



Welcoming and Generative Local Welfare as an Agent for Territorial Development: A Case Study from Southern Italy

Alice Lomonaco¹ · Maurizio Bergamaschi¹ · Pierluigi Musarò¹ · Paola Parmiggiani¹

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Abstract

In Italy, shrinking regions cover more than 60% of the national territory. Although these areas are in demographic and economic decline (Accordo di Partenariato, 2014), many resilient initiatives have been developed over the years (Moss, 1996; Meloni, 2015). Among these experiences, several are aimed at welcoming the migrant population (Corrado, 2013), becoming privileged spaces for more equitable and inclusive modes of territorial regeneration (Van der Ploeg et al., 2003; Oostindie et al., 2010). Drawing upon these premises, the paper intends to reflect on the presence of non-EU migrants in shrinking Italian areas and on their role in local sustainable development. The contribution presents some of the first results of the Horizon 2020 project “WELCOMING SPACES”, with a specific focus on the municipality of Camini, one of the most shrinking areas in Southern Italy, to highlight how migration can lead to local development and rural regeneration processes. Camini is a good case study, as the reception centre managed by the social cooperative ‘JungiMundu’ hosts 118 migrants out of a total population of 810. Thanks to the presence of this number of people, several public services (i.e., post office, school, etc.) have been (re)activated. In the first part of this article, we introduce the case study, while in the second part, we reflect on how the reception of migrants contributes to the implementation of collective and public services for the whole community. The increase in population, both in terms of newcomers and Italian returnees, has also allowed for the regeneration of the village, economically and socially, creating connections between different cultures and traditions that had almost disappeared.

Keywords Shrinking area; Reception · Camini · Generative local welfare

✉ Alice Lomonaco
alice.lomonaco2@unibo.it

¹ University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy

Introduction

In Italy, about 60% of the territory belongs to inner areas (Accordo di Partenariato, 2014), this territorial polarisation—between rural and urban areas—is a phenomenon that is spreading throughout the West, in Europe as in the USA. Around 30% of the Western population lives in these areas, which have seen a relative and often absolute deterioration in access to and quality of basic public services (education, health, mobility, communication) and private services (UN Habitat, 2016). In Italy, these territories—predominantly rural—are characterised by a historical and intense demographic crisis that sees a decrease in the presence of young people and an increase in the ageing rates of the population, a strong reduction in the surface area and activities destined for agropastoral use, which determines an abandonment of land care, increasing its fragility (Barca, Carrosio, Lucatelli, 2018). For some time, rural sociology has focused its studies primarily on primary goods (food and water studies), the environment and territorial inequalities, while more recently, it has returned to discussing territory, variously defined—fragile, marginal, peripheral, inner, and remote as a space within which to study certain social phenomena (the settlement of migrants, the spread of welfare practices, the management of environmental resources, etc.). Points of interdisciplinary convergence are found on the issue of territorial cohesion, which is also legitimised by the important measures that Europe is directing towards this policy axis (Osti, 2000). These areas have recently returned to the subject of interest in the scientific and public debate, bringing attention back to territorial inequalities and, more generally, as a context within which to investigate certain social phenomena such as social innovation, tourism, migrant reception, and welfare (Van der Ploeg et al., 2003; Oostindie et al., 2010). The focus on shrinking regions (Espon, 2017, 2020) within the European public debate has made it possible to activate development policies with the aim of reversing current trends and supporting these territories considered unable to retain residents (Shucksmith, 2010) or attract new ones (Elshof et al., 2017). The capitalist reorganisation of the agri-food sector and the development of new, more flexible technologies have, however, changed the fate of inner areas (Moss, 1996; Meloni, 2015), making them poles of attraction for new migration flows (Corrado, 2013). In fact, in these areas, where a migrant presence was already predominantly linked to agricultural work—nested market (Van der Ploeg et al., 2012; Osti, Carrosio, 2020; D'Agostino, Corrado, 2019), in the last decade, there has been an important influx of refugees and asylum seekers, which in Italy has led to the establishment of a national reception system based precisely on geographical dispersion in small municipalities (SAI)¹. This system provides for the dispersion of these new flows of migrants precisely in small-medium towns and rural areas—STRAS (small-medium towns and rural areas—Bolzoni, Donatiello & Giannetto, 2022).

¹ The progressive European 'communitarisation' of migration policies has not been matched by a similar process for integration policies, which have been limited to declarations of principle, soft law, or the exchange of good practices. Integration policies are thus increasingly declined at the local level, in heterogeneous multi-level models. On the multi-level approach used in Europe, see Dimitriadis Iraklis et al. (2021), Ambrosini (2021), and Campomori (2019).

