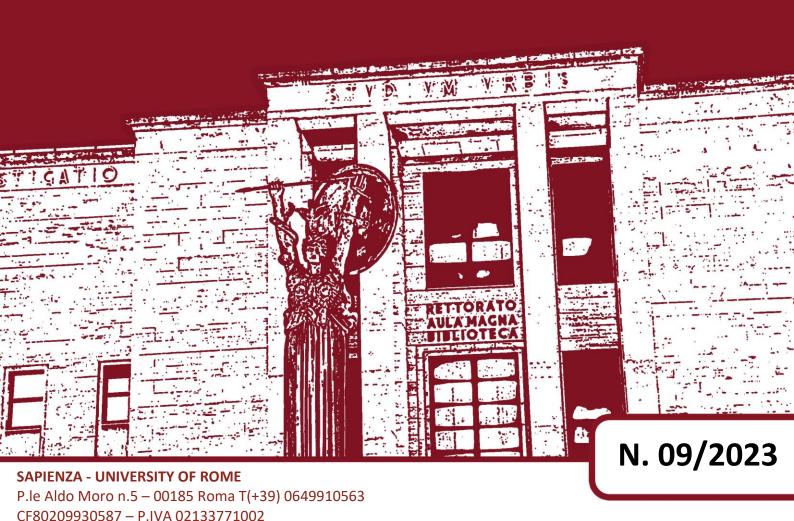## WORKING PAPERS SERIES
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Migrants and local development in the Italian Inner Areas: opportunities and critical issues

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Abstract

As a result of the management of the health emergency linked to the spread of the Coronavirus, the debate on the Inner Areas has been enriched with new insights: there is a renewed interest in these territories both in the world of academic research and in public debate. The pandemic phenomenon has led to the emergence of alternative paths to the logic of agglomeration and has led some scholars to theorize that in the future it will be possible a return to the small villages. In this regard, it's worth highlighting that today many administrations of small villages - thanks to the spread of certain processes also facilitated by the pandemic - want to offer services in a new way, different from the city model, through innovative practices. In addition, in recent years a further line of reflection has developed on the relationship between possible rebirths of inner areas and migrations. It is an interesting and at times controversial line of research that attempts to understand the delicate interaction between small places, that were marginalised for too long compared to the great global processes, and immigration. Through various documentary sources, the research aims to provide new insights into the Italian inner areas and the identification of possible case studies. This paper aims to better understand the phenomena related to small villages and their potential for growth.

1. Introduction

As a result of the management of the health emergency linked to the spread of the Coronavirus, the debate on the Inner Areas has been enriched with new insights: there is a renewed interest in these territories both in the world of academic research and in public debate. The main indicators that help us to identify a territory as an inner area concern: significant distance from the main essential service centres (education, health and mobility); becoming depopulated, youth emigration and unemployment; numerous environmental resources - water resources, agricultural systems, forests, natural and human landscapes - and cultural resources, such as archaeological assets, historic settlements, abbeys, small museums (Lucatelli, 2014).

The pandemic phenomenon has led to the emergence of alternative paths to the logic of agglomeration and has led some scholars to theorize that in the future it will be possible a return to the small villages: a revolutionary thought which would go against the trend of the Global Cities Index estimates dating back to 2016. According to Global Cities Index in 2050 two-thirds of the world's population will live in large urban areas (Ritchie & Roser). The new focus on these places is strongly linked to the expectations inherent in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, a possible great opportunity to close

the structural gaps in our Country. In addition, in recent years a further line of reflection has developed on the relationship between possible rebirths of inner areas and migrations. It is an interesting and at times controversial line of research that attempts to understand the delicate interaction between small places, long marginal compared to the great global processes, and immigration. The proposed article is the first part of a research work that intends to deepen the relationship between refugees and local development in marginal territorial contexts.

The article is organised as follows: the second section presents the theoretical framework guiding this study, based on a brief overview of the main sociological, historical, geographic, and anthropological contributions to the study of inner areas. The third section details the selected case study - migrants and local development in the small villages of Italy, paying particular attention to the case of small Calabrian municipalities - and briefly discuss the methodology followed to structure the research. The last section will be devoted to the main conclusions of the research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Inner areas: the interpretive challenges of Italian sociology

For several years now in the social sciences the idea has been rooted that in the condition of marginality there are assumptions for innovative action. The first social scientist to use the concept of "margin" was Robert Park who introduced the term "marginal man" (1928) from studies on marginal types by Georg Simmel. The German sociologist in his writing *Excursus on the stranger* (1908) identified the relationship of the stranger to the group as a "unique synthesis of opposites: nearness and remoteness. The stranger is near insofar as the stranger and the group share general qualities like race or gender. But the stranger is remote because those general qualities are impersonal and indistinct, and are shared with so many others". As a result, "the stranger is seen not as an individual, but, rather, as a type of person whose particular characteristics make him fundamentally different from the group" (Edles and Appelrouth, 2010). According to Simmel "the stranger is an element of the group itself and element whose membership within the group involves being both outside it and confronting it" (1908). Because the stranger is part of the group, and yet exists outside of the group, she is confronted by and herself confronts the group. According to the sociologist, this outsider status may actually transform the stranger into an "indispensable element of the group" (Edles & Appelrouth 2010). Indeed the stranger is characterized by mobility, which affords the stranger the unique ability to have an objective attitude regarding conflict within the group (*ibidem*).

