

Stuck and Exploited

Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Italy Between Exclusion, Discrimination and Struggles

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Finding New Ways for Refugees and Asylum Seekers' Inclusion

A Reflexive Analysis of Practices Developed by the Third Sector and Civil Society in Trentino

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Abstract This essay aims at analysing the role played by civil society organisations in refugees' social and labour inclusion, highlighting the assumptions that drive their action and the challenges they are facing in the light of the recent political changes in the Italian scenario. The social realities investigated spare no effort for migrants' integration, sometimes finding solutions beyond the reception system. In this paper, we discuss their practices, analysing the borders (juridical, political, territorial, corporative, social, institutional, symbolic) they act and react, reflecting also on the assumptions that drive their actions, and crossing them with migrants' assumptions and biographical trajectories, to explore how they intersect, impacting on their migration and integration paths.

Keywords Reception system. Civil society. Third sector organizations. Refugees. Inclusion. Trentino.

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Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Società e trasformazioni sociali 8

e-ISSN 2610-9689 | ISSN 2610-9085

ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-532-2 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-533-9

Peer review | Open access

Submitted 2021-02-01 | Accepted 2021-03-07 | Published 2021-10-27

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DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-532-2/008

1 Introduction

The reception system and its organisation, management and evolution influence the biographical trajectories of refugees and asylum seekers who are inside and outside it, as well as the policies and actions of the local social services. In line with the laws and regulations that discipline international migration in Italy in the last 30 years (Basso, Perocco 2003; Della Puppa et al. 2020), the national reception system was developed following emergency and security logics, too often aimed to assimilate or exclude immigrants settled in the territory and make them vulnerable.¹ These logics led to different, fragmented and discretionary levels of protection guaranteed to refugees and asylum seekers,² also triggering social tensions (Cuono, Gargiulo 2017).

In particular, research underlined the role played by local policies and local organisations in facilitating or instead hampering the reception projects for asylum seekers (Ponzo 2008; Fratesi et al. 2019) as well as how the whole reception system is imbued of protection and humanitarian logics that represent the asylum seeker as a voiceless body that needs to be restored and disciplined, leading to forms of institutional violence, thus prompting 'infantilisation' and victimisation processes, that cannot allow the recognition of their subjectivity and agency.³

Manocchi (2017), for example, developed interesting reflections on the role played by third sector organisations and their social workers in creating and reproducing, often because of economic reasons linked to the possibility of gaining funds, new processes of 'labelling' among the hosted asylum seekers, distinguishing among who is worthy of help from who is not, who is vulnerable and who is not, thus pushing those who are not fitting with these representations at the margins of the whole system (Sanò 2017). This structural and antagonistic perspective of the relationship between hosted people and social workers can be combined with another one that we can define more subjective and cooperative. According to Ambrosini (2018) all organisations and volunteers that work and act with immigrants

This chapter is the common result of a shared work of research, investigation, and analysis. However, Giulia Storato wrote §§ 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8; Giuliana Sanò wrote §§ 4 and 9; Francesco Della Puppa wrote § 5.

1 Ambrosini 2014; 2015; Bertozzi, Consoli 2017; Campesi 2011; Bona, Marchetti 2017; Della Puppa et al. 2020; Gozzo 2017.

2 Bertozzi, Consoli 2017; Colloca 2017; InMigrazione 2018; Marchetti 2014; Naga 2017; Sorgoni 2011.

3 Avallone 2018; Mallki 1996; Michelin, Storato 2019; Pinelli 2017; Vacchiano 2005; Zetter 1991.

have also the possibility to act in their favour, facilitating processes of 'debordering' of the forms of labelling and control that imbue the reception system and, in a broader sense, what he defined as the immigration "battleground" (Campomori, Ambrosini 2020; Fontanari, Ambrosini 2018), thus promoting the recognition of their agency.

2 The Act of Labelling People Through the Legal Dimension

By addressing these two different perspectives, in this contribution we will focus on everyday practices – and their underlying meanings – developed by third sector organisations, associations and informal groups that deal with refugees and asylum seekers inside and outside the institutional reception system. The changes that have taken place in recent years will also be considered and, in particular, those after the entry into force of Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019 (the so-called 'Security Decrees'), converted respectively in Law 132/2018 and Law 77/2019, through which the law on international protection was reformed and the structure and rules of the reception system changed. In concrete terms, the new law changed the criteria for inclusion in the reception system, excluding asylum seekers from the so-called second level (SPRAR), which was reserved only for unaccompanied minors and holders of protection. Together with the structural changes, humanitarian protection has been abolished to make way for new forms of residence permits, namely the ones for special reasons. Above all, it is significant how due to the cancellation of the 'humanitarian protection' and the 'registration of residence', the new law imposed a gradual process of 'irregularity' of migrants, both newcomers and those who had already achieved their legal and social stabilisation in recent years. Thanks to its particular nature, before the entry into force of the new law, humanitarian protection was the most widespread among the forms granted by law. Designed to include all cases where despite the impossibility of proving the persecution the applicants' vulnerability was still evident, in reality, humanitarian protection was able to fill the gaps in international law.