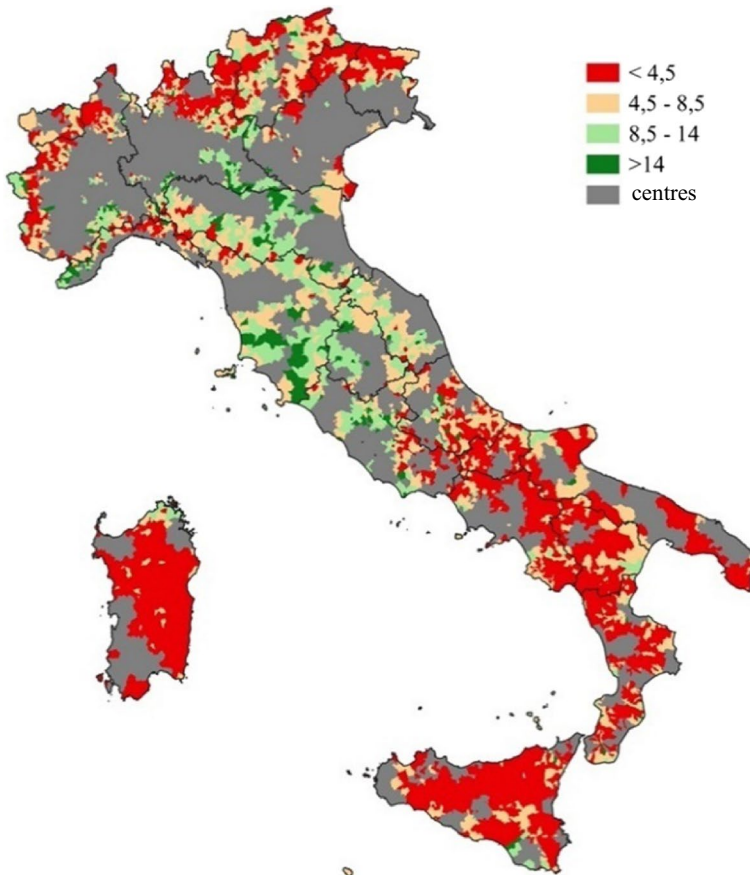


Fig. 1 Quota of foreign residents (%) in inner areas (1 January 2022) (source: author's elaboration with Istat data)

Although research on the relationship between migration and the territory (Caponio, 2006; Pastore & Ponzo, 2016; Ambrosini, 2012) has focused on the foreign presence in large cities, the majority of migrants, in Italy, reside in small towns, where the top twenty-five municipalities with a percentage of foreign residents above 20% are located (Balbo, 2015, p. 7) (Fig. 1). A significant acceleration has been seen in the presence of foreigners regularly present also in Calabria, especially since the 2000s, with the highest percentages recorded in small or very small municipalities (Sarlo, 2015). Since the end of the 1990s, experiences of reception of migrants and refugees have been promoted mainly within small municipalities to cope with the processes of abandonment and depopulation, fostering integration in situ (D'Agostino, 2013). The selection of the municipality of Camini as a case study offers the opportunity to explore the success factors that have enabled sustainable development, while

also reflecting on the limitations of such a model, in comparison, for example, with the neighbouring case of the municipality of Riace. The two municipalities are in fact both part of that portion of the Calabrian territory—one of the poorest regions in Italy and with a greater presence of inner areas (Istat, 2021)—known as the *Dorsale dell'ospitalità* (Sarlo, 2015). This is characterised by a strong presence of municipalities that adhered to the widespread reception system (SAI²), and the municipality of Riace is one of the first municipalities that implemented this reception model.

then one day we were chatting in the square in the summertime and we were looking at Riace, we saw that Riace, which before the reception was also a village in the wake of abandonment, and we were looking at how Mimmo [Lucano] had managed, thanks to this reception project, to create and in any case to give that vitality to the village, especially in the inner area, which it was losing. So, we went to Riace and we had our first meeting with Mimmo, who gave us a bit of a how to say... he told us a bit about how he got started, how he was able to carry out this project and manage it and so on... (G. Alfano, Mayor of Camini, 15 June 2021)

This article has a twofold objective: first to reflect on the presence of non-EU migrants in shrinking Italian areas and their possible role in local sustainable development, arguing that what is portrayed as a 'problem may turn out to be an added value. Secondly, it investigates the role of the local community in the governance of local welfare practices and its capacity to produce social innovations in favour of newcomers and 'old residents'.