Park, resuming Simmel's studies, introduced the term marginal man: "a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct people (…) He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies which never completely interpenetrated and fused" (1928).

From the 1980s the characteristics attributed to social marginality have also been explored in the dimension of territorial marginality thanks to the contribution of rural sociology and the sociology of the territory. Scholars of these disciplines have carried out several research aimed at investigating the

processes of innovation at the margins and their ability to anticipate and guide social change in a new direction (Osti, 2008). The topic of territorial disparities is a subject of highly interdisciplinary study. Indeed this theme involving sociologists, economists, anthropologists, urban planners, engineers and so on. Here, particular emphasis will be placed on the support that the social sciences can provide to the study concerning the conditions of the inner areas in Italy.

In our country the most interesting contributions that start from a sociological assumption to contextualize and analyze the potential and limits of inner areas are found in the studies of Giovanni Carrosio and Giorgio Osti. The two sociologists, in a four-handed contribution within the book *Fondamenti di sociologia economica* (Barbera & Pais, 2017), identify a useful category with which to read territorial inequalities: the "marginality". The marginality draws attention to the condition of socio-economic disadvantage of those territories that during the process of industrial development have become interstitial with respect to the main poles in which wealth and population have concentrated. This topic is particularly relevant in Italy where the arrangement of internal differences is varied and heterogeneous. Moreover is not possible to formulate a universal definition of marginality and not even a unique methodology to identify areas that may fall into this category. The selection of variables will therefore depend on the theoretical framework adopted. In fact although these territories sharing a significant demographic decline, this indicator is not enough to explaining the specificities. To this indicator it must be added the low population density and the high proportion of elderly people; the difficulty in maintaining services on the territory; the low capacity to attract new inhabitants; the presence of lower per capita incomes and the weakness of the business fabric. Combined, these elements create a spiral of marginality (Osti, 2017).

According to Carrosio and Osti, before intervening with public policies built ad hoc to reverse demographic trends, it is useful that social scientists and policy makers start from the base of the problem and ask the right questions: Why do territorial disparities exist? What are the reasons that in the history of development some areas progress at the expense of others? How is the phenomenon of territorial marginality born? What variables are there to use to identify inner areas? How is it possible to get out of the vicious circle of marginality and put the change back in motion in these areas? (Carrosio, 2017). According to these authors there are four interpretative models to which the social sciences can refer to explain territorial marginality: *theory of modernization, dependency theory, endogenous growth theory, social network analysis.*

The *theory of modernization* was born with Talcott Parsons (1971) and his *evolutionary universals* typical of modern society: a benchmark to analyze the different local societies and explain their degrees of development on a scale that tends precisely to modernization. In this case, marginality is a delay with respect to evolution, and its cause is linked to the persistence or form of certain social aggregations - such as the family or local communities - considered obstacles to development. Inners areas would therefore be characterized by a traditional model of society, where the coexistence of cultural and structural elements hinder the natural process of development towards which local societies must tend.

The *dependency theory* contests the Parsonian assumptions, referring the cause of marginality not to the cultural factor but to the economic one and to the relational dynamics between centers and peripheries. Marginality is not the

starting point of a natural evolutionary process but the outcome of a historical process that has acted negatively on the economic and productive structures of peripheral areas. Inner areas have been deprived of natural resources and labour force during industrialization, ending up in a relationship of dependency vis-à-vis the urban areas through the unequal exchange mechanism: central areas have capital, technology and commercial ability, while peripheral areas only have low value-added products. The exchange mechanism induces the dynamics of marginalization and fosters labour migration from the periphery to the centre. In addition to economic dynamics there is also cultural dependence: inner areas absorb the values and knowledges of the urban centres. According to the logic of this approach, the solution to the marginality of peripheral areas is self-determination.

The interpretative models of modernization and dependence have been used on different territorial scales to explain the relationship between developed and developing countries, as well as the relationship between North and South, not only in the Italian context but also in other countries. Thanks to the contribution of spatial analysis, the two approaches were also analysed in the study of the relationship between city and countryside: The school of Marxist geographers has produced many analyses on the relationship between metropolitan and peripheral economies since Slater's studies (1975). Instead modernization approaches have brought to light aspects related to rural culture and extended rural family, investigating the differences between areas based on the principle of functional differentiation.

