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## Understanding international migrations in rural areas: new processes of social innovation and rural regeneration in Southern Italy

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**Abstract.** The current international migration has transformed the morphology, the social structures and the local economies in many rural areas, often helping to reverse a long-term demographic and social decline. Analyzing two experiences of Southern Italy, affected by depopulation and deficit of social services, the paper aims to explore how immigrants can contribute to social regeneration, focusing on the hypothesis of social innovation. The strengthening of local services and the diversification of economic activities, which are conveyed by immigration, have helped to achieve significant implications for the territories. On the one hand the positive impact of migration for rural regeneration is recognized, on the other the settlement of new population appears problematic, due to the resistance processes posed by local communities and the lack of social infrastructures. These could represent an obstacle to the possibility of social change.

**Keywords:** international migration, rural areas, social innovation, rural regeneration, Southern Italy.

**JEL codes:** F22, O35, P25.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the changing on a global scale of phenomena such as the capitalist restructuring of agri-food systems, the new space-time flexibilities and technologies and the production of differentiated immigration policies have determined a restructuring of migratory flows, directed to new spaces of life and work that respond to the post-industrial migration model (Pugliese, 1993). New drivers of migration (Corrado, D'Agostino, 2018; King, 2002; Sassen, 2016) have therefore led to a transformation in the geography of migration in which rural and peripheral areas, unlike fordist migrations inspired by functionalist and structuralist paradigms (Sivini, 2000), assume a certain significance.

Global cities (Sassen, 1991) and gateway cities (Çağlar, Glick Schiller, 2015) have traditionally represented the preferred field of analysis to explore the migratory processes and the dynamics of social and economic integration of the foreign population; just recently the topic of migration to rural areas has been included in the international debate (Jentsch, Simard, 2009;

McAreevey, 2012; Woods, 2016). Therefore, pursuant to the processes of peripheralization of capitalist development (Arrighi, Piselli, 1987) and to the restructuring process of the agricultural sector connected to a growing demand for flexible and precarious wage labor - faced with the specific problems of European rural areas characterized by unfavourable demographic dynamics and a lack of local labor supply (Kasimis *et al.*, 2010; Kasimis, Papadopoulos, 2005; Colloca, Corrado, 2013) - and to the introduction of spatial dispersal policies - connected to the need for member countries to share the “burden” -, a significant number of economic migrants, often employed in labor-intensive activities, and refugees and asylum seekers have settled in European rural areas (Camarero *et al.*, 2012; Morén-Alegret, 2008; Camarero *et al.*, 2009; Oliva, 2010).

The arrival of new populations, of “unexpected groups in unexpected places” (Camarero, Oliva, 2016: 93), has encouraged studies and research about the transformation processes of populations and rural places (Milbourne, 2007; Smith, 2007; Morén-Alegret, 2008; Bell, Osti, 2010; Woods, 2011; Kordel *et al.*, 2018) which are differentiated, multifunctional and globalized (Woods, 2007, 2016; Murray, 2006; Hedberg, Do Carmo, 2012).

The diversity, the complexity, the multi-spatiality of the patterns of mobility (Corrado, 2020) crossing rural areas have given rise, in fact, to unprecedented transformations in social, economic and environmental relationships, allowing rural communities to experience multiple development trajectories (Brown, Schucksmith, 2016). In this regard, migratory processes contribute to redefining the faces of rural areas (Woods 2007, 2016) in which settlement and residential patterns, work organization dynamics and distribution of goods and services suggest thinking about these new presences as opportunities to contrast the processes of depopulation and degradation of rural areas. The presence of foreigners makes a clear contribution to the survival of rural areas as populated spaces (Hedberg, Do Carmo, 2012; Bell, Osti, 2010; McAreevey, 2017; Stenbacka, 2013) struggling to remain resilient (McAreevey, 2017); it has also offered opportunities for maintaining active services, for developing new relationships and regenerating the socio-economic context (Camarero, Oliva, 2016; Corrado, D’Agostino, 2018; Jentsch, Simard, 2009; Labrianidis, Sykas, 2009).

The aim of this paper is to research the transformative action of international migration in rural areas referring to demographic, social, economic and environmental spheres, attempting to read the experiences given here as processes of social innovation. A certain dynamism in relation to the foreign presence and to the regeneration of rural areas has been observed.

Reasoning on the effects of the foreign presence in host societies and on the strategies adopted at institutional level, through two case studies, will make it possible to “recognize the specificities and generalities that emerge in terms of immigrants’ experiences” (Miraftab, 2011).

Two experiences of resistance and regeneration, matured in the context of Southern Italy, will then be analyzed, the community of Camini (province of Reggio Calabria, in Calabria region) and the Welcome Network of small municipalities (province of Benevento, in Campania region) in which SPRAR projects are present. The arrival of foreign population in these specific contexts has transformed the morphology and the social structures of rural areas. Italy is one of the major European countries affected by rural depopulation, in which the inner areas suffer from evident deficits in citizenship services; the presence of different national instruments such as the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI), the Leader and the SPRAR, promotes the recognition of the centrality of new inhabitants in the processes of territorial development and social regeneration. The methodology adopted refers to an extensive review of the academic and grey literature, to a recognition of studies and research, and to the analysis of available Istat data. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with privileged stakeholders.

## 2. DYNAMICS OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN RURAL AREAS

Rural areas, especially the inner and more fragile ones (Osti, Corrado, 2019), starting in the second half of the twentieth century, have experienced a process of disintegration, that has put them in a condition of marginalization and isolation. The “aree dell’osso” (Rossi-Doria, 1958) are therefore witnesses of degradation processes of places, of hydrogeological instability, of land abandonment and loss of biodiversity, of economic stagnation and of the suppression of services. These areas, perceived as areas in need of development measures, as places “left behind by globalization” (Longworth, 2008:103) continually at risk of existence, struggle to increase their attractiveness in order to identify new development opportunities (Taylor *et al.*, 2016).