To all this is added the fact that the extraordinary reception system has undergone significant financial cuts (as established by Ministerial Decree 20 November 2018), making it impossible for the managing organisations to provide certain services, such as teaching the Italian language or orientation activities to the labour market. The negative effects of these new legal provisions have already been highlighted by other sources and research conducted in the field.⁴ Follow-

⁴ Boccagni et al. 2020; OpenPolis, ActionAid 2020; Della Puppa et al. 2020; Campomori 2020; Pasian et al. 2020.

ing the cancellation of the 'registration of residence', many obstacles have occurred in the daily life of migrants, exposing them to exclusion from settlement and work inclusion (Della Puppa et al. 2020).⁵

During our fieldwork, we referred to these subjects with the term 'the Unacknowledged' (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa 2021), given that all of these people, regardless of their legal status, were experiencing different forms of denial in terms of access to a permanent job and home. In terms of the legal dimension, a further form of denial was experienced by some of our participants, the so-called 'out of quota', who entered the Italian border via the Balkan route and requested asylum and hospitality in Italy, without being immediately hosted in projects as happened to those who came by sea.⁶ Likewise, recognised and unacknowledged asylum seekers expelled from the reception system have developed precarious housing paths, also due to a general closure of the access to the private real estate market. This uncertainty influenced, and at the same time, was influenced by the precariousness of the labour market, which seemed greedy for an unskilled workforce to be employed mainly in seasonal jobs in the agricultural and hotel tourism sectors. In these structural and material conditions, the participants developed their path that crossed the actions undertaken by local social services, third sector organisations, associations and informal groups which, from their different perspectives on the situation, tried to develop and strengthen their own services and support activities. In other words, the actions and activities developed by those organisations involved in the institutional reception system influenced the actions and strategies of refugees and asylum seekers as well as those developed by the other social services of the local context.

Starting from these premises, in this paper, we refer to the results of the research entitled 'Unacknowledged' conducted in the Autonomous Province of Trento, between 2018 and 2020, which aimed to explore housing, work and mobility strategies put in motion by refugees and asylum seekers who were on the margins of the reception system. In particular, we will focus on the role played by civil society and third sector organisations in promoting the work and housing integration of refugees and asylum seekers, by referring to the first part of the research that involved key-informants, working or participating in these organisations. In doing so, we will explore the principles and representations that guide their actions and highlight their

5 In recent days, news has come that the government has amended the security law approved by the previous government run also by the Northern League party. We pick up on these changes on § 4 of the present chapter.

6 Sanò, Della Puppa 2020; Semprebon, Pelacani 2020; Benedikt 2019; Medici Senza Frontiere 2018; Antenne Migranti et al. 2017.

(potential) strengths, expressed in terms of creativity, cooperation and resilience, as well as their (forced) limits, uttered in terms of reproducing inequalities, maintaining boundaries and differentiation.

3 Methodological Note

In this research we adopted a qualitative methodology, combining ethnography with in-depth interviews. The fieldwork lasted 18 months and it entailed two different phases in data collection: the first one based on interviews with key-informants who entered in contact with the research population, while the second one based on ethnography and in-depth interviews with refugees and asylum seekers who were living at the margins of the reception system. The first phase was concluded with the collection of 28 interviews with: case-workers with asylum seekers hosted in the reception system, social workers and volunteers who work with homeless people; volunteers of associations and informal groups which develop activities and services addressed to research population. The second one, driven in the places of ethnography, allowed us to meet around 40 men who applied for asylum in Italy and were out of the reception system. About half of them have been also interviewed.

Though initially conceived to refer to asylum seekers who obtained a definitive denial of their request for international protection, the research, thanks to the experiences and know-how shared by key-informants and to the preliminary observations of the researchers, changed its target, including also regular asylum seekers and refugees who obtained the formal international or humanitarian protection. What emerged was that these people, although they were formally recognised, were experiencing almost the same forms of social denial than those who were undocumented. In this sense, the notion of 'Unacknowledged' from the heuristic title of the research became the lens through which analysing and re-reading the juridical and the social conditions experienced by the majority of the immigrants with whom we came in contact during our fieldwork. From the analysis of the empirical material we collected, it seemed quite evident to us that the use of this 'label' had much more to do with the social dimension and everyday life conditions of the migrants who were at the margins of the reception system.

In particular, the term 'Unacknowledged' resulted to be appropriate and analytically useful to describe the social invisibility and forms of everyday denial lived by the individuals outside the institutional circuits in terms of housing and working arrangements, which was strongly hindered by local policies and sometimes by the actions of third sector organisations and associations that entered in contact with them. Refugees and asylum seekers' biographical trajec-

ries were indeed influenced by the action of these “intermediaries” (Ambrosini 2018), whose initiatives and services were represented as ambivalent, acting as both push and pull factors that might lead to stratified and diversified forms of ‘unacknowledgement’ (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa 2021).

Within this perspective, the interviews conducted with key-informants have been extremely useful not only to acquire a deep knowledge of all actors around the reception system and how they work, but also to observe the practices and representations that drive their actions, allowing the researchers to reflect on the different ways they react or reproduce the different forms of ‘unacknowledgment’, thus to unveil their strengths and weaknesses.

The empirical part of this chapter will focus on both these issues. Before presenting it, a detailed explanation of the normative frame within which these social agents act and of the peculiarities of the research context is needed.

4 A Brief Summary of the Legal and Employment Framework

Due to the high number of arrivals of forced migrants across the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, a binary reception system has been implemented in Italy. As the number of reception’s places within the SPRAR system (the acronym stands for Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) was insufficient in satisfying the number of requests, another parallel reception system was created (the so-called CAS – the acronym stands for Extraordinary Reception Centres).