However, these theories not always are effectively able to interpret the reality. North-south, development-underdevelopment, centre- periphery, city-country, modernity-tradition are not sufficient oppositions to explain territorial inequalities. In this context the endogenous growth theory was born. This approach explains marginality starting from non-generalizable factors of every single territorial context. In Italy, the emergence of a third model interposes itself in the classic distinction between North and South to break the heuristic capacity of dichotomous models. Bagnasco (1977) defines this model as "Third Italy", a sort of macro-region characterized by productive specialization and diffusion of small businesses, In which a multiplicity of social and professional figures coexist and where there is a hybridization between urban and rural involving lifestyles, production methods and the relationship with the environment. These studies find the solution to the marginality in the investment in the local expertise and the endogenous resources of the territory: diffuse knowledge, the quality and the nature of the local institutions, and the presence of localized social capital. According to these theories, territorial marginality manifests itself when an area cannot create value from local resources, be it they cognitive, social or material. This inability can result from weak institutions or from the low endowment of social and civic capital, which hinders collective action according to schemes of mutual cooperation and the production of public goods (Barbera, 2001).

The last interpretative model taken into consideration by Carrosio and Osti is the *Social network analysis*. This study interprets marginality as the inability to establish stable and loyal internal and external relations. They identify the explanation of territorial disparities in weak relational dynamics dominated by opportunism. There are two meanings of networks in the study of territorial dynamics, one positive and one metaphorical. The positive one represents the physical and infrastructural elements that determine the structuring of the

geographical and economic space, organized according to the interconnections between places. The second concept represents the relationships between the actors. Dematteis (2003) distinguishes a two-tier network: the global one, in which the networks connect with each other in different territories and regardless of the mutual distance; the local one, in which space means proximity and presupposes interactions between actors in the presence of a given set of resources and a specific local environment: the local, territorial system (SLoT). In the SLoT the interactions between the subjects that compose it are self-contained in a specific territorial scope (Dematteis, 2000). Self-contained systems are characterized by dense social networks, which do not allow interchanges and connections with supra-local networks. The existence of an isolated local level can lead to self-sufficiency - in which the territory reaches a capacity for self-organization such that it does not require interference with the outside - or to marginality, where self-organization unintended leads to decay of the local system. The social networks theory responds to marginality with intermediation, that is, a simultaneous membership of the global and local networks.

In recent years, some scholars have privileged mapping inner areas by identifying some indicators to build margins at the municipal level (Carrosio & Osti, 2017).

During the Monti government (2011-13), a national development policy dedicated to the country's inner areas came into being: the National Strategy for Internal Areas (SNAI), part of the European Cohesion Policies 2014-2020, and about to continue with a new round of interventions, through the European Structural Funds of the 2021-2027 programming. The project - proposed in 2012 by the then Minister for Territorial Cohesion Fabrizio Barca - aims to release the unexpressed potential of internal areas, reduce territorial inequalities and, above all, reverse the negative demographic trend in place. The SNAI derives from an analytical work that includes a theoretical interpretation of marginality and a survey of the phenomenon starting from classifying Italian municipalities. The SNAI refers both to the neo-institutionalist vision that can be traced back to the endogenous growth theory - thus proposing a place-based development strategy - and to the dependency theories, bringing the cause of the marginality of the Inner Areas to the unequal relationship with the urban ones.

2.2 Historical and geographical studies and the first research on the depopulation of inner areas of Italy

What historical, social and economic processes led to the abandonment of inner areas in favour of metropolitan areas? In Italy during the second post-war period, the acceleration of the process of production of consumer goods on a scale mobilizes human, technical and financial resources from the countryside and small Apennine and Southern Italy towards the industrial triangle (Turin, Genoa, Milan). The metropolitan model is, therefore, constituted like a "Factory City" that isolates the hill, the mountain and the south and makes the historical urban network peripheral, relegating it to tourist and museum roles. The territory is deconstructed, and the open spaces are dismembered in the following ways (Dematteis, 1993):

- Creation of large factories, large dormitory districts that destroy and homogenize the rich and multiple territorial cultures, small villages and rural fabrics;

- The plain spaces suitable for mechanization have been razed. Rural landscapes become mechanical-chemical deserts for industrialized agriculture;
- Coastal areas;
- The hill and mountain landscape are abandoned to social and environmental degradation.

