Occorre con urgenza favorire la creazione di un sistema forte per porre le basi di una crescita più	Confindustria	

		elevata e sostenibile.		
S17	For every Euro in the industry sector, the GDP growth twice as much	Per ogni euro in industria, il Pil sale del doppio	Confindustria	An increase in GDP is good, no matter what
S18	Growth is still too moderate , to create employment	Crescita ancora modesta per creare occupazione	President of Confindustria (G. Squinzi)	Growth leads to higher employment
S18	The level of internal consumption is still low	Livello di consumo interno è ancora moderato	President of Confindustria (G. Squinzi)	Need higher consumption
S22	There won't be any new job without growth . Investments are the only way to create employment.	Il lavoro non riparte senza la crescita. Gli investimenti sono l'unica strada per creare occupazione.	Journalist (A. Orioli)	Job and growth are essential for life. Full employment is the goal to achieve.
S24	The government estimates (...) financial measures for growth (of GDP)	Il governo stima (...) manovre di "finanza per la crescita" (del PIL)	Minister of Economy (P.C. Padoan)	
S25	Growth too slow and too frail	Crescita "troppo lenta e troppo fragile"	International Monetary Fund Outlook 2016	
S29	(to foster growth ...) Forward with the reforms, in particular the political-institutional-administrative-bureaucratic ones	(per incrementare la crescita ...) avanti le riforme, in particolare quelle politico-istituzionali-amministrative-burocratiche	President of Confindustria (G. Squinzi)	
S31	The structural reforms for goods, services and employment had positive effects on growth	Le riforme strutturali dei beni/servizi/lavoro hanno avuto effetto positivo sulla crescita	FMI, Various economists of "classic school"	
S31	In the long term, aN increase in income and growth in productivity brings a reduction of unemployment and a solid increase of salaries	Nel lungo periodo insomma (...) una maggiore redditività e crescita della produttività porta a un calo della disoccupazione e a un più solido aumento dei salari.	FMI, Zangana and various economists of "classic school"	Objective is reach full employment
S32	We cannot sleep in peace if the Chinese economy does not grow sustainably (sustainably in this case is used to mean "at a constant, steady rate)	No sonni tranquilli se la crescita cinese non è sostenibile	Journalist (G. Noci)	

S32	(...) introduction of a welfare and healthcare system, to incentivize people's level of consumption	(...) Introduzione di un sistema di welfare e sanitario efficaci in primis: per incentivare il livello di propensione al consumo delle persone	Journalist (G. Noci)	
S33	(The issues with the Brazilian economy) ... a strong degrowth that will continue in the 2016 and grow over 3%	(I nodi dell'economia brasiliana ...) una decrescita marcata che nel 2016 continuerà a essere superiore al 3%	Journalist (R. Da Rin)	Degrowth is recession
S4	Renzi has promised growth . This is the heart of his government and political bet : a magic number that should show a strong recovery.	Renzi ha promesso la crescita. Qui sta il cuore della sua scommessa politica di governo. Un numero magico che deve indicare una ripresa forte.	Journalist (G. Gentili)	
S5	A low rate of growth is not good even for the slides, what it is required today is credibility in front of the markets .	La bassa crescita non è buona neanche per le slide, la credibilità è quello che serve oggi sui mercati.	Journalist (G. Gentili)	
S7	Urgently required are interventions that may re-launch global growth , which at the moment remains elusive	Urgono interventi forti per rilanciare una crescita globale che rimane "elusiva"	Summit of central bankers in Shanghai	
S7	There are worries that growth will be similar to the previous year	C'è preoccupazione per una crescita pari all'anno precedente	Summit of central bankers in Shanghai	
S7	Eurozone requires strong reforms to avoid slowing down global growth	Eurozona necessità forti riforme per non rallentare la crescita globale	OCSE	
S9	The bet for the government is now to make Italy grow again. If the GDP does not steadily grow, the employment "flame" will eventually turn off.	La scommessa per il Governo ora è far tornare a crescere l'Italia. Se non aumenta il Pil in modo consistente, la fiammata occupazionale che si sta registrando	Journalist (C. Tucci)	Betting on growth is the right way to improve the consumers' future condition.

		in questi dati si spegnerà		
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Appendix 4.2 Fragments of the “Escape the Growth Fetish Discourse”

Source ID	Fragment	Original (Italian)	Actor
C12	The measurement of perceived happiness and the achievement of wellbeing should be daily activities in every nation willing to follow sustainable objectives. Instead of adopting an approach exclusively based on economic growth, we should promote prosperous, fair and environmentally sustainable societies.	La misurazione della felicità percepita e il raggiungimento del benessere dovrebbero essere attività all’ordine del giorno di ogni nazione che si propone di perseguire obiettivi di sviluppo sostenibile. Al posto di adottare un approccio incentrato esclusivamente sulla crescita economica, dovremmo promuovere società prospere, giuste e sostenibili dal punto di vista ambientale	Journalist quotes American Economist J. Sachs
C16	Swing of numbers that in reality mean close to nothing	Altalena di cifre che in concreto significano poco	Journalist (G. Schiavi)
C16	Eurostat’s decision of including illegal economy in the GDP calculation is an insult to all honest EU citizens.	La decisione di Eurostat è accettato da tutti in imbarazzante silenzio di Includere l’economia illegale nel Pil è un’offesa ai cittadini onesti	Journalist (G. Schiavi)
C18	(hopes for) ...a new sustainable model that could bring together the economy and the society . The duty of politics is to define common objectives (...) and joint prosperity with democracy .	Un nuovo modello sostenibile che leghi economia e società Il compito della politica è quello di definire obiettivi comuni (...) tenere insieme prosperità e democrazia.	Journalist (M. Magatti)
F2	(on GDP calculation) each time the ministry encounters and hardship, it just shoots a random number	Il ministero se sbaglia spara una cifra “ad minchiam”	Journalist (A. Strozzi)
F2	(sarcastic tone) Goods, products, services. In one word: things. We have a desperate need for more things. We need to consume, waste, work to produce to consume more and again : it is the clever vicious circle studied over two centuries ago to satisfy our chronic dissatisfaction. Consumo ergo sum (Latin: I consume, and therefore I exist).	Merci, prodotti, servizi. In una parola: cose. E’ di nuove cose di cui abbiamo disperato bisogno, infatti. Abbiamo bisogno di consumare, per poi sprecare, per poi lavorare, per produrre e per consumare di nuovo, daccapo: l’astutissimo circolo vizioso concepito oltre due secoli fa per alimentare la nostra cronica insoddisfazione. Consumo ergo sum.	Journalist (A. Strozzi)
	(sarcastic tone) Who cares if our model is based on hypertrophic consumerism, chronic indebtedness, if it feeds on social inequality and	Chi se ne frega se è un modello fondato sul consumismo ipertrofico, indebitamento cronico, nutrito da iniquità sociali, causa problemi	Journalist (A. Strozzi)

