

The '(In)security Decree': Undermining Practices of Reception in the Italian Hosting Mechanism

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Abstract

In the past decade, academic and field research highlighted the benefits of local integration as a desirable solution for displacement. European migration policies, however, are far from implementing more welcoming migration regulations and are, instead, progressively enforcing stricter reception measures aimed at disincentivizing new arrivals. In step with the general strategy of containment practiced in Europe, Italy's increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric has precipitated a permanent state of emergency, empowering the government to progressively introduce various restrictions against asylum seekers and refugees. The anti-immigrant campaign culminated in 2018 with the so-called *Security Decree* that introduced important changes to the existing migration policy, especially the one governing the reception system.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it illustrates the Italian secondary level of reception with its *diffused integration* model. Such integration is implemented through SAI (*System of Reception and Integration*) projects and is known for a number of effective practices that encourage social and economic inclusion in the territory. Next, it discusses the impact of the *Security Decree* (and its amendment) in the reception mechanism. Interviews with practitioners working in SAI projects revealed that the changes and the continuous modifications of the system became a source of disorientation and additional work, which forced many organizations to find alternative ways to continue to help migrants excluded from integration projects as imposed by the *Security Decree*. Furthermore, the political instrumentalization of the decree engendered an increased perception among professionals that governmental policies were actively trying to weaken the hosting mechanisms at all levels, undermining their work before public opinion. Ultimately, while the *diffused integration* model still offers solid reception practices, this empirical research reinforced the idea that legality and integration are still strongly interconnected and that a long-term and stable integration takes place when local organizations and national policies are aligned.

Keywords local integration, diffused integration, SAI/SPRAR projects, Security Decree

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Focus

For a long time, researchers have claimed the potential positive impact of migration on the economy of host states. Notably, very recently, in an effort to support reception and inclusion, in her State of the Union Address, EU Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen reiterated that immigrants are not only an asset for our economies, but they also represent a form of cultural enrichment of our societies.¹ In recent years, however, the world has witnessed a surge of nationalist movements coupled with populist and xenophobic propaganda that are successfully promoting a climate of hostility and intolerance against immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees alike. In Europe, along with the criminalization of humanitarian help especially at borders sites along the Mediterranean and Balkan routes, public opinion blames immigrants for major issues such as economic instability and criminality. Since the 2015 'European migration crisis' many have come to believe that Europe is under invasion and that mass migration movements are threatening both national security and European identities. In a short period of time, states have progressively implemented stricter reception policies aimed at disincentivizing new arrivals. Today border rejections and relocations – often at odds with the principle of *non-refoulement* – occur much more frequently to the detriment of human rights, and in violation of applicants' rights to apply for international protection.

In step with the general strategy of containment practiced in Europe, Italy's increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric has precipitated a permanent state of emergency which empowered the government to progressively introduce various restrictions and limitations against asylum seekers and refugees. The anti-immigrant campaign culminated in 2018 with the decree Law 113/2018, also known as the *Security Decree*, that introduced important changes to the existing migration policy, especially that governing rescue at sea operations and the reception system.² In a short period of time, the decree led to significant consequences impacting the lives of countless immigrants and deeply undermining the integration hosting system. The introduction of the new migration policy also polarized public opinion dividing those who praised the restrictive regulations and new attitude of 'securitization,' from those who criticized such measures. According to Tondo and Giuffrida, far from guaranteeing the security it promoted, the decree generated new forms of fragility, abandonment and marginality, and severely disrupted an imperfect, yet functioning reception mechanism.³

The aim of this article is twofold. First it seeks to inform the reader of the secondary level of integration and the so-called *diffused integration* model of reception in Italy. Such integration is implemented through SAI (*Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione, System of Reception and Integration*) projects, formerly known as SPRAR,⁴ and is known for a number of effective practices that enhance and encourage social and economic inclusion in the territory. Next, by looking in particular at the dismantling of the SPRAR system imposed by the *Security decree*, it will show that, while local integration can take place even with an insecure legal status, failure to receive support from the national government creates disruption and confusion that prevents a long and durable integration for refugees and asylum seekers. A lack of stability in migration policies also has a deep impact on the benefits and the skills gained over the years within the hosting system by those operating in the field, undermining all efforts of inclusion and integration.

1 State of the Union Address by President Ursula Von der Leyen, (2020), European Commission <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655> accessed 17 November 2020.

2 Law 1 December 2018, n. 132: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2018/12/03/18G00161/sg>. This Decree, as I will explain in chapter 3, was followed by a second one, known as the *Security Decree Bis*.

3 Lorenzo Tondo, Angela Giuffrida, 'Vulnerable migrants made homeless after Italy passes 'Salvini decree''. *The Guardian* (London 7 December 2018) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/07/vulnerable-migrants-made-homeless-after-italy-passes-salvini-decree>> accessed 30 October 2020.

4 *Sistema di protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* (System of protection for asylum seekers and refugees). See Chapter 3 for details.

1.2 Theoretical Framework and Social Background

Considered for a long time as a “non-solution”⁵ or a “forgotten solution”,⁶ local integration, according to forced migration scholarship, has never occupied a preferred position in the migration policies anywhere in the world.⁷ Yet, as Jacobsen points out, integration should be considered a “desirable outcome” and “the most realistic alternative to keeping refugees in camps”.⁸ Today, research is pushing for a renewed approach of investigation, inclusive of all the actors involved in the process, both immigrants and hosting communities, highlighting the many possibilities for integration as a solution for displacement and a resource for the host states.

Although academic and field research are highlighting the benefits of integration, European migration policies are far from favouring arrivals or implementing more welcoming regulations. Characterized by political instability and complicated by an enduring economic crisis, Italian society adjusted to the current European tendency and became a fertile ground for right-wing, populist parties to foment anti-immigrant waves and intolerance. In 2018, the populist government passed the so-called *Security Decree* that enabled a further tightening of the measures against asylum seekers and humanitarian visa holders.⁹ The bill had a major impact on the first reception centres and reorganized the secondary level of the hosting mechanism implemented through the SPRAR projects network. In particular, the decree abolished humanitarian protection visas and excluded asylum seekers from any long-term project of integration. Turning **SPRAR** projects into **SIPROIMI** projects,¹⁰ and only granting access to unaccompanied minors or beneficiaries of international protection (such as refugees),¹¹ the law excluded all asylum seekers as well as individuals with an irregular or precarious legal position. Only a year after its implementation, the weekly magazine, *L'Espresso*, defined the decree as a “social bomb”¹² whereby emphasizing the inevitable consequences of a law whose only goal appeared to further exacerbate the issue of integration.¹³

In 2020, the decree was partially amended,¹⁴ and the secondary level of the reception system was transformed into SAI.¹⁵ Today, asylum seekers can once again access integration projects, albeit with restrictions, and therefore the hosting mechanism is basically splitting the secondary phase of the admission process into two levels of reception, with one more accommodating than the other. None of the modifications resulted in the significant changes that were hoped for, and while the overall adverse impact on the beneficiaries has been reduced, the numerous changes to the core structure of the mechanism within a short period of time have produced instability and confusion among those who operate in the field. The result is a system potentially effective, yet still fragile and whose functioning confirms that legality and integration are still strongly interconnected and that a long-term and stable integration can occur only when local organizations and national policies are aligned.

5 Alexandra Fielden, ‘Local integration: an under-reported solution to protracted refugee situations’, (2008) UNHCR Research Paper No. 158, 3, (UNHCR) <www.unhcr.org/486cc99f2.html> accessed 17 November 2020, citing NGO statement on Local integration Global Consultations on International Protection 22-24 May 2002

6 Karen Jacobsen, ‘The forgotten solution: local integration for refugees in developing countries’ (2001) New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper No. 45, 1, (UNHCR: Geneva) <<https://www.unhcr.org/3b7d24059.pdf>> accessed 17 November 2020.

7 Crisp talks about a ‘hierarchy of solutions’ where local integration is the less preferred option, in comparison to voluntary repatriation. In: Jeff Crisp, ‘The local integration and local settlement of refugees: a conceptual and historical analysis’ (2004), UNHCR, New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper No. 102, 4, (UNHCR: Geneva) <www.unhcr.org/407d3b762.html> accessed 17 November 2020.

8 Jacobsen (n 6) 27.

9 Humanitarian protection visas are permits granted for critically vulnerable cases in alternative to refugee status or subsidiary protection.

10 *Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati* (the System of Protection of International Protection holders and Unaccompanied Minors).

11 Subsidiary protection.

12 Andrea Segre ‘Gli Sprar sono una bomba sociale: è ora di smantellarli’. *L'Espresso*. (20 February 2020) <<https://espresso.repubblica.it/plus/articoli/2020/02/20/news/smantellare-gli-sprar-una-bomba-sociale-1.344693/>> accessed 25 September 2020.

13 As Crisp claims, when refugees cannot access and benefit from local integration “they are more likely to move on to urban areas or to other countries and regions, thereby exacerbating the problem of irregular migration”, Crisp (n 7) 7.

14 The new decree D.L. 130/2020 (21 October 2020) modifies again the hosting system. In particular it revises the permits for special reasons, trying to compensate for the abolition of humanitarian protection visas. Moreover, it increases the number of permits that can be converted into work permits.

15 See here (n 4).

1.3 Research Methods and Field Work

For this study, I adopted a mixed approach. I relied on desk research to gather quantitative and qualitative materials, in particular, existing literature, Italian government documents, reports, case studies, and data from current SAI projects to describe and critically discuss strengths and weaknesses of the secondary reception system in general. Considering the recent and brief implementation of the *Security Decree*, findings on its impact emerge mainly from magazine articles or preliminary investigations. I integrate this information with data gathered through semi-structured interviews with field practitioners, supervisors and professionals that are currently working in SAI projects in selected centres.