The National Institute of Agricultural Economics (INEA) researched the first synthesis on rural abandonment in collaboration with the CNR. The first surveys on the depopulation of Italian mountain areas date back to the first post-war period. With the birth of the National Geographic Committee (1922), the phenomenon aroused the interest of Italian geographers, who wanted to outline some possible solutions. The project began in 1930 and continued until 1938, ensuring the realization of an exhaustive mapping of the problems that afflicted - specifically - the Alps and the Apennines (Perrone, 2019). The research carried out by geographers has the merit of having highlighted a problem which did not concern only Italy but which had also been studied at the European level, in particular in the studies carried out by French and German-speaking geographers (Austria and Germany). It is also interesting to note that the intuitions of intellectuals on the causes of the phenomenon under investigation do not differ much from the possible solutions still hypothesized today: to repair the lack of health service, reopen schools closed for lack of a minimum legal number of pupils (Giusti, Toniolo, 1938). Although the National Committee for Geography survey work became obsolete over the years, their analyses and emerging solutions may still be helpful today (Perrone, 2019).

Between 1948 and 1973, Italy experienced an exceptional economic development that nevertheless contributed to accentuating the fragility and imbalances (Biasillo, 2019). Italy seemed so polarized: on the one hand, the big cities, especially those of the North, were animated by jobs, services, and infrastructure; on the other, the South and rural areas were subject to depopulation, isolation, lack of essential services, Economic and social marginality (Dematteis, 1995) Just as territorial marginalization reached its maximum expansion and Italy was preparing to become a vast satellite area of a few urban centres, in the early seventies the country was affected by two critical processes capable of laying the foundations for a possible change of direction: the slowdown in the population growth of large cities in favour of small surrounding centres, and the interruption of the exodus from the mountain regions. These phenomena were the combination of several factors: the decreased attractiveness and absorption capacity of large cities and areas of emigration after the war, the return of a part of the emigrants, the effects of the equalizing policies implemented in the previous twenty years, an incipient economic dynamism distributed first in the Alps, then in the northern Apennines and finally in the southern Apennines (Pazzagli, 2015). In addition, many foreigners, among the most affected by the economic crisis of the early 2000s, who did not return to their countries of origin settled in rural areas and small mountain towns, benefiting from lower living and housing costs and job opportunities (Corrado, 2018). From this moment onwards, a more mature phase will begin. The inner areas will gradually stop being interpreted as places of impoverishment and abandonment to become development areas within the framework of general national programming aimed at reducing imbalances. (De Rossi, 2018).

2.3 The rhetoric of "piccoloborghismo" in the narration about the inner areas

In a varied Italy in which resistant suburbs emerge, a strong affinity with sociological analyses can be found in the studies coming from Italian cultural anthropology, which since the eighties of the last century "changed the way it was approached the more classical themes of his repertoire (local traditions, festivals, popular cultures) in a changing way" (De Rossi, 2018). At the heart of anthropological studies on the marginal territories were no longer the processes of disappearance but those of resistance and revitalization. Alessandra Broccolini focuses on the need for an anthropological look within the debate on inner areas: "It seems that all the others (architects, urban planners, geographers, sociologists, economists) see as an obstacle that the resistance of many marginal territories is reinforced by great calendar rituals, religious events, local beliefs. On the contrary, anthropologists find the suburbs more animated by festivals than by innovative companies based on biodiversity. They recognize in these practices forms of resistance to individualism, collective expressions of democratic participation" (2021). About the anthropological interpretation of the inner areas has an intense relevance the contribution of Vito Teti - author of essays now considered a cult, including the most famous, *Il senso dei luoghi* (2004) - on the re-appropriation of abandoned places, on returns, on the *restanza*, with particular attention by the anthropologist towards the small towns of Calabria. At the beginning of this century, in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, we are witnessing a global phenomenon of the return to the countryside. Rural areas have a priceless but very vulnerable value that has to be defended from certain forms of tourism. (Saladini, 2016). What in the past was considered a form of backwardness of peasant societies today becomes a theme, on the one hand, by the strong identity, on the other, functional to some precise lines of marketing of the territories (Bindi, 2021).

In Italy, the policies of territorial regeneration in less populated and fragile areas are often addressed through the rhetoric of "piccolo-borghismo". This narrative has become mainstream in recent media communication. According to this thought, the regeneration of small historical municipalities transforms them into 'places of memory' and new possible places of life and work. This narrative responds to the urban desire for spaces to escape from the chaotic metropolitan life and the recovery of a housing dimension associated with a higher quality of life (*Ibidem*).

"Burghs" thus becomes an ennobling term that alludes to the communicative and economic game of territorial marketing, according to which everything becomes a representation of the past. This vision risks conveying the erroneous idea that the settlements and the people who live there are single and compact bodies while, on the contrary, they are complex systems. The design developed within the framework of the *National Strategy for Inner Areas* and the new perspectives opened by *National Recovery and Resilience Plan* - a possible great opportunity to fill the gaps in our Country – show, however, how to regenerate the conditions of habitability and repopulation there is a need to rethink mobility, digital connectivity, the presence and restoration of key neighbourhood services (health, education, public administration). Without careful planning of territorial development, the continuity of this momentary return to small villages is likely cease (Bindi, 2019).

