



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

ISSN 2385-2755
DiSSE Working papers
[online]

WORKING PAPERS SERIES
DIPARTIMENTO DI
SCIENZE SOCIALI ED ECONOMICHE

**Integration of migrants in the Italian's
small villages: Opportunities and
critical issues**

Giulia Lang



N. 17/2024

SAPIENZA - UNIVERSITY OF ROME

P.le Aldo Moro n.5 – 00185 Roma T(+39) 0649910563

CF80209930587 – P.IVA 02133771002

Integration of migrants in the Italian's small villages: Opportunities and critical issues

Giulia Lang; giulia.lang@uniroma1.it

Abstract

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), 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). Through various documentary sources, this contribution aims to deepen the relationship between refugees and local development in marginal territorial contexts. 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 (pathshaping).

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, 2015). 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). 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 locals in marginal territorial contexts.

The article is structured like this: The second section presents the theoretical framework that guides this study; The main research hypotheses and methodology are presented in the third section; The fourth section focuses on case studies of two small municipalities in Calabria and Piedmont regions regarding the integration process of asylum seekers and refugees; The last section will be devoted to the main conclusions of this paper.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 React to the crisis through the lens of the Social Innovation

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. In this regard, is particularly relevant to mention the studies on marginal types by Georg Simmel, discussed in his writing *Excursus on the stranger* (1908). Simmel describes 'the stranger' as a social figure whose position is characterised by being near and far at the same time, an individual who is a member of a system but not completely. The sociologist differentiated the stranger both from the "outsider" - who has no specific relation to a group - and from the wanderer, "who comes today and leaves tomorrow" The stranger, he wrote, "comes today and stays tomorrow." (Simmel, 1908).

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. Park described the "marginal man" as "a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples (Park, 1928). But, according to the American sociologist: "It is in the mind of the marginal man - where the changes and fusions of culture are going on - that we can best study the processes of civilization and of progress" (*ibidem*).

More than one hundred years after Simmel's essay, the concept of the stranger is still powerful in social science. In addition, 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. The places on the margins, commonly known as inner areas, share common characteristics such as low employment and land use, high age index, lack of local services, and degradation of cultural and landscape heritage (Martinelli, 2020). Fabrizio Barca (2011) argues that a space-blind approach - carried out by the institutions through the implementation of questionable

reforms - has negatively impacted inner areas. This strategy assumes that a few experts and technocrats possess the knowledge to structure development policies by suggesting standardized solutions that can be applied universally. This approach has proved to be unsuitable and particularly disadvantageous for rural areas, given that the national and supranational elites making the decisions are largely urban (Mazzola e Nisticò, 2016).

The population's dissatisfaction with space blind practices, which neglect their needs, sparked a wave of social innovations centered on creativity, cooperation, and participation. As highlights by Moralli and Allegrini (2021) “social innovative initiatives are conditioned by a context of crisis that is not only economic but also social, political and administrative”.

The concept of social innovation emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from the studies of Franklin, Durkheim, Weber and Schumpeter (Urso, 2021).

According to Moralli, the social innovation (SI from this point forward) can be defined as “a service, a product, a process, a way of acting that comes from below on a local basis and is spread collectively, in order to produce benefits for society and the territory where it is generated. Such actions arise from the need to respond to an emerging or not yet satisfied problem, and presupposes a shared cultural horizon, which is expressed through the creative capacity of the subjects participating in it” (Moralli 2019). On the other hand, as suggested by Vicari Haddock “in order to speak of SI, it is not enough to identify initiatives promoted from below that are able to experiment with new services co-planning and co-produced; there must also be a change in the balance of power, in governance and accountability practices” (2009).

Referring to Moulaert et al. (2013), social innovation can be understood as a process that involves three dimensions: meeting needs, reshaping social relations, and taking collective action.

As claimed by Bock (2016) while the concept of SI is commonly associated with development in urban contexts by policy makers, its application has expanded to rural areas in recent years. “The need to innovate is therefore dictated by the necessity to identify new development opportunities aimed at creating a better, egalitarian, inclusive and sustainable society (Urso, 2021).

2.2 Integrating newcomers: The interpretive challenges of social sciences

In recent years a further line of reflection has developed on the relationship between possible rebirths of rural/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 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). However, 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 phenomenon 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. Reception projects are highly important for long term integration outcomes: integrating newcomers must be understood as a two-way process involving both immigrants and civil society.