This second one was inspired by logics of emergency and, lead by Prefectures, was managed by third sector organisations. CAS could be placed in large hotels or military barracks, hosting a large number of asylum seekers or could be engaged in the so-called ‘wide-spread reception’, with small flats converted in reception centres placed in cities and small towns all around Italy. Although governed by different resources and principles, the two different reception systems followed similar rules, offering to the hosted asylum seekers some basic services and an orientation to the institutions of the territory. In this organisation, the big centres became the places of first reception in each region, while the small ones, both CAS and SPRAR, assumed the duty to manage a second reception, in which a stronger orientation to working and social integration of asylum seekers was intended to be promoted.

In this scenario, Law Decree 113/2018 marks a further obstacle in the path of social inclusion of immigrants. As we have already explained, it entails the cancellation of the residence permit for humanitarian reasons; the restrictions on the right of residence regis-

tration; the denied access to SPRAR programs for asylum seekers; the extension of detention periods in hotspots and repatriation detention centres; and the shift of funds from assistance to expulsions.

The introduction of these innovations has produced new forms of 'irregularities' within the immigrant population. In practice, it has made people invisible, even those currently present in the territory, by hindering their access to social health services, and putting them in a position of vulnerability to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and criminal networks. It also foments fears and racism, and as we will see below it undermines the virtuous paths activated over the years in many Italian municipalities (Boccagni et al. 2020). We can affirm that, the 'Security Decree *bis*' (Law Decree 53/2019) is part of this political and social framework of 'institutional racism'. Indeed, the law has amended the criminal code, to the text of public security laws and the provisions for the protection of public order aimed at the repression of social and civil struggles and dissent, moving the repression of almost any form of protest to the criminal field. The consequences are particularly serious for immigrants, given that they often live in precarious socio-legal conditions compared to natives. This repressive tightening must be read in the light of a particular economic phase, which desperately requires a reduction in the protection and cost of the workforce. In this regard, the current reconfiguration of the mechanisms of repression, precariousness and marginalisation of refugees and asylum seekers tends to make these people increasingly 'vulnerable' within the social dimension and, above all, in the labour market system (Dines, Rigo 2015).

As Di Cecco claims:

While (Italian) migration policies seek to strengthen the command of migrant mobility, producing complex logistics based on control and discipline within the reception system, the labour market is crossed from increasingly massive phenomena of non-payment, thanks to diversified forms of competition between workers and the growing weight of the 'political economy of promise' [Bascetta 2015]. (2019, 211)

This particular nature and vocation of the labour market for asylum seekers and refugees will be present in the following empirical section of this contribution, in which the rhetoric and practices related to job inclusion will be extensively explored, by addressing particular attention to the representations put in place to make a distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants.

Furthermore, the very recent Law Decree 130/2020 must also be recalled, accepted by the main Italian mass media as a 'cancellation of the security decrees'. Actually, the new provisions on immigration, approved by the so-called 'Conte 2 government', hegemonised above

all by the 5 Star Movement and the Democratic Party, do not cancel anything essential of the previous Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019, limiting themselves to making a few minor adjustments and fully confirming the repressive and criminalising system towards immigrants - and social struggles (Della Puppa et al. 2020) - they contain.

First of all, the multiple detention facilities for refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants without residence permits have not been abolished and no abolition is planned. In these detention centres, frequently, human, social and civil rights have systematically been violated. At the same time, the SPRAR system was not restored, the only one that guaranteed minimum results of social inclusion, providing for the insertion of applicants for international protection in small structures, integrated within the local socio-territorial fabric, with training courses and integration paths. Although the SPRAR system does not represent a 'glorious past' to be claimed, it was certainly a more shareable and effective system - despite the coexistence of very different methods of intervention among them (Sanò 2018) - than the current one, based on a concept of emergency and 'extraordinary' reception, which provides for the concentration of large numbers of applicants, amassed in large centres and separated from local communities. To replace the SPRAR, a new 'reception and integration system' has been created with features that are still largely unknown and opaque.

The institution of humanitarian protection - up to the decrees of the previous government led by the Northern League and the 5 Star Movement - was the form of protection through which asylum seekers could most frequently hope to obtain a permit of residence - has not been reinstated, but new cases of 'special' protection have simply been 'added'.

Therefore, the entire security, repressive, discriminatory and racist approach of Italian migration policies, past and recent, is substantially reaffirmed.⁷

5 The Research Context

As previously written, the research has been conducted in the Autonomous Province of Trento. Because of its position, among the Alps and close to the Austrian border, and of its greater political autonomy from the central national government, the so-called 'forced migrations' and the management of the reception system present in this territory some peculiarities.

⁷ Basso 2010; Basso, Perocco 2003; Della Puppa et al. 2020; Ferrero, Perocco 2011; Perocco 2012.

Firstly, as the other Italian regions, also the Province is involved in the territorial redistribution of immigrants that arrive in Italy through the Mediterranean Sea. Once arrived on the territory, asylum seekers found the same double standard of reception previously described (CAS and SPRAR, now called SIPROIMI - Protection System for Persons with International Protection and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors). The total population of asylum seekers received in Extraordinary reception centres during 2015-20 has been always maintained below 2000,⁸ thus a limited quota compared to other regions. The same can be said about the receiving capacity of the local SIPROIMI system. It offers only 149 places (17 of them reserved for non-accompanied foreign minors), and together with the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, it covers only 1% of the total places available (SIPROIMI, CITTALIA 2019). Probably also because of these limited numbers, the management of the local reception system differs from the rest of Italy, as we are going to see later.