3. Case presentation, research questions and method

3.1 Migrants and local development in the small villages of Italy

In recent years a further line of reflection has developed on the relationship between possible rebirths of inner areas and migrations. It is an interesting and at times controversial line of research that attempts to understand the delicate interaction between small places, that were marginalised for too long compared to the great global processes, and immigration. (Bindi, 2021).

According to Osti and Ventura (2012), immigration of foreigners in Italy is not an urban phenomenon but is evenly distributed between city and country. The first local authorities that have chosen to be part of the Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Programme (SPRAR[1]), have been the medium-large centers, as already attractive poles for possible new inhabitants. Small municipalities, which rarely have a continuous flow of people, have begun to adhere more quietly and gradually to projects of this type (Di Capua, 2018). The territorial morphology takes on particular importance: Could the inclusion of asylum seekers in small municipalities halt depopulation? (De Gregorio & Giacomelli, 2022).

In daily experience, some small Italian municipalities have shown to be able to manage reception and integration policies, through a project based on the possibility of developing the territory with a wealth of people and investments. Not a project with a beginning and an end but a medium and long-term tool, connected to the specificities of the context (Di Capua, 2018).

Central to the link between migration and territorial development is the role played by third-sector actors - mostly social enterprises and cooperatives, but also religious bodies - promoters of bottom-up initiatives, which often act as substitutes for a missing national policy (D'Agostino, 2017).

3.2 Method

This paper aims to deepen the relationship between refugees and local development in marginal territorial contexts, paying particular attention to the case of small Calabrian municipalities. Specifically, the aim is to investigate the reasons that led to the break of the established trajectories (*path-breaking*), thus interrupting the historical spiral of decline and marginalization (*path-dependency*) and defining new paths of development (*path-shaping*).

The following research questions guided the survey:

- There is a rhetoric, fuelled in particular by the mass media, around the saving power of the small villages facing the dynamics of immigration. What impact can foreign immigration have in places marked by a history of emigration, often seen as areas of escape, poor areas, destined to remain so? Can migrants contribute to the economic growth of these territories?

- Third-sector entities play an increasingly important role in local decision-making processes where territorial fragility and migration intersect. Have the practices promoted by these actors been concretely transformed into new resources and entrepreneurship that improve the living conditions of both indigenous and immigrant communities in a two-way perspective?

We used different documentary sources to answer the questions (monographs, scientific articles, local press articles, laws and other official documents).

[1] In 2018, SIPROIMI replaced SPRAR. Subsequently, the reception system provided by D.L. 130/2020, established the SAI, Reception and integration System.

Finally, we focused on some case studies potentially relevant. These are five small Calabrian municipalities considered by the mass media the best practices of reception and integration of immigrants in the community.

3.3 Third- sector organisations at the local level: change agents or State replacement?

Immigration policies are constantly changing. In Italy, the first legislation on the subject is Law 30 July 2002, n. 189, better known as the Bossi-Fini law. Despite this law having a security and emergency approach to the migration phenomenon, it recognized the value of the National Asylum Plan. An experience was born from the bottom as a form of reception to accommodate migrants from Eastern Europe, especially those fleeing the conflict in Kosovo. The SPRAR system was thus established (De Gregorio & Giacomelli, 2022). In 2015, Decree No 142/2015 entered into force, implementing the European Directive on reception conditions (n.2013/33/EU). The SPRAR[2] network system became the primary reception system in Italy. This Decree is particularly relevant because provides for a distribution of expertise between the various levels of governance. This turn has led to an increased involvement of municipalities in SPRAR projects, consistent with both the needs for vertical subsidiarity and with those horizontal subsidiarity (Mas Giralt & Sarlo, 2017). These last promote citizens' initiatives - and the forms of associations they create - implementing activities of general interest (Esposto & Ficcadenti, 2019).

Thus, the local contexts become central places also within the migration issue, and each administration plays a leading role in managing the reception of migrants, positive or negative (Zincone & Di Gregorio, 2002). Within this context, third-sector entities have acquired an increasingly important role in local decision-making processes, with the entry into the decision-making processes of numerous stakeholders in the management of social policies (Esposto & Ficcadenti, 2019).

With the most recent retrenchment of the national government regarding both immigrant policy and social services in general, third-sector actors - social associations and cooperatives, Catholic organizations, philanthropic foundations - have become valuable providers of social services to immigrants by integrating, or - in some cases - replacing, local authorities (Ambrosini, 2005). These actors associated in different network configurations, local and national - provide both "specific services for migrants" (legal assistance, guidance services, housing procedures or job application) and other services such as language courses or cultural mediation.