In recent decades, European rural areas have experienced the arrival of different types of migration that, in different ways, have changed the composition of rural populations.

Buller (1994: 9) wrote that “foreigners are called on to play an increasingly important role, directly or indi-

rectly, in the evolution of the rural space and world”; therefore, contemporary rural migrations are configured as key processes for the future of the marginal areas themselves (Woods, 2005; Cloke, 2006; Bell, Osti, 2010; Hedberg, Do Carmo, 2012).

In the areas marked by abandoned and available “empty spaces” (Membretti, Lucchini, 2018), international migration has helped to balance the structure of population, which is getting older and older, giving rise to a “rural demographic refill” (Hedberg, Haandrikman, 2014: 129) and to a “rural revival” (Merlo, 2009: 29). The new inhabitants redefine rural spaces in many shapes: from the restructuring of the existing rural heritage to the recovery of ancient traditions, to the recovery of large portions of land, to the creation of new jobs (Battaglini, Corrado, 2014) and to the diversification of economic activities. In fact, migrants in rural areas work in a variety of economic sectors (Morèn-Alegret, Solana, 2004) oriented towards different workspaces, in particular in tourism, pastoralism, construction, and care services (Corrado *et al.*, 2016; Osti, Ventura, 2012). In this sense, rural areas are “multifunctional” (Kasimis, Papadopoulos, 2005; Labrianidis, Sykas, 2009; Kasimis *et al.*, 2010; Colloca, Corrado, 2013).

Several contributions highlight the improvements in relation to the overcoming of the labor shortage, to the tax revenue growth, to the increase in GDP (Gretter, 2018), to the sustainability of public services and commercial activities (Jentsch, Simard, 2009; Corrado, D’Agostino, 2019; McAreavey, 2017). Furthermore, the value of properties and requests for housing and infrastructure have increased through migrant entrepreneurship and the expansion of local markets (Søholt *et al.*, 2018). Finally, the foreign presence has changed and influenced the social fabric of the destination countries thanks to the contribution of new languages, new cultures, new habits and lifestyles that enrich social and cultural life (King, 2000; Kasimis *et al.*, 2003; de Lima, Wright, 2008; Fonseca, 2008). For these spaces, built as multi-author, multiform and co-constituted (Woods, 2011), immigration is an unexpected resource (Carchedi, 1999), that qualifies as an opportunity to be exploited within the local development policy of rural areas and social innovation.

However, foreign presence has also caused local conflicts (Bell, 1994; Woods, 2005). In small communities the arrival of new inhabitants has challenged the sense of belonging to places, undermining the processes of cohesion (Milbourne, Kitchen, 2014). The construction of ethnic or race-based relationships has been generated within the processes of territorialization of migrations (McAreavey, 2016), supported by anti-immigrant

ordinances (McAreavey, 2017). Corrado (2020: 71) highlights that “neo-European groups, by virtue of some elements – being «white», sharing similar cultures and religions – suffer fewer forms of discrimination and are more «accepted» in rural communities”. According to Sayad, migrants are not recognized as “persons with rights equal to those of citizens” (Palidda, 2002: X), their existence is functional to the persistent need for low-cost labor to be employed in informal labor-intensive sectors. These dynamics generate processes of “subordinate integration” (Ambrosini, 2005) and of “differentiated inclusion” (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2013) – inclusion in the labor market and exclusion from civil rights. In fact, the poor working conditions under which migrants are employed as agricultural laborers in rural areas, result in a “multi-dimensional precariousness” (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2018), life precariousness and job precariousness. Refugees and asylum seekers who face the irregular and illegal market for flexible, underpaid, and precarious jobs, also respond to the process of “refugation” of work in agriculture (Corrado, D’Agostino, 2018).

European rural areas have also been affected by a process of feminization of migration as opposed to the “gender blind” approach (King, 2002) of migration theory. Considering the intensification of labor demand associated with traditionally female sectors (Camarero *et al.*, 2012), there has been a strengthening of the “global care chain” (Hochschild, 2000). Further processes have seen the employment of women in various production, processing, and packaging activities which, however, tend to “reproduce and naturalize traditional roles or gender representations” (Corrado, 2020).

The analysis of the processes of inclusion and exclusion of migrants in rural areas, if on the one hand underlines the obstacles and opportunities both for those who arrive and for those who welcome, on the other hand it highlights the temporariness of migration and the consequent definition of rural areas such as “places of transit” (Kasimis *et al.*, 2003; Corrado *et al.*, 2016). The presence of migrants in rural areas is short-lived (Hedberg, Haandrikman, 2014); in particular, after a first phase of reception and stay, refugees decide to move to urban areas in search of other life and work opportunities (Corrado, 2020). Therefore, their impact on demographic revitalization is limited (Hedlund *et al.*, 2017). A lot of research (Bosque, 2018; Fonseca, 2008; Coleman, 2002) have rejected the idea of immigration as a long-term repopulation strategy, and as a solution to the structural problems of rural areas. The process of territorial regeneration is also hindered by the absence of structures that immigrants can draw on to orient themselves in the host communities. The lack of experience

and of institutional infrastructure represents a challenge not only for migrants but also for service providers, who in most cases are replaced by the action of volunteers and third sector actors (Camarero, Oliva, 2019). Winders (2014) notes that immigrants in newly immigrated areas are mostly young; this demographic trend amplifies the impact on specific services, increasing the pressure on local health and education systems (Azzolini *et al.*, 2012; Camarero, Oliva, 2019; Dax, Machold, 2015). Therefore, local, and national voluntary organizations become important support systems to help migrants access information and health care, enhance economic opportunities and reduce inequalities (McAreevey, 2012) which, however, face scarcity of resources available.

In this sense, immigrants who arrive in rural areas have to experience new forms of access to the material conditions of existence (Sivini, 2005), forced to implement strategies for adaptation, survival and overcoming the structural constraints imposed by capital in the reception contexts, which can be translated as experiences of social innovation.