Field work consisted of interviews conducted online with practitioners working in organizations and cooperatives belonging to the SAI network across Italy, mainly located in the centre and the north. People interviewed operate in different professional areas: legal, social, educational, and psychological, and interviews took place between July and September 2021. Following is a list of the organizations, locations and the role of the professionals that participated in the research:

- *Fondazione Comunità Solidale* and *Casa dei popoli* in Settimo Torinese, located just outside the metropolitan area of Turin (Piemonte) are the two organizations in charge of integration projects. Here, beneficiaries are channelled into two different paths. One is managed within a hub and hosts about 70 beneficiaries, the other implements SAI projects and host 30 people, including adult males and females, and single-parent families. Both have operated for a long time in the territory, and, therefore, have established a strong network with the local private sector and with the local administration. The interview was conducted with a social worker of *Fondazione Comunità Solidale* (Interview 1).
- *ADL Zavidovici (Ambasciata della democrazia locale a Zavidovici)* located in Brescia (Lombardia). The association born in the 1990s to help refugees from the Bosnian War has participated in SPRAR projects since their origin. Today, the organization implements five SAI projects across the city and its province assisting male adults, families, single-women and individuals with mental vulnerabilities. The interview was conducted with the legal advisor of the organization, and with the supervisor and legal advisor of SAI projects (Interview 2).
- *Ideaprisma* is an organization operating through the association *Well@home* and implements SAI projects in Rome, in the Municipio Roma III, the third administrative subdivision of the city. At the moment, the organization assists about 14 people, among them families and single parents (male and females). The interview was conducted with the founder of the organizations *Ideaprisma* and supervisor of SAI projects who is also involved in a number of other projects at a national and European level – aimed at social and professional inclusion in the territory – that intersect with the SAI activities, enhancing opportunities for the beneficiaries (Interview 3).
- The cooperative *Dimora di Abramo* located in Reggio Emilia (Emilia Romagna) implements projects assisting 58 people. About ten of them are vulnerable individuals (older people or individuals with special psychological needs). The interview was conducted with the legal advisor and social worker of the cooperative (Interview 4).
- *Asp Ambito 9* in Jesi (Marche) hosts one of the biggest hubs in Italy for integration projects and actively coordinates projects since 2018. This is the first facility in Italy for number of municipalities participating in the SAI network, with a total of 22 municipalities and 94 organizations and cooperatives collaborating and dislocated in different areas of the region. It is also the third centre in Italy for number of beneficiaries hosted, capable to accommodate a maximum of 482 migrants of all categories (single males and females, families and single parents and unaccompanied minors). Two interviews were conducted here: the first one with the social worker and advisor of the immigrant division SAI projects for adults (Interview 5), the second one with the social worker and advisor of the immigrant division SAI for unaccompanied minors (Interview 6).
- The cooperative *Labirinto* in Pesaro (Marche) has been implementing SPRAR/SAI projects since 2014 accommodating ordinary projects for adult males, as well as projects for unaccompanied minors and for individuals with physical disabilities. Currently, the project *Tandem* assists twenty-three beneficia-

ries (of the 50 places available); the project *Invictus* has twenty beneficiaries (of 52 places), and the project *Pesaro Accoglie* assists six individuals with disabilities (of 8 places available). The interview was conducted with the advisor and immigrant division and supervisor of all SAI projects (ordinary projects for adult males, unaccompanied minors, and individuals with physical disabilities) and with the entire team working in the SAI projects, including: social workers, legal advisors, supervisors of SAI projects (Interview 7).

- The non-profit organization *Farsi Prossimo* in Milan, operates in network with other cooperatives *Arca* and *Comunità Progetto* and the association *La Grangia di Monluè* and assist at the moment about 350 beneficiaries. The interview was conducted with a social worker of the organization (Interview 8).

1.4 Chapters Overview

After a brief overview of the academic literature on integration (chapter 2), looking at the way scholars have engaged with the notion of integration and what it entails, I present the secondary level of reception in the Italian hosting system (chapter 3). In particular, I discuss how the Italian *diffused integration* model is coordinated by a centralized service, yet is depended upon a wide network of organizations at the local level in order to coordinate the various projects of integration. SAI projects grant accommodations within the urban territory, offer basic language courses and provide legal and health services for all its recipients. Moreover, the projects carry out several initiatives – from paid internships in local private sectors to foster professional growth, to cultural events aimed at raising awareness among the hosting communities. Ultimately, the SAI framework seeks to encourage individual professional autonomy and enhance the social inclusion of the beneficiaries. In accordance with national guidelines, each project is dependent upon the resources of the territory in which it is implemented. Interviews, therefore, were instrumental to understand how the *diffused integration* unfolds in the different geographical locations included in my study.

Data gathered from open-ended questions (chapter 4) provided insightful information on how the SAI network operates, as well as on the immediate consequences of the *Security Decree* both for the beneficiaries and the social workers involved. My empirical research revealed that many organizations were able to find alternative ways – such as appeals, additional funds, or other types of economic and practical support – to continue to provide guidance and assistance to those individuals formally excluded from the benefits of a SAI. Data also showed that in 2020 the amended decree slightly improved the situation for asylum seekers. Nonetheless, interviews revealed that the number of changes and the continuous modifications of the system became a source of confusion and disorientation for practitioners operating in the field, creating additional work. Furthermore, the political instrumentalization of the decree increased the perception among the professionals of a general attempt from the governmental policies to weaken the hosting mechanism at all levels, and to undermine their work in the face of public opinion.

2. Local Integration: Analytical Framework

2.1 2.1. Local Integration, which Definition?

Article 34 of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention states that: “the Contracting States shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees.” While, over time, the notion of integration has replaced the concept of assimilation – to better reflects the idea of refugees maintaining their identity in a new society¹⁶ – today the concept of local integration still lacks a homogeneous definition in international refugee law.¹⁷

Defined as “the forgotten solution”¹⁸ or considered for a long time as a “non-solution”,¹⁹ local integration remains the least preferred among current international migration policies. For Kibreab, integration means the “granting of full and permanent asylum, membership and residency status, by the host government,” occurring “through a process of legal, economic, social and cultural incorporation of refugees, culminating in the offer of citizenship”.²⁰ According to Sigona, integration is “an elusive concept,” the result of different entities, and a “combination of several forces” – actors, agencies, logistics –²¹ that render it a “chaotic and vague” notion.²² Quoting Castles et al, Ager and Strang reinforce this idea as they predict that the notion of integration will remain “controversial and hotly debated”²³ both “as a policy objective and as a theoretical construct”.²⁴ In contrast to integration as a ‘forgotten’ or a ‘non-solution’,²⁵ Fielden claims that it is rather “an undocumented one” and a solution that has great potentiality in case repatriation and resettlement are not applicable.²⁶ Like Fielden, also Hovil argues that local integration is “the most viable of the three solutions”²⁷ claiming that, at both a national and international level, integration is an “evaded” solution, which can occur despite migration policies.²⁸ Ultimately, also Hovil concludes that local integration “is hard to define, hard to quantify, hard to categorize, and hard to evaluate”.²⁹

In spite of a restrictive definition, which affirms that integration is possible only when refugees become citizens of the host state, scholarship in general tends to agree that integration occurs in various forms, even when the legal status remains uncertain.³⁰ Jacobsen claims that successful integration depends upon both how local populations and refugees relate to one another as well as the host government’s position.³¹ On the other hand, Ager and Strang outline a conceptual framework that highlights four domains of interest including employment, housing, education, and health as indicators to measure successful integration. Within such multidimensional nature of integration, research shows that employment data remains the most studied one as it can determine several other positive outcomes, from self-sufficiency to relationship with the locals, language learning, promotion of self-esteem and settling down. Yet, education also plays a crucial role, especially for children because it helps them integrate more easily but mainly it allows them to develop the skills and abilities they will need in the future. Finally, health is a fundamental factor that

16 Crisp (n 7) 2.

17 Ibid 1.

18 Jacobsen (n 6).

19 NGO Statement on Local Integration Global Consultations on International Protection 2002 cited in Fielden (n 5) 1.

20 Jacobsen (n 6) 1 citing Kibreab 1989, 496.

21 Nando Sigona, ‘Refugee integration(s): Policy and practice in the European Union’ (2005) 24 [4] *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 115, 118.

22 Ibid citing Robinson 1998, 118.

23 Alastair Ager, Alison Strang, ‘Understanding integration: a conceptual framework’ (2008) 21 [2] *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 166, 186, citing Castles et al. 2001, 13.

24 Ager, Strang (n 22) 186.

25 See (n 18) and (n 19).

26 Fielden (n 5).

27 Lucy Hovil, ‘Local integration’ in Elena Fiddian-Qasbiyeh et al. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Refugee & Forced Migration Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014) 488.

28 Ibid 488.

29 Ibid 490.

30 See Jacobsen (n 6), Crisp (n 7), Hovil (n 27).

31 Jacobsen (n 6) 18.

enables refugee to engage actively in the new community.³² Along the same lines, other scholars assert that, in addition to the legal perspective that outlines the number of rights that refugees obtain progressively, economic and social factors should be taken into account because they help promote stability for refugees.³³

Thus, while an economic perspective measures the opportunity to establish a livelihood, ultimately leading to self-reliance and independence, a social perspective remains equally important as it encompasses all the processes that enable refugees to integrate with the host population. A social integration, in fact, will allow refugees to contribute to the host country actively and, ideally, enable them to overcome the fear of discrimination or exploitation. By looking at how local integration occurs at different stages and in different geographical locations in Italy, this study keeps in the foreground such multidimensional approach incorporating legal, social, and economic aspects, as well as the relationships between locals and refugees.

2.2 The Right to Belong: Barriers and Obstacles to Integration

While both research and reality suggest that integration is a process that requires time, the idea that a 'right' to citizenship needs to be earned is still present in much of the rhetoric and policy around integration. Consequently, refugees and asylum seekers alike feel the pressure to quickly gain language proficiency and demonstrate cultural knowledge. Often, next to finding a job, they engage in volunteer activities to bond faster with the host communities and to show that they deserve to be there. This attitude, however, does not consider that a secure legal status is often what allows refugees, in the first place, to develop a feeling of belonging and that obtaining rights can, in fact, become instrumental for integration.³⁴

Considering the rights that refugees are entitled to³⁵ and those they slowly yet often unofficially obtain, Hovil makes a distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* integration, highlighting the official nature of the first one versus the informal, "context specific",³⁶ character of the second. *De jure* integration is a fundamentally political process that refers to the possibility of obtaining all the rights – ideally including citizenship – to belong officially to the receiving state. On the other hand, *de facto* integration unfolds in the relationship between displaced people and the host population. Because national governments usually opt for temporary permits, integration often manifests itself in invisible ways or in "localized forms of belonging".³⁷ Regardless of the status, such forms of belonging result from a process in which an ongoing negotiation between displaced people and host communities occurs. While taking place at various levels (economic, social, cultural, and political), *de facto* integration, however, often leaves refugees with an illegal and temporary status and lacking valid forms of protection. Therefore, Hovil concludes that "in order to deliver on its promise as a genuinely durable solution, whereby former refugees have access to the full ambit of rights (...), local integration *in practice* needs to take place at both a local and national level".³⁸

By looking at the impact of national policies within a very localized reception system, this study aligns with Hovil's approach and its conclusion. Notably, as I will show in chapter 4, field research observing the relationship between regulations at a national level and local implementations of integration will demonstrate that when they lack the institutional support at a national level, efforts to provide stable and solid integration to displaced populations are undermined in several ways.

The way in which relationships with the locals develop and how social bonds with the host communities are created is well-reported in both policy and academic literature. As previously mentioned, knowledge of the language and culture of the host country is a fundamental factor in enabling migrants to feel confident to settle down in a community. Likewise, knowledge of the host state rules and governmental policies can

32 Ager, Strang (n 23).

33 See Jacobsen (n 6), Crisp (n 7), Fielden (n 5).

34 Alison Strang, Alastair Ager, 'Refugee Integration: Emerging Trends and Remaining Agendas' (2010) 23 [4] *Journal of Refugee Studies* 589, 596.