The territorial diffusion of immigrants and the intensifying landings of asylum seekers, especially in the South, have further triggered local 'organised solidarity' initiatives, in which 'short-range' community networks interact with 'long-range' solidarity networks such as Caritas and Médecins sans Frontières, generating answers to the social needs of immigrants, in different forms and with different degrees of institutionalisation (Mas Giralt & Sarlo, 2017). As stressed by Barberis (2010) a micro-regulation model, without a central state

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[2] Subsequently, DL 113/2018, also known as the "security decree", limited the SPRAR system to holders of international protection and unaccompanied foreign minors (https///www.openpolis.it/). With the economic cuts to the reception system, the services offered to asylum seekers have been limited, returning to the logic of the provision of basic necessities, such as food and accommodation (De Gregorio & Giacomelli, 2022).

paradigm and largely based on residualism and local networks has thus taken shape in Italy.

3.4 The Local Dimension of Migration Policymaking: Between practices of reception and emergency solutions

The considerable literature on asylum seekers and refugees from countries torn apart by civil wars shows how they prefer big cities when they are free to choose where to resettle in Europe. Indeed, urban agglomerations represent, for migrants, places where they can build a dignified lifestyle but also where they can find communities of migrants from the same country, able to help them in their search for housing and employment (Bevilacqua & Bertaux, 2022).

The increasing inflows of asylum seekers on the one hand, and the lack of integration of refugees in large cities on the other, have prompted European governments to direct flows towards medium-sized and small cities. According to Bevilacqua and Bertaux (2010), this can be a great opportunity, as small villages would represent the best places for resettlement, as they are more prone to dynamics of cooperation and solidarity than large urban centres. However, integrating newcomers must be understood as a two-way process involving both immigrants and civil society.

According to Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016), the basic definition of integration encompasses three analytically distinct dimensions in which people can (or cannot) become an accepted part of society: (i) legal-political, (ii) socio-economic, and (iii) cultural-religious. These dimensions correspond to the three main factors that interact with immigration and integration processes: the state, the market and the nation. The question, then, is not only how immigrants behave, with whom they interact and how they identify themselves, but also whether they are accepted and how they get positioned in each of those three dimensions.

In the context of contemporary crises and potentially increasing flows of migrants, creating new reception facilities in cities and small villages can provoke feelings of hostility and racial opposition to immigrants, who often find themselves in tragic housing situations. In this regard, the uprising that broke out in Rosarno contributed to bringing the inhuman conditions of informal settlements to international attention: in 2010, in the municipality of the metropolitan city of Reggio Calabria, migrants employed in agriculture - most of them with regular residence permits - rebelled against a situation of exploitation, violence and racism by the natives (D'Agostino, 2017).

In Italy, as in other European countries, the recent refugee reception crisis, starting especially with the Arab Springs, has shown the structural weaknesses of urban policies which aim at integrating migrants into host societies. Some of the symptoms of this failure are, for example, the confinement of migrants in camps, leading them to phenomena of increasing marginalisation (Bevilacqua & Bertaux, 2022; Ambrosini, 2023).. According to Bygnes (2020), the initial hostilities of natives are directed at reception centres, and this hostility tends to diminish as asylum seekers become part of local relations, i.e. in the transition from governmental First Reception Centres (CPA) and Reception Center for Exceptional Cases (CAS), to the Reception and Integration System (SAI, former SPRAR/SIPROIMI).

The establishment of the CAS was conceived as an emergency solution in the case of exhaustion of available places in the first and second reception systems.

However, research by Openpolis reports that in the period between 2014-2021, the ordinary system has always been in the minority, to the advantage of the CAS, which has become by far the majority over the years. Therefore, the second reception, although oriented towards greater integration and inclusion of people in the social fabric, continues to be largely underutilised, and therefore undersized with respect to needs.

This fact can be observed empirically through research by Bevilacqua and Bertaux (2019) on the attitudes of the local population towards migrants in two small villages in Molise with less than 1,000 inhabitants: Pescopennataro and Roccamandolfi.

The experience of Pescopennataro proved to be very positive: the mountain municipality hosted three migrant families in 2017 at the request of the mayor. The very small size of the village and the constant presence of migrants in the community facilitated a spontaneous process of getting to know each other. A few weeks after the migrants' resettlement, the SPRAR Cooperative (now SAI) promoted integration activities, such as projects based on the migrants' skills and competencies, taking into account the resources available locally (structural, professional and economic).