### 3. SOCIAL INNOVATION IN RURAL AREAS

The concept of social innovation (SI) as polysemic and “used in a variety of contexts by a range of different authors writing for diverse audiences” (Oosterlynck, 2013: 107) is not immediately referable to a general and shared interpretation. As Moulaert *et al.*, (2013) point out, SI cannot be restricted to a set of good practices alone, but also stands for a theoretical construct - albeit still being defined (Oosterlynck, 2013) -, a research field and an emerging phenomenon.

In recent years there has been a proliferation of SI literature, also stimulated by the growing interest on the part of policy makers. But despite the popularity the concept has gained, it still remains vague and ambiguous, influenced by a variety of approaches and lacking an established methodology. SI is traditionally presented as a remedy for social problems that technological innovation has not been able to solve (Caulier-Grice *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the SI is considered opposite and subsequent to technological innovation; but SI is not a new concept (MacCallum *et al.*, 2009). As Godin (2012) points out, SI appeared between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, already suggested by Franklin ([1741]1987), Durkheim (1893), Weber ([1947]1968) and Schumpeter (1934), who use the concept as a process that modifies the social organization of the community and the enterprise, but not fully documented. SI is therefore never theorized but is adopted as a slogan

to indicate alternative solutions to social problems and needs (Godin, 2012).

In the 1960s, in the context of social movements, the use of the concept of SI “explodes” (Barbera, 2020) and acquires a “scientific status” (Moulaert *et al.*, 2017), related to the notions of emancipation and autonomy, to then be assumed as a structuring principle of socio-economic change and as a local development strategy. After a decline in importance, in the 90s the SI regains relevance in the international debate, relating the themes of social entrepreneurship and hybrid organizations (Barbera, 2020). In contemporary literature we can therefore refer to two interpretative areas of SI studies: a first field of Euro-Canadian studies, which interprets the SI as a tool to achieve equity between citizens and social groups through the satisfaction of human needs, and to contrast neoliberal model (Barbera, 2020), with the emphasis on empowerment and solidarity; a second approach, defined by public institutions, in which SI is a strategy that aims both to satisfy individual and collective needs, and to strengthen solidarity in social relations (BEPA, 2010). However, as Barbera states, the definitions provided are “naively preached without clarifying the added value of the concept compared to those already available in the social science toolbox” (Barbera, 2020: 137). A quasi-concept (Busacca, 2013), of a chameleon-like nature (Moulaert *et al.*, 2013), an all-encompassing umbrella that includes a multiplicity of practices, which nevertheless deserves to be investigated in order to identify its transformative scope.

Although the SI has been addressed by different disciplinary perspectives, which keep their academic habitus (King, 2012), MacCallum *et al.* (2009) note that there is a dimension that unites these perspectives: the reconfiguration of social relations and the satisfaction of needs. The analytical framework we refer to in this paper is provided by Moulaert *et al.* (2013), according to which SI is a process that concerns three dimensions: satisfaction of needs, reconfiguration of social relations and collective action.

If understood in this way, SI is a new form of civic involvement, participation and democratization that involves disadvantaged groups, leading to the satisfaction of unsatisfied human needs, with the consequent improvement in the quality of life in a region (Neumeier, 2012). The SI is therefore realized through paths in which people change the way they relate, redefine behaviors, attitudes, procedures and rules that have repercussions on social and institutional practices (Moulaert, Van Dyck, 2013). But 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 (Vicari Haddock, 2009).

The processes of social innovation can be identified through the occurrence of this three-dimensional structure, that simultaneously connect the material, social and political dimensions. Whether it is changes in relationships, in the work organization, in new social institutions, in the development of new social movements, in the introduction of new business practices (Mumford, 2002), the SI actions must be social in both objectives and methods (Murray *et al.*, 2010).

As Bock (2016) points out, the concept of SI, which entered the international debate as a critique of innovation theory in the traditional sense, has been frequently adopted by policy makers with reference to development processes in urban contexts and, only recently, in rural contexts.

The definition proposed by the author, that adapts to the context of rural marginalization, identifies SI as “changes in the social fabric of rural societies that are pertinent to their survival: social relations, available capabilities, readiness to engage for the collective and the capacity to organize collective action” (Bock, 2016: 559). In this sense, we can mean SI as a process that determines the reconfiguration of social practices in response to the challenges related to the economy, the environment, the society and the demand for change triggered by the local actors, whose needs are not reflected in the institutionalized field of public or private action (Moulaert, van Dyck, 2013). 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.

SI is accepted as a “new” concept that intervenes in the resolution of structural problems; however, “social innovation does not necessarily have to be new «in itself» but rather new to the territory, the sector, the field of action”<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, rejecting the reductionist views that consider social innovation as a panacea to face the changes affecting the most vulnerable areas, there is recognition of its development potential in the mobilization of local resources, in the processes of participation and empowerment of the community, through actions aimed at the material and existential satisfaction of essential needs, and at the adoption of a more democratic governance.

The community dimension is of crucial importance; in fact, collective action, from the territory, stimulates

new forms of organization of productive and social relations. New alliances arise from the active involvement of the community, self-organizing groups that develop new solutions to common problems. The SI is therefore socially, culturally and territorially deeply ingrained (Bock, 2012), due to the path-specific and place-specific (Zamagni *et al.*, 2015) nature of the process, dependent on both previous experiences and the historical-social characteristics of the context in which it develops. Bock (2016) reports critically the spread of a narrative that, in order to promote the emerging experiences of social innovation, assumes that the territories involved must necessarily own abundant human and social capital (Kinsella *et al.*, 2010), fortified social networks, spirit of trust, collective commitment, common sense and identity of the place (Dargan, Shucksmith, 2008) as well as charismatic and capable promoting groups. This overview constitutes a limit for those more marginal areas which, due to depopulation and loss of critical mass (Woods, 2011: 179), do not have sufficient resources to trigger change, highlighting thus the nature of the SI as a process that conveys spacial inequalities and disparities. At this point, the author identifies an alternative way to produce social innovation: starting from the recognition of the structural disadvantages suffered by rural areas, it is effective to draw on exogenous development resources, improving spatial “connectivity” and attracting new and diversified actors.