35 It is "the right to have rights" in Hovil citing Hannah Arendt 1986 (n 27) 490.

36 Ibid 489.

37 Ibid 497.

38 Ibid 489-490.

facilitate the process of integration. The importance of building 'bridges' with the receiving communities is discussed by Strang and Ager who highlight how social connections can turn into opportunities for people to connect and exchange resources in a way that is mutually beneficial. Integration should therefore be viewed as a dynamic "two-way process"³⁹ in which both refugee needs and host community demands are taken into consideration.⁴⁰ While involving members of the local community can be challenging, social and community events can encourage people in such a positive way to give life to a "virtuous cycle"⁴¹ that will ideally broaden social networks and foster relationships with official institutions.⁴² Receiving communities have a strong responsibility in creating opportunities to enhance the capital offered by refugees and displaced populations and, simultaneously, to educate the host society through anti-discrimination and awareness-raising events.⁴³

Despite such potential for integration deriving from social connections, the political climate currently investing Europe shows that resistance to reception has become the default approach to new arrivals. Interestingly, local populations often express hesitations and objections that are not always supported by facts and their perceptions of reality do not coincide with what is really happening.⁴⁴ As we frequently see nowadays, and as field work for this study will show, propaganda capitalizing on the fears of host communities can result in restrictive policies that prevent local integration and stigmatize the presence of refugees. Today, the reality of many European countries shows that a particular political situation can further exacerbate hostility and intolerance precluding, rather than encouraging, the integration process. This happens especially when locals perceive refugees and asylum seekers as antagonists struggling with them for limited resources. Very often, in fact, the way funding is used can affect the process and put local populations and migrants in competition for the available resources. Therefore, the attitude of the receiving communities can change with time to range from an initial positive welcome to "increasing concern about the threats and burdens, to outright resentment and resistance".⁴⁵

Today, research is focused on investigating the potential benefits for both refugees and host populations and rejects the idea of migrants as a 'burden.' By highlighting the great opportunities that hosting refugees may offer for economic development, the focus shifts from the refugees to the benefits that the entire community may enjoy, such as access to new infrastructures supported by international funding or new labour force.⁴⁶ Ultimately, these factors reinforce the idea that integration is a process which rather than encompassing two distinct and homogenous groups, the host populations and the migrants, enables a variety of individuals to form relationships across the territory.⁴⁷ Similarly, the core of the *diffused integration* model that I will discuss in chapter three focuses its attention on both the refugees and the host communities, what their needs are and the resources they can access.

2.3 Towards a Re-definition of Integration: New Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

Unpacking the categories of *host* and *guest*, Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh⁴⁸ engage in a philosophical approach with the concept of integration that broadens the notion and redefines it at the same time. Drawing upon the contradictory nature of the term *hospitality*, which, as argued by Derrida, includes since the very

39 Strang, Ager (n 34) 600.

40 Ibid. 600. Ager and Strang develop their approach quoting from the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). They highlight the reciprocal nature of refugee integration as a dynamic and two-way process placing demands on both receiving societies and individuals/or the communities concerned.

41 Ibid 599, citing Hynes.

42 Ibid. 597. A separate chapter should be devoted to investigating the positive yet often controversial role of co-ethnic bonds. While such connections provide refugees with invaluable personal and practical value, they can also become problematic if conflicting factors among members of the same group emerge.

43 Ibid.

44 Jacobsen (n 6).

45 Jacobsen (n 6) 19.

46 Fielden (n 5).

47 Strang, Ager (n 34).

48 Mette Louise Berg, , Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Introduction to the Issue: Encountering Hospitality and Hostility.' (2018) *Migration and Society: Advances in Research* 1, 1.

beginning its opposite – and therefore the possibility of rejection or *hostility* – they discuss the contradictory and complex forms of encounters during migration processes. Such encounters take place not only between refugees and host populations but also between different groups of displaced people. This, in turn, may result in hierarchies and new tensions each time somebody else arrives. Blending *hospitality* with *hostility*, Derrida coins the concept of *hostipitality*, a word of “a troubled and troubling origin, which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it”.⁴⁹ Such an approach forces us to reconsider the human experiences in general and the nature of the variety of encounters that potentially take place in a context of migration. This will also lead us to revise the relationship between the self and ‘the other’ and to challenge the notion of ‘care’. As several questions arise pertaining to moral, ethical, political, and social issues, we are invited to redefine our idea of hospitality, and encouraged to reflect upon new ways of understanding and implementing solidarity.⁵⁰

In similar vein, Astolfo and Boano examine the concept of hospitality in the current asylum system in Italy, outlining its ambivalent and complex nature, especially in relation to an increasing attention to urban humanitarianism. Drawing from Derrida’s suggestion that hospitality means “how we relate to the otherness within ourselves”,⁵¹ the scholars embrace Derrida’s critique of how hospitality, often implemented through laws and regulations, ends up limiting the mobility and the rights of others. As pointed out earlier, because hospitality is often assumed to be temporary, or because it undergoes restrictive national policies, asylum seekers and refugees often feel the pressure to demonstrate that they are “worthy” to be received.⁵² Derrida calls these limitations a ‘conditional hospitality’, in other words, the necessity to adhere to specific rules in order to be accepted by the host state and not be labelled as an illegal or a criminal.⁵³ While unconditional hospitality is practically impossible, the need to deconstruct conditional hospitality forces us to reconceptualize the very idea of hospitality.

Investigating integration projects implemented in Italy, Astolfo and Boano, engage with the concept of hospitality, intended as a dynamic concept comprehensive of all human relations, not only those between the host and the refugees. In their study, the scholars specifically look at social separation factors that affected the structure of hospitality, such as refugees’ isolation from the residents to minimize potential conflicts. Oriented from utilizing an Heideggerian perspective, they discovered that processes of marginalization reinforced and amplified the idea of ‘otherness’, because it treated the other as an outsider. Therefore, refugees and immigrants ended up embodying “the exteriority of the urban system” in which the receiving country is always the one setting the rules of engagement.⁵⁴ In their research, Astolfo and Boano also highlight the successful results obtained by an organization located in the north of Italy⁵⁵ – and implementing a SPRAR project – which disrupted such framework of exclusion and provided refugees with new ways to relate to the environment in which they lived. Similarly, by focusing on the *diffused integration* system, also this study uncovered positive practices of integration. Specifically, as discussed in chapter four, such practices focus on creating opportunities for migrants to become financially autonomous while simultaneously re-claiming their political and individual existence, and securing a social role in the community.

Stepping away from the typical portrayal of refugees as vulnerable victims, an image often reinforced by the media, Betts and Collier advocate for the need of a paradigm shift in how we think about refugee needs and their skills. Citing the need for “restoring autonomy”⁵⁶ and in order to “regain a sense of dignity”,⁵⁷ they regard refugees not as humanitarian subjects but as individuals with the potential for development, already in possession of skills and talents. While Betts and Collier discuss the several restrictions and limitations to mobility and rights to work that affect refugees and put them at risk of exploitation in a very

49 Ibid citing Derrida 2000, 3.

50 Ibid.

51 Giovanna Astolfo, Camillo Boano, ‘The imperfect ethics of hospitality: Engaging with the politics of care and refugees’ dwelling practices in the Italian urban context’ in: Elena Fiddian-Qasbiyeh (ed.): *Refuge in a Moving World: Tracing refugee and migrant journeys across disciplines* (UCL Press 2020) <<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10105213/1/Refuge-in-a-Moving-World.pdf>> accessed: 17 November 2021, 462.

52 Ibid. 464, citing Rozakou 2012, 568.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid. 465.

55 The same organization also participated in this study.

56 Alexander Betts, Paul Collier, *Refuge. Rethinking Refugee Policy in a Changing World* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2017) 156.

57 Ibid 157.

different context, their proposed shift of attention can and should be applicable everywhere. Even if political and institutional barriers may determine the market and the destiny of refugees, Betts and Collier's renewed approach redefines refugee potential in a positive way. Opposing the idea of integration in 'developmental terms', Bardelli's ethnographic research, on the other hand, warns against the risk of putting the success of integration entirely on the "on the refugees' shoulders".⁵⁸ By considering only a refugee's ability to contribute to the economy and focusing on their livelihoods, rather than looking at political, human, or social aspects, she writes, we risk focusing solely on refugees' economic value as a durable solution to displacement.⁵⁹ While employment makes it possible to become self-sufficient and economically autonomous, access to the job market alone prevents us from looking at other political issues such as inequalities, exclusion, and exploitation, that originate around situations of displacement.⁶⁰

Exploring the complexity of the concept of integration and challenging the traditional unidimensional or bidimensional view that assumes the presence of a dominant culture, Kazłowska and Phillimore introduce the notion of 'super-diversification' to describe our current, complex demographic world.⁶¹ Aware that research is still lacking methods and theory to investigate such reality, they point out that an emergent demographic complexity and new local challenges, in particular investing religion, ethnicity and gender are originating new forms of injustices. Therefore, new ways of conceptualizing the notion of integration are needed to overcome a binary language of oppositions such as minority/majority, or them/us, dominant/non dominant. Warning against the tendency to politicize the term integration, they invite us to include all the variables that may have an impact, such as education, language knowledge and gender. New conditions of migration should also be considered, including migrants not settling permanently in the place they first arrive in, or considering those who have connections to more than one country and enact transnational connections. Kazłowska and Phillimore call for a new approach, one that defies the assumption that immigrants are outsiders that need to adapt to a dominant and well-defined society. As migration processes have changed over the years, so too have the receiving societies become progressively more "fluid and diverse".⁶²

In line with Bardelli's suggestion previously discussed, Phillimore also criticize a unidimensional approach that holds migrants responsible for their failures and success in integration and that absolves "host communities of their responsibility".⁶³ Therefore, against an empirical approach that attempts to measure integration outcomes in education, employment, or health within a dominant culture, Phillimore claims the need for more studies on the multidimensionality of our societies. Ultimately, the fragmentation and the fluidity of our current societies demand a new, multidisciplinary approach in order to understand the processes through which integration occurs, along with the accelerating social change, increasing diversification, temporariness, and transnationalism.

2.4 Challenging National Belonging: New Imagined Communities

Ideally, local integration involves "the acquisition of a permanent status of asylum along with the membership and residency status".⁶⁴ As discussed above, however, several factors may prevent asylum seekers from obtaining an official legal status and impact the process of integration. Moreover, as Ager and Strang point out in those countries where nationhood is based on descent, the *ius sanguinis* (blood ties) such as Germany or Italy, rather than the *ius soli* (birth in the country), integration based on legal status may become a much longer and complicated process. According to them, therefore, identifying the nation's understanding of identity, cultural perception of citizenship and nationhood can help us appreciate how a

58 Nora Bardelli, 'The shortcomings of employment as a durable solution' (2018) 58 *Forced Migration Review* <<https://www.fmreview.org/economies/bardelli>> accessed 17 November 2021 54.

59 Ibid. Bardelli highlights how the growth of public-private partnerships in refugee assistance programs supports this approach.

60 Ibid.

61 Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazłowska, Jenny Phillimore, 'Introduction: rethinking integration. New perspectives on adaptation and settlement in the era of super-diversity' (2018) 44 [2], *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 179.

62 Ibid 186.

63 Jenny Phillimore, 'Refugee-Integration-Opportunity Structures: Shifting the Focus from Refugees to Context' (2020) 34 [2] *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1946, 1950.