Migration in Shrinking Areas

European shrinking areas have been affected by the phenomenon of migration (Balbo, 2015) on the one hand due to the processes of economic restructuring of agricultural labour (Kasimis, Papadopoulos, 2005), and on the other hand due to the emergence of geographic dispersal policies adopted by European states aimed at sharing the burden of reception. Therefore, there has been the arrival of an ever-increasing number of 'economic' (and informal) foreign workers in labour-intensive and low-skilled sectors, including refugees and asylum seekers, in the country's most fragile areas. The emergence of the latter has aroused the interest of policy makers for the potential positive spin-offs that could be created in terms of territorial development. Rural communities repopulated, thanks to the arrival of migratory flows, have been defined as *New Immigrant Destinations*—NID (Winders, 2014; McAreavey, 2017; McAreavey & Argent, 2018) and are characterised by social,

² Only asylum seekers and refugees can access widespread reception projects. This allows them to have access to some important services and protections: psychological and legal assistance, as well as Italian courses and individual project aimed at the socio-economic integration of beneficiaries, also through the construction of individual autonomy project.

cultural, political, and economic diversity, changing the composition and structure of these places. The presence of foreign populations in these areas has, in fact, redefined the space in many respects: from the restructuring of the existing heritage to the diversification of economic activities such as tourism, the creation of new jobs in pastoralism, construction, and care services (Corrado et al., 2016; Osti, Ventura, 2012).

The benefits derived from this presence have contributed to the sustainability of public services and business activities (Corrado, 2020), as well as to overcoming labour shortages, growth in tax revenues, and an increase in gross domestic product (GDP) (Gretter, 2018). This has, moreover, allowed for a rebalancing of the increasingly ageing population structure, resulting in a 'rural demographic recharge' (Hedberg, Haandrikman, 2014, p. 129). Although the presence of the new inhabitants in some areas has been perceived to revitalise these fragile areas, it has nevertheless generated a sense of discontent among residents, who say they are worried by the foreign presence and in not a few cases has generated racist and violent reactions (Hubbard, 2005; McAreavey, 2017). As highlighted by several authors, the foreign population has often been marginalised and discriminated against, in many cases, because of decentralisation policies, which have reinforced racism in rural areas (Blaschke, Torres, 2002; Odenbring, Johansson, 2019). Especially in small communities, it has challenged the sense of belonging, undermining cohesion processes (Milbourne, Kitchen, 2014). This is also because rural areas are often also characterised by a lack of heterogeneity, less experience in services aimed at reception, and inadequate socio-economic inclusion pathways, all of which do not favour the acceptance of differences (Leuba, 2017). The temporary nature of residence, limited access to services, poor language skills, and lack of autonomy constitute obstacles to the inclusion process and contribute to the creation of a new social stratification. Finally, a further effect generated by the increased foreign presence in these fragile areas has been the collapse of an already previously inadequate and inefficient service system (Urso, 2022). In Italy, we can therefore observe that the geography of the migrant presence in inner areas is basically linked to three different factors: (a) the presence of SAI projects (where we find asylum seekers and refugees), (b) formal and informal (and often seasonal) work in the agricultural sector, in the tourist industry, and (c) low-skilled work positions in the manufacturing and care sectors.

The Role of the Calabrian Community in the Governance of Reception

Starting in the 1990s, Calabria went from being a region historically characterised by emigration dynamics and growing unemployment rates to becoming a destination for immigration. The geographical position and the presence of a substantial informal sector with a high demand for low-skilled labour have been pull factors for seasonal and transit migrations (Pugliese, 1993; Simpson, 2022), producing a ruralisation of immigrants' employment and a progressive concentration in southern areas (Murtagh et al., 2020). The literature shows how, especially in some productive sectors, there are irregular working conditions (in Calabria with rates of over 30%, according to data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2010) and exploitation (Omizzolo, 2019); extreme working and living conditions are added to structural

deficits of the territory in terms of social policies and territorial governance systems (Ires-CGIL, 2011). The emergency dimension in the management of migratory flows has compromised both the creation of a programmatic framework of reference and the capacity for innovation of many local administrations, affecting inclusion policies (Sarlo et al., 2014). Moreover, Calabria is also characterised by a high rate of ‘undetected’ migratory flows, mostly due to the demand for agricultural work and labour in the tourist season (who often live in conditions of extreme marginality due to the phenomenon of ‘agromafie’, that of ‘caporalato’ and the exploitation of workers in the countryside, see Omizzolo, 2019). There are thus two extreme models of reception in the territory, which highlight how crucial the role of local communities can be in inclusion processes. On the one hand, we find along the regional territory innovative reception experiences such as in the centres of the ‘Dorsale dell’ospitalità’—Locride area—and on the other hand, the drifts that can occur in the absence of migration management, as the case of Rosarno shows (Sarlo, 2015).