	<p>antidepressants and causes irreversible environmental damage.</p> <p>Compared to an increase of +0,7 of an indicator that to measure the health of an economy has the same efficiency that has a ruler to measure pressure.</p> <p>Because this is the growth they want. And this is the growth they will obtain. Of what, they do not even imagine.</p>	<p>ambientali irreversibili, sugli antidepressivi.</p> <p>In confronto al +0,7% di un indicatore che, per misurare la salute di un'economia, ha la stessa efficacia che avrebbe un metro per misurare la pressione</p> <p>Perché è la crescita che vogliono. Ed è la crescita che otterranno. Di che cosa, però, ancora neppure lo immaginano</p>	
F13	<p>The occidental growth model finally showed to the entire world its systemic unsustainability: the financial economy and its true value, the fake needs created by marketing etc. (...)</p> <p>... collective consumistic hypnosis</p>	<p>Il modello di crescita economica occidentale sta finalmente denunciando al mondo intero la sua insostenibilità sistemica. (a) l'economia finanziaria e il suo controvalore reale, (b) i bisogni effimeri indotti dal marketing etc (...)</p> <p>Ipnosi consumistica collettiva</p>	Journalist (A. Strozzi)
F15	<p>In Italy, daring to discuss, not even about the economic value but of the opportunity cost of following humanistic studies is a bit like swearing in the church.</p> <p>(...) a cultural impoverishment where the preferences of the population become barbarized and enslaved by the cunning laws of the market which creates a vicious circle.</p> <p>In this way, the decay of the society is fueled and the river of ignorance become larger, because the school at its time did not generate curiosity toward culture, given its worries to prepare workers for the job market.</p>	<p>In Italia, azzardarsi a discutere, non dico del valore economico, ma anche del costo opportunità di effettuare studi umanistici è un po' come bestemmiare in chiesa.</p> <p>impoverimento culturale, in cui i gusti della popolazione s'imbarbariscono e la perfida legge del mercato, agisce come una sorta di circolo vizioso: "Così il degrado viene alimentato e il fiume dell'ignoranza collettiva s'ingrossa, perché a suo tempo la scuola non ha generato una curiosità e una fascinazione per la cultura, dato che la sua preoccupazione è addestrare al futuro mondo del lavoro".</p>	Journalist (M. Famularo) quotes from "The Knowledge Capital of Nations"
F23	<p>(commenting world happiness report) Environmental issues are not unrelated to the different faces of the society, but represent an essential driver to the life satisfaction and happiness that each of us perceives every day. Therefore, sustainable development becomes the essential indicator (...) (then quotes J. Sachs as C12)</p>	<p>Le questioni ambientali non sono estranee alle diverse sfaccettature della società, ma rappresentano un driver essenziale della soddisfazione che ognuno di noi percepisce del proprio vivere. E lo sviluppo sostenibile diventa quindi l'indicatore essenziale. (Poi quota Sachs)</p>	Journalist (R. Rosso) + quote physicist J. Sachs
	<p>Sustainable Development: the voluntary simplicity.</p>	<p>Sviluppo sostenibile: la semplicità volontaria. Consumare di più non significa vivere meglio.</p>	Philosopher, historian,

	Consume more does not mean living better.		anthropologist (I. Illich)
	The economic growth dogma and the employment extortion justify environmental damages.	Il dogma della crescita economica e il ricatto occupazionale giustificano il disastro ambientale	Journalist (L. Maggiori)
	A progress that feeds on finite resources, unsustainable and antidemocratic .	Un progresso energivoro, insostenibile, antidemocratico.	Journalist (L. Maggiori)
	Slaves of industrial products, that we could locally produce but we do not because we do not have time. And who steal our time? Too much work.	Schiavi di prodotti industriali, potremmo autoprodurli o comprarli da locali, ma no tempo. Ma il tempo chi ce lo ruba? Il troppo lavoro.	Journalist (L. Maggiori)
	People sucked in the GDP maelstrom : more work, more income, more needs, less time, more purchases, more expenses, more need of work. The GDP grows but we do not have time to live anymore .	Persone risucchiate nel vortice del PIL: più lavoro, più reddito, più bisogni, meno tempo, più acquisti, più spese, sempre più necessità di lavorare. Il Pil cresce ma noi non abbiamo più il tempo di vivere.	Journalist (L. Maggiori)
F32	Contradiction between unlimited growth and limited resources . Producing in a clean, healthy and green manner within a safe working environment, demands more work and more jobs rich of meaning .	Contraddizione tra crescita illimitata e finitezza delle risorse. Produrre in modo pulito, verde e sano, in condizioni di lavoro sicure, richiede infatti più lavoro e più posti di lavoro ricchi di senso.	Journalist (G. Recovery)
F34	Producing value is different from extracting value .	Produrre valore è diverso dall'estrarre valore.	Intellectual (L. Gallino)
R1	Sharing is what creates wealth more than the stock market. To grow it is necessary to combine employment with welfare, economic development with social wellbeing .	La condivisione che crea ricchezza è quella del fare assieme più che le azioni in Borsa, che per crescere bene è necessario coniugare lavoro e welfare, sviluppo economico e benessere sociale.	Journalist (A. Rosina)
R3	Unlimited growth is the waste economy	La crescita illimitata è economia dello spreco	Austrian Physicist (F. Capra)
R3	Today it is becoming increasingly clear that the crucial problems of our age (energy, environment, climate change, poverty, violence, wars etc.) cannot be understood separately. They are systemic problems .	Oggi è sempre più evidente che i problemi cruciali della nostra epoca (energia, ambiente, cambiamento climatico, povertà, violenza, guerre...) non possono esser compresi separatamente. Sono problemi sistemici.	Austrian Physicist (F. Capra)
R3	This irrational faith in an eternal economic growth indicates a fundamental clash between a linear thought and the non-linear schemes of our biosphere .	Questa fiducia irrazionale in una perenne crescita economica è indicativa di uno scontro fondamentale fra un pensiero lineare e gli schemi non lineari della nostra biosfera	Austrian Physicist (F. Capra)
R17	(talking about Irish situation) ...economic recovery made of “blood and tears” interventions. Now it is the paradise of multinational, thanks to a friendly fiscal policy the GDP is flying up to 7% . Nevertheless, the population	ripresa a suon di manovre lacrime e sangue. Ora è il paradiso delle multinazionali grazie al Fisco amico e il Pil è ripartito a balzi del +7%. Ma la popolazione ha punito il	Journalist (E. Franceschini)