64 Jacobsen (n 6) 1, citing Kibreab 1989, 469.

state adopts and implements integration. It is only by establishing a clear and articulated policy on nationhood and recognizing how the rights granted to refugees determine the sense of belonging that we can hope for a successful outcome of integration.⁶⁵ Sigona reinforces this idea by provocatively asking: “who or what is integrating whom and in what?”⁶⁶

Demonstrating that integration projects can be implemented prior to obtaining citizenship or any more stable legal status, and launching projects that successfully enhance social inclusion, SAI models I discuss in the coming chapters challenge the traditional idea of national belonging. Inviting both locals and refugees to share the same space, both groups become a new microcosm and a new “imagined political community.”⁶⁷ Here, people from different places are invited to have a new purpose and to live as a “horizontal” comradeship.⁶⁸ As policies and approaches are shaped by national political agendas, rather than by the potential that integration projects can offer, successful local integration models show a different and new way of thinking about our societies and our communities. While we are moving toward an increasingly globalized world, many people today claim their nationality and cultural identity even more strongly. If, on the one hand, policy discussions and the media prefer to amplify fears and misinformation, on the other, these communities challenge the notions of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ reinforcing the idea that a new political space, global and local at the same time is possible.

65 Ager, Strang (n 23), (n 33).

66 Sigona (n 21) 118.

67 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (3rd edn, Verso 2006) 6.

68 *Ibid* 9.

3. The Italian Diffused Integration System and the Introduction of the Security Decree

3.1 3.1. The Italian System of Reception: Overview

The Italian reception system is designed to serve beneficiaries in two distinct ways. The first stage of reception is offered by hotspots, CARA (*Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo, Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers*) and CAS centres (*Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria, Extraordinary Reception Centres*), which have an emergency-like approach and focus on responding to the first needs of refugees and asylum seekers. In the second phase of the reception system, as mentioned in chapter one, beneficiaries are located in small groups within urban areas across Italy through the network of SAI projects, which focus on developing and enhancing refugee autonomy and self-sufficiency. Over the years, the Italian migration policy and the systems managing migration flows have undergone a number of changes that had a significant impact on the infrastructure of the hosting mechanism in general. According to Astolfo and Boano, the Italian reception system is now “a complex, multifarious and fragmented apparatus” and the result of “the intersection of humanitarianism, control and containment and chronic policy failure”.⁶⁹

While CARA and CAS centres are not the focus of the current work, a brief overview of how they function will better illustrate the impact of the migration policies on the hosting mechanisms. Located in remote areas of cities, isolated from urban centres and from the local population, CARA and CAS are big reception facilities that, I argue, resemble camp dynamics. They are “constellation of more or less segregated urban and peri-urban centres”,⁷⁰ in which asylum seekers are expected to stay only for a short period of time. In reality, with the excuse of maintaining public security, beneficiaries often spend months or years there, without any perspective for the future. Just as camps separate refugees from the host population, channelling asylum seekers through such facilities often creates additional unstable and dangerous situations.⁷¹ As Astolfo and Boano point out, CAS are fundamentally characterized by a lack of adequate structures and services and have often been the subject of mismanagement, becoming a place where asylum seekers are kept on hold until their application for refugee status is processed. The lengthy periods that asylum seekers spend in such ‘emergency’ accommodations, coupled with an unstable legal situation and the isolated nature of these places, ultimately often fails to address even their primary needs. Forced to remain in precarious living conditions, sometimes in violation of basic human rights, asylum seekers are trapped in a system that only aims at “accommodating, containing or detaining” them.⁷²

3.2 The Diffused Integration Model: from SPRAR to SAI Projects

Unlike CAS, the secondary phase of reception aims to provide the project beneficiaries with the tools for a long-lasting integration in the country. The Italian PNA (*Programma nazionale asilo, National Asylum Program*)⁷³ was established in 2001 as the first public system for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees. The system was introduced through a memorandum promoted and signed by the ANCI (*Associazione nazionale comuni italiani, National Association of Italian Municipalities*),⁷⁴ UNHCR and the Italian Ministry of the Interior. Its aim is to share the responsibilities between the Ministry of the Interior and the local authorities across Italy in matters of migration. On July 30 2002, Law 189 institutionalized the PNA and established SPRAR projects, the System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, designating that the *Servizio*

⁶⁹ Astolfo, Boano (n 51) 467.

⁷⁰ Ibid 468.

⁷¹ As argued in Jacobsen (n 6).

⁷² Astolfo, Boano, (n 51) 467.

⁷³ The following information are gathered from the official website for the SAI network <<https://www.retesai.it/english/>> accessed 30 October 2020.

⁷⁴ ANCI, National Association of Italian Municipalities, includes institutions with public functions of local interest with Parliament, the Regions the Public Administration and other Communities bodies. As of July 2019, there are over 7000 municipalities that are members of ANCI and representing over 9% of the Italian population. ANCI is very active on migration issues encouraging and developing networks and collaborations. Source <<https://www.retesai.it/english/>> accessed 30 October 2020.

Centrale, a centralized office, is in charge of the coordination and management of the projects allocated to the different municipalities across the country. The Central Service in Rome is managed by ANCI, and works with the support of *Fondazione Cittalia*,⁷⁵ a foundation that informs and coordinates local authorities in charge of the integrated reception services. Local institutions and organizations can voluntarily apply to be part of the network of reception projects – each time a project lasts for three years – and can also establish partnerships with cooperatives, private actors and NGOs. The *Servizio Centrale* then allocates refugees and asylum seekers to the different municipalities that are part of the network across the country. According to Astolfo and Boano, the diffused hospitality models “fit the specificity of the Italian territory and its social fabric, formed by a constellation of small and medium-sized cities and small (usually very internally homogeneous) communities”⁷⁶

In 2018, following the Decree-Law 113 of October 4 (later enacted as Law no. 132 of December 2018), known as *the Security decree*, SPRAR projects were renamed SIPROIMI, (*Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori non accompagnati, Protection System for Beneficiaries of International Protection and for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors*). The new legislation excluded asylum seekers from the projects and established that reception services were now destined only to unaccompanied minors, refugees, and holders of international protection. The law eliminated beneficiaries of humanitarian protection, a type of visa commonly granted to asylum seekers, and, in its place, it introduced residence permits for ‘special reasons’ (such as victims of domestic violence or trafficking). On 21 October 2020, in an effort to mitigate the rigid limitations of the *Security decree*, SIPROIMI projects were renamed SAI, through the Decree-Law no.130, enacted as Law no.173 of 18 December 2020. The new decree establishes that, in addition to refugees and unaccompanied minors, asylum seekers can once again have access, albeit limited, to the services offered by the integration hosting mechanisms. It also established that SAI projects can include victims of disasters, migrants with special civil value, holders of a residence permit for medical reasons or for special protection (such as victims of labour exploitation or domestic violence). As of September 2021, there are 852 active SAI projects throughout Italy, providing reception to 32.456 beneficiaries and involving a combination of more than 722 municipalities, cooperatives and organizations.⁷⁷ Unlike CAS centres where a professional may oversee the cases for twenty to forty people, in SAI projects each social worker assists six to ten people.

As mentioned earlier, the main objective of the SPRAR/SAI is to allow beneficiaries to (re)gain individual autonomy, in a way that enables them to become an active protagonist in their individual process of integration and social inclusion.⁷⁸ Key to the SAI/SPRAR projects is the concept of *diffused integration* which refers to the idea of creating “a wider notion of social inclusion: increasing beneficiaries’ sense of belonging to the community and leading to the positive cohabitation of the urban social tissue”⁷⁹ Urban accommodation becomes therefore crucial to enhance and foster the individual autonomy and encourage social inclusion.

Recipients can take part in any given project for a duration of six months, renewable once for another six months. After they are provided with accommodation in shared apartments or small structures, they meet with a social worker for a personalized pathway tailored to their specific needs and skills. Services included in a SAI project are health, social and legal assistance, cultural and linguistic mediation, and orientation to social and residential inclusion. Finally, SAI offers professional training opportunities and paid internships with the aim of preparing beneficiaries to access stable employment, and, ideally, become autonomous and to feel socially included in the territory of residence. In step with SAI’s holistic approach, the projects are led by a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team of practitioners and social workers trained and equipped to respond to the different areas of need of each recipient.

⁷⁵ Established in 2008 *Cittalia* is an ANCI foundation that promotes reception and integration, facilitating the role of cities in the implementation of policies of social inclusion. It operates in projects on asylum, human rights, immigration, citizenship, social inclusion, social and health policies. It has also the task to keep the municipalities informed about European services and funding programs towards citizenship, reception and integration. Source <<https://www.retesai.it/english/>> accessed 30 October 2020.

⁷⁶ Astolfo, Boano (n 51) 468.

⁷⁷ Numbers are from the official website of the SAI Network, which provides also a breakdown of the types of projects for each region: <https://www.retesai.it/i-numeri-dello-sprar/>

⁷⁸ SPRAR Central Service (2018). *Manuale operativo*. Rome: Ministry of Internal Affairs, 7.

⁷⁹ Martina Manara, George Piazza ‘The depoliticisation of asylum seekers: Carl Schmitt and the Italian system of dispersal reception into cities’ (2018) 64, *Political Geography* 43, 48, citing SPRAR Central Service (2015) *Manuale operativo*. Rome: Ministry of Internal Affairs, 50.

Following a “multi-level governance model,” SAI projects involve a variety of actors, from national offices to local organizations and cooperatives, and the private sector. Support from local authorities and administration is pivotal for successful project implementation. Finally, it is common practice for local institutions and cooperatives to establish strong partnerships with the non-profit and charity sectors, both religious and non-governmental organizations, which provide further help in supplying the requisite services. It is a unique “proactive role,” as argued by Sigona, that “NGOs, religious organizations and the Church have historically played in Italy in the development of migration policies and, in particular, in the resettlement of migrants and refugees”⁸⁰

Dependent upon goals, funding and resources available in a given territory, as well as the welfare mechanisms and social policy strategies, local organizations implement different types of projects. Such projects may address adults, male or females, families, single-parent families, unaccompanied minors, or individuals with physical disabilities. In addition, vulnerable recipients with mental health issues may be accommodated in specific projects that better respond to their needs and demands. As mentioned above, employment is promoted through paid internships with a duration of three to six months. These work experiences intend to help beneficiaries create or improve a resumé, develop professional skills, and reduce the unemployment rate. Simultaneously, they are meant to raise awareness within the private sector of the needs, as well as of the employability of individuals within the immigrant community. SAI projects also promote and curate cultural activities that aim to inform and educate the local inhabitants of the projects that are being implemented. These awareness-raising activities may include events that present the causes that brought people to leave their countries, or aim at increasing understanding of the difficulties that are part of the integration process, while trying to establish connections and promote cooperation. Ultimately, participation in this secondary level of hosting reception system means receiving “a period of orientation to all domains of life in the territory,” with extra attention given to the economic considerations.⁸¹

By encouraging refugee autonomy and independence and tailoring their formative paths according to the skills and aspirations of the beneficiaries, SAI projects focus their attention on what Hovil refers to as “the agency of refugees.”⁸² While, as Hovil warns, refugee empowerment should not be “over-romanticized”⁸³ – because vulnerabilities and needs remain that are not necessarily being addressed or resolved – through the intersection of the beneficiaries’ skills with the available resources in a territory, SAI projects do enable a system that puts refugees at the centre. In an attempt to favour programs that enhance beneficiaries’ skills and independence, SAI projects reject the idea of ‘warehousing’ refugees in big reception accommodations, like CAS or CARA facilities do.