Local action promoted by a small group, through the use of endogenous and exogenous resources, and the re-appropriation of physical and symbolic spaces, becomes a collective action.

The awareness of the fact that SI is not a self-help process, which consequently reconfirms its material, symbolic and political disconnection, can give rise to unprecedented development opportunities even for the most remote areas (Bock, 2016).

#### 4. PRESENTATION OF CASE STUDIES

Two experiences seem particularly relevant for the identification and the analysis of reception strategies that have encouraged the regeneration of rural areas, in relation to demographic, social and economic dynamics. These have been identified in the context of Southern Italy, where the effects of multiple crises (Corrado *et al.*, 2020) have had a greater echo and where the number of migrants in rural areas, in relation to the new dynamics of respatialization, has increased significantly. In Calabria, in 2019, the number of foreign residents was 108,494 (5.5% of the total population [ISTAT, 2018]),

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rogers E.M. (1995). *Diffusion of Innovations* Free Press, New York in *Modelli ed esperienze di innovazione sociale in Italia. Secondo rapporto sull'innovazione sociale*. Franco Angeli, Milano, 2015.

while in Campania it was 258,524 (4.4% of the resident population)<sup>2</sup>. During the last years there was also an increase in the presence of asylum seekers and refugees in the internal areas of the regions. In Calabria in 2020 there were 2,959 beneficiaries of the SPRAR/SIPROIMI<sup>3</sup> projects for a total<sup>4</sup> of 10,347 asylum seekers and refugees, while in Campania there were 2,677 beneficiaries of the projects, out of a total of 16,422 asylum seekers and refugees. The reception of migrants and refugees is a new and important fact for these territories. These contexts, traditionally areas of emigration, have experienced immigration processes in recent decades; they represent micro contexts, lacking structures, infrastructure and income opportunities able to meet the needs of new inhabitants, but in which the arrival of new population has stimulated the activation of initiatives with the aim of encouraging development and revitalization processes (Corrado, D'Agostino, 2018).

By analyzing local practices, it will be possible to examine the ways of satisfying the different needs referred to the foreign population and to the local population, observing on the one hand the potential for transformation of marginal areas and on the other the dynamics of reconfiguration of social relations.

#### 4.1. Eurocoop Jungi Mundu – Camini (RC)

Since the end of the nineties, the Calabrian inner areas have been involved in migratory dynamics that led to the arrival of populations of different origins, which has been followed by the promotion of hospitality projects that have influenced the development of new social and economic transformations (Corrado, D'Agostino, 2016). Among the reception projects for asylum seekers and refugees promoted by small Italian municipalities, as part of the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR), the experience of the municipality of Camini should be evidenced.

Inspired by the nearby “Riace model”, in 2011 the Municipality of Camini started the SPRAR “Jungi Mundu” project of widespread hospitality entrusted to the social cooperative<sup>5</sup> “Eurocoop Servizi”. New inhabitants from Syria<sup>6</sup>, Morocco, Senegal, Gambia, and the Coast

of Ivory, refugees, and asylum seekers, today populate the houses once abandoned, re-inhabiting the places and creating spaces for economic and social exchange. The challenge of Eurocoop Servizi has been to combine the intercepted needs – depopulation of the village, closure of commercial activities, absence of essential services, disused property assets – in an innovative system for the benefit of both the migrant component and the local community, with the dual objective of repopulating the village by promoting a better coexistence between “old” and “new” inhabitants.

In 2019, there were 118 people in reception (15.8% of the entire population) compared to 25 in 2009. The largest foreign community is the Syrian one, in a percentage equal to 32.5% of foreigners present in the area, followed by Nigeria (16.3%) and Eritrea (9.8%). The foreign population is equally distributed between the male percentage (52.8%) and the female one (47.3%) with an age range between 0-14 years equal to 27.6% of the total and between 15-39 years equal to 48.7%.

The reception of the population thus distributed has allowed the activation/reactivation of basic services suppressed following the depopulation, including the opening of the school and the post office, the restoration of the bus line, the establishment of a playroom, of an educational farm and of a baby parking service and the opening of a bar and three restaurants. The increase in population and the consequent increase in the demand for housing in which to host migrants, has also encouraged the restructuring of the historic center of Camini, with the recovery of the abandoned and disused houses that the owners have granted free of charge. This has made it possible to set up a building cooperative whose members – migrants and natives – have recovered the abandoned houses, now used as *Albergo Diffuso* for the promotion of solidarity tourism. The redevelopment of the village has increased its attractiveness with an international coverage; in 2018, Camini registered 3,000 visitors, in an area which had never been affected by tourist flows. The development and promotion of local, gastronomic and cultural products has also been enhanced; through the “Camini d'Avorio” project, created with the involvement of Ivorian migrants, more than 1,000 liters of extra virgin olive oil were produced using organic and sustainable farming practices on abandoned land. The promotion of local products and the recovery of ancient crafts and processing techniques, have also been enhanced through the activation of specific artisan educational workshops including cooking, wood, painting, tailoring, wrought iron, ceramics, jewelry and soap workshops (using locally produced oil). The management of the workshops and the provision of training intern-

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the estimates in the two reference areas do not consider migrants who are permanently present but not registered as residents, and those who are undocumented.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.siproimi.it/i-numeri-dello-sprar>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/249445>

<sup>5</sup> The cooperative was founded in 1999 in the form of a type B social cooperative, to provide services to the person.