The concept of integration continues to be central in many studies and debates on the settlement of newcomers in host societies. According to Harrell-Bond integration is “a situation in which host and refugee communities are able to co-exist, sharing the same resources – both economic and social – with no greater mutual conflict than that which exists within the host community” (Harrell-Bond in Kuhlman, 1991). However, this definition seems to oversimplify the dynamics related to this topic. Among the most famous and innovative studies on integration stands out the conceptual framework developed by Ager and Strang (2008), who identified ten core domains that shape understandings of the concept of integration: Employment, housing, education, health, social bridges, social bonds, social links, language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability, rights and citizenship.

Another study worth mentioning is the conceptual framework proposed by Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016). According to the two scholars, 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) socioeconomic, 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. Indeed, 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.

2.3 Third- sector organisations at the local level: Change agents or State replacement?

Immigration policies are constantly changing in Italy. In the 1980s, there was an increasing sense of urgency to obtain a regulation of migration policies. One of the first interventions on this subject was introduced in 1986, with Law n. 943 of 30/12/86. The "Foschi" Law aimed to define standards for non-EU workers and their families (<https://temi.camera.it/>). The migratory phenomena changed profoundly and rapidly during the 90s. In 1991 there were 650,000 foreigners present in Italy, while in 1997 - only 6 years later - the number of migrants exceeded one million (Bontempelli, 2009). It is in this context that was established the Law n.40 of 1998 "Turco-Napolitano", that aimed to look at migration no longer from an emergency and temporary point of view. About the limits of the Turco-Napolitano it is necessary to highlight the establishment of Temporary Detention Centres – CPT (Garau, 2019).

The sign of a greater closure of the Italian government in matters of migration policies is concretized with the approval of law no. 189 of 30 July 2002, 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 SPRAR¹ 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 SPRAR² network system became the primary reception system in Italy. This Decree is particularly relevant because it 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 (Esposito & Ficcadenti, 2019).³ 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

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

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).

³ The first local authorities that have chosen to be part of the SPRAR 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).

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

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. Research questions and method

3.1 Research problem and research questions

Effective management of reception practices can positively impact marginal territories by combatting depopulation, reviving commercial activities, establishing schools, and generating new jobs. However, these outcomes represent just the best scenarios. Indeed, smaller municipalities are places of conflict. According to Simmel (1908), conflict arises in a group in which some members are sedentary and others are mobile. Hostility can potentially arise from differences in spatial behaviour. Indeed, the arrival of refugees in small municipalities can provoke feelings of hostility and racial opposition to

immigrants, who often find themselves in tragic housing situations. Along with the conflict dimension, we have to consider the increasing bureaucratization of reception practices, that undermines the political motivations of the reception systems (D'Agostino, 2010).

Understanding the integration process in these territories requires considering multiple factors, including the interplay of power dynamics among local government, civil society, and the private sector in relation to migrant welcoming, as well as the strategies employed by immigration actors. The literature cited in this article shows that in recent years there has been a growing number of studies about the relationship between migrants and rural areas (in particular it is worth mentioning the studies of Corrado and D'Agostino, 2016). On the other hand, most of these studies are associated with developing a theoretical framework, with limited empirical field research experiments. Italian literature primarily explores the potential of migrants as a resource for revitalizing depopulated areas or examines the implementation of reception practices. The migrants' own perspective and life stories are often overlooked.

The objective of this study is to examine how newcomers are integrated into the municipalities under study, focusing on the factors that determine their inclusion or exclusion. The survey will be guided by the following questions:

- Has the placement of migrants in small municipalities on a national level led to the formation of protest or solidarity movements? What is the stance of local politicians? What are the strategies employed by actors (public and non-public) to decrease conflict between natives and newcomers?
- What are the hopes and ambitions of migrants and asylum seekers who live in rural areas? What kind of relationship do they have with the locals?
- Third-sector entities play a crucial 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 locals and immigrant communities? How do migrants get involved in labor and social level? What kind of job opportunities do they have?

3.2 Hypothesis and method

The methodological choice to be used in this research work is the binary comparison. This type of analysis can be carried out between similar systems with common characteristics, or between different systems (Morlino, 2005). A binary comparison will be proposed using the strategy of most similar

systems. This will be done within territorial systems that share common characteristics of marginality. (e.g., population is decreasing, services are lacking, and the age index is high, reception systems for asylum seekers and refugees). The choice to use comparative research is linked to several aspects: (a) Firstly, because of its exploratory and descriptive nature, it's well-suited for observing complex phenomena; (b) Another reason is its flexibility, which allows for easy redirection of research objectives; (c) Thirdly, by comparing individual cases, we can understand the complexity of the phenomenon and arrive at a more generalized understanding (Yin, 2014).