Working at both a national and local level, and encouraging awareness-raising initiatives, SAI projects have a unique nature, which enacts what Ager and Strang call a “two-way process”⁸⁴ between refugees and host communities, allowing the creation of a “connective tissue”⁸⁵ between them. A process that promotes refugee participation in the life of the host community has, in fact, an important outcome: it can provide a perception of safety which can be beneficial as it supports a positive quality of life.⁸⁶ Furthermore, becoming increasingly connected with the local environment expands refugees’ opportunities to create networks with local authorities and the private sector. Additionally, working to restore refugee autonomy contributes to the strength of local services, whereby improving the quality of life of the entire community, not just that of immigrants. Finally, by fostering multilingual and multicultural projects that aim to raise awareness among local communities and fight discrimination and injustices, the focus is shifted from the migrants to

⁸⁰ Sigona (n 21) 118. Within the migration policies, one notable example are the “humanitarian corridors” a pilot self-financed project coordinated by the Community of St. Egidio in collaboration with the Federation of Evangelical Churches. The corridors, established to stop irregular migration, grant vulnerable people a visa for critically vulnerable cases which allows them to enter safely in the Italian territory. Once in Italy they can apply for asylum. The idea is that, through these ‘corridors’, refugees stop seeking help from human traffickers, avoiding the risk of crossing of the Mediterranean Sea or undertaking other dangerous routes. Refugees receive funds, which come entirely from donations, to support themselves for a year. They are resettled in different cities across the Italian territory, received by communities and associations ready to help them in the process of integration.

⁸¹ Astolfo, Boano (n 51) 50.

⁸² Hovil (n 27) 496.

⁸³ Ibid 497.

⁸⁴ Ager, Strang (n 23) 177.

⁸⁵ Ibid 177.

⁸⁶ Ibid 180.

the “established community”, questioning and problematizing it.⁸⁷ Such an approach is clearly embedded within a context that regards resources towards integration as an investment for the entire community.⁸⁸

3.3 Critique of the Diffused Integration Model

While the core of *diffused integration* is considered the strength and the excellence of SAI projects, scholars have outlined a number of critical aspects that are worth mentioning. In step with the academic research on integration discussed earlier, such flaws, in fact, mirror the challenges and obstacles that local integration continually presents.⁸⁹

Drawing upon the UNHCR Policy on Alternative to Camps from 2016, which encourages receiving communities to see refugees as potential friends rather than enemies, Manara and Piazza⁹⁰ suggest that a similar approach also emerges from the SPRAR Manual and its diffused system. While investigating the Italian reception system, however, they concluded that asylum seekers involved in their study were left in an ambiguous state, as neither friends nor enemies of the local communities.⁹¹ In particular, they argued that, even though the urban dispersal reception redesigns the relationship between refugees and host communities by removing the separation that exists between them, refugees interviewed still felt precluded from building “a collective capable of political action”.⁹² Because asylum seekers often felt threatened by the host community, they preferred to isolate and to remain in the security of their homes. Ultimately, Manara and Piazza argue that SPRAR projects became “practices of atomization”⁹³ in which displaced individuals were experiencing a process of ‘depoliticization’. Despite the efforts towards integration, their study highlighted that the dispersal reception system was “failing to provide asylum seekers and local communities with the necessary instruments to realize social inclusion”.⁹⁴

If for Manara and Piazza the agency of refugees and asylum seekers is the core problem to improve, Astolfo and Boano⁹⁵ regard the short-term nature of the projects as the major shortcoming of SAI networks. The limited duration of a project, they argue, could compromise all attempts for a relationship with the locals and the territory of residence. Campomori, on the other hand, considers the voluntary nature of participation in the SPRAR/SAI network as problematic. This in fact, resulted in a heterogeneous and unbalanced distribution of projects across the territory.⁹⁶ Finally, while recognizing “experiences of excellence” within

⁸⁷ Strang and Ager (n 34) 595, citing Valenta and Bunar 2010.

⁸⁸ “The Riace experiment” is one of the most famous yet controversial SPRAR integration models implemented in Italy. Located in the South of Italy, the small town of Riace has been welcoming refugees since the 1990s. Through the SPRAR funding, Riace’s mayor, Domenico Lucano has accomplished a number of reception projects that encouraged immigrant integration in the territory. Through these projects, he was able to, simultaneously, revitalize his town, previously known mainly for the local Mafia. In Riace, refugees received accommodation in the empty houses of the local inhabitants emigrated elsewhere, and the government’s funding was used to implement projects of integration and start internships which slowly led to job opportunities. In a few years, local artisanal activities, no longer active, were restored and the town’s economy was revitalized. This, in turn, allowed to hire many young Italians as language teachers or cultural mediators. Thanks to a very interesting system of vouchers used as money, refugees were able to gain a certain degree of autonomy. While the host population welcomed a system that revitalized their town, the intricate bureaucracy slowly became an obstacle. Soon, the national government started to attack the project reducing funding and limiting the rights of the refugees. The (now former) mayor was accused of encouraging illegal migration and put under house arrest for several months. Today, Lucano is still target of accusations, and his model of integration has been severely undermined. For a brief overview of Riace’s story see: Angela Giuffrida, ‘In Italy’s ‘hospitality town’, migrants fight to save mayor who gave them a new home’ *The Guardian* (London, 7 October 2018) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/07/migrants-fight-save-riace-mayor-who-gave-them-home>> accessed 17 November 2021.

⁸⁹ For a case study on SPRAR projects, see also Baldoni, E., Giovannetti, M. ‘Gli interventi di accoglienza integrata e la ricaduta sui territori’ (Percorsi di secondo welfare 2019) <<https://www.secondowelfare.it/immigrazione-e-accoglienza/gli-interventi-di-accoglienza-integrata-e-la-ricaduta-sui-territori/>> accessed 17 November 2021.

⁹⁰ Manara, Piazza (n 79).

⁹¹ Manara and Piazza’s investigation draws upon the work of Carl Schmitt and his conceptualization of the “political as the friend-enemy distinction” (n 79) 44.

⁹² *Ibid* 49.

⁹³ *Ibid* 45.

⁹⁴ *Ibid* 48.

⁹⁵ Astolfo, Boano (n 51).

⁹⁶ Campomori, for example, highlights that the region Veneto, one of the most industrialized in Italy, has a low involvement of municipalities in the Sprar network in comparison to other regions in the south that implement projects but have less resources. In: Francesca Campomori ‘Quel che resta dell’accoglienza dopo il Decreto Salvini. E qualche indicazione per invertire la rotta’ (*Osservatorio Internazionale per la coesione e l’inclusione sociale*, Nota 4/2020) <<https://osservatoriocoesionesociale.eu/osservatorio/quel-che-resta-dellaccoglienza-dopo-il-decreto-salvini-e-qualche-indicazione-per-invertire-la-rotta/>> accessed 17 November 2021.

the SPRAR/SIMPROIMI network, La Bella highlights the weaknesses of the integration system and the limitations that emerge in the south of Italy.⁹⁷ Here, in fact, the hosting system faces historical issues pertaining to the Italian job market. Less industrialization and profound historical economic problems result in a lack of job opportunities and an increase of illegal work for the locals as well as for immigrants.

3.4 The "(In)security Decree"

When in 2018, the Decree-Law 113 of October 4 (later enacted as Law no. 132 of December 2018) was ratified, it affected primarily CAS centres by significantly reducing the budget allocated. This resulted in a sudden and considerable decrease in the quality of services. These facilities, already at capacity prior to the introduction of the decree, became even more overcrowded and fundamentally incapable of responding to the needs of the increasing numbers of recipients.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, budget cuts also significantly reduced the number of practitioners and social workers.⁹⁹

Regarding the secondary reception, as explained above, SPRAR projects were renamed SIPROIMI and consequently excluded asylum seekers from accessing the network. The law also abolished visas granted for humanitarian reasons, which, until then, was the most common permit for the majority of migrants arriving in Italy. Such visas are normally valid for two years and serve a working permit. Meanwhile, the *Security decree* created obstacles for those applying for citizenship, introduced a procedure to expedite the expulsion of 'dangerous' asylum seekers, and deprived asylum seekers of their status. These changes resulted in the recategorization of thousands of individuals from asylum seekers into irregular immigrants, making them 'invisible' in the eyes of Italian territory and government.¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, the decree established that integration services should be limited to unaccompanied minors, asylum seekers and recipients of international protection. In substitution of the humanitarian permit, the law established residence permits for "special reasons" (such as for victims of domestic violence or trafficking), which, however, became much more difficult, or "practically impossible" to obtain.¹⁰¹ All asylum seekers excluded were channelled into the CAS centres already at full capacity.

The first decree was followed shortly by a second one, known as the *Security Decree Bis* which was endorsed by the President of the Republic, yet not without raising a number of additional concerns about its constitutionality.¹⁰² The second decree in particular, modified the norms regarding the arrivals and rescue at sea operations, giving the government the possibility to bar the entrance of rescue boats in the Italian territory, in violation of Italian law. It also established funding to repatriate irregular immigrants, granting more power to the minister of the interior.¹⁰³

As stated earlier, the *Security decree* perfectly aligns with the politics of 'closed ports,' and the European approach of securitization. According to Campomori, the new regulations clearly represented a reactionary move along the same lines of the European policy of containment.¹⁰⁴ In particular, the abolition of the permits for humanitarian protection had the effect of increasing the number of the denials of asylum seekers' applications, from 58% to 83% and the immediate consequence of increasing the number of irregular immigrants to 60.000 from June 2018 until December 2020.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, Campomori notes that the

97 Marco La Bella 'Accogliere senza integrare: le distorsioni delle politiche sull'immigrazione nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia' (2020) 11 [21] *Società Mutamento Politica* 29.

98 Alessandro Lanni 'Cambiamenti del "decreto sicurezza e immigrazione"' (Associazione Carta di Roma, 28 December 2018) <<https://www.cartadiroma.org/news/cambiamenti-del-decreto-sicurezza-e-immigrazione/>> accessed 17 November 2020.

99 For an overview on the impact on the reception mechanisms see: 'La Sicurezza dell'esclusione' Centri d'Italia, parte terza. Report (Openpolis, 2019) <https://www.openpolis.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CentridItalia_2019_PARTE_3.pdf> accessed 17 November 2021.

100 Luca Misculin, 'I "decreti sicurezza" sono un fallimento' // *Post* (Milan, 18 January 2018) <<https://www.ilpost.it/2020/01/18/decreti-sicurezza-salvini-risultati/>> accessed 17 November 2020.