<sup>6</sup> Through the Resettlement program prepared by the Ministry of the Interior. Today Camini has 57 Syrians, the largest community in Italy.

ships were financed with SPRAR resources aimed at the employment of some migrants such as bakers, teachers, farmers and breeders, craftsmen, and masons. Among the future projects of Eurocoop there is the launch of an agri-food laboratory in synergy with other territorial realities in which to involve young migrants, to whom will be entrusted land to be cultivated in full respect of workers' rights and under regular conditions. It is also planned to start a weaving laboratory for women victims of trafficking, financed by the Italian Buddhist Union, which provides, after a period of training, the establishment of a mixed cooperative (of refugees and locals) and the creation of enterprise. These initiatives that involve migrants in diversified activities are configured as alternative and efficient tools for the realization of an integration that is both economic and social; if shared and collectively participated, these practices can guarantee long-term sustainability. In order to diversify its funding resources, the Cooperative also adheres to various programs. For example, the volunteer project promoted by Projects Abroad, a government organization based in London and with the only Italian headquarters in Camini, manages and welcomes volunteers from all over the world. Furthermore, since 2018, Camini has joined the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects, hosting young people and international students. The SPRAR project has therefore contributed to the economic and social growth of the municipality of Camini; the coexistence and sharing of spaces between people from different countries, the mobilization of different actors, the support of local administrations, have given centrality to the arrival of new populations who are recognized for their participation in an inclusive growth and sustainable development of a declining reality.

However, the difficulties were not lacking. The local community expressed fear and mistrust in 2011 when the first refugees, eleven young people from the Ivory Coast, arrived in Camini; but the awareness-raising interventions by the members of the Cooperative and the need to trigger dynamics of change have accompanied the community on a path of openness. Further difficulties concern the management and bureaucratization of the SPRAR project. It very often happens that at the end of the project there is no guarantee for the successful socio-working integration in the context of arrival; this is determined in particular by the weak socio-entrepreneurial fabric and by the scarce income opportunities. The small size of the village, the need for new places for recreation and socialization, discourage young beneficiaries who decide to go to the big cities, in view of better living conditions. The unfavorable context flawed by the existence of organized crime also

hinders the process of achieving autonomy and entering the labor market. This also determines an instability of the SPRAR project, as it is highly dependent on the institutional political dimension. In response, the community of Camini has begun developing alternative solutions, experimenting with new forms of governance and development. Differentiated marketing channels and new sources of income are progressively supporting further initiatives. This shows that it is possible to create a model of good reception in synergy, through the support of local institutions, local associations, volunteers and citizens.

#### 4.2. *Welcome Network of small municipalities (BN)*

Part of the national territory (53%) consists of internal areas, which host 23% of the population that occupies 60% of the national territory. In these areas, marginal areas, and areas with a deficit of essential services, there are experiences in which communities and territories are self-activating from below, triggering innovative and sustainable forms of service delivery. This is the case of the network of "Small municipalities of Welcome", born in 2017 in the Benevento area and financed by the Fondazione con il Sud, which today has 32 member municipalities that go beyond the regional borders<sup>7</sup>. The network is configured as an alliance between small Italian municipalities, with a population of less than 5,000 inhabitants, sharing the demographic hemorrhage and the consequent decline in the supply of services. The goal of the network is to facilitate the transition from a classic model of "welfare of services" to a model of "relationship welfare". At the time of its establishment, the network adopted a pact in the "Manifesto for a network of small municipalities of Welcome" shared by Caritas of Benevento, which commits the municipalities involved to a supportive and welcoming. The Network adopt different tools: the Income for Inclusion (SIE), which supports poor families in their path out of poverty, the Health Budget, which provides for individualized therapeutic and rehabilitative projects, and the adherence to the Protection System for asylum seekers and refugees (SPRAR). Among other purposes, the fight against gambling and innovations in renewable energy development and the internet. The adoption of a universalistic welfare system that responds simultaneously to the needs of migrants and natives has served to stem the phenomena of racism and xeno phobia within the communities that, following

<sup>7</sup> For example, the municipalities of Zocca (Modena), Feltre (Belluno), Tiggiano (Lecce) Roseto Val Fortore, Biccari and Giuggianello, and other municipalities in the Molise area also joined the network.

the abandonment by the state, have closed themselves in localism mechanisms. There have been great difficulties in the network creation process; the presence of an information gap on the side of local administrators limited the knowledge of the tools available.

In 2017 Benevento ranked first in the SPRAR “Welcome” ranking in Italy with 14 newly approved SPRAR, compared to the five that were active before the campaign promoted by the Consortium and Caritas. The arrival of a new population has certainly triggered processes of transformation, in demographic and socio-economic terms. Among the Campania’s municipalities<sup>8</sup> participating in the network, promoters of SPRAR projects, Petruro Irpino is the most numerous in terms of the foreign population/total population ratio. With a percentage of around 8%, migrants present in Petruro Irpino come mainly from Syria, Nigeria, the Dominican Republic (17.4%) and from Ghana (13%). All the municipalities in the area have a balanced gender distribution and belonging to age group (on average mainly in the 0-4 and 15-39 ranges) but differentiating by country of origin. It should be noted the majority presence of women (67%) mainly of Ukrainian origin in the municipality of Chianche, and of Romanian origin in the municipality of Baselice (77%), and the greater presence of male citizens (70%) in the municipality of Torrecuso, mainly from Nigeria.

Immigrants established in the municipalities belonging to the network are involved in learning the Italian language, and in cultivating the abandoned countryside, in social agriculture aimed at km 0 markets, in cultivating vineyards and olive groves, in re-functionalizing abandoned buildings and commons. The donation of land by some inhabitants has allowed migrants and local people to recover uncultivated land, responding to an existing order from IPER CONAD. Several carpentry, tailoring and glassmaking workshops have been activated, as well as training internships that allowed migrants to learn technical skills and, in some cases, work on social farms and agricultural and gastronomic activities. In addition to the creation of new income opportunities, the foreign presence has favored the reactivation of community services, including the reopening of schools, commercial activities and public services. The solid structure of the network, in order to transform migration into opportunities for territorial development, has been configured as a response to the counter-exodus that characterized the small municipalities and the rural/mountain areas in Italy.