Between these two poles lie new and different processes of territorialisation of the foreign presence, which especially in small municipalities generate new dynamics of polarisation between new and old inhabitants and different ‘geographies of use’ of space. It is especially in the small municipalities that local action seems to be decisive, precisely because on the margins of global economic circuits, they are forced to invent new ‘reactivation’ strategies. The region, however, is also characterised by a recent liveliness of local actions: some long term (Grecanica area) adapt to the new demands, others, instead, mobilise by integrating ‘humanitarian emergencies’ and ‘local creativity’, distorting the social perception of the immigrant from a problem to a resource—as happened in the case of Riace and the Dorsale (Sarlo, 2015). The contribution refers to social innovation theories as those initiatives that contribute to satisfying unmet social demands by changing the relationships between local actors, improving the ability of excluded groups to act—*empowerment* (Moulaert, 2009; Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019; Moralli, 2022). There are, however, some possible spin-offs the literature highlights such as those related to institutionalisation, the sustainability of spontaneous practices and those related to the role of individual leadership (Martinelli et al., 2010). These, in fact, may cause some unexpected consequences that affect smooth functioning, such as curbing the capacity for local innovation or reducing the space for flexibility and dependence on public funding that institutionalisation can often bring, especially in territories now excluded from economic circuits. According to Sarlo (2015), in Calabria, the geographies of immigration present five patterns of reception and settlement:

(a) that of the ‘urban polarities of permanence’ (in the 5 provincial capitals), where there is a high concentration of immigrants employed mainly in personal services and in tourism

(b) the ‘specialised agricultural systems of seasonality and transhumance’ (in the agricultural plains of Sibari, Gioia Tauro, Lamezia, Crotona-Cirò), i.e., areas of emergency due to the living and working conditions of immigrants with the formation of segregated living and ghetto situations (Brovia, Piro, 2020)

(c) that of the “minor agricultural systems of interstitiality (southern Pollino, Valle del Crati e della Sila, Locride and Grecanica areas) where foreigners are

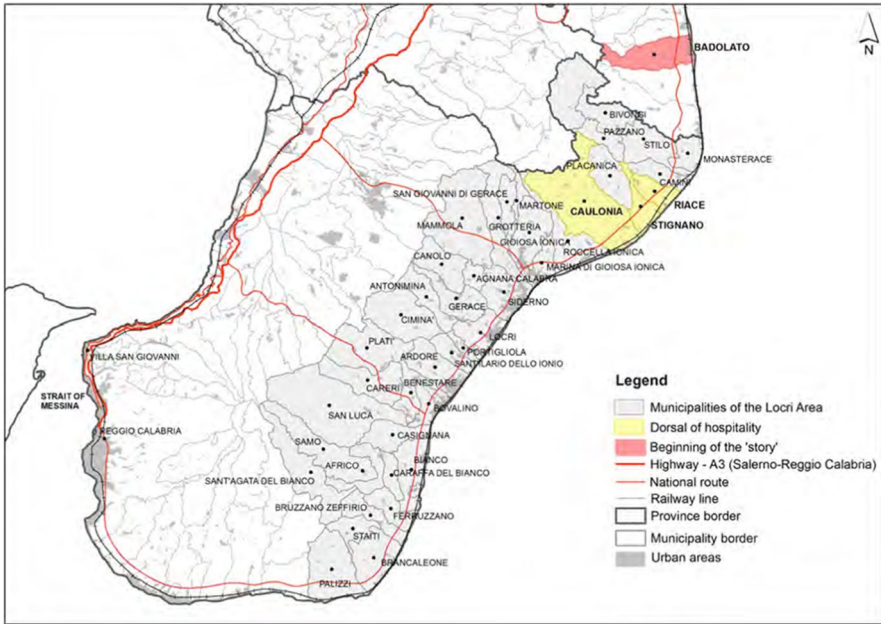


Fig. 2 The Locride area (<http://www.cost-is1102-cohesion.unirc.it/working-papers>) (source: Sarlo & Martinelli, 2016)

mainly employed in animal husbandry and present a sedentary settlement model that is widespread, especially in small municipalities, where the way space is used and lived in generates, an invisible yet perceptible barrier between the two populations (Papotti, 2002), and is therefore interstitial

(d) tourism systems (typical of coastal areas) where the seasonality of employment and foreign presence linked to the seaside vocation of the places is recurring

(e) 'Dorsale dell'ospitalità', a marginal area in terms of numbers and territory considered (see Fig. 2) which, following the numerous migrant landings since the 1990s, has initiated innovative bottom-up reception practices (Sarlo, 2015, D'Agostino, 2017)

Among these models of reception and settlement, we focus in this contribution on the *Dorsale dell'ospitalità* model, which includes a small number of municipalities in the Locride area, in the province of Reggio Calabria. The area stretches from Badolato to Riace, where since the 1990s, following the numerous migrant landings along the coast, unprecedented and innovative bottom-up reception practices have been initiated.