In order to answer research questions, case studies have been identified within two Italian regions: Calabria and Piedmont. These areas are actually promoting regional strategies that explicitly mention the foreign population as a way to stimulate social and economic development in municipalities impacted by severe depopulation.

The municipalities under investigation have been selected on the basis of the meaning of theoretical categories used: Municipalities with fewer than 5 thousand inhabitants identified by The National Strategy for Inner Areas as “intermediate”, “peripheral” or “ultra-peripheral” areas; the presence of public policies or specific regulations related to the reception of asylum seekers on the territories in relation to repopulation practices; the presence on these territories of Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS) or Centres of Reception and Integration System (SAI).

The comparison has explanatory objectives, as it aims to highlight similarities and differences between different cases, in order to explain the phenomenon under investigation.

4. Case presentation

4.1 Contextualising the case study: Refugee governance in Calabrian and Piedmont 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 measures⁴. 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

⁴ The full version of the document is available here:
https://www.consiglioregionale.calabria.it/upload/istruttoria/LR_18_091.pdf

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).

The story of Piedmont's mountain/inner regions is similar to that of Calabria, with a long history of abandonment and depopulation (Martellozzo, 2021). Besides, the Italian Region has the most municipalities with under 5 thousand inhabitants: 1,045, or almost 19% of the national total⁵.

The theme of welcoming refugees within rural and mountain areas is of great importance to both Piedmont and Calabria, which share similar territorial characteristics in terms of marginality. A Regional Plan for the reception of non-EU citizens was approved by Piedmont's Regional Council on August 5th, 2015. The resolution explicitly mentions the strategic role of the migrant population in repopulating mountain municipalities: "The Region aims to encourage the repopulation of abandoned villages in Alpine lands and areas experiencing residential abandonment involving migrants through the appropriate departments and Uncem actions. The Italian Mountains Report reveals that the mountains have a unique ability to receive and integrate new migration flows, with foreigners becoming a crucial part of the work force. The Italian mountains serve as a testing ground for integration policies and community welfare in many municipalities. The demographic trend in Piedmont isn't negative, thanks to dozens of integrated immigrants, initiated by the local administration and welfare communities. Today, the possibility of integration in mountain and rural areas is evident⁶." (Regional Council on August 5th, 2015, n. 3-2013).

The Region has taken other steps to address the progressive abandonment of smaller towns. One example is the 2021 launch of the call "Residenzialità in montagna"⁷.

These are contributions on the costs of purchase and/or recovery of property by people who decide to

⁵ Data available online at: <https://www.tuttitalia.it/comuni-minori-5000-abitanti/>

⁶The full version of the document is available here:

http://www.regione.piemonte.it/governo/bollettino/abbonati/2015/36/attach/dgr_02013_610_05082015.pdf

⁷ The full version of the document is available here: <https://bandi.regione.piemonte.it/contributi-finanziamenti/residenzialita-montagna>

move to the mountain municipalities of the Region. However, as pointed out Martellozzo (2021), the decision to reserve the call only to the citizens of the European Union, appears to counter the region's desire to stabilise refugees and economic migrants in its territory.

4.2 Case studies selected

The two case studies are small villages with less than 5 thousand residents, which are known for depopulation and the arrival of forced migrants.

Satriano is a Calabrian municipality of about 3.000 inhabitants (ISTAT data as of 1 January 2024). The village, affected by youth unemployment and consequent depopulation and youth emigration, has a long history of reception. The municipal administration has joined the the Sprar in 2014. Since 2016 the SAI project is managed by Fondazione Città Solidale Onlus (successor to the local cooperative Globe Media) - while the promoter is the municipality of Satriano.

Chiesanuova is a Piedmontese mountain municipality of 226 inhabitants (ISTAT data as of 1 January 2024), over six hundred meters high. The village joined SPRAR in 2016 and, to date, the managing body and promoter of the SAI project is the municipality of Chiesanuova.

5. Interpreting the case study: Participatory Photo Mapping technique

Our first step is to create a sector-wise mapping of stakeholders involved in the reception and integration of migrants in small Italian municipalities, as part of our comparison between the two case studies. The objective of the mapping is to comprehend how stakeholders impact hosting projects, both directly and indirectly. As anticipated, considering the perspective of migrants is crucial, not only regarding their time in reception centers but also their personal narratives (biography, hometown, ambitions). In this regard we selected the Participatory Photo Mapping (PPM) approach.