101 Ibid.

102 Especially those in relation to rescue at sea operations. See: Vitalba Azzollini, 'Dubbi costituzionali. L'errore di Mattarella: il decreto sicurezza bis non doveva essere firmato' *Linkiesta* (12 August 2019) <<https://www.linkiesta.it/2019/08/decreto-sicurezza-bis-salvini-mattarella-mi-granti/>> accessed 30 October 2021.

103 The law also allowed the government to fine the captains of the boats who violate the entry ban and to requisite the boat.

104 Campomori (n 96).

105 Data from ISPI quoted in Campomori (n 96).

decree resulted in an increase in the number of legal disputes, such as the number of appeals to renew the former-humanitarian permits, as well as against the suspension of the reception, or against the abolition of the asylum seekers' right to residence registration with the municipality.¹⁰⁶ Channelling people to temporary centres or leaving them outside any network of reception also increased the work and the expenses in the public services, which had to deal with individuals that did not qualify for any hosting mechanism, yet still needed material assistance. Ultimately, "the decree wanted to reduce the costs in the reception system, yet it increased the costs in the legal one".¹⁰⁷

Preliminary findings on the impact of the decrees, showed that the spots in the emergency centres and in the SIPROIMI projects had dropped from 183,000 to 83,000 leaving the places open for more recipients.¹⁰⁸ These data also demonstrated that, rather than discouraging departures and reducing the arrivals or even deaths at sea, the new regulations had the opposite effect. By disregarding the safety of the migrants, whereby creating more and greater difficulties and obstacles to their arrivals or their stay, the law increased instability and irregular migration as it significantly weakened the reception system.

106 The abolition of the registration for asylum seekers in the municipal register created several tensions and further unbalances across the territory. See Magda Bolzoni et. al., '(Dis)fare accoglienza. Attori e contesti alla prova dei decreti sicurezza' (*Diritto d'asilo. Fondazione Migrantes Report 2020*) <<https://www.migrantes.it/il-diritto-dasilo-report-2020-costretti-a-fuggire-ancora-respinti/>> accessed 17 November 2021, 196.

107 Campomori (n 96) 5, citing Zarzella.

108 Duccio Facchini, 'L'accoglienza due anni dopo il "decreto Salvini", tra crollo dei posti e inutilizzo di quelli rimasti' (*Altraeconomia*, 5, October 2020) <<https://altreconomia.it/accoglienza-due-anni-dopo-decreto-salvini/>> accessed 20 August 2021.

4. Investigating SAI Projects and the Impact of the Security Decree: findings

4.1 SAI projects participating in the study: Overview

Field work consisted of interviews conducted online with operators and practitioners working in organizations, cooperatives and non-profit organizations belonging to the SAI network located in the centre and the north of the country. People interviewed operate in different professional areas (legal, social, educational, psychological) and interviews were conducted between July and September 2021.

The interview entailed two objectives.¹⁰⁹ First, it tried to gather information about the operational structure and the main aspects of the SAI projects. Questions focused on the network of organizations and cooperatives involved, the number of beneficiaries, the types of projects and the activities and services offered. Ultimately, this part of the interview aimed at learning how, in practice, what is considered the strength and the excellence of the SAI project, namely the *diffused integration* model, is implemented. In particular, questions investigated how the projects encourage self-reliance and autonomy of the beneficiaries, introduce them to the job market and encourage social inclusion in the territory of residence. The second half of the interview focused on collecting information regarding the impact of the *Security Decree* from the period of its implementation, in 2018 until its amendment. Because interviews involved professionals operating in the field, questions aimed at investigating mainly the impact on them and their work and not only the legal or practical consequences that affected the beneficiaries.

The open-ended nature of the questions allowed to gather a wealth of information and to expand the knowledge of the SAI projects. While I asked to interview one representative, I received positive and enthusiastic availability from more than one person from nearly each place I contacted. One exceptional response came from the SAI network in Pesaro where a whole team of eight people came to the interview. Interviews were conducted within a friendly and motivating atmosphere, where driven, enthusiastic and engaged professionals discussed with passion and competence about their work and their mission. Personal engagement and commitment were not the focus of my research, however, such positive responses unveiled an inspiring and stimulating reality that clashes with the dramatic picture that the media and the public opinion describe when talking about immigrants in Italy. Subverting the hostility and the mainstream rhetoric around projects of integration and inclusion, what emerged from these conversations was a deep commitment to the core of the SAI projects, namely the desire to move away from a traditional culture of dependency that sees beneficiaries as passive and voiceless victims. Practitioners involved are committed to enable the transition to autonomy of their beneficiaries in the most fluid and organic way for the recipients, helping them to build relations and networks with the local territory, while encouraging their social, professional and personal growth.

In step with the guidelines of the SAI projects, interviews confirmed that each organization consists of a multidisciplinary team (including coordinators, social and legal advisors, psychologists, supervisors of reception and integration, language teachers, and cultural mediators), in order to respond to the different spheres involved in the process of integration. Operators meet on a regular basis to get informed about the beneficiaries, familiarize with their needs and demands and discuss the variety of situations they may encounter. Monthly workshops and training courses are also required to stay up-to-date with the latest norms and guidelines.

Findings showed that because the *Security Decree* was in place for less than two years, it did not have a major impact on the services and benefits usually offered by a SAI project. However, the numerous changes that affected the structure of the hosting mechanism and a general unclarity of the decree created confusion and frustration among the operators. The discussion of the findings in the last section will reveal that, during this time, practitioners had to deal with additional work while trying to find alternative solutions in order to continue to provide assistance to asylum seekers excluded by the law.

¹⁰⁹ See interview questions in the appendix.

4.2 Diffused Integration Models in Practice

As highlighted earlier, speaking the language of the host country is consistently identified as pivotal to the integration process.¹¹⁰ All centres contacted confirmed that Italian language courses are one of the first services offered in a SAI project.¹¹¹ In the Pesaro network, in particular, despite the limited resources and a lower number of beneficiaries, supervisors of the projects were able to open different sections according to the different language levels of the beneficiaries. Additionally, the organizations try to work in collaboration with local centres for adult education, known as CPIA (*Centro Provinciale Istruzione Adulti, Provincial Centre for Adult Education*) to provide basic literacy for adults.¹¹² Interestingly, the social worker in the Milan network highlighted that in bigger and more industrialized cities such as Milan, where agricultural and unskilled labour is less common, a reasonable level of language is often the first mandatory requirement in order to find any job.

Other interesting experiences in relation to language learning, and worth mentioning, emerged during the interview with the social worker in Settimo Torinese. Here, a high number of volunteers is actively engaged in one-on-one language classes with the beneficiaries, something that contributes to reinforce their language skills and to build connections at the same time. Additionally, volunteers in Settimo Torinese are also coordinating language courses to prepare beneficiaries for the driver license exam. Such courses are very unusual across Italy, yet the demand, especially in industrialized areas like the one near Turin, is very high. Having a vehicle, in fact, means becoming more independent and gaining access to more employment opportunities. Language courses aimed at obtaining the driver license are an example of how the *diffused integration* model is attentive to the territorial offers and demands, encouraging initiatives and services that can be immediately beneficial for the recipients of the projects. A similar strong network of volunteers is also collaborating with the Milan organization, planning multicultural events aimed at fostering socialization with the host communities. Finally, more than one operator mentioned that very often beneficiaries of the project remain connected with the organization and later become themselves volunteers.¹¹³ A notable experience is the one involving beneficiaries in the Jesi network who met with seniors in a retirement home in a 2019 project for social inclusion. These examples also confirm the crucial role played by charity organizations, to encourage socialization, as well as the successful implementation of the services.

Along with language classes, professionals confirmed that their organizations offer material assistance, legal support and orientation to residential inclusion, especially needed when beneficiaries from different nationalities live together.¹¹⁴ Psychological support is not mandatory, however operators have highlighted that, in step with an increased attention to address psychological traumas experienced, beneficiaries are invited to take advantage of the service offered.¹¹⁵ While, as explained earlier, projects are tailored according to each beneficiary,¹¹⁶ practitioners interviewed confirmed that it is crucial that the different structures, cooperatives and organizations work in synergy. Therefore, staff meetings are scheduled once or twice a month in order to coordinate and plan activities, to monitor results, and prevent potential issues.

As far as looking for employment, practitioners confirmed that the first step is getting to know the needs, skills and wishes of the beneficiaries, in order to design a solid plan and an individual pathway to become autonomous. Next, operators help beneficiaries to look for a place where to start an internship program funded by the network. These initial work experiences are aimed at developing beneficiaries' skills in specific working areas, build a resumé, and ultimately facilitate their access to the job market. Notably, the Pesaro network was able to activate additional training courses to educate beneficiaries against illegal work and exploitation, and increase awareness of their own skills. Relationships with the private sector and local businesses become instrumental to start more easily the internships and to establish future collabo-

¹¹⁰ Agier, Strang (n 23).

¹¹¹ Beneficiaries should ideally reach a A2 level of language, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

¹¹² CPIA are public schools instituted by the Minister of Education. The school offers education for adults, Italian national and immigrant, with the aim of fostering their personal, cultural, social and economic growth. They offer language courses for foreigners and special educational tracks for the acquisition of the middle school diploma, as well as literacy and basic computer science courses. A middle school diploma is generally required to get a job in Italy.

¹¹³ "Lewis observes that the cultural activities organized by refugee community groups are generally evidence of proactive reaching out to make connections with the established community" in Strang and Ager (n 33) 601.

¹¹⁴ Interview 7 (Refer to ch 1.3. for details on the interviews).

¹¹⁵ Interview 5.

¹¹⁶ To stipulate the beginning of the project, beneficiaries and practitioners in the Jesi network sign a "pact of mediation and reception," a mutual agreement in which beneficiary's rights and duties are outlined and all actors of the projects agree to work together.

rations with them. All interviewees consistently confirmed that mutual trust with some local companies is built only over the years and that, when this is established, it can have some important positive outcomes. Often, in fact, beneficiaries who have carried out a successful internship, receive the offer of a permanent job. Interviewees also discussed the strict synergetic relationship that exist not only between a number of associations, cooperatives and NGOs, but also with the local administration. Everyone stressed that the more the local administration is supportive, the more the integration projects are successful.