In these municipalities, humanitarian reception is closely linked to local development, according to an almost utopian vision of the inclusion and rebirth of these abandoned communities. Although the numbers in absolute terms are quite small and mostly linked to a particular category of immigrants (asylum seekers and refugees), innovative practices have been generated from local planning, configuring a peculiar territorial model of multi-level governance and social innovation. As in the

rest of the regional territory, the Dorsale suffers from the parcelling out of the settlement system, which, being structured on municipalities of small demographic size, is affected by a multipolar supply of services whose fulcrums are in the urban centres. Size and peripherality, as well as the fragile consistency and fragmented nature of the socio-economic and productive system, are thus reflected in the capacity and levels of services that individual municipalities are able to offer. The process of settlement in the Dorsale is based on this structure, where various realities are inspired by the Riace model, i.e., through participation in the institutional system of reception (SAI), a process of local action and spontaneous, bottom-up innovative planning is fostered. In this model, therefore, the immigrant is perceived as a subject capable of generating processes of activation of new local planning, in which micro-practices of inclusion are interwoven with processes of social innovation, local development, redesigning of public space, and recovery of the built heritage, determining forms of integrated urban regeneration (Vicari & Moulaert, 2009; Ostanel, 2017).

Case Study and Methodology³

Methodologically, the essay is based on a threefold-focused ethnography on the concepts of economic sustainability, social welfare, and political stability. Focused ethnography is conceived as a derivative of conventional ethnography, albeit “of relatively short duration and centred on a specific and inevitably circumscribed aspect (or aspects) of the phenomenon under study” (Arosio, 2010, p. 47). Thirty-five in-depth interviews were then conducted, to which a direct observation phase was added. With regard to the people involved, the following were interviewed: eighteen non-European migrants (asylum seekers, refugees, foreign residents), two local administrators, ten residents (from non-European countries, migrants from European countries, natives), three actors from the third sector, religious and cultural groups, two local entrepreneurs, civil society organisations, and local experts.

The material collected thus consisted of recorded interviews, photos, documents, and ethnographic notes. The fieldwork involved two female researchers who collaborated jointly throughout the research period⁴. During the fieldwork, the role of the local JungiMundu Cooperative in Camini as a gatekeeper facilitating access to the fieldwork was crucial; however, it cannot be excluded that this resulted in a cognitive bias. This can occur when access to the interviewees comes through an introduction

³ The paper uses data collected for the European Horizon 2020 project ‘Welcoming Spaces’. The data collection used consisted of four different phases. The first phase corresponds to the collection of data on locations and initiatives through desk research and telephone interviews with privileged actors. This first data collection was then used to develop a database of hospitality experiences in inner areas. In total, this exploratory phase of the research examined 10 hosting initiatives located in different Italian regions. Subsequently, the desk analysis was extended to update the information on the locations that were selected as case studies. In this phase, the initiatives’ websites, newspaper articles, local policy documents, statistics, social media discourses and other digital and physical material on the initiatives and selected locations were collected. The third phase will be presented within the section.

⁴ The first fieldwork took place in June 2021 and lasted one week, the second in March 2022 and lasted five days.

by the cooperative, which can lead the interviewer to perceive the researchers as an extension of the cooperative, and therefore, the answers can be influenced by this reading. For this reason, interviews were always conducted away from the cooperative's premises, taking care to create a protected setting. The first few days were also useful in explaining our presence in the municipality and in explaining our extraneousness to the cooperative and to the central service of the reception system (national level). The structure of the interviews changed depending on the interviewee, it was a semi-structured interview which, however, the female researchers adapted according to the needs of the research and specially to create a 'safe place' for the participants (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019). From an ethical perspective, each participant signed two forms, one for participation in the research and one for privacy. Given the complexity of the topic and the possibility of exposing participants to certain risks, it was decided to only publish the names and information of participants who held a public role. Therefore, we wanted to respect one of the basic principles of research ethics, namely the avoidance of harm (Wang, Redwood-Jones, 2001) and the construction of a 'safe place' capable of intertwining participants' differences and vulnerabilities (Hartal, 2018). In addition, we used methodologies of co-creation and mapping of local resources related to the revitalisation of declining regions through the ABCD approach—asset-based community development (McKnight & Kretzman, 1993). Finally, data analysis was carried out through a coding procedure collectively developed by the researchers and with NVIVO software. The code book used consists of three main project-related categories: wellbeing, economic viability, political stability, and an additional category called 'development' which was used to code those data that were particularly significant in highlighting the link between development and migration but not directly assigned. Finally, a collective discussion between the two researchers identified some relevant highlights for each category that were useful for a categorisation of the welcoming initiatives within them.