<sup>8</sup> Baselice (BN), Castelpoto (AV), Chianche (AV), Petruro Irpino (AV), Pietrelcina (BN), Roccabascerana (AV), San Bartolomeo (BN), Santa Paolina (AV), Sassinoro (BN), Torrecuso (BN).

In addition to improving the living conditions of the inhabitants of small communities, the project “The small municipalities of Welcome” has also provided for the establishment of ten community cooperatives engaged in local services and active in the field of social agriculture, tourism, crafts, maintenance services and local welfare. The community cooperative, a model still being defined, has proved to be a useful tool to create shared development paths. As a model of social innovation in which citizens appear at the same time as managers and users of the services they provide, it is able to create synergy by systematizing the activities of individual citizens, businesses, associations and institutions, thus responding to multiple needs of mutuality<sup>9</sup>. A hybrid between public and private, paid and voluntary work, economy and sociality, production and consumption, which responds to multidimensional needs. To this day, there are six community cooperatives<sup>10</sup> formalized in the network, all united by a mixed composition – migrants and natives – and by the mission of regenerating communities. Each of them has carried out innovative projects of coexistence between natives and migrants, investing and systematizing local resources. The constitution of the “Borgo Sociale” which hosts nine young asylum seekers and refugees from the SPRAR of Roccabascerana; the organization of theatrical, craft and textile workshops; the inauguration of a small “AlimenTiamo” market which gave work to the local unemployed and to the beneficiaries of the SPRAR of Chianche; the management of a widespread hotel in Campolattaro which involved ten guests of the SPRAR project and the establishment of the “Alimenta” bistro are among the activities carried out.

The cooperatives are, together with the other actors that coexist in the Campania region, included in a consortium system already existing and consolidated in the territory. The reference is to the “Sale della Terra”, a consortium made up of about sixteen cooperatives, associations, social enterprises and community cooperatives<sup>11</sup>. Established in 2016, the realities that are part of it have a history of social commitment rooted in the territory, actively involved in civil economy projects as an opportunity for social cohesion and inclusive and multifunctional agriculture. Consortium members and beneficiaries are heterogeneous: local farmers, unemployed young people, people with disabilities, migrants welcomed in

<sup>9</sup> Legacoop, <http://www.legacoop.coop/cooperativedicomunita/>

<sup>10</sup> Among these Tralci di Vite in Chianche, Ilex in Pietrelcina, Cives in Campolattaro, Pietra Angolare in Petruro Irpino, Con Lavoro in Sassinoro, and Tilia in Roccabascerana.

<sup>11</sup> Consorzio Sale della Terra, <https://www.consorziosaledellaterra.it/le-socie/>



the SPRAR system. The Consortium now employs about 250 workers, through the creation of a business and the recovery of uncultivated land.

Fourteen administrations, among those that adhere to Welcome Network, have used the collaboration platform of the Manifesto to present SPRAR projects, attracting resources of around eight million euros, otherwise not used, and blocking the speculation of private “migrant centers”. Here the consortium has had the role of supporting the territory and the small municipalities of the area, also guaranteeing a correct and integrated management of resources, through the use of existing local development tools to promote social cohesion (PSR, SNAI, municipal resources).

A micro-ecosystem of civil economy has been created around the Sale della Terra, which has generated opportunities for income and employment in tourism, agriculture and crafts sectors.

The associations have created a model that welcomes, it takes the opportunities to develop a model of solidarity economy after the employment crisis, and welcomes, integrating, hosting and generating benefits for the territory. Among the activities of the entities associated with the Consortium, there is the promotion of practical agricultural workshops in which the beneficiaries participate in the agricultural production of vegetables and their subsequent processing; the production of ancient grains for flour, pasta and bakery products, of hemp from which to obtain flour and oil ready for sale have also been started. The beneficiaries of the SPRAR can follow and participate in all stages of production, in order to acquire the necessary skills. The Consortium has also equipped itself with a production line for products grown at km 0<sup>12</sup>, delivered to shop counters, which decide to support an ethical and civil economy. Training courses in the wine and olive growing field were also activated, in collaboration with Slow Food Benevento, benefiting from the funds for social agriculture of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Project with which a rural building was recovered into an experience of rural social cohousing for people with disabilities.

A key partner is Caritas of Benevento which works daily to support the reception and assistance of vulnerable people. The joint action of the network of “small municipalities of Welcome”, the Consortium “Il Sale della Terra” and Caritas has worked with the aim of integrating welfare policies with those of local development and promoting national and international solidarity networks.

A paradigm shift that allows an innovative form of municipal welfare which, by responding in an undiffer-

entiated way to everyone’s needs, can generate economy and sociality. Small communities therefore have been intended as laboratories to experiment with new forms of active citizenship and new development paths with zero exclusion.

## 5. CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

The reception experiences examined in this contribution offer a point for reflection about the analysis of developmental and social innovation processes in marginal areas. The role of the context is crucial for understanding the emergence and consolidation of socially innovative initiatives. The realities of Camini and the small municipalities of Welcome emerge from a fragile and fragmented context, in relation to both geographic isolation and periphery due to insufficient infrastructures, demographic decline, increased unemployment and emigration of groups more active, as a consequence of the wider processes of social change related to the financial crisis and the dismantling of the welfare state (Bock, 2016).

The cuts in public funding, the dissatisfaction of local communities and the challenges posed by the arrival of new populations have acted as catalysts for the development of SI.

In the case of the small municipalities, the demographic decline and the economic crisis have led to a greater deepening of welfare tools, with the consequent implementation at the local level; in the case of Camini, on the other hand, the lack of services and work, the degradation of the landscape and the demographic decline have stimulated the activation/reactivation of essential services, and the promotion of services for the community, which have made it possible to overcome the limitations linked to local context.