PPM is a technique developed to facilitate public participation in researching, planning, and implementing strategies to improve wellbeing (Dennis Jr, 2009). This technique integrates participatory photography, photo elicitation interviews and public participation geographic information systems (PPGIS). PPM combines these strategies through analysis of a comprehensive set of images, narratives and other qualitative data produced by participating community residents (*ibidem*).

This technique has been tested for the first time in research on the relationship between place and health. This approach will be utilized in the present research to investigate the relationship between place (the two villages under investigation) and integration (the newcomers hosted in reception centers). The PPM is seen as a particularly useful and innovative method in the field of qualitative

research. Active participation tools can improve the participation experience for guests at reception centers, especially for those who don't speak the host community's language.

Participants (the newcomers hosted in reception centres, social professionals and educators working in the reception centres, members of the local community) will be divided into groups and involved in:

- Generating data about the place where they live through the medium of photographs (capturing places that have a positive impact for themselves and for the territory, and capturing places that cause them discomfort).
- Placing their shots on the map of the territory.
- Interpreting data - highlighting multiple or conflicting interpretations - through the construction of content categories.
- Presenting results to decision makers.
- Evaluating outcomes and improving future efforts.

The data and categories from meetings in Satriano and Chiesanuova will be compared to highlight similarities and differences between the two case studies.

Conclusions

This paper is the first part of a research work that intends to deepen the relationship 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 nonmetropolitan 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 (Bindi, 2021). 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 (*ibidem*). 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. Specifically, 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.

References

- Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *J. Refugee Stud.*, 21.
- Ambrosini, M. (2005), *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Ambrosini, M. (2023, March 28). *Il campo di battaglia dell'accoglienza dei rifugiati*. Available at: <https://www.rivistailmulino.it/a/il-campo-di-battaglia-dell-accoglienza-dei-rifugiati>
- Balbo, M. (2015). *Migrazioni e Piccoli Comuni*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Barberis, E. (2010), Il ruolo degli operatori sociali dell'immigrazione nel welfare locale, *La Rivista delle Politiche Sociali*, XXIV (1).
- Bevilacqua, S. A., & Bertaux, D. (2022). Asylum Seekers in Small Villages: Spatial Proximity and Integration in Italian and French Villages. *Borders in Globalization Review*, 4(1).
- Bindi, L. (2021). Oltre il 'piccoloborghismo'. Comunità patrimoniali e rigenerazione delle aree fragili, *Dialoghi Mediterranei*.
- Bock B. (2016). Rural marginalisation and the role of Social Innovation. A turn towards Nexogenous development and rural reconnection. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 56(4): 552-74. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12119>
- Bontempelli, S. (2009). Il governo dell'immigrazione in Italia: il caso dei decreti flussi. *Tutela dei diritti dei migranti: testi per il corso di perfezionamento universitario, Pisa, luglio 2009.*-(*Scienze per la pace*; 21), 115-136.
- Bygnes, S. (2020). A collective sigh of relief: Local reactions to the establishment of new asylum centers in Norway. *Acta Sociologica*, 63(3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699319833143>
- Corrado, A., & D'Agostino, M. (2016). I migranti nelle aree interne. Il caso della Calabria. *Agriregionieuropa*, 45.
- Corrado A., D'Agostino M., (2019) Migranti, mercati nidificati e sostenibilità in territori fragili: i casi di Riace e Camini (Calabria) in *Mondi migranti* 1/2019.

D'Agostino, M. (2010). *La fuga dei rifugiati fra autonomia e politiche di sfruttamento. Alcune riflessioni a partire dai fatti di Rosarno*. Available at: <https://www.riflessioni.it/riflessioni-sociologiche/fuga-rifugiati-rosarno-1.htm>

D'Agostino, M. (2017) 'The evolution of the global governance of refugees and its territorialisation in Calabria, *Partecipazione e conflitto*.

D'Agostino, M. (2017). L'abitare dei rifugiati in Calabria. Pratiche e politiche, oltre l'emergenza. *Fuori Luogo. Rivista di Sociologia del Territorio, Turismo, Tecnologia*, 2(2).

D'Agostino, M., & Raniolo, F. (2022). La governance europea dei rifugiati di fronte alla pandemia. Perché fallisce ancora. *Rivista Italiana di Politiche Pubbliche*, 17(1).