Camini and Eurocoop JungiMundu

The municipality of Camini is a small town⁵ of about 800 inhabitants, located in the south of Calabria, which has distinguished itself by promoting reception projects that have generated new social and economic transformations (Corrado, D'Agostino, 2016). Before the SAI reception project started, the municipality had two grocery stores, an insurance office, a pharmacy, a primary school with a single multi-grade

⁵ Law No. 158 of 2017 defines 'small municipalities' as municipalities with a resident population of up to 5000 inhabitants as well as municipalities established as a result of mergers between municipalities each with a population of up to 5000 inhabitants. An analysis of the demographic and economic-productive characteristics of Italian municipalities, as well as the functional and administrative 'roles' they play, shows that in Italy, there is a strong prevalence of small municipalities (70.4%), a percentage that increases to 85.1% and 93.7% when considering municipalities with up to 10,000 and up to 20,000 residents, respectively. There are 46 municipalities with more than 100,000 residents, including 14 defined by law as 'metropolitan cities'.

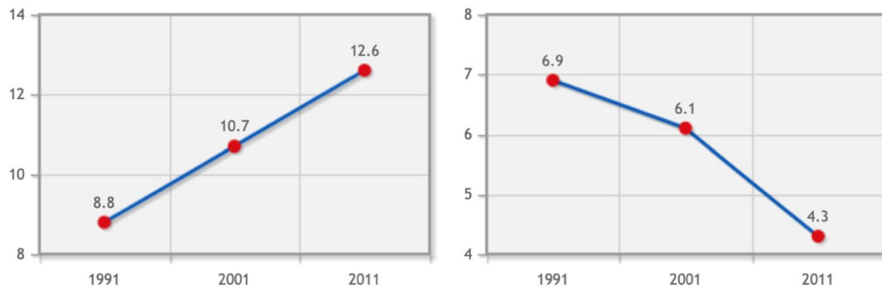


Fig. 3 Resident population of 75 years and over and younger than 6 years (source: Istat)

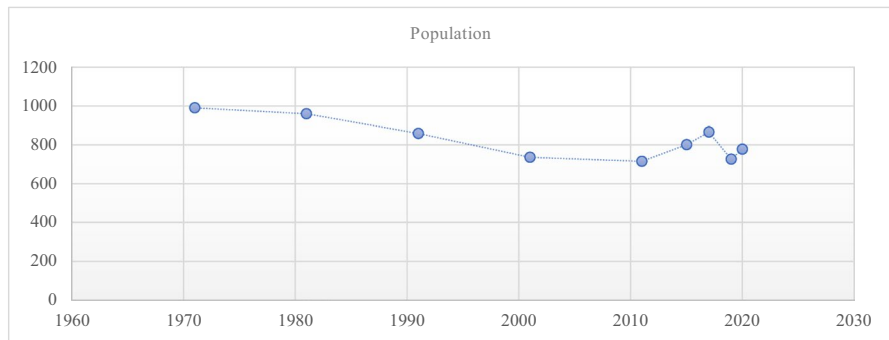


Fig. 4 Population historical series 1971–2020 (source: authors' elaboration on Istat data)

class⁶, and a post office open on a non-continuous basis and at risk of closure. The demographic structure (see Fig. 3) presented a population composed mainly of the elderly and a significant reduction in new births, which was also a determining factor for the maintenance of essential public (and non-public) services.

The municipality, as evidenced by the mayor's words, suffered from high rates of emigration (see Fig. 4), with the consequent abandonment of the land and properties that constituted its territorial structure.