	<p>punished the government in the last elections. In the pub people drink, but without happiness.</p>	<p>governo nelle ultime elezioni. Al pub si beve, ma senza gioia.</p>	
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Appendix 4.3 Examples of Articles Employing Legitimization Strategies

Example of Narrativization

From: Il Fatto Quotidiano (3 April 2016) – On the “Alternative” side of the Discourse

<http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2016/04/03/sviluppo-sostenibile-la-semplicita-volontaria-consumare-di-piu-non-significa-vivere-meglio/2604151/>

Sustainable Development: the voluntary simplicity. Consuming more does not mean living better

Two weeks are missing to the referendum and who is in favour of drillings brings on the table the usual reasons: development, economic growth, employment. The dogma of economic growth and the employment extortion justify the environmental disaster in Basilicata caused by Eni, and the tailored amendments in favour of large oil companies. But is it really true that “more is better” and that for the economic interests of the State we should close our eyes...and nose?

Investing on renewable energy would create many jobs, more than the ones created by the fossil industry. Yet, we should also learn to exit from the vicious circle of economic growth at any price. Ivan Illich, philosopher, historian and anthropologist, in “Plea to the Bicycle” was warning us that at a certain point, an increase in energy per capita would not increase anymore social welfare but instead would have created inequality and frustration in the majority of people. Illich compares the bicycle and the car, both invented in the same period: the bike could have given freedom to everyone within city borders and ensured maximum democracy. Instead, (due also to the great power of the automobile industry) a progress based on fossil fuels, excessive energy use, private motorization, unsustainable and anti-democratic has been chosen.

But now it is time to changing the course. As Nanni Salio was used to say, from the Research Center Sereno Regis: “Too many cars, too much concrete, too many houses, too much waste, too much food, too many products that people use and throw away, that do not create a better world but prevent us from having more harmonious relationships between us and with the other living beings. Here is therefore the choice of voluntary simplicity”.

In Italy we have 61 cars every 100 people, more than one car every two people and the market is growing. The Ispra report says that every day 55 hectares of soil are being cemented. New houses are built, new streets, new parking slots and new malls. Always more villas in the countryside (also for who does not work in agriculture) increase the kilometres covered every day to go to work. For not talking about the excess of food: 1,3 billion tons wasted every year in the world. If we think that 40% of the cereal production is used for the upbringing of livestock, we can easily deduce that vegetarianism is a choice of peace and justify not only toward animals, but also toward other humans.

We are always more slaves of the supermarket, new industrial products, packaged foods and industrial products, which produce waste, consume energy and come from far away. Some of those we could auto-produce them or buy them from small local producers... if only we had more time.

But who steals our time? Too much work. Many unemployed, even people that work 8-10 hours a day, mothers and fathers that stay away from their sons in the most important part of their lives, which delegate the education of their children to grandparents, babysitters or schools. People drowned in the maelstrom of GDP: more work, more income, more needs, less time, more purchases, more expenses, more need for work. The GDP grows but we do not have any more the time for living. The state should incentives always more part-time contracts: work less for working all, while dedicating half-day to the people we care of, to culture, to volunteering and to auto-production.

Self-production and a sober lifestyle can generate savings similar of a monthly wage. And we are not even talking about the positive environmental impact. Eating mostly vegan, without car, with electricity deriving from renewable sources, auto producing and buying local, re-using and re-cycling, my ecological footprint has been of 2,8 hectares of which 0,8 are fixed (given Italian energy policy). Italians have an average footprint of 5, while US citizens of 9 hectares. In Eritrea, this value falls to 0,35.

This development model has failed. Now it is time to open ourselves to voluntary simplicity, trying to leave fossil fuels. It is time to exit the GDP maelstrom. A maelstrom which destroys the environment, the justifies disasters, abuses, corruption, which steals the time of our lives, that traps us in traffic and that makes us unlearn what is enjoyable to do.

Example of Rationalization

From: Il Corriere della Sera (13 April 2016) – On the “Legitimization” side of the Discourse

http://www.corriere.it/opinioni/16_aprile_14/nodo-pensioni-4b7ffaae-01a7-11e6-b513-8228f9f09a00.shtml

The Crux of Pensions between Demagogy and Decisionism

Here we are again, the discussion on pensions started once again, stronger than ever, and everyone speaks and makes proposals, some very interesting. Still demagogy reigns sovereign especially in the talk shows! It is hard right now to make clarity and un-tangle the skein which becomes more complicated day by day. Let's try to establish some fixed points. Talking about pensions, two rules should be applied: speak few, do not agitate what is calm and calm what is agitated. First, the reform of 2011 was made because Italy was close to a financial crisis and it was imposed by external constraints. It allowed us to allow a catastrophe and let us regain the international credit that we lost which led to important savings. Attacking Elsa Fornero is for cowards and irresponsible, it is important to remember that we have been forced and there were no alternatives. The reform can surely be improved, but we have to start from facts, not demagogy. Due to the strong aging of the population, OECD countries have chosen to increase pensionable age, more working years, less retired years. The precarious conditions of our public finance do not allow in the short-term a structural reform to this approach – like make everyone retire at 60. There is nothing to do. Who makes demagogy in Tv should indicate which would be the financial cover for sustaining such a reform – do the speakers in talk shows know the dimension of our debt?

Second, the problem is with the dissociation between pensions and job market. The current re-allocation system, where the active pay for the retired, expects for careers to last 40 years or more. Those do not exist anymore, maybe only in the public sector, and therefore raising the retirement age to 66 years or more compensates the people losing the job before or after 60 – and here are the income-deprived early retired. Third, flexibility is when exiting. From an efficiency and free-choice perspective, inside a certain range a person should be able to decide when to retire, but naturally a correction on its income should be made. In structural terms, this means going back before the 2011 reform, so such a structural reform would be costly and would damage younger generations. Still, something shall be done, for example for “heavy” works, where leaving a roof of 66 years appears hard, or perhaps by promoting part-time. We should ask ourselves which kind of employees would accept a voluntary early-exit with a strong penalty and the equity implications – only rich people stops early, which have more than one income in the family and sufficient wealth?