The discussion on the arrivals by sea and the local reception system needs to be integrated and enriched with the features of another important phenomenon that differentiates the research context from the other parts of Italy. We refer to the arrival of immigrants from a different route, that of Brenner, which crosses the border between Austria and Italy. These people, coming above all from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh (Giovannetti 2018), often ask for asylum in Trento. They are usually called 'Dubliners' or 'out of quota'. 'Dubliners' because they have often crossed, and have been fingerprinted, in other European countries of the 'Schengen area' and for this reason for them Italy does not represent, as for the arrivals by sea, the first country in which they formally asked for international protection. Given the regency of the Dublin Treaty, once they arrive in Italy their request for asylum is 'frozen' and the Dublin procedure is activated to establish which is the competent country that has to examine their request. 'Out of quota' because these people are not included in the quota of territorial redistribution previously cited as those arriving through the Mediterranean route. For this reason, they do not immediately enter the formal reception system, being forced to access the low-threshold services as if they were undocumented and, in the worst case, to sleep in the informal settlement of the city (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa 2021). Also because of these 'unacknowledgement', these particular categories of asylum seekers suffer from invisibilisation processes within official statistics. It is almost impossible to establish the quantitative dimensions of this

⁸ Reference to data available at the following link: <https://www.cinformi.it/Progetti/Accoglienza-straordinaria/Cruscotto-statistico-accoglienza/I-grafici/Presenze-in-Trentino>.

phenomenon, although other researchers and our fieldwork suggest that it is constant and continuative.⁹

In this scenario, our research aimed at exploring the working and housing strategies, and in a broader sense the biographical trajectories, of refugees and asylum seekers who were at the margins – of pre-reception and post-reception – of the institutional reception system. As it has been said earlier, it is almost impossible to establish how many people are at such margins: data available show how, only in 2019, more than 400 people exited the extraordinary reception system, finding themselves at the opposite side (CINFORMI 2020). Among them, there are refugees and asylum seekers who decided to remain in Trento, some of them living different forms of ‘unacknowledgment’ and describing precarious housing and working trajectories. Also for this reason, the features and everyday work of the reception system is linked with the features and everyday work of other territorial social services, which the research population may access. We refer in particular to the low threshold services addressed to homeless people that in Trentino seem to be highly developed compared to those arranged in other Italian regions. Although the presence of dormitories – whose capacity is increased during the winter – and daily services open all year, their access criteria, in particular of the dormitories differently accessible according to the residence permit, subtend the conviction, guided by the ideological rhetoric of the ‘welfare shopping’, that a good and always accessible welfare system may attract many new immigrants and asylum seekers from other territories. For these reasons, in recent years the receiving capacity and measures have been drastically reduced, limiting the assistance provided to ‘out-of-quota’ asylum seekers and dismantling the reception system itself. Data provided by the Provincial body CINFORMI, clearly show how, after the entry into force of Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019 and the victory of Lega at the provincial election, the widespread reception system has been drastically dismantled. If at the end of 2018, there were 179 reception centres in 69 municipalities of the Province, the provision for the end of 2021 is to maintain 40 reception centres distributed only in 12 municipalities (CINFORMI 2020).

Also for these reasons, in recent years, an increased number of people who are forced to live in informal settlements has been registered. These people usually live in Trento, not only because it is the city which receives most asylum seekers, but also because this is the only city, together with Rovereto, that offers low threshold services. This group of people is therefore composed also by asylum seek-

⁹ Benedikt 2019; Semprebon, Pelacani 2020; Medici Senza Frontiere 2018; Antenne Migranti et al. 2017.

ers that are not able to access the reception system and by refugees and asylum seekers that, although having completed their reception project, have not been able to find a permanent house and work position within the territory. In their everyday life, these people can cross the initiatives developed by third sector organisations and social services, whose action has been challenged by the previously discussed provisions on asylum and reception systems.

6 “Nobody Has an Umbrella”: Past and Present of the Reception System in Trento

As we said earlier, the organisation, the provided services and, in a broader sense, the politics of reception inevitably influence refugees and asylum seekers' biographies as well as the actions that local social services, third sector organisations and informal groups can take. The deep changes of the reception system, presented in the previous paragraphs, were implemented also at the local level, and therefore in Trentino, where in the same period the result of the local elections confirmed how the electorate was in line with the orientation taken by the national government in the field of immigration. In this context, most of the key-informants involved in the research experienced, as defined by one of the interviewees, a 'shock' in adapting to this changed working and social context, realising that they probably had been working and operating in a 'bubble', without having a full understanding of the increasingly hostile attitude towards immigrants in their city.

It has been like going out, I don't know, from, feeling a big shake and saying: but what did we do? Nobody understood us, in these years we have been talking among us, because evidently outside there, something else was happening, thus, the idea of a bubble that is exploding, a bubble, I mean, I am afraid that all of us remained actually in a bubble, that is the reception world, I don't know how much we succeed to bring it outside; we were so busy to make things work that maybe, then, I don't know how much we transmitted. (key informant)

What I realise is that the world of social work in Trentino somehow is in shock now and it struggles to overcome this shock because, it's like saying, there has always been the sun and suddenly it starts to always rain and nobody has an umbrella, boots and you only have two pairs of sandals, while you need socks and hot clothes, thus we are retooling. (key informant)

This widespread feeling of being misunderstood and the consequent shock has been reinforced by the fact that the reception system in

the City of Trento has been depicted as an example of 'good reception', given also to the porous borders between the two different sub-systems (CAS and SPRAR).