The second experience, on the other hand, highlighted the problems linked to a strictly emergency type of intervention; in Roccamandolfi, a mountain village of 900 inhabitants, the CAS deals with the reception of refugees. The centre is about four kilometres away from the central square, so the migrants live in total isolation, and the villagers feel they have no opportunity to get to know them better.

In questioning the causes that may explain the process tightening of national and international asylum policies, it is important to highlight how the strengthening of economic structures based on the automation of production, the segregation of the labour force, and the financialisation of capital, has led to a high degree of competition and social polarisation, in which certain groups of people, such as refugees, are considered as no longer being integrated into the social fabric (D'Agostino, 2010).

In conclusion, despite the good example of innovative reception practices implemented by some small villages committed to re-qualifying refugees as a resource and elaborating new forms of democratic coexistence - such as the example of the municipality of Pescopennataro - one cannot hide the difficulties of the current phase. Phase in which the dynamics of bureaucratization of the SAI are advancing, weakening the political motivations originally underlying this system.

To govern the refugee reception crisis with standardised assistance practices that continue to place displaced populations within a victim and emergency order is to leave refugees without any prospect of social and economic integration

3.5 Refugee governance in Calabrian small villages
Since the '90s, the position of the Italian Mezzogiorno in the migratory scenario has changed radically. From a region historically characterized by emigrations dynamics South of Italy becomes a destination for increasing immigration. A pull factor that explains this phenomenon is the geographical position of the South and the permeability of its borders, which make it a privileged entry for incoming flows (Pugliese, 1996). In the southern context, Calabria is an emblematic case for some peculiar and contradictory features.

An emergency event (with the condition of structural marginality) stimulated some small Calabrian municipalities to create a planning oriented to combine humanitarian hospitality and local development. An ideal model in which the immigrant becomes a device for activating new projects in which micro-inclusion practices intertwine with processes of social innovation and local development (Sarlo, 2015).

In Calabria, in 1997, a boat carrying about eight hundred Kurdish refugees ran aground on the Ionian coast of Badolato. The refugees were welcomed by the local population and settled in the oldest part of the country, decimated by emigration and then with different housing facilities available. The refugees became a resource to revitalize a depopulated territory. A new discourse became aware in Calabria, highlighting the positive aspects in actively involving refugees in community development (D'Agostino, 2017).

The following year, two hundred twenty refugees Kurdishin landed in Riace (another Calabrian country affected by a progressive depopulation). On that occasion, the promoters of the association *Città Futura* worked to obtain the allocation of the houses left empty by the emigrants and invent a new model of hospitality. Thus was born the Riace Village, a network for widespread hospitality. In the following years, *Città Futura* transformed the reception of migrants into an opportunity for them and the local youth to work, promoting the establishment of several cooperatives. Moreover, the adhesion of the municipality to the SPRAR project has contributed to keeping the business alive (*Ibidem*).

A new model of local micro-reception was born, which promotes the active role of refugees and the local community and contributes to the survival of a marginal reality (Sarlo, 2015).

However, in 2016, after an inspection of the Reggio Calabria prefecture, the Ministry of the Interior blocked the disbursement of funds, no longer recognizing bonuses and job grants to the Municipality. Moreover, in 2018, the mayor of Riace, Domenico Lucano, was subject to judicial investigations on charges of aiding and abetting "illegal immigration" and alleged irregularities. It was therefore decreed the transfer of the host refugees elsewhere and the end of an experience of integration considered a virtuous model throughout the world (*Ibidem*).

In any case, in Calabria, the widespread reception interventions focused on the repopulation of the most marginal areas, starting from the experience of Badolato and Riace, continue to urge the construction of new hospitality experiences. In addition, these experiences have inspired Regional Law No. 18 of 12 June 2009, which promotes the integrated regional system of reception and supports actions aimed at the socio-occupational integration of refugees, asylum seekers and holders of a subsidiary or humanitarian protection measures (https://www.council regionale.calabria.it). On the other hand, the low propensity of regional and local institutional actors to plan social policies organically by mobilizing the various actors of the territory has determined an institutional vacuum. This lack is increasingly being filled by supplementary action by third-sector associations. But despite the action that these actors carry out, there remain problems of lack of coordination, fragmentation of initiatives and long-term sustainability of the projects. The local authorities, together with the networks supporting horizontal governance, seem to trace the roads of policy already practised in the 80s and 90s by the cities of the

North, giving priority to individual areas of integration and inclusion policies, often linked to emergencies (Sarlo, 2015).

Therefore, social enterprises and cooperatives that associate the reception of refugees with activities based on alternative values may serve to build innovative systems of host communities. However, these processes can have long-term sustainability only under certain conditions: collective participation, educational paths and cultural growth, generational turnover and leadership, construction of practices of solidarity and social recognition of migrants, development and reproduction of diverse networks, use of material and intangible resources (Corrado & D'Agostino, 2019).