Third, the discussion has been concentrated on finding resources to allow exit-flexibility, and therefore on the penalties to apply on who wants to exit first. The 3, the 5 or the 8%? A correction properly studied on early-retirements in the long-term, it is true, does not produce effects, so it does not increase the total pension debt required – although at least 20 years are required – but in the short run it does and who supports flexibility for early exit faces hardships in admitting it. To make it as easy as possible, a pension of 1000 Euro, payed in advance would be reduced to 900 and the in the long run the cost would be the same. Yet, in the short run there is a big difference, because the early-payment, even if early of only one year, forced the state to find immediately funds, a year before, with obvious effects on the national balance. The time distribution of the complex pension cost is indeed important. Would the European Commission agree on reforms that become neutral in 20 years but that increase spending in the short run? What would happen if, in some years, a future government would change the way again? Would they tax today's early pensions' payments?

Fourth, an early exit would affect employment? The crucial question is whether there is substitutability between retirees and youngsters in the job market. The data highlight low substitutability, with the exception of less qualified jobs. We therefore have to increase economic growth and employment, not sending workers to their retirement earlier. After seeing the impossibility of structurally reform pensions, the way to explore is therefore only the one of increasing to add a contribution to pension budgets to create a solidarity mechanism for the lowest income retirees. It is a hard path on which we should tread softly – should we hit also the pensions of who retired with less than 20 years of work? The only solution is to follow the suggestion expressed by the Constitutional court and Giuliano Amato years ago: a mechanism of solidarity inside the pensions system, the richer retirees help the poorer, a safety budget is created and only if strictly necessary integrated with other taxes. Different options may be imagined but we need to define a small detail: where do we fix the threshold? Around 1500 or over 3000? The limit should provide enough resources for the mechanism of integration – at least 5-10 billion. All simple in theory; sadly the forced withdraw will have effects on the social and electoral level.

Example of Authorization

From: La Repubblica (07 April 2016) – On the “Legitimization” side of the Discourse

<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2016/04/07/guardate-meno-al-debito-piu-al-pil26.html?ref=search>

“Look less at Debt, more to GDP”

Eight years after the financial crisis, the divergence between EU and US economies could not be more evident. In an exclusive interview with Repubblica organized during the think tank meeting “Volta”, Jason Furman, chief of economic counsellors of president Barack Obama, encourages the Eurozone and Italy to utilize fiscal policies to foster growth instead of worrying too much about public debt.

The US economy surpassed since years the level reached before the crisis, while this has not happened in the Eurozone. How do you explain this? “The US growth recovery, compared to other countries, is has been a real success. The key has been acting immediately and strongly on four fronts: on the fiscal policy (with reforms providing stimulus), on the monetary policy (reducing immediately interest rates to 0%), banks recapitalization (by forcing all institutes to take the funds that we provided) and by recognizing immediately, still in the banking system, the credit problems that were existing”.

In Italy, it is said impossible to employ expansionistic policies because of public debt, which surpassed already 130% of GDP. What do you think? “Financial markets do not seem excessively worried about debt of deficit. Interest rates in Italy are already way lower than the one with had in 2008/2009. The danger is being too worried about debt, when instead more flexibility for example to manage the refugee crisis would be required. The solution, is to combine, as we did, expansionistic policies with a program for reducing deficit and debt in the medium-period.”.

World’s growth is disappointing, but there are still countries (such Germany) that are opposing to expansionistic measures. Do you really believe that there is a global consensus in favour of reforms sustaining growth? “The debate inside of the G7 is shifting. An always increasing number of countries is understanding the role that aggregate demand may play. For example, in the Eurozone it has been decided to adopt flexible deficit policies to manage refugees. Doing the same for security expenses would be an important step.”.

The Greek crisis risks of exploding again in summer. How do we exit from here? “Our approach is to encourage everyone to reach a solution, or in other words, to conclude the current program review in a ordinate manner. We believe this to be impossible without a Greek debt reduction, but still, at the same time, reforms are necessary. Even if we think that our economies are isolated from a possible Greek crisis, I would not be so sure that the measures could prevent an eventual infection.”.

One of the big challenges that unites Italy, the Us and all the modern economies is a slow pace of productivity growth. Can we do something to make it accelerate again? “A reason for low productivity growth is the weakness of investments. So, with the growth of internal demand, we would see a re-launch of investments and with them, of productivity. Still, there is a specifically European and Italian problem: productivity should converge to US levels, but instead it is diverging. If I were living in those countries, I would be obsessed by this problem. To launch productivity once again it is not enough to invest in education and research. It is necessary to make less productive companies to leave the market and let more efficient ones to enter”.

Although the US economy acquired once again good speed, many Americans are angry with your administration and choose alternatives such Donald Trump. How do you explain this? “If you ask American citizens what is their perception of the economic situation, the answers are quiet positive. But it is true, there is a certain level of insatisfaction. Partly, it is a non-economical phenomenon. For years the growth of salaries and income has been a real challenge. If your income does not grow for a long time, this becomes a problem.”.

Example of Exemplification

From: La Repubblica (11 April 2016) – On the “Legitimization” side of the Discourse

http://www.repubblica.it/economia/affari-e-finanza/2016/02/15/news/finlandia_quarto_anno_di_recessione_si_sgretola_il_dogma_del_rigore_nordico-133527899/?ref=search

Finland, fourth year of recession. The Nordic austerity crumbles.

For 2016, a negative GDP is forecasted as in the previous 3 years. Since 2009, the country lost 6% of its GDP. The industrial sector received a strong hit by losing Nokia, and austerity contributed making everything worse.

Helsinki. Luckily there are the pastors of the protestant church to distribute food and beverages, or to offer warm meals in cities such Oulu, once upon a time real “booming towns” and now suffering under the heavy weight of the economic crisis. The unemployed grew to 17%, way over the 10% national average. Youngsters emigrate, like in the darkest times, they go to Sweden or Norway looking for better lives. On this scenery, bad mood and negativity are growing: the front of the “No” to euro is flying in surveys and the “Odin soldiers” are on the march against migrants. Who would have said it: the most hawk country between the hawks in the Eurozone, the Finland judged by the WEF as one of the 10 most competitive economies in the world, an avant-garde in social services and technology, fully overwhelmed by the crisis. Finland is nowadays living its fourth consecutive recession year, after already in 2008/2009 got to know the dark period of negative growth. Today, the light at the end of the tunnel is not visible, the government of Juha Sipilä, a billionaire lent to politics, promises only budget cuts. In the extreme north of the continent, the country is fearing of becoming the new Greece (standing by the words of the finance minister Alexander Stubb that in the past reserved same severe words for the Mediterranean countries) and is to be considered the “new Big Sick of Europe”.