The changes for me, this question obviously makes me think only and exclusively of the ongoing political change that in Trentino we perceived in a particular way, because I believe that here a reception system had been established, although with thousands of critical issues, but after all good, compared to the rest of Italy, I mean, the idea of a 'widespread reception', the activation of many services, in my opinion, over the years allowed the effective integration of people, also in the most distant territories, in the valleys, because the small centre and few people allow integration more easily and so on. (key informant)

Differently from the rest of Italy, the whole reception system was in fact governed by the Autonomous Province of Trento, to which all third sector organisations managing small and big centres referred. This centralisation, spatially expressed in the institutional building of CINFORMI, allowed the elaboration of a quite homogeneous reception system, with similar standards between SPRAR and CAS and with some transversal services that were addressed to all asylum seekers and refugees hosted. Just to give some examples, the legal service, the orientation to the integration in the labour market and the psychological support were provided by single organisations and were aimed at all asylum seekers hosted in the Province. With the changes described above, some of the services were forced to close (i.e. the Italian language courses or the job orientation for CAS) and others have been reformulated. Furthermore, the 'widespread reception' in small apartments in the valleys is still closing and the hosted asylum seekers are gradually being transferred into the only big reception centre that is placed in the city of Trento. Also, the borders of all social work in and beyond reception are porous, with strong cooperation between third sector organisations and civil society, that has its roots in the past years and now is still evolving, given the changes previously described. Some of the organisations which are managing reception centres for asylum seekers are for example responsible of other forms of reception addressed to holders of international and humanitarian protection as well as to immigrants or people who suffer from working and housing precarious conditions. They manage some flats, sometimes with the cooperation of the municipality of Trento, to contrast potential situations of marginality in the city. Once a recognised asylum seeker has to abandon the reception project, they can ask for a place in these other services and find a temporary housing solution, that may be free or rented with a facilitated fee. At the same time, once an immigrant

is forced to leave the reception project without having found a house, an articulated network can be activated. For example, some associations are managing flats that are available for refugees and asylum seekers, promoting also experiences of co-habitation, and volunteers are offering a place to sleep for the night. Finally, there are services which are addressed to homeless people which are providing daily and night reception also to the population involved in the research and in particular to those arrived from the Balkan route and other Italian cities. With particular reference to the so-called 'Out of quota', other services have been implemented during the past and the present, establishing dormitories or 'pre-reception centres' in which they have been hosted.

Therefore, in this sense the biographical trajectories of the research population influence, and at the same time, are influenced by the services and solutions that the civil society and third sector in Trentino are able and willing to provide. The offer addressed to these people is always evolving in this new scenario. In the following two paragraphs we are going to describe some of the meanings, practices and representations that guide the promotion of the social and labour integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Trento.

7 "People with their Suitcase in their Hands": Subjectivity, Creativity, Cooperation and Resilience Among Civil Society and Third Sector Outside the Bubble of the Reception

A first dimension that emerges from key informants' interviews is the fact that, given the changes occurred, they feel a need to develop new creative answers, without relying so much on public institutions, thus showing also their resilience. The centralisation in the management of the reception system that represented in the past a point of strength is indeed nowadays revealing its weaknesses:

To me it has been quite a shock, therefore now we are operating in a very different context, you need to invent new strategies that are going out from the, I mean, institutional logics of the project and you need to start to think on European funds, other funds and therefore going out from the dynamic very much, here everything depended from the Province, Cinformi was at the centre and then every organisation worked; I believe that this experience will teach us, as an organisation, to orient on other realities. (key informant)

Perhaps, as a system we did not protect ourselves. I mean, the communication that we gave, probably was not the right communication. We didn't communicate efficiently. Our internal organi-

sation has always depended from [CINFORMI][...] the system was not ready to sustain itself beyond the Province, it was too linked, so perhaps we should have reflected on this. (key informant)

Therefore, within this new context, both third sector and civil society organisations developed new forms to cooperate and new services to respond to the emergent needs in particular of those people who are at the margins of the reception system (Boccagni et al. 2020). For example, front offices have been created to help refugees and asylum seekers without the legal assistance provided by the reception projects, to be properly informed on the advancement of their request for international protection as well as to help immigrants with humanitarian protection to renew their documents. Some important efforts have been done also concerning the teaching of the Italian language. Besides the existing associations, new ones have been created and they all coordinate their action – through the newborn 'Rete Italiano Trento' – to avoid overlapping, and at the same time to differentiate, the offer. Lots of volunteers are nowadays engaged in the teaching of the Italian language, showing also how the changes have generated a counter-action by people who previously maybe were not so much in 'the field'. The Italian schools seem often to represent the first contact point between the research population and all other services. Through lessons, they can establish the first relationship of trust and then present the different problems they are facing in their everyday life outside the system.