Collaborating with local administration play a crucial role also when it comes to promoting events and launching initiatives with the locals. Practitioners mentioned a number of events and activities that took place in the past years as a way of encouraging inclusion and raising awareness on the realities of asylum seekers and refugees. Such events take place locally, involving schools as well as adults and older people in a variety of cultural events. Each organization contacted recounted initiatives that support and encourage social inclusion, from the multi-ethnic dinners offered in Milan with volunteers mentioned earlier, to a music experience with a rapper invited in the schools in Brescia. During the past year the Reggio Emilia SAI network offered cultural events remotely, demonstrating that, albeit the great limitations imposed by the pandemic, projects successfully established over the years like these ones could continue online nonetheless. In the project called *Asylum*, beneficiaries of the Jesi network attended training courses in farming and agricultural businesses during which they learned to cultivate and produce wine, oil, and beans. Such products were later distributed to the municipalities involved in the reception projects and the experience led to the hiring of some of the beneficiaries by the local companies involved. Of a slightly different nature are the initiatives organized by the organization *Ciancaria* in the Rome network, which includes beneficiaries in projects that revitalize abandoned urban spaces. The organization also participates in the WWOOF¹¹⁷ network providing further job opportunities to the recipients of the SAI, once they conclude their project. Finally, in step with a system that refuses to passively assist beneficiaries, another significant experience is implemented by the SAI network in Rome. Here, beneficiaries are frequently invited to participate in the meetings and encouraged to express their needs and wishes and share their opinions. Against the risk of “depoliticization” outlined by Manara and Piazza’s study mentioned in the previous chapter,¹¹⁸ the Rome network tries to encourage the agency of asylum seekers, proposing an horizontal approach based on the idea of “inter-azione” (*interaction*)¹¹⁹ and inviting all participants, both refugees and the local community to work in collaboration with key actors of the urban politics. Moving even beyond the concept of integration,¹²⁰ the supervisor of the Rome project encourages such ‘interactions’ not in a regular office, but instead in places immersed in the neighbourhood in which they live. This particular approach facilitates the relationship with the urban territory and its services, increasing opportunities to establish social connections and, ideally, future employment.

At the end of the first part of the interview, practitioners also expressed their suggestions in order to improve SAI projects. Several operators explicitly mentioned the need to create more projects for single women and for unaccompanied minors¹²¹ which others focussed on single fathers,¹²² seeking to eliminate the two levels of benefits within the SAI.¹²³ Many practitioners mentioned the need to advertise more their initiatives and make SAI projects more visible.¹²⁴ Others highlighted the need to expand and strengthen ways to continue to support beneficiaries “after the project”¹²⁵ or to encourage more social initiatives that reduce the separation between “us” (the locals) and “them” (the beneficiaries).¹²⁶ In line with Campomori’s observations previously discussed, the fact that SAI projects are based on a voluntary participation of the municipalities and organizations was also mentioned by several practitioners as something that should be

117 World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms.

118 See chapter 3.3.

119 Interview 3.

120 Notably, the intentional choice of the word ‘interazione’ recalls but also replaces ‘integrazione’ (integration). The linguistic effect is lost in English.

121 Interviews 2, 4, 6, 7. While the situation of unaccompanied minors was not the focus of this work, interview 6 and part of interview 7 described SAI projects for unaccompanied minors and allowed to have a better perspective on the situations. In particular, they confirmed that because the number of unaccompanied minors is increasing the services for them, especially those linked to education and work internships, should be strengthened.

122 Interview 3.

123 Interview 7.

124 This was repeatedly mentioned especially in interviews 5, 7 and 8.

125 Interview 5.

126 Interview 7.

revised because it increases their precarity if local administrations decide to withdraw their support. Finally, one comment by the legal advisor in Reggio Emilia resounded particularly notable and inspiring. Because SAI project, when successful, have very positive social repercussions in the territory, a similar mechanism, he argued, should be extended to Italian nationals currently facing economic and social difficulties.

In conclusion, what came across was a positive and engaging reality of cooperation and collaboration among all the organizations involved, which demonstrates that a multi-governance system can bring positive results and lead beneficiaries to a constructive social inclusion in the territory of residence. Ultimately, while describing the services offered, the initiatives and the events implemented, interviewees described how, in practice, the *diffused integration* system is carrying out the core principles of the SAI network.

4.3 The Impact of the Security Decree

Findings of the interviews confirmed that while local institutions and professional engagement of operators involved are crucial for the process of integration, restrictive regulations and lack of support at a national level can become an obstacle to integration.

All interviewees confirmed that the major impact of the decree affected the CAS centres with a significant reduction of funding and services for an increasingly higher number of guests in those facilities. While the decree did not impact too much the services offered in SAI projects, the introduction of the new regulations and, in particular, the exclusion of asylum seekers and of beneficiaries of humanitarian protection visas from the integration project led to some important consequences.

First of all, the unclarity of the law initially created confusion around who met the requirements to be admitted in a project and who did not. Some operators defined the decree “poorly written”¹²⁷ and generally unclear, while others mentioned that at some point they did not know anymore “who qualified and for what.”¹²⁸ This created a moment of “disorientation and confusion”¹²⁹ because the decree had redesigned the system, separating and making a distinction between refugees and asylum seekers creating “two levels of reception.”¹³⁰ Moreover, since for some beneficiaries the changes happened *in itinere*, the fear of being excluded provoked anxiety in the asylum seekers, and “anger and frustration”¹³¹ in the professionals operating. Amid this confusion, the only positive outcome was that the ambiguities deriving from the very language of the decree allowed practitioners to avoid a “rigid interpretation”¹³² of the new regulations, especially if it was going to affect those individuals who were waiting for an imminent response on their status. In step with what Campomori’s study previously highlighted,¹³³ practitioners interviewed confirmed that legal procedures increased. Meanwhile, the interpretation of the new regulations often required frequent mediation with some local administrative offices, where employees were often not up-to-date with the new migration policies. This became an additional burden for the SAI professionals who had to navigate the interpretation and the correct application of the law,¹³⁴ and dealt with the stress and anxiety felt by the beneficiaries.

Because the *Security decree* was not retroactive, asylum seekers or beneficiaries of humanitarian protection who had been already admitted to a SAI at the time the law was enacted could remain until the end of their project. Moreover, even though the pandemic increased the challenges, it allowed to apply for exceptions due to the health emergency. Nonetheless, practitioners claimed that the exclusion of asylum seekers and

127 Interviews 2, 7.

128 Interview 4.

129 Interviews 2, 7.

130 Interview 7.

131 Interview 7.

132 Interview 8.

133 See chapter 3.4.

134 Similar conclusions have been reached in an investigation conducted by Bolzoni et al. who outline that the decree regulations forced to redesign the relationship between beneficiaries and operators. This, coupled with an increase in the bureaucratization for paperwork and documentation of each beneficiary, and the frustration of not being able to offer benefits for integration, has contributed to make the position of the operators more stressful. Moreover, their investigation outlined that the national campaign against immigrants fostered by the government at that time significantly increased a hostile sentiment against immigrants impacting their process of social inclusion. In Bolzoni et al (2020) *(Dis)fare accoglienza. Attori e contesti alla prova dei decreti sicurezza*. In: *Diritto d’asilo*. Report 2020 [online] Fondazione Migrantes. <<https://www.migrantes.it/il-diritto-dasilo-report-2020-costretti-a-fuggire-ancora-respinti/>> accessed 17 November 2021, 195, 176.

of beneficiaries of humanitarian protection greatly diminished the number of people that SAI projects could accommodate. Some organizations found themselves with the paradox of having more funding and spots that could not be used for lack of guests. In the Pesaro network, for example, the number of recipients almost reduced to a half of what it used to be.

With the amended decree in 2020 the situation did not improve. The two levels of reception that resulted from the changes forced practitioners to find solutions for those who suddenly were accepted in the project yet excluded from all of its benefits. In particular, the exclusion of asylum seekers from the professional trainings and paid internship experiences was a crucial shortcoming. As previously highlighted, entering the job market is instrumental in the process to autonomy, therefore lacking a professional orientation period can strongly affect the integration process. All interviewees consistently reported that they made efforts to find alternative ways in order to continue to offer assistance and help to those who could not benefit from the paid internship program. These solutions were frequently mentioned by all the interviewees: filing appeals or suspensions of acts, crowdfunding,¹³⁵ or applying for additional European funding, such as AMIF.¹³⁶ Many outlined how even just contacting local companies directly or the office for employment allowed them to initiate collaborations and implement independent internships programs. Others were able to turn humanitarian visa into working-permits which ultimately enabled beneficiaries to find job more easily.¹³⁷

Another consequence highlighted by the interviewees was the way the decree has been politicized and how this ended up affecting the work they have been doing. Some practitioners said that the decree has been instrumentalized¹³⁸ to further raise tensions and hatred against immigrants. Many also discussed the mediatic operation that accompanied the proposal and preceded the enactment of the decree and how "it destroyed what was built so far,"¹³⁹ engendering a general attitude of depreciation against integration projects in the face of public opinion. While political leanings of the interviewees were never discussed, the majority of them pointed out that the process of undermining the hosting system dates back years ago and only found its culmination with the *Security Decree*. The approval of the decree was felt as an attack to belittle their job and the positive outcomes reached in years in the field of integration. Some practitioners said that they felt "they had to defend their job and what had been achieved so far,"¹⁴⁰ others that these political decisions were meant to "weaken the system and its strategic planning capacities."¹⁴¹ Finally, practitioners consistently noted how this containment approach is mirrored by the European attitude in general, arguing that funding for migration policies is progressively destined to control the borders instead of supporting integration projects.¹⁴² The majority of the professionals pointed out that SAI projects, which have already a temporary nature, are facing unstable future perspectives.

It is suggested that:

policies, emphasizing limitation and control, undermine integration by communicating a negative message to the public that refugees are damaging society. This negativity in turn powerfully conflicts with policy aimed to promote integration of those granted refugees status.¹⁴³

Similarly, practitioners highlighted that the rhetoric of 'Italian first' and the political instrumentalization of the decree made an impact on the local communities with the immediate consequence of reinforcing the lack of willingness to integrate and thus "slowing down the multicultural process of our society,"¹⁴⁴ whereby creating a more aggressive and hostile atmosphere around immigrants and practitioners. The climate of intolerance led to repercussions for refugees in particular once they conclude the project and start searching for a house. In step with the climate of fear and hostility promoted by the decree, practitioners interviewed

135 In Brescia (interview 2) for example, some crowdfunding campaigns allowed to implement two projects "*Io accolgo*" and "*Prima le persone*," which enabled operators to assist excluded beneficiaries for housing needs and to fund internships.

136 The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) aims at strengthening the common European asylum policy.

137 Interviews 4, 5.

138 Interviews 5, 7.

139 Interview 7.

140 Interview 7.

141 Interview 8.

142 As highlighted also by academic research: "Historically it has proven difficult to secure funding for local integration projects" Fielden (n 5) 3.

143 Strang, Ager, (n 34) 595.

144 Interview 7.

highlighted the reluctance from real estate agencies and the locals to rent houses to foreigners with unstable jobs or recently hired. This often resulted in additional work for SAI professionals who tried to help their former beneficiaries.

While discussing the challenges they faced in working in the field, operators described a climate of suspicion and mistrust created by the decree around all individuals and organizations implementing integration projects. This also disturbed and undermined collaborations with social and economic networks, even those established over the years, and consequently led to more challenges and frustration among them. While navigating the hostile climate that surrounded the enactment of the decree, everyone consistently reiterated the crucial role of the local administration and municipalities, whose support became fundamental in order to continue to implement successfully the projects or to find alternatives. One operator mentioned how the historically left political leaning of the region was decisive,¹⁴⁵ while others said that they “ended up trying to resolve new issues discretely”¹⁴⁶ to avoid burdening local administrations with further bureaucratic issues linked to the immigrants.