The data are impressive. GDP has stayed at 0% in 2015, and in 2016 the same zero growth is expected. Already the first international crisis, the one of 2008, hit hard the Finns. A little growth after there has been, but in the last years the obstinacy or austerity, the absence of strategy for growth and many other factors produced the second recession: four years exactly, the longest and deepest crisis after the second world war. After Greece, the “country of the thousand lakes” is, inside of the Eurozone, the economy with the worst performance in 2015. Its data always more diverge from the powerful guide of the big north, Sweden, which with low interest rates, quantitative easing policies and a mix of harsh fiscal reforms and non-orthodox decisions (like allowing deficit of 2% for financing education and hi-tech) enjoys growth rates of almost 3,5% a year. Compared to 2008 before the crisis, admits the Finnish finance minister, Finland became increasingly poorer: compared to the 2008 data in fact, the country lost a 6% of the GDP. “To say it simply – said the minister – we can say that Apple killed Nokia and the iPad killed our paper industry”. Defined an “exaggeration” by the conservators’ leader, junior partner of the tycoon-premier Sipilä and the populist ultras, xenophobe and no-euro Timo Soini. Still, it contains part of the truth.

“The majority of our problems are linked to the industrial sector, there are no problems in the financial or banking system” says Matti Pohjola, teacher of economic at the Aalto School of Business. A big dose of misfortune, according to Nordea’s analysts, but bad luck accompanied with a lack of creativity and an obstinacy in not correcting austerity. Finland received a first hit to the heart when Apple defeated Nokia and became the world leader in the mobile phone industry. Suddenly, those so important mobiles for Finnish exports, producing 4% of the GDP, appeared obsolete, prehistorical and refused by global markets. Then, the crisis of printed media came and cut the legs of the Finnish paper industry. Moreover, but not last, the western sanctions imposed on Russia after the Crimea issue, turned to be lethal damages for Helsinki, with heavy limitations of the Finnish export to one of its main partners.

“I promise you I will create 110k jobs, but then we have all to accept harsh reforms” keeps saying the premier Sipilä. Nowadays, austerity and rigor, ideas that until today Finns always supported by believing more credible politicians supporting them, tear the society apart. The cost of labour is 20% higher than in Germany, the labour market is not fluid. The demographic profile of Finland is one of the most aging in the world. Because any dialogue between government, entrepreneurs and syndicates has been vain, the country proceeds with unilateral reforms, starting with the cuts of festivities and sickness days. If those will change anything, nobody knows. The governor of Bank of Finland, Erkki Liikanen, considered a hawk within the ECB and one of the most trusted allies of Weidmann, asks for structural reforms and warns about the dangers of stimulating internal demand through fiscal policies. Not everyone agrees. According to Matti Tuomala, professor of economics in Tampere, “fiscal policy which stimulates internal demand had positive effects in 2008, then in 2011 the structure changed and became too restrictive, according to the IMF”. Some cuts, such to university budget, seems an extremely danger for the long term success of the country. Helsinki already lost the triple-A rating from Standard and Poor’s.

The public debt, in the meantime, because of the weight of social welfare and the recession, keeps growing. From the 32,7% of 2008 it almost doubled and is close to 60%, threatening the long-lasting tradition of respecting Maastricht’s parameters. The gap with Sweden worsen day by day, where appropriate monetary policies, creativity of government/entrepreneurs/syndicates, priority for export and growth and a strong internal demand, make the economy run and almost doubling the speed of German growth. The pessimism on the future, in Helsinki, helps the no-euro front. While the not-so-far England is thinking about the Brexit, here the euro-sceptical gathered 50k signs to ask the parliament whether to stay in the Eurozone or to exit from it in order to re-launch the country with a more competitive currency. In the public opinion, the yes to the Euro fell from 72% pre-crisis to 54%. This is an incognita on the future of the country, and the scenario of a country without growth, cannot look nothing else than grey.

Example of Moralization

From: Il Corriere della Sera (11 April 2016) – On the “Alternative” side of the Discourse

http://www.corriere.it/cultura/16_aprile_04/valore-economico-bene-tutti-72e07e14-f9d4-11e5-91c9-425ed3b43648.shtml

The Economic Value of Everyone's Good

The real Italy, which lives outside of the boundaries traced by the Gross Domestic Product, needs a surplus of attention to not be only a passive spectator of a rollercoaster of numbers that mean little or nothing.

If to the decimals of hope, which leave Italian growth to a zero comma, we could add the value produced by thousands of volunteers here in Italy, our faith and optimism would skyrocket. If from the confused and biased GDP we would erase the stains of drugs and prostitutions which pollute the calculation, we could better understand what it means wellbeing in a civil country. The real Italy, which lives outside of the boundaries traced by the Gross Domestic Product, needs a surplus of attention to not be only a passive spectator of a rollercoaster of numbers that mean little or nothing.

This world, made by families, organizations, workers, strong and weak people, students and people full of humanity and spirit of abnegation, provide an exceptional vital service to society which take cares the State's deficiencies. The step forward on the law for the Third Sector, approved these days in the Senate, it is a comforting signal to whom, since years, pushes for a juridical recognition of social growth efforts in this country. Those efforts are worth investing even more, by making donations easier, by de-taxing them, by fostering the creation of new social businesses, by not asking the VAT tax to whom offers economic help to realize schools, hospitals and kindergartens for the community (no profit/ no Iva).

On the field of public ethics, if we want to give a sense to the reform, we would need to have an honest reflection on the development indicators we use, introducing the topic of GDP corrections suggested by Nobel prize Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, Fitoussi or the New Economic Foundation in London, gathered all in Italy at the Positive Economic Forum of Jaques Attali and Letizia Moratti: the fact that illegal economy raises the value of the ratio debt/growth, is an offense to all honest citizens, decided by Eurostat and accepted with an embarrassing silence by everyone. To this kind of opaque economy, it is preferable another one which bets on transparent volunteering, on social businesses that hire, on the no-profit that in 10 years grew by 28%. A civil economy, with responsible entrepreneurship in its centre, open, competitive, careful with balance sheets and supporting values that lead people to give something back to others: to the territories, to the community, to the poors, to the sick, to refugees, to who has less.