[Camini] has greatly changed, especially now in the last few years. I only remember this that in 2007-08 I was exasperated because the town was dying... there was nothing left, apart from the summer period with the return of our few townsfolk, who most of the time do not all come back... Taking away those two summer months then the rest was all gone without a return... The municipality suffered a very substantial demographic decline which then led to the closure of the few services we had in Camini, from the school in the first place

⁶ In primary schools, especially in the past and nowadays more rarely, in those municipalities where multiple classes are not possible, it is a group of several classes that are grouped together, each consisting of very few students, and taught at the same time by a single teacher.

and other activities such as small shops. They closed because there was rightly nothing left.... (G. Alfaraño, Mayor of Camini, interview held in Camini on 15 June 2021)

For this reason, based on the Riace experience, in 2011, the municipality of Camini started an institutional reception project (SPRAR, today SAI) on the model of widespread hospitality through the 'JungiMundu' project (unite the world, in the local dialect) managed by the social cooperative Eurocoop Servizi. The municipality and the cooperative are respectively the owner and managing body of the SAI. The municipality is the entity that, on a voluntary basis, activates the reception, while the third sector organisations (Eurocoop, in that case) are those who lead the reception. Collaboration and a common vision between the two entities are extremely important for the success of the project. The social cooperative has been active for 20 years (1999) and operates in the field of social inclusion, particularly in favour of the most vulnerable segments of the population, promoting practices of community cohesion, integrated development, socio-professional enhancement, anti-discrimination, and support to youth participation also through transnational initiatives and integrated projects at local, regional, European, and international levels.

This trend of depopulation was reversed by the SAI project, thanks to which the village began to repopulate and experience a new development from a social and economic point of view through the reception of migrants (as of 2018, 118 people have been received in the SAI and 31 in the CAS, for a total of 149 people/year). In this process of rebirth, the work carried out by 'Eurocoop Camini - Jungi Mundu', which manages the diffuse reception centre in Camini, has been fundamental. Thanks to this experience, the village is now inhabited by new residents, who are an active part of the social, cultural, and economic context of the place. The reception project of the social cooperative 'Jungi Mundu' is characterised by numerous activities created to support the schooling and vocational training of the migrant population, including laboratories and workshops in cooking, art, ceramics, bread-making, and tailoring that enhance and recover local traditions, making them key elements of a community economy projected towards a future of inclusion and sharing. The first experience with migrants dates back to 2011, when it welcomed about a hundred people from the Ivory Coast. The first experience was not easy.

In 2011, at the beginning, there were 11 Ivorian boys, eleven all boys. It wasn't easy because the people of Camini were rightly a little afraid of seeing these eleven young men in the village... little by little, in September, when the olives had to be harvested (we have a lot of olives here), people would ask "look at these boys, what are they like?" and little by little, from there, they began to get to know each other, let's say [...] Day after day through them we understood their needs and their situations. We started let's say this great journey that you are seeing now (older resident from Camini, 11 June 2021)

Today, there are about 98 beneficiaries of the reception project, mostly families, from Syria, Nigeria, Libya, Mali, Ghana, Pakistan, Sudan, and Bangladesh. Here, the reception projects have been intertwined with various architectural projects, such as the reconstruction of houses through restoration and green building; the

recovery of cultural heritage, both material and immaterial; the creation of ceramics and carpentry workshops; local and Syrian cooking courses (with the creation of a bar-restaurant); the recovery of Calabrian land, with the production of organic oil, wine, and wheat; free baby parking for all children under the age of 6; and after-school courses open to the entire population. One of the projects developed by the cooperative is Ama-La, a project aimed at the economic integration of refugee women through training and the creation of textile handicrafts. In addition, the cooperative also organises other workshops that contribute to local sustainable development, such as the ceramics workshop, based on the fact that Camini (from the Greek *Kaminion*, kiln) was originally known for the presence of numerous kilns, used for the creation of clay bricks, a fundamental element of local culture. In this ceramics workshop, hand-decorated candlesticks, glasses, and plates are created by refugees and local craftsmen. The creative art and natural soap-making workshop, on the other hand, is based on the idea of transforming, repurposing, and giving new life to what is apparently useless to create original paper jewellery, natural soaps, and other recycled products. Finally, the agricultural workshop, entitled 'From the Earth to the Table', promotes some typical Calabrian products made by women from Camini together with refugee women.

Over the years, the cooperative has been able to set up partnerships with other third sector organisations (at a regional and national level) and other regional agencies to increase the range of services offered (for example, Provincial Adult Education Centres (CPIA) for Italian language courses that are also necessary to obtain a residence permit, or other NGOs with which they have set up territorial projects for job placement and protection of rights⁷). All the actions promoted by the cooperative are aimed at migrants and natives and have had the positive effect of alleviating growing unemployment, made it possible to implement the number of classes in the primary school, and encouraged the developing of international ethical tourism activities (i.e., Amnesty International summer camps, yoga retreats, conferences, etc.).