In both cases, the arrival of new population has enabled them to move towards new models and new political and social relationships and alliances connected to a change in places of power (Lèvesque, 2013). In this sense, implementing measures with a view to social innovation is an alternative development strategy (Moulaert *et al.*, 2013) which contrasts social and territorial inequalities and which, using a place-based approach, tries to respond in a sustainable way to the specific problems of territories, also drawing on external resources.

We can interpret the practices from a tripolar perspective, referring to the definition of SI offered by Moulaert *et al.* (2013) which simultaneously takes into account the satisfaction of needs, the reconfiguration of social relations and the mobilization of disadvantaged groups.

<sup>12</sup> #FrescodiTerra, [www.frescoditerra.it](http://www.frescoditerra.it)

### 5.1. Satisfaction of needs:

In order to meet the needs of a heterogeneous population, the practices investigated have proposed new models of resource management and promotion of services, using local resources and enhancing traditional development sectors.

In the case of small municipalities, the network has implemented new ways of providing services, the development of unprecedented legal forms such as community cooperatives, the joint use of three welfare tools (on health, poverty, and social inclusion), the use of the consortium form for a widespread distribution of goods and services throughout the territory. Several paths of work, social and housing inclusion have been proposed to people with disabilities, to poor and frail people who, thanks to the Welcome/Welfare model, have improved their living conditions. In particular, specific integration and autonomy paths were offered to refugees and asylum seekers, beneficiaries of the SPRAR project, who were involved in the establishment of mixed cooperatives, in the management of small businesses and commercial activities that enhance local products, and in the organization of cultural events.

In the case of Camini, local actors have recourse to diversified sources of income and financing, have developed new production and distribution methods of goods produced locally and ethically, and have recovered ancient activities and professions. With regards to migrants, the organization of training courses and educational workshops to learn specific skills, the creation of meeting places and common spaces, the experimentation of the widespread micro-reception model to counter processes of marginalization and precarious, have favoured the processes of social inclusion in the small southern community.

The satisfaction of the needs of migrants, who face several types of exclusions due to linguistic barriers, access to services, and ethnic discrimination, is complementary, and not substitute, to the needs of the local population. In both experiences the processes that have been triggered have contributed to the improvement of the living conditions of old and new inhabitants. Welcoming foreign population has led, in Camini, to the reactivation of the essential services which had been suppressed up to then (school, post office and railway line), to the enhancement of local resources and the promotion of residential tourism; for the small municipalities it has meant a reactivation of the local economy, recovering traditional activities otherwise lost, developing new opportunities for entrepreneurship, involving young people in economic activities and generating social and economic dynamism.

By strengthening the processes of socio-economic and political inclusion of local subjects, it has been possible to collectively identify needs and adopt change strategies that affect the ways of production, distribution and consumption, that is, new forms of social economy.

### 5.2. Reconfiguration of social relations:

A practice can be defined SI if it is able to alter perceptions, behaviors and pre-existing structures (Caulier-Grice *et al.*, 2012) and, therefore, to determine an improvement in the living conditions of a group (Neumeier, 2012). In the practices investigated, the involvement of different actors, with heterogeneous projects, needs, ambitions and resources does not lead to conflictual dynamics, on the contrary led to the establishment of a social network made of locals and foreigners who cooperate and collaborate pursuing a common goal. Social innovations are therefore based on the alliances of different actors (Neumeier, 2012).

In the experience of Camini, the Eurocoop social cooperative, the “core group” that triggered the transformation process, launched the SPRAR project in 2011 with many difficulties. In the early stages of reception, the foreign presence was considered negatively, perceived as a threat to order and social cohesion. Faced with the discontent and the fears expressed by the local population, the municipality and the Eurocoop Cooperative responded with initiatives and awareness campaigns, with the promotion of events aimed at the whole community and with the active involvement of the foreign component in activities of public utility (i.e., grape harvest, olive harvest, village maintenance).

Also, in the case of the Network, the member administrations created partnerships with civil society, associations, and subjects of the third sector to create spaces for discussion and dialogue (squares, recreational centers) and activities (cultural events, demonstrations, inaugurations) in order to develop common interests and encourage coexistence. The universal welfare model that has been proposed has avoided the creation of social fractures, rather favoring the creation of solid and supportive networks.

The active participation of migrants in local economies, in volunteering, in the arts and in public decisions-making has changed the negative perception of foreigners, with effects on the redefinition of relationships between traditional and non-traditional actors, and on the re-invention of meeting spaces. Further reconfigurations of relations also involved collaboration between the local and institutional dimensions. Within these practices, the close collaboration between adminis-

trators, civil societies and organizations has favoured the meeting between bottom-up initiatives and top-down initiatives, generating real participation processes, with direct participation of local actors in decisions.

### 5.3. Social mobilization:

The practices investigated have led to changes in social relations, favoring, in particular, the participation of traditionally marginalized groups and better access to resources. Characteristic of SI processes is the ability to mobilize many subjects in the local system, through the organization of extensive networks, the focus lying on common goods, the presence of values and motivations and the construction of mutual trust (Di Iacovo, 2011). The involvement of all subjects in the co-planning and co-production processes has given rise to initiatives at the micro level with repercussions at the macro level.

In Camini, for example, local and foreign populations have collaborated in the renovation of old abandoned houses, to guarantee housing autonomy for the beneficiaries of the SPRAR and to develop new forms of residential tourism, and in carrying out public utility activities, such as for example the olive harvest from which a sustainable oil was produced at zero km. In the case of the Network, on the other hand, various cooperatives have been set up and an economic circuit has been created for the sale of local and sustainable products obtained. They have favored the social and economic integration of refugees and have guaranteed their economic and employment independence as well as creating an economic circuit for the sale of local and sustainable products obtained from working the land and recovering common lands. In both experiences, the co-participation in the production and decision-making processes meant that the added value was reinvested locally for the development of the community, and that the whole community was employed in training courses, access dynamics and re-use processes of private or public land. The diversification of activities linked to the rural dimension, the activation of workshops aimed at enhancing skills and learning new skills and the creation of paid job opportunities have favored the empowerment of the most vulnerable groups, both with respect to access to resources and the guarantee of rights.