Another important contact point is daily services for homeless people, often attended also by the research population, in which great cooperation between social workers and volunteers has been established, also through the creation of particular projects. Thus, in both examples, from a situation of crisis, forms of cooperation and resilience have arisen, that questioned the already exploded borders of the reception bubble. The cut of financial resources for reception was converted in social and relational resources for the whole community. In fact, on one hand, refugees and asylum seekers increased their possibilities to meet new local people, on the other hand, there has been collective care of their situation by social services and local communities, which had never been in contact with these people before. A brief note is needed about the only people who, in these cases, seem to have been most affected by these changes, i.e., the social workers and Italian teachers employed in the reception centres, who lost their jobs and who are another kind of 'unacknowledged' that we are not considering in this contribution, but to which public and academic attention should be given.

All third sector and civil society organisations are 'retooling' themselves on the promotion of housing and labour inclusion, which is also the main focus of the research. Concerning the facilitation of the integration in the labour market, the only service that is still

working is addressed to those who are hosted in the SIPROIMI system. The transversal service of orientation for CAS closed during winter 2019 and, although it presented some limits that we are going to describe later, it was extremely useful because it made many efforts to work also with the territory, to increase immigrants' qualifications and to inform them about their rights as workers:

We meet everyone. We give them information concerning the labour market, what is a CV, which are workers' rights, what is a contract and which are the training possibilities; how you can carry out an active job search, I mean, a general understanding and then we start meeting them in individual interviews, and according to the path length and their knowledge of the Italian language, during the individual interviews we try to understand which are the objectives to work together on. (key informant)

Well, in general we work a lot with the territory, because the key of job orientation has been that of working a lot with the companies and a lot with the territory. (key informant)

With regards to the new strategies to promote refugees' job orientation, the only facilitations provided by social services and civil society are related to help to find job opportunities through formal and informal channels (job agencies and acquaintances) and to write or update their CV. For the refugees and asylum seekers involved in the research, finding a job is one of the main worries, although they are losing their trust in the formal channels provided by the city (public and private job agencies), recognising the importance of knowing people who might help them.

He tells me that he needs a job, that he wants to pay taxes and he doesn't understand why the labour market is so closed. He brought his curriculum to different job agencies and nobody answered him. Also among the other guys involved in the research, there is a widespread idea that job agencies are useless. Several times they told me that they have brought their CV everywhere without receiving any answer. (Field note, 4 July 2019)

Once again, the collective care previously described and the increase of the occasions of contact between local people and refugees, maybe through the Italian schools or through social services for homeless people, can represent a new strategy for civil society and third sector organisations to 'react' with creativity to the changes related to the orientation in the labour market, relying more on immigrants' words and volunteers or migrants' social networks than on the market of credentials and qualifications.

Developing creative and cooperative projects outside the boundaries of the reception system seems to help people who are working in these services to change their representations on their users, allowing asylum seekers to escape from their label of 'non-autonomous people' to become 'citizens' and 'normal people' who need just further help to start their new life on the territory:

You create a different relationship with the hosted people in these projects, it is much a relationship of trust, not a peer one, but almost, I mean, they are free; it is a little bit their home, and a little bit our home; so that is the agreement; we can talk, we can stay together and communicate with each other, so far things have always been fine, then there is always the exception [...] at first I asked myself, but are they the same people? [...] because they were different, I mean, the reception system is necessary but it is a mandatory frame for people, there is little to say, a mandatory frame saying where one has to live, how they have to live, who they can meet, how many social workers, the legal and juridical procedure for the request, it is an obligation and they live it as an obligation, than it works because they have no alternatives and by the way it is an obligation that is useful also for them, but then they arrive to us, after two weeks, you feel that the person is 'decompressed', I use this term [...] because they are on the territory as citizens, it is really a thing in which you can see the difference, it is a different approach [...] so, this is the difference, they are not the beneficiaries, they are not all, the asylum seekers, they are not the ones who have just received, they are people who right now have their suitcase in their hands and who have to try and who want to stay here with things that they have not discovered yet. (key informant)

Once outside the bubble of reception, the representations of refugees and asylum seekers may change, opening to the possibility to find other solutions and to shift the focus from the formal aspects (the juridical label) to the substantial one (on people and citizens' rights), developing also creative solutions or showing the necessity to adapt the action to a new kind of people that may benefit of it. This path is not always easy and representations and the consequent practices developed by civil society and third sector associations may follow different guiding principles. This is particularly evident in the field of the initiatives developed to facilitate the housing inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers out of the reception system. Although the presence of immigrants who are sleeping in informal settlements around the city is still a significant phenomenon (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa 2021), many associations, informal groups and third sectors organisations are trying to do their best to overcome it. As written before, some of the third sector organisations which manage reception cen-

tres, have also their own projects, in which they host for a while families or young men who are facing, not only economic, difficulties in accessing the private housing market. Only regular asylum seekers and refugees may access these services and places are limited, not enough to satisfy the requests. Besides these services, some associations or volunteers work in strict collaboration with third sector organisations involved in the reception, and offer refugees and asylum seekers who are going out from the projects, a place to live until they can find a house. Furthermore, there are associations or social services finding housing solutions for migrant and native people in difficulty, that are adapting their action in the light of the new requests, questioning their ways to offer housing solutions. They develop new experiences of cohabitation not depending on, but in collaboration with third sector organisations engaged in reception. Finally, informal groups have been created with the peculiar aim to offer temporary housing solutions to these people while exercising forms of advocacy to guarantee their fundamental rights.

All the solutions and new projects offered and here briefly presented are still evolving and present both strengths and weaknesses. The former may be shortly listed as a strong general commitment of the local community, which increased after the latest changes to the reception system, the strong collaboration at every level (public, third sector, associations, informal groups and single volunteers), the creativity and the resilience, both expressed in terms of the capability to convert the resources available, relying also on other forms of social and financial support. The latter, and in particular the difficulties all these realities are facing to overcome an internalised model of reception, will be presented in the following paragraph.