Ultimately, while the multi-governance framework of the SAI projects allows for developing projects depending upon territorial needs and availabilities, frequent changes in the migration policies have weakened the central monitoring service and simultaneously created frustration and stress among the practitioners who continued to provide services with passion and determination, but struggled to keep up with the new regulations. By undermining the job of the professionals, their skills, relationships and resources, the *Security Decree* provoked a general weakening of the Italian hosting system and of the work done by people operating in it. At the same time, interviews also demonstrated that while the decree fomented populist propaganda against the immigrants, increasing a general attitude of intolerance and hostility, operators continued to provide services and benefits to the beneficiaries. A few practitioners argued that some local institutions even enacted a sort of “resistance from the bottom”¹⁴⁷ against national policies that were having such a dramatic impact on the immigrants.

Investigating the changes introduced by the decree and the relatively short period of time in which they took place, provided useful information, albeit in small numbers, about the impact that national policies can have directly into local projects of integration, both legally and practically. The data resulting from this research showed that the decree provoked disruption within the hosting mechanism with profound consequences for countless asylum seekers and former beneficiaries of humanitarian protection visas, as well as for the practitioners working in the field.

145 Interview 4.

146 Interview 2.

147 Interview 7.

5. Conclusion

Practices of containment and criminalization of humanitarian help implemented across Europe highlight a dramatic and disturbing shift in EU policies towards securitization and border control as a way of managing migration. As a result of the Syrian war, or, more recently, of the severe humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the current war in Ukraine, an increasing number of displaced people seek refuge in the West. European migration policies, however, do not seem to fulfil displaced people needs and show that they require urgent reformation.¹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, as the current pandemic has further exacerbated the situation, persistent mainstream rhetoric asserts that immigrants constitute a threat to our societies and a burden for our economies. In this ongoing 'state of emergency' that does not mirror the reality, diverse and often contrasting migration policies among various countries reveal that Europe does not contain an equitable distribution and reception system of asylum seekers and immigrants across the Union.¹⁴⁹ The way each country is managing migration is also questioning the very identity and the core values of the EU¹⁵⁰ and scholars and practitioners alike fear that the European dream of a United Union free of borders is slowly collapsing.

Of the three durable solutions for displacement, local integration has for a long time been "everywhere except on the political agenda".¹⁵¹ However, as discussed in the previous chapters, integration is one of the most effective alternatives to keeping refugees in camps.¹⁵² Research, in fact, has shown that 'warehousing' refugees and asylum seekers in camps or crowded reception centres precludes them from enjoying basic human rights and puts them in a situation of precarity that risks increasing illegality and criminality, while also potentially becoming more expensive for host states.¹⁵³ Additionally, by excluding integration as a possible solution, governments are simply ignoring the fact that many displaced people cannot safely return to their countries.¹⁵⁴ Finally, it has been demonstrated that rejecting displaced populations also prevents them from having a potential positive impact on the economy and the society of the host country.

Hovil reminds us that asylum seekers and refugees require both the support of national policies as well as the opportunities to integrate in the territory of residence. Both are "intimately connected and need to be mutually reinforced".¹⁵⁵ My empirical research investigating a multi-governance system for integration that works at a national and local level allows for the simultaneous reflection on both aspects. As discussed in this work, the Italian secondary level of integration is based on the so-called *diffused integration* model, which is coordinated at a national level, but is implemented by local organizations and municipalities through SAI projects. Such system is applauded for a number of solid practices of reception that encourage beneficiaries' social and economic inclusion. Working in synergy and with the help of cooperatives, non-profits and the charity sector – and depending upon goals, funding and resources available in a given territory, as well as the welfare mechanisms and social policy strategies – these organizations implement a variety of initiatives that aim to restore the agency and autonomy of the beneficiaries. Recipients are also provided with accommodation, material assistance, and receive a personalized pathway tailored to their specific needs and skills. Field research was instrumental to learn how the diffused model is implemented in particular with regards to the different ways in which agency and autonomy of the beneficiaries is fostered in the different geographical locations and by the organizations contacted. Learning about the events and initiatives implemented by the SAI network was also fundamental to understand that, while focusing on the well-being and the autonomy of the beneficiaries, professionals are aware of the territory,

¹⁴⁸ Chetail defined the Dublin Mechanism as a 'fiasco' and as "a system of shifting more than sharing responsibility", which brought to adopt a coercive approach of Member States especially those located at the external borders. In: Vincent Chetail, Looking beyond the rhetoric of the refugee crisis: the failed reform of the common European asylum system, *European Journal of Human Rights* 5 2016, 584, 595.

¹⁴⁹ Sigona claims that the variety of approaches to migration policies in Europe not only show different models of integration, but also countries' inherently contrasting interests. (n 21) 117.

¹⁵⁰ Shada Islam 'Europe's migration 'crisis' isn't about numbers. It's about prejudice' *The Guardian*, (London, 8 October 2020) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/08/europe-migration-crisis-prejudice-eu-refugee-orban-christian>> accessed 30 October 2021.

¹⁵¹ Hovil (n 27) 497-498.

¹⁵² Jacobsen (n 6).

¹⁵³ Crisp (n 7).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Hovil (n 27) 497.

its resources and demands, and therefore try to implement such projects in a way that can be beneficial to the needs of both the refugees and the host communities.

Involving a variety of actors and institutions, the multi-governance structure of SAI projects also showed that the reality of integration is more complex and nuanced than it may appear. Drawing upon Kazłowska and Phillimore¹⁵⁶ who use the term “super-diversity” to suggest that our current societies are complex, fluid and multifaceted, these projects become an interesting case study to further explore such diversity. As I advance my research and investigate SAI projects, I consider their suggestion to continue to renew my approach of investigation beyond traditional binary definitions towards a broader observation of all actors involved, in order to continue to revise and re-define the concept of integration.

In alignment with the containment strategy implemented across Europe, Italian migration policy introduced restrictions and limitations which had a severe impact on the reception system, deeply undermining the hosting mechanism at all levels. In particular, the *Security Decree* enacted in 2018 abolished visas for humanitarian reasons and excluded asylum seekers from projects of integration. As preliminary findings revealed, while claiming to enhance security, the decree did just the opposite, whereby creating more instability and disorientation and further exasperated the migration issue.

This study has provided the opportunity to reflect on how governmental decisions and the implementation of policies of containment has affected a system that, despite some shortcomings, offers opportunities for inclusion. Conducting interviews with practitioners and professionals that work in SAI networks in different locations in the north and centre of Italy revealed the impact of these national policies on the recipients and the services offered. Data gathered also revealed that the decree, and the amendment which followed about two years later, created confusion and additional work for those operating in the field, forcing them to navigate the new regulations. In particular, practitioners consistently revealed how they tried to find alternative ways to help beneficiaries excluded from SAI benefits, such as appeals, suspensions of acts, crowdfunding, or other local or European funding. In addition, the politicization of the decree severely affected the work of the SAI projects in the eyes of the public opinion that started to regard both beneficiaries and professionals with mistrust and hostility. The latter, in particular, consistently perceived that their job and the result achieved in the field of integration over their years of work was being undermined.

As Campomori suggests, it is only by establishing legal avenues to securely access the country – such as reinstating humanitarian protection visas – that migration policies will prevent the creation of more irregularity and instability. As she furthermore suggests, we can hope for a higher number and a more homogenous distribution of the projects across the country, as well as a better use of local resources and competencies, if SAI projects were made the official hosting system of integration and were not based on the voluntarily participation of municipalities and local organizations – something that many professionals interviewed for this study also pointed out. By reinforcing the potential of these models through increased economical and structural investments, SAI networks can be successful. This, in turn, will have a positive impact on the society, eliminating fear and suspicion and fostering a productive and inclusive social climate with the host communities as well.¹⁵⁷

Despite the precarious nature of SAI projects, field work demonstrated that they still offer solid reception practices, granting services and guidance to the beneficiaries included. Interviews allowed to get in touch with an inspiring and stimulating environment that clashes with the dramatic picture that the media and public opinion project when talking about immigrants in Italy. Subverting the hostility and the mainstream rhetoric around migration issues and looking at the beneficiaries’ needs and demands, as well as at their wishes, practitioners interviewed implement with passion and enthusiasm the core principles of the SAI projects. By offering material and psychological support, internship opportunities and cultural and social events, SAI projects encourage social and professional inclusion in the territory, ultimately enhancing recipients’ agency and personal and professional growth.

Field work also suggested that a policy of containment, implemented by a precise political agenda in step with the general European approach of securitization, dismantled mechanisms that were effective

156 Kazłowska and Phillimore (n 61).

157 Campomori (n 96).

and contributed to create confusion, irregularity and marginality among countless immigrants. Frequent changes and restrictions applied to the core structure of the SAI hosting system, within a very short period of time, produced disorientation among those who operate in the field, creating a hostile attitude around the integration projects in general. While the data gathered refer to a small number of SAI networks and do not allow for drawing general conclusions, they, nonetheless align with Hovil's idea that there is a strong relationship between "de facto" and "de jure" integration. After investigating the legal and practical consequences of the *Security Decree*, findings reinforced the awareness that integration is still deeply connected to legality, and that local institutions and national policy makers should cooperate in order to offer long-term and more stable integration to all displaced populations.

6. Appendix

6.1 Interview Questions

Part 1

1. Tell me about your current and recent work in the SPRAR/SAI projects. How long have you worked in such projects? What is your role? Did it change over the years?
2. How big is the reception centre/cooperative/organization you work for, and for how long has it been implementing integration projects?
3. Approximately how many people work in the SAI projects you have currently activated, and what is their role?
4. Within the reception process, three different types of projects exist ('regular', 'for non-accompanied minors', and 'for people with mental health issues'). Which one/ones are you implementing? Did you have others before? How many beneficiaries do you have at the moment? Where are they from? Which status do they have?
5. Which other (local/national) organizations/associations/institutions/non-profit collaborate with you? What services do they provide?
6. It is known that one of the strengths of the SPRAR/SAI projects is the *diffused integration* model. Can you tell me how, in practice, you encourage and enhance social inclusion and professional autonomy in the territory? (Can you give me examples of job/internship experiences? What multicultural activities and initiatives do you implement? Have they all been successful?)
7. What would be, according to you, the most urgent changes/interventions to implement at the moment to improve SAI projects?

Part 2

8. Following the implementation of the so-called *Security Decree*, SPRAR projects have become SIPROIMI (with one major consequence: that of excluding asylum seekers from integration projects). Recently, the decree has been amended, new regulations have been introduced and reception projects have become SAI. In sum, the projects have undergone a series of structural changes. Can you tell me how have these changes affected your work compared to previous years? (You can discuss: services offered, number of guests, the staff, as well as your personal work and commitments, solutions to new issues and general work atmosphere).
9. As we mentioned earlier, with the *Security Decree* asylum seekers could not be part of integration projects. Did you have some asylum seekers at the moment of the implementation of the decree and what happened to them?
10. Following the amendment of the decree, asylum seekers are again admitted into SAI project, yet with some restrictions. What does a SAI project offer them now in practice? How is their limited access to SAI services impacting their future?