We can consequently identify the following characteristics that share the experiences of social innovation:

- Processes stimulated by a trigger and the need to satisfy a community need (depopulation, lack of services, unemployment).
- Collective mobilization and local participation aimed at building and strengthening social relations

(recovery of abandoned land, craft workshops, renovation of abandoned houses).

- Use of endogenous “dormant” and exogenous resources to draw upon.
- Re-planning of alternative services and ways of organizing work aimed at generating social value for the community (universal welfare, greater network connections, widespread reception, work grants, paid internships).
- Production of quality and sustainable goods and services (local production, investment in renewable energy, construction of short km 0 supply chains, recovery of the artisanal wool and textile industries, etc.).
- New multi-stakeholder collaborations between citizens, businesses, the Third Sector and administrations (consortium, community cooperatives, networks).
- Essential role played by third sector subjects (cooperatives, associations, social enterprises).
- Presence of diversified sources of financing (Inclusion income, Health budget, Slow Food, Erasmus +, Projects Abroad, etc.).

However, some critical points should be highlighted. The simple transfer of a foreign population into an “empty” context, with vacant spaces and available jobs, does not automatically imply a process of successful inclusion and a regeneration strategy, since these are subjectivities that define themselves and can continually redefine themselves and are not necessarily tied to a permanent space.

Research about the inclusion of refugees in marginal areas as a result of dispersion policies have shown that forced settlement in rural areas with few job opportunities does not appear to lead to greater participation of migrants in the labor market and in social life (Robinson *et al.*, 2003; Hedlund *et al.*, 2017). Hedlund *et al.* (2017) highlight that, although migrants have commonly found employment in low-paid, low-skilled and precarious jobs in the agricultural, touristic, constructing, manufacturing and servicing sectors, we must be “cautious to the extent that the employment of immigrants in this sector can stimulate rural revitalization” (Lundmark *et al.*, 2014).

Although experiences have offered, and continue to offer, support for migrant inclusion, the needs and status of migrants change over time. The work, housing, school and family situation changes. In the case of Camini, for example, most of the young beneficiaries of the SPRAR project, at the end of the project, decide to continue their journey, not finding enough stimuli in the small town. In the case of the Network, there is the risk that

some paths will not become self-sufficient in the absence of economic resources to invest. The presence in rural and marginal areas of an excessively fragmented entrepreneurial fabric risks of pushing migrants into illegal, precarious and unstable economic circuits. Furthermore, skills acquired can very often not be spent in the territory; in fact, the number of those who cannot find regular employments after the end of the SPRAR project remains high. The question is then whether the changes triggered by the foreign presence are permanent and how much they can affect the development of the territory. External factors (new migration management policies and regulatory changes) and internal factors (administration change and availability of the local contest) could influence the course of initiatives in this sense.

A first step towards recognizing the potential of migration is acting against the persistent problems of rural regions through policies that regulate the entry and stay of migrants, guaranteeing them social and economic rights. It is also essential building networks that can serve as expansions for sales channels and the diversification of activities.

Finally, in order to promote SI, there is a risk of responding to a demand for change without determining a systemic impact on the community, thus making innovation the prerogative of a few or an elite as a “private representation of development” (Di Iacovo, 2011).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the article was to analyze the reconfiguration of social practices in the contexts involved in the dynamics of migration. It has been asked to what extent the foreign presence has been a catalyst for the socio-economic regeneration of marginal rural areas and how, by virtue of this presence, services and relationships have been reconfigured.

The actions promoted by the local actors have redefined and reorganized the places and spaces of production and socializing. The presence of new inhabitants has started processes of local transformation, of inversion of demographic trends, of reactivation of the local economy, of establishment of new partnerships and institutional agreements acting as a catalyst for social services and for the acquisition of new trajectories of development.

The results show that both practices have employed endogenous and exogenous resources to address the limits of the context, facing demographic, organizational and economic difficulties. The involvement of non-traditional actors in these practices has improved the condition of the foreign component and the local community.

At the same time, the perception of the foreigner has changed.

Migrants and natives identify themselves as agents of innovation in a system of co-production and co-governance within rural spaces; while on the one hand represent spaces of depopulation, degradation and isolation, on the other they may be viewed as spaces of autonomy, of rural regeneration and social innovation.

However, although in disadvantaged areas the foreign presence can have a positive impact on social cohesion, in some contexts, due to a lack of experience and of capacity in welcoming, funding and coordination between the different institutional levels, could favor the issue of social fractures, marked by discrimination, racism and xenophobia. In order to counter these mechanisms, integrations policies aimed at satisfying needs and redefining social relationships are necessary.

Furthermore, the initiatives promoted from below and embedded in context, while being the most innovative and rooted, are also the most vulnerable (Martinelli, 2013). In small communities individuals are more difficult to mobilize and support; and the practices risk not being sustainable in the long run. Over-reliance on public resources, or the conversion of SI practices into the expression of self-help, can undermine practices in the long run. It is therefore necessary that solid network paths be structured, that activities and sources of income diversify.

Further research is needed to explore the connections between the dynamics of rural development and social innovation, to understand in what forms and through which processes the effects of wider social changes are critically addressed, taking positions of breaking with respect to existing systems, no longer adequate and efficient. And this is true also considering the recent and current pandemic crisis which has highlighted the limits of the reception management system and the guarantee of rights in offering support to multi-vulnerabilities of the territory; in particular economic migrants and forced migrants encounter difficulties, posed by language and bureaucratic barriers, in accessing health care and information.

Investigating the dynamics of mobilization and development can allow us to rethink rural spaces as fluid, dynamic and moving areas (Cavazzani, 2015) and to promote a different narrative on the foreign presence in rural areas.

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