To whom states that GDP is all about numbers and includes all the activities that produce income, independently of their juridical status, it is possible to answer with an example: if I invite citizens to smoke, I will increase the income of monopolies and multinationals, the revenues of local tobacco shops and overall the national GDP. Still, on the other side, I will create an enormous social harm, by favouring the insurgence of pulmonary problems, respiratory and cardiac sicknesses. The initial benefit is worth the future damage? In a society that can be defined civil, the answer is: no. The smoking ban of minister Sirchia arrived to safeguard the health of everyone, when it has been demonstrated that the social costs were higher than public benefits, and also private ones.

The discussion about the third sector, which will be held in few days within the chamber of deputies, is a good chance for reasoning about the market, virtuous entrepreneurship and the value of volunteering. It must wash away the useless institutional practices to avoid other cases such as “Mafia Capitale”. By incentivizing civil service, by widening the offer to youngsters, the government demonstrates to believe in a formative path that educates to volunteering and to caring about others' needs, in a society in which – according to Istat – 5,6% of families can barely live.

The signal we expect is a push in the practices which, together with employment and the production of income, may fortify social responsibility, favour transparency and the “entrepreneurship for creating the Good”, as Claudio Magris writes on *Lettura*. Social welfare, is read on the *Devoto Oli*, “is a condition of guaranteed prosperity that gives an optimal quality of life and fairly distributes resources”. Drugs and prostitution do not distribute resources. And they do not lead to equity. The king, or better, the GDP is naked. But nobody says it.

Appendix 7. Articles Sample – Full List

C1	Il Corriere	21/01/2016	Al sistema Italia serve un'agenzia per la ricerca
C10	Il Corriere	08/03/2016	Le posizioni di rendita frenano la crescita
C11	Il Corriere	09/03/2016	Cresciamo poco, investiamo meno. La zavorra sui conti pubblici
C12	Il Corriere	16/03/2016	Felicità, l'Italia è cinquantesima. In testa Danimarca e Svezia
C13	Il Corriere	16/03/2016	Cina, il nuovo piano economico "affonda il coltello nella carne viva"
C14	Il Corriere	21/03/2016	La condanna cinese: crescere senza sosta
C15	Il Corriere	01/04/2016	Manovra 2017 ancora espansiva, sale il deficit. A febbraio più disoccupati
C16	Il Corriere	03/04/2016	Il valore economico del bene di tutti
C17	Il Corriere	04/04/2016	Il think tank Bruegel: "Il patto di bilancio UE deve cambiare. Deficit legato a crescita e inflazione
C18	Il Corriere	06/04/2016	Un nuovo modello sostenibile che leghi economia e società
C19	Il Corriere	07/04/2016	La ricchezza? Al sud è la metà del Nord
C2	Il Corriere	12/02/2016	Competitività e concorrenza. Quello che ci manca per crescere
C20	Il Corriere	07/04/2016	Inflazione, bassa crescita e rischio di nuovi shock: la Bce serra i ranghi ma "servono le riforme"
C21	Il Corriere	08/04/2016	La sfida del Def e l'incognita del debito
C22	Il Corriere	09/04/2016	L'eredità di Squinzi alla Confindustria: "L'imprenditore? Deve restare centrale"
C23	Il Corriere	10/04/2016	Valdis Dombrovskis: "Italia, meno debito per crescere di più"
C24	Il Corriere	12/04/2016	L'esperto: "Con questi numeri anche se contieni le spese, il debito rispetto al Pil non può calare"
C25	Il Corriere	12/04/2016	Fmi: Italia cresce meno del previsto. Nel 2016 dell'1% e nel 2017 dell'1,1%
C26	Il Corriere	13/04/2016	Il nodo delle pensioni tra demagogia e decisionismo
C27	Il Corriere	14/04/2016	Lagarde, Fmi: "Europa a rischio con l'uscita di Londra dalla UE"
C28	Il Corriere	15/04/2016	Padoan e le stime diverse sul Pil "Vedremo chi ha ragione, noi o Fmi"
C29	Il Corriere	15/04/2016	La Cina e quella crescita del 6,7% ai minimi dal 2009
C3	Il Corriere	26/02/2016	La UE: "Fuga di cervelli può compromettere la crescita dell'Italia"
C30	Il Corriere	19/04/2016	Economia, lo slancio perduto
C31	Il Corriere	25/04/2016	Renzi firma il patto da 9,5 miliardi di Euro: "La Campania farà crescere l'Italia"
C32	Il Corriere	26/04/2016	Pensioni, arriva la busta arancione. Da oggi calcoli IMPS a domicilio
C33	Il Corriere	27/04/2016	Il declino dei neoliberalisti apre spazi per i populismi
C34	Il Corriere	27/04/2016	La bocciatura di Moody's: Pmi italiane troppo deboli