8 “At Least I Don’t Have to Say Thanks”: Some (Forced) Limits in and Beyond the Reception System

The bubble in which the whole reception system has been included and that nowadays is challenged, revealed some limits in promoting the substantial working and housing inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers who entered in it.

Built on strict rules and through a language focused on some keywords like ‘autonomy’, ‘competence’, ‘vulnerability’, the reception system not only has been divided and separated from all other public services (providing, for example, its own psychological support system or job orientation), but produced divisions also within it, distinguishing between ‘good migrants’ or ‘bad migrants’, according to their capabilities and, above all, to their adherence to the rules of the reception (respect of the times, respect of the rules of co-habitation, being reliable on the working place) (Manocchi 2017).

This second differentiation probably depended on the expectations of the managing organisations to represent themselves outside, in the territory, as examples of 'good reception', also legitimised by a rhetoric of the public institutions linked for example to the development of 'best practices'.

Furthermore, this distinction could be reinforced also by the fact that from a legal point of view, in the past, asylum seekers could be recognised if they could prove a 'good integration path'. These stratified separations had also important practical consequences once people went out of the projects, leading to paradoxical situations that could question this rhetoric:

The point is if the integration has been interpreted, for example, for young age, as a lack of relationships in the country of origin, a good studying path, maybe a civil service that in the meantime is finished; therefore a person who is potentially hyper-integrated and who obtained the document on this basis, is forced to go to a dormitory and therefore to move from a moment in which in the project you are the best, or one of the best, to a moment in which you share a dormitory with people who are at the margins of the society, and this fact creates very strong imbalances, because people are not ready, and also social workers are not ready. (key informant)

A discourse based on the merit, although legitimised firstly by the legal frame, and not on rights, can be counter-productive for the social inclusion of these people and the reproduction of these logics outside can create new boundaries among asylum seekers and refugees who deserve further help and those who do not.

These representations tend to be reproduced outside the reception system in other services or initiatives.

Well, for the moment I met two opposite macro-categories. I mean, there are the super-autonomous and therefore the people who arrive [to the service] who are present, here, on the territory, but completely autonomous; from the other side there is a big bracket of people who are hyper-vulnerable, that is they often come accompanied also by social workers, there are many services who are already activated or that are activating, I would say that the intermediate bracket is missing, perhaps that we are more used to see within the project [of reception], that is the person who is autonomous on certain aspects, while on others who needs an accompaniment that is a little structured; well, these two categories, the super-autonomous and the vulnerables no autonomous are much more present [within the service]. (key informant)

We agreed that people are chosen by the social worker, therefore it is difficult that we help someone who has not been introduced to us, for a reason, they are too many [people who need help]; [...] so, it seems to us a right criterion that of saying well he/she is a person who did a lot and has some numbers to move forward, he/she deserves also help, it doesn't mean that an unlucky person doesn't deserve help, but they are so many that, I mean. (key informant)

Within this context, some refugees and asylum seekers, who are considered to behave properly, can pass from a project to another, others can find other solutions, above all in terms of housing and working strategies, that don't cross the ones provided by the services listed above, becoming even more invisible for the native community, but maybe more rooted in the territory. The situation of precariousness that refugees and asylum seekers are facing, reveals how the structure of the labour and housing market in Trentino (with some differences and similarities in Italy as well) can be considered one of the main reason why these people, in most cases, cannot project their life in the territory in a more stable manner. Given the seasonal or short-term jobs that they are doing while they are going out from the projects (notice how having a job can be also a cause of exclusion from the right of reception), they can enter in some other projects of the territory or find some temporary housing solutions, falling then into a situation of extreme vulnerability once their contract, as well as the period in which they are hosted, are concluded. Among case workers and volunteers, there is awareness about the possibility that their support may end with an accompaniment to the so-called 'low threshold services'.

Well, the job loss or we know that we received an intern, hoping that this period can help him as a launch pad, but we foresee that maybe this cannot be its conclusion; therefore an intern, a person who lost his job because his contract has not been renewed or truly because he lost the job because the company closed and... people who are doing civil service, right now there is this phenomenon of guys who are doing the civil service, it may be that where they are doing the civil service doesn't end with a hiring and it finishes, in those cases we do an accompaniment on the territory, it is sad, but it happens, we know that it may happen. (key informant)

The structure of the labour market, as well as the distrustful attitude towards migrants of the local community - widespread also in the housing market - limit the operating margins of the social workers who are engaged, or were engaged, in the promotion of refugees and asylum seekers' working inclusion.