This theme becomes particularly relevant in the times we are living in: the Covid pandemic -19 has not led to greater solidarity with people who have had to leave their homes and their countries that, in addition to being on the run, are confronted with a radical worsening of their chances of life, as subjected to collective practices of rejection (D'Agostino, 2022).

3.6 SAI projects in small Calabrian villages

To identify the case studies protagonists of this work, we consulted the list of Calabrian municipalities that have at least one ordinary territorial project active in the SAI network. The research led to 109 projects. Subsequently, we proceeded with further skimming, extracting from the list only the municipalities falling into rural areas according to the "Inner Areas Strategy" 2014-2020 classification.

Finally, using the Google search engine, we isolated municipalities identified by the local or national press as villages saved from abandonment thanks to the arrival of migrants. The data considered concern the last decade: from 1 January 2013 to 1 January 2023. In the search engine, the terms "country" and "migrants" have been added to the name of each municipality. Five Calabrian villages have responded to these criteria:

Municipality	Newspaper	Title	Year
Acquaformosa (CS)	La7 Attualità	*Acquaformosa: Il paese salvato dai migranti.*	2017
Satriano (CZ)	cartadiroma.org	*Satriano, il paese che rinasce grazie ai rifugiati.*	2015
Badolato (CZ)	repubblica.it	*Badolato, il borgo calabrese salvato dai migranti.*	2021
Camini (RC)	lastampa.it	*Camini: Così i migranti hanno salvato il borgo destinato a scomparire.*	2016
Sant'Alessio D'Aspromonte (RC)	reggio.gazzettadelsud.it	*Sant'Alessio D'Aspromonte. Il paese si ripopola grazie ai migranti.*	2017

TABLE 1. *Synthesis of the five municipalities identified by the local or national press as villages saved from abandonment thanks to the arrival of migrants.*
Source: Graphic by the author

The survey has led to pioneering projects that have acquired a historical character, consolidated experiences over time, and more recent experiments. It would be interesting to understand if, years later, these small villages have been

reborn thanks to the presence of migrants, as supported by the mass media and, if so, through which paths of development and integration.

It would also be interesting to understand the relationship - and possible cooperation - between public and private actors operating in these territories, especially in the light of the fact that the SAI projects currently active in the five villages under investigation are managed by third-sector bodies - social cooperatives, non-profit organizations and cultural associations - as shown in the table below.

Municipality	Sai managing body	Project
Acquaformosa (CS)	Associazione Don Vincenzo Metrangolo	Acquaformosa che accoglie
Satriano (CZ)	Fondazione Città Solidale Onlus	Centro di Accoglienza Palazzo Condò
Badolato (CZ)	Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati	Integrando
Camini (RC)	Eurocoop Servizi	Jungi Mundu
Sant'Alessio in Aspromonte (RC)	Coopisa	SAI

TABLE 2. *Synthesis of the SAI projects currently active in the five villages under investigation.*
Source: Graphic by the author

It would be interesting to continue this research by creating indicators that can assess the impact, sustainability, and possible replicability of these projects.

The quantitative research method will need to be accompanied by qualitative research techniques: the use of fieldwork and semi-interviews structured to privileged witnesses corresponding to local actors fundamental in the cognitive process of each experience taken into account.

Conclusions

This work aimed to deepen the link between the dimension of territorial fragility in small Italian villages and the phenomenon of immigration. Faced with the growth of projects of inclusion and integration of migrants in non-metropolitan contexts, small municipalities and rural and mountain areas - many of which are affected by a progressive depopulation - seem to present themselves almost naturally as places of welcome and integration (Balbo, 2015). In this sense, peripheral territories become invaluable laboratories because they escape from the emergency logic and require a reflection on the launch of shared and stable social innovation projects capable of generating employment.

On the other hand, according to recent socio-anthropological studies, it is

necessary to get out of the rhetoric around the saving power of these territories with regard to the dynamics of immigration. Indeed these places need policies for housing and work placement capable of conveying a less controversial and conflicting acceptance of the entry of a population of foreign origin in small villages and rural areas (Bindi, 2021).

The municipalities of the inner and rural areas are places that produce enormous conflicts, and many doubts grow about the sustainability and innovation capacity of the proposed experiments. Some cooperatives and associations operating in these places tend to give a romantic interpretation of their participation, while refugees - in the absence of support from trans-local and transregional networks - risk remaining only spectators of social action.. For example, small villages can be difficult to reach without adequate mobility infrastructure or own transportation. If the beneficiaries of the projects cannot move, the paths of autonomy and favoured dynamics of dependence on operators and isolation are compromised.

Therefore, asylum policies within the places affected by a progressive depopulation must look at the needs both of inhabitants and newcomers.

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