C35	Il Corriere	30/04/2016	Squinzi: "Per le riforme fatto molto ma il governo è a metà dell'opera"
C4	Il Corriere	29/02/2016	I conti pubblici nella tenaglia di debito e deflazione
C5	Il Corriere	01/03/2016	Il Pil torna a salire. 300mila occupati in più
C6	Il Corriere	04/03/2016	Consumi e investimenti in crescita. Maggiori rialzi da 5 anni
C7	Il Corriere	04/03/2016	Il Pil 2015 spinto dal calendario. Il tesoro ottimista sulla crescita nel 2016
C8	Il Corriere	06/03/2016	La crisi che non c'è (nonostante i pessimisti)
C9	Il Corriere	08/03/2016	Germania, Import e spesa pubblica. Così torna la locomotiva d'Europa
F1	Il Fatto Q.	21/09/2015	Crescita, Ufficio parlamentare bilancio: "Governo troppo ottimista per 2016-18"
F10	Il Fatto Q.	12/02/2016	Crescita, ora per il governo "I decimali contano poco". Ma fino a 2 giorni fa rivendicava +0,8%
F11	Il Fatto Q.	12/02/2016	Grecia, torna la recessione. Pil -0,6%. Agricoltori in piazza ad Atene: scontri con la polizia, 4 arresti
F12	Il Fatto Q.	14/02/2016	Pil, quelli che "Renzi ha portato la crescita all'1%"
F13	Il Fatto Q.	16/02/2016	Petrolio giù, borse a picco? Parola d'ordine: fermarsi
F14	Il Fatto Q.	18/02/2016	Crescita, Ocse: "Pil Italia nel 2016 salirà solo dell'1%". Ma governo punta a +1,6%
F15	Il Fatto Q.	24/02/2016	Università, e se il segreto della crescita fosse la cultura?
F16	Il Fatto Q.	27/02/2016	Crescita, G20: "Rischi da Brexit e crisi migranti" Ma non passano misure di stimolo comuni
F17	Il Fatto Q.	01/03/2016	Pil, Istat rivede al rialzo il dato sul 2015: "+0,8%, Ma resta più basso che nel 2000. Pressione fiscale cala di 0,3"
F18	Il Fatto Q.	01/03/2016	Pil, quelle regole (impossibili) basate sullo zero virgola
F19	Il Fatto Q.	03/03/2016	Pil, il mistero dello 0,1% di crescita in più. Botta e risposta su twitter tra Istat e l'economista Daveri
F2	Il Fatto Q.	04/10/2015	Crescita di che cosa? Neppure lo immaginiamo
F20	Il Fatto Q.	04/03/2016	Pil, Istat dopo le polemiche ammette: "Gioco di arrotondamenti per arrivare allo 0,8%"
F21	Il Fatto Q.	09/03/2016	Crescita, Istat: "Nel primo trimestre 2016 Pil a +0,1%"
F22	Il Fatto Q.	21/03/2016	Crescita, il Pil aumenta poco ma soprattutto male: poco export e consumi fermi, molte scorte di magazzino
F23	Il Fatto Q.	29/03/2016	Lo sviluppo sostenibile aiuta ad essere più felici?
F24	Il Fatto Q.	30/03/2016	Crescita, S&P "Pil Italia a +1,1%" Meglio di Fitch, ma molto meno del governo
F25	Il Fatto Q.	02/04/2016	Pil, tasse, lotta all'evasione e mutui: i "veri numeri" di Renzi e quelli che al premier non piacciono
F26	Il Fatto Q.	02/04/2016	Sviluppo sostenibile: la semplicità volontaria. Consumare di più non significa vivere meglio
F27	Il Fatto Q.	08/04/2016	Def, crescita ridotta all'1,2% e flessibilità anche per il 2017. Renzi: "No manovra" Ma serve aggiustamento
F28	Il Fatto Q.	10/04/2016	Def, il governo ammette: "debito/pil superiore dell'1% rispetto alle previsioni. E per il 2017, stime sbagliate di 3 punti
F29	Il Fatto Q.	22/04/2016	Ue, le proposte di Renzi e Padoan "Crescita e lavoro contro populismi, Eurobond per migranti e investimenti
F3	Il Fatto Q.	01/12/2015	Istat: "Disoccupazione ai minimi. Ma la crescita rallenta: obiettivi sempre più a rischio". Padoan: "colpa degli emergenti"
F30	Il Fatto Q.	26/04/2016	Crescita, OCSE: "Italia riduca gli incentivi a evadere e la corruzione e aumenti la concorrenza"
F31	Il Fatto Q.	30/04/2016	Ricerca e sviluppo, ai governi risponde l'ingegneria italiana
F32	Il Fatto Q.	30/04/2016	Il clima e lo scisma della realtà
F33	Il Fatto Q.	05/10/2016	Crescita, l'Istat precisa: "Nel 2015 tre giorni lavorativi in più. Tenendone conto il Pil sale dello 0,8% e non 0,7%
F34	Il Fatto Q.	06/10/2016	Cop 21: i limiti della crescita nel mondo di "Buridano"
F35	Il Fatto Q.	29/12/2016	Crisi, Vittorio Emanuele: "Ritorno alla crescita? Solo con riforme e taglio tasse"
F4	Il Fatto Q.	02/12/2015	Benessere economico, Istat: "Sale la spesa per i consumi ma continua ad aumentare la disuguaglianza"
F5	Il Fatto Q.	04/01/2016	Governo Renzi, altro che gufi, è la politica del suo esecutivo che rischia di affossarci
F6	Il Fatto Q.	15/01/2016	Crescita, Bankitalia: "Pil su dell'1,5% nel 2016. Disoccupazione sotto 11% nel 2017"
F7	Il Fatto Q.	19/01/2016	Cina, dietro il rallentamento del Pil la metamorfosi del modello economico e la riforma delle aziende Stato
F8	Il Fatto Q.	23/01/2016	Sistema Finanziario, è instabile? No, serve la crescita
F9	Il Fatto Q.	31/01/2016	Spagna, la crescita economica non è solo questione di gambe