De Gregorio O, Giacomelli, E. (2022). *Dentro, fuori e contro le involuzioni delle politiche sull'immigrazione: riflessioni dalle esperienze di microaccoglienza diffusa di richiedenti asilo in Valsugana e Valle di Susa*. *Mondi migranti* 2/2022.

Dennis Jr, S. F., Gaulocher, S., Carpiano, R. M., & Brown, D. (2009). Participatory photo mapping (PPM): Exploring an integrated method for health and place research with young people. *Health and place*, 15(2).

Di Capua, D. (2018). Accoglienza nello SPRAR: il ruolo dei comuni tra welfare e pratiche di sviluppo dei territori, presentato al ciclo di seminari *Migrazioni e aree rurali: quali percorsi per la cooperazione territoriale e lo sviluppo*, 27 novembre 2018, Roma.

Esposito E., Ficcadenti C. (2019). La depoliticizzazione nel sistema di welfare italiano: il caso del "Secondo Welfare", in *Politica e azione pubblica nell'epoca della depoliticizzazione. Attori, pratiche e istituzioni*, D'Albergo E., Moini G. (cur.), Roma, 2019.

Garau, E. (2019). Gli studi sull'immigrazione e il caso italiano. *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea*, 5.

Hollweck, T. (2015). Robert K. Yin.(2014). Case Study Research Design and Methods . *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 30(1).

Kuhlman, T. (1991). The economic integration of refugees in developing countries: a research model. *Journal of refugee studies*, 4(1).

Lucatelli, S. (2015). *La Strategia Nazionale, il riconoscimento delle aree interne*, in *Territorio*, 7.

MacCallum D., Moulaert F., Hillier J., Vicari Haddock S. (eds.) (2009). *Social innovation and territorial development*. Farnham. Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Martellozzo, N. (2021). Nuove appartenenze, nuove comunità: fare cittadinanza nelle aree interne. Articolo. *Dialoghi Mediterranei*. Available at: <https://www.istitutoeuroarabo.it/DM/nuove-appartenenze-nuove-comunita-fare-cittadinanza-nelle-aree-interne/>

Martinelli, L. (2020). *L'Italia è bella dentro: storie di resilienza, innovazione e ritorno nelle aree interne*. Altreconomia.

Mas Giralt R., Sarlo, A. (2017). The social inclusion of immigrants in the United Kingdom and Italy: different but converging trajectories?, *Social and political science*.

Mazzola, F., & Nisticò, R. (Eds.). (2016). *Le regioni europee: Politiche per la coesione e strategie per la competitività*. FrancoAngeli.

Moralli, M. (2019). *Innovazione sociale. Pratiche e processi per ripensare le comunità*, Milano: Franco Angeli.

Moralli, M., & Allegrini, G. (2021). Crises redefined: towards new spaces for social innovation in inner areas?. *European Societies*, 23(sup1), S831-S843.

Morlino, L. (2005). *Introduzione alla ricerca comparata*, Il Mulino.

Moulaert F., MacCallum D., Mehmood A., Hamdouch A. (eds.) (2013). *The International Handbook on Social Innovation*. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar

Osti, G., Ventura, F. (2012). *Vivere da stranieri in aree fragili: l'immigrazione internazionale nei comuni rurali italiani*, Liguori.

Park, R. E. (1928). Human migration and the marginal man. *American journal of sociology*, 33(6).

Penninx, R., & Garcés-Mascareñas, B. (2016). The concept of integration as an analytical tool and as a policy concept. *Integration processes and policies in Europe: Contexts, levels and actors*.

Pugliese, E. (2002). Italy between emigration and immigration and the problems of citizenship. In *Citizenship, nationality and migration in Europe*. Routledge.

Ritchie, H., Roser, M. (2018). *Urbanization*. Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization>.

Sarlo, A. (2015), L'immigrazione nella Calabria dall'economia fragile, in M. Balbo (ed.), *Migrazioni e piccoli comuni*, Milano: F. Angeli.

Sassen, S. (1997). *Città globali: New York, Londra, Tokyo*, UTET, Torino.

Simmel, G. (1908). *Excursus sullo straniero*. In "Sociologia", Brossura.

Urso, K. (2021). Understanding international migrations in rural areas: New processes of social innovation and rural regeneration in Southern Italy. *Italian Review of Agricultural Economics*, 76(1), 59-75.

Zincone, G., & Di Gregorio, L. (2002). Il processo delle politiche di immigrazione in Italia: uno schema interpretativo integrato. *Stato e mercato*, 22(3).