One of the most used tools to match job demand and supply has been internships, which, although having been often successful for

inclusion, accepted and institutionalised unpaid work, socialising immigrants to their label of unqualified workers within the society and allowing companies and factories to always benefit from a free labour force, that hardly could have been absorbed in the paid labour market (Di Cecco 2019). Although the creativity of certain solutions found by third sector organisations can be, as previously written, appreciated and a strong work also to inform immigrants of their rights has been carried out, internships may have contributed to enforce the precariousness of life conditions of refugees and asylum seekers and all migrants and people in general, improving their qualifications, but imposing on them an institutionalised subordination, that someone did not accept. The episode narrated by one of the key informants is extremely useful to highlight this controversial issue, on which organisations have already reflected:

I believe an interesting case, on which we have reflected also in team, is the case of this man, therefore a man of a certain age, we tried many ways, but he was having a very hard time with the language, he was a little slow, and it was at the end of the project and he was one of the cases in which we found a somewhat extraordinary resource, we understand what we can do, he went to a hotel in Trentino, on the mountains and therefore he did, the idea was that he would have a couple of months of internship and then he would be hired, it seems to me; now I don't remember exactly, but after the internship they did hire him, but with very few hours and in a situation of extreme irregularity and he chose to move, and he moved to work in Foggia, he went to Foggia, Rosarno, he worked in agriculture according to the different seasons and then he came back to renew his documents, we saw each other and he told me the situation in the South, that he was living etcetera and I said to him 'well, but don't you think that maybe you could have had a little bit more here?' and he answered 'in the South, I am exploited but at least I don't have to say thanks to anybody; here it seems that they do me a favour if they give to me 400 euro per month to work in a hotel' and I said: 'OK let's reflect a little bit on it', and sometimes it comes back to us, eh? In our mind. (key informant)

Furthermore, this system tended, above all in the past, to centralise the knowledge and expertise in assisting refugees and asylum seekers, operating within some forced limits (above all legal) that inevitably shaped also those of the wider community. An example can be provided through the meaningful words of a key informant, who is trying to develop new strategies to face the requests for accommodation by immigrants out of the projects. In the ethnographic diary written during one of our meetings it is said:

An important issue emerged concerning the 'new requests': the paths developed by immigrants who came to access the service are very similar, people have similar experiences and this leads to talk about a 'massification of assistance', that is, it is like if during the reception project, anybody was offered the same possibilities and experiences (training or internships), making it difficult for the other services/projects to understand peculiarities and in which qualities a person differs from the other to propose its own intervention. (field note, 14 March 2019)

Finally, the reception bubble created also confusion and debates on which should have been the social service responsible for the care and assistance of refugees and asylum seekers:

With particular reference to the research population, the key informant tells me about a problem concerning 'to whom belongs an asylum seeker?', a short circuit was created concerning the assistance of international protection seekers, with social services affirming that they were the responsibility of CINFORMI, making these people fall in a condition of strong marginality that forced them to access the low threshold services. (field note, 18 March 2019)

These are limits that we observed within and beyond the reception system and they can all be linked with the creation and maintenance of borders that lead to a mechanism of reproduction of inequalities, also in the wider community. After the changes previously described, all these limits have the potential to be overcome. Stronger collaboration and reflexive analysis among all people who are engaged in the welfare system is needed and it seems to us that these processes are ongoing and reinforcing. At the same time, it should also be emphasised that the creation of a sort of 'parallel welfare' or a welfare specifically aimed at refugees and asylum seekers, if, on the one hand, it could provide specific and more targeted support, on the other hand, it can create the conditions for an easy and generalised dismantling of the services, with the consequent loss of both migrant 'guests' and social operators.

9 Conclusions

The panorama described is extremely varied and undoubtedly shows a social world deeply committed to promoting work, housing and the social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers at the margins of the reception system. In doing so, civil society and organisations are facing different challenges, referred not just on financial resources, that in Trento do not seem to be a problem as confirmed by the success of

many fund raising occasions, but in terms of taking reflective actions on the projects developed, avoiding the reproduction of inequalities, while one is engaged in overcoming them.

Further reflections on the entire social system are needed and they have to be inserted in a broader theoretical frame. In particular, it seems important to keep together the reflections on the living conditions of migrants with the analysis of the uncertain and opaque nature of the institutions.

Given its peculiarity and fruitful social texture, the territory we have chosen as a case study allowed us to reflect both on the incorporated meanings and representations associated to reception and on the practices developed inside and outside its borders, problematising their lights and shadows.

In light of the changes that have taken place in recent years, the efforts made by this contribution in exploring the triangulation made up of social actors, migrants and institutions can help broaden our vision on the reception system. Although the reception of refugees and asylum seekers has long been at the centre of numerous Italian debates that are mainly focused on rules, workings, and dynamics of control circulating inside the system, still not much has been written about how the reception paradigm affects the everyday-life conditions of migrants who are outside of this system.

Just as not many words have been said about the working conditions of social operators who are now forced to manage the erosion caused by the national and local policies. To the creativity and gestures of resistance that for years we have observed coming from migrants, especially in those studies focused on this topic, we must now add those coming from the employees involved in the reception system. Despite the concrete differentiation of status, with particular regard to the condition of non-citizen status shared by migrants, observing the role played by third sector organisations in facing the numerous obstacles posed by institutions can become a topic of interest. The ethnographic data and materials displayed on the pages of this article reveal two important elements not yet fully explored. Firstly, they show the forms of racism and discrimination that affect the workers employed in the reception system. This type of treatment is the result of an intense campaign of hatred and intolerance carried out by political actors who have spread the idea that working with migrants is not a real job. The consequences of this political communication are extremely visible in the empirical section reported in this article, especially where the testimonies of social workers describe the difficulty of building relationships of trust with the community and with the territory to provide social assistance, work and housing inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers.

Secondly, they capture the reflexivity adopted by workers who observe the functioning of this system from the outside and which

now appears to them full of critical problems. By adopting an external look, workers can certainly become more critical and, above all, put in place new strategies to cope with communication and cuts imposed by the political actors.

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