R1	Repubblica	08/01/2016	Qui c'è vita oltre il PIL
R10	Repubblica	07/03/2016	Eurogruppo, per l'Italia obiettivi di bilancio a rischio. Fitch taglia le stime sul PIL
R11	Repubblica	09/03/2016	Istat: "Crescita moderata" In ripresa l'occupazione sugli sgravi contributivi
R12	Repubblica	18/03/2016	La denuncia di Confcommercio: "La burocrazia costa 230 miliardi di PIL"
R13	Repubblica	21/03/2016	"Vita facile per le imprese, ecco la ricetta dello sviluppo"
R14	Repubblica	22/03/2016	Emilia, l'occupazione torna a crescere, l'occupazione no
R15	Repubblica	24/03/2016	Il calo del petrolio spaventa le borse prima del lungo ponte
R16	Repubblica	26/03/2016	Gli Usa crescono, ma il calo dei profitti delle imprese preoccupa
R17	Repubblica	26/03/2016	Il boom dell'Irlanda: corre più di tutti, ma per la gente comune il prezzo da pagare è stato troppo alto
R18	Repubblica	06/04/2016	Padoan: "Ripresa più debole, ma le misure per la crescita valgono il 0,2% del PIL"
R19	Repubblica	07/04/2016	Guardate meno al debito, più al PIL
R2	Repubblica	28/01/2016	Consumi in ripresa, ma il nero domina sull'economia italiana: vale 540 miliardi
R20	Repubblica	07/04/2016	Crisi, il PIL del Nord Italia è doppio di quello del Sud
R21	Repubblica	08/04/2016	La bozza del DEF, i punti caldi
R22	Repubblica	08/04/2016	Il CDM approva il DEF: PIL 2016 al +1,2%, il governo punta alla flessibilità anche nel 2017
R23	Repubblica	09/04/2016	Padoan: "Ora basta con l'austerità" Meno tagli al deficit e arriva il Jobs Act 2
R24	Repubblica	11/04/2016	I conti dell'austerità, più debito, meno PIL
R25	Repubblica	11/04/2016	Cautela dell'Upb sui conti italiani: "Rischi sulla crescita"
R26	Repubblica	16/04/2016	Padoan: "Presto interventi su rimborsi a risparmiatori e recupero crediti bancari"
R27	Repubblica	17/04/2016	Quanto avrai di pensione? L'IMPS invia le simulazioni valide solo se l'economia tira
R28	Repubblica	18/04/2016	Bankitalia: "Le stime del Def sono plausibili ma ci sono rischi al ribasso"
R29	Repubblica	19/04/2016	DEF Padoan: "L'economia accelererà, margini per le pensioni"
R3	Repubblica	29/01/2016	La crescita illimitata è economia dello spreco
R30	Repubblica	20/04/2016	"Crescita a rischio" Da Istat a Bankitalia l'ottimismo del governo rimandato agli esami
R31	Repubblica	23/04/2016	Qui, Quo, Qua e la paperopoli dell'inflazione
R32	Repubblica	27/04/2016	Il Tesoro: "Noi i più virtuosi con sacrifici record in Europa. Berlino ha sfiorato 7 volte
R33	Repubblica	27/04/2016	Nove proposte per l'economia
R34	Repubblica	15/06/2016	Finlandia: quarto anno di recessione, si sgretola il dogma del "rigore nordico"
R35	Repubblica	21/06/2016	Con le politiche per il clima, il PIL può crescere dell'1,5%
R4	Repubblica	30/01/2016	Locomotiva USA in frenata. Il PIL cresce solo dello 0,7%. E a Tokyo tassi sotto zero
R5	Repubblica	12/02/2016	Frena la ripresa italiana nel quarto trimestre, per l'intero 2015 l'Istat stima un +0,7%
R6	Repubblica	13/02/2016	PIL
R7	Repubblica	24/02/2016	Fiducia imprese giù e frenata dell'export. La locomotiva tedesca ora corre di meno.
R8	Repubblica	26/02/2016	Commissione UE: debolezza Italia influisce anche sull'Eurozona
R9	Repubblica	01/03/2016	Renzi: "La ripresa in Italia è stabile, ma non basta. Ridurremo ancora le tasse"
S1	Il Sole 24h	15/01/2016	Germania in piena occupazione: crescita del Pil al massimo da 4 anni
S10	Il Sole 24h	03/03/2016	Sprofonda il PIL del Brasile nel 2015. E' il peggior risultato da 25 anni
S11	Il Sole 24h	04/03/2016	In Brasile il pil a -3,8, la peggior crisi dal 1990
S12	Il Sole 24h	04/03/2016	Perché dal 2008 il Pil dell'Italia ha perso il 10%, l'Eurozona è ferma e gli USA son cresciuti del 10%
S13	Il Sole 24h	10/03/2016	La crescita del PIL ferma allo 0,1%
S14	Il Sole 24h	11/03/2016	CSC: produzione industriale -1% a febbraio, Pil sopra 0,1 nel primo trimestre
S15	Il Sole 24h	11/03/2016	Circolo virtuoso tra prestiti e PIL
S16	Il Sole 24h	17/03/2016	Quanto costerebbe ad ogni italiano azzerare il debito pubblico (col "Pil demografico")?
S17	Il Sole 24h	18/03/2016	Confindustria: urgente un piano per reindustrializzare l'Italia. Puntare su manifattura per far ripartire la crescita
S18	Il Sole 24h	21/03/2016	Squinzi: crescita ancora modesta per creare occupazione, governo proceda con riforme
S19	Il Sole 24h	26/03/2016	Eurostat: Italia maglia nera per spesa pubblica in istruzione e cultura
S2	Il Sole 24h	29/01/2016	La Spagna continua a correre: Pil in crescita del 3,2% nel 2015
S20	Il Sole 24h	31/03/2016	Perché i paesi usciti dalla cura Troika crescono più degli altri?
S21	Il Sole 24h	02/04/2016	Nel 2015 crescita dello 0,8% e deficit al 2,6%
S22	Il Sole 24h	02/04/2016	Il lavoro non riparte senza la crescita
S23	Il Sole 24h	04/04/2016	"Con il pacchetto crescita, +0,2% di Pil"
S24	Il Sole 24h	06/04/2016	Banche, Padoan: il sistema va rafforzato ma ha resistito assai bene alla crisi. Ripresa sotto le attese
S25	Il Sole 24h	06/04/2016	Le tre ricette del Fondo monetario per ridare slancio alla crescita
S26	Il Sole 24h	07/04/2016	Istat: arretra la speranza di vita. Pil pro capite del sud metà rispetto al nord
S27	Il Sole 24h	09/04/2016	Nel Def crescita il Pil tagliata all'1,2% nel 2016. Renzi: nessuna manovra correttiva
S28	Il Sole 24h	09/04/2016	Investimenti al 20% del PIL chiave per la crescita
S29	Il Sole 24h	09/04/2016	Squinzi: Def, agganciare la ripresa a tutta velocità
S3	Il Sole 24h	05/02/2016	Renzi vede il premier olandese Rutte: insieme per UE centrata sul lavoro e crescita
S30	Il Sole 24h	11/04/2016	Conti Pubblici nel labirinto del PIL potenziale
S31	Il Sole 24h	12/04/2016	FMI taglia le stime sul PIL italiano e globale: crescita mondiale "deludente"
S32	Il Sole 24h	16/04/2016	La Cina cresce, obiettivo sostenibilità
S33	Il Sole 24h	19/04/2016	Brasile: un'instabilità che complica la ripresa dell'economia
S34	Il Sole 24h	24/04/2016	Se per l'Italia cresce il PIL potenziale
S35	Il Sole 24h	29/04/2016	Brusca Frenata del Pil Americano: solo +0,5% nel primo trimestre
S4	Il Sole 24h	07/02/2016	Sulla crescita serve un balzo, non bastano i decimali
S5	Il Sole 24h	13/02/2016	L'ipoteca della bassa crescita
S6	Il Sole 24h	18/02/2016	Perché l'Ocse ha tagliato le stime di crescita per l'Italia
S7	Il Sole 24h	23/02/2016	Se l'Europa delle regole dimentica la crescita
S8	Il Sole 24h	29/02/2016	Crescita record in Svezia nel 2015 (+4,1%), anche grazie ai rifugiati
S9	Il Sole 24h	01/03/2016	Far crescere il PIL per non spegnere la fiammata occupazionale