In this way, the reception initiative aims to be an opportunity for innovation and sustainable development in an area, such as Locride, often characterised by poverty and depopulation. In fact, following the opening of the SAI project, in Camini today, we find the post office with ATM, a bar/restaurant (previously not present), and the two grocery shops still open; actually, the presence of new inhabitants and the cooperative's focus on creating synergies with the local area have made it possible not only to keep local activities open but also to create cohesion:

As long as I was here there were people, then gradually, as I did, a lot of people of the same age left so it emptied out. In fact there were years when it was really sad. Then of course with the arrival of the immigrants, the refugees, fortunately it came back to life a bit, in all areas, so we all benefited a bit

⁷ Since 2020, Eurocoop is part of a new and wider network of associations, together with Sos Rosarno, Nuvola Rossa, and Mediterranean Hope, to support the 'Lights on Rosarno' project. Over the last few months, these associations have distributed thousands of bicycle lights and vests with reflective bands to increase visibility and prevent labourers from being run over, as has unfortunately happened.

from that. The more people there are the more movement is created... even you yourself otherwise you wouldn't be here. (a resident and owner of a retail business, 14 June 2021)

Discussion

The analysis of the case study identified shows the central role played by small municipalities in reception processes, highlighting how small size and marginality are often themselves strongly propelling conditions for local development and a different perception of the social role of immigration. These territories, in fact, are often perceived as 'empty' areas, especially due to the absence of services, and therefore conceived as areas to be 'filled'. Migration, however, can lead to a different perception of the same territory; in fact, the increased presence of residents has augmented the income of local businesses and favoured the maintenance, expansion, and opening of services that had been downsized over time precisely because they had been abandoned. Moreover, in Camini, it was possible to reopen the post office more frequently and, above all, to add the ATM service, which is the only one within a 5 km radius and therefore also used by residents of neighbouring municipalities. The primary school, following the arrival of foreign families accepted into SAI, was also able to expand the educational offerings of its school from one multi-grade class to 3.

Proximity, flexibility, generativity, and territoriality are in fact just some of the characteristics that—within the academic debate—characterise social work in these areas, and the role played by the JungiMundu cooperative is an example of this model. Within the framework of this debate, starting from the experience of reception in Camini, the contribution analysed the social links and welfare practices promoted by the social cooperative JungiMundu. These seek to combat the territorial marginality and social exclusion of residents (new and old) in one of the poorest areas of the country, such as the municipality of Camini. Activities, such as after school classes, were designed for the entire community precisely to encourage the inhabitants of the village to meet and get to know each other. Moreover, this made it possible to hire personnel, necessary to maintain the service, which, as in other cases, favoured the return of some Calabrian inhabitants who had previously emigrated because they had not found work opportunities. The return of old inhabitants and the arrival of new ones therefore generated new economic opportunities for the activities that had remained there. Workshop activities, such as those related to the production of textiles and fabrics created according to traditional techniques and using only sustainable materials, are allowed for the meeting of different cultures and the exchange of different printing techniques, but also, the activation of networks are related to eco-sustainable tourism, which has therefore become one of the area's lines of development.

I am Syrian and I am here in Camini in the Jungi Mundu project. it is a project where refugees come, but Italians are also working on the project. This project helps these refugees, it gives many possibilities to work. It teaches for

example if someone wants to study, to do something, wants to work, the project helps those people, it gives a hand, it gives help. [...] The first time I saw it was a small village. But later I saw that there are many people, especially in summer, many tourists, volunteers, they come here. I do many activities with tourists, volunteers, to learn Italian. By talking I learn many words... When I go to the caffè I don't feel that I am... because I arrived in the summer, and I see that when I go to the bar it's always full of people. I don't feel that I am in a small village. Anyway I don't have the time to go outside, I don't care for now, because I have so many things to do, I have my goal (refugee, resident in Camini, 14 June 2021)

By welcoming new residents, new synergies have been created between local actors, as in the case of the cooking workshops that have created moments of community, knowledge, and exchange of traditions between residents—old and new. Retail activities have also been strongly supported by the cooperative's activities and by the presence of new residents who, through the purchase of products from local businesses, satisfy their needs and reactivate the local economy, on the one hand, fostering the acceptance of the new inhabitants by the old inhabitants, at least through a Goffman-like civic inattention (Goffman, 1963), and on the other hand, the integration of the new inhabitants. This emphasis on community cohesion is the result of the cooperative and the municipality's intensive work since the beginning of the project to mitigate forms of conflict and minimise the politicisation of migration (De Haas et al., 2019; Gattinara, Morales, 2017) in the area. This was also possible thanks to the experience learnt from the Riace case. If in fact the general approach of having a global vision of the territory was already present in the case of Riace, Camini's experience was able to avoid as much as possible the politicisation of migration, both locally and nationally, which was instead fatal in the case of neighbouring Riace.

The results of the analysis reveal a capacitating and generative role of actions applied to social practices for migrants and their families, but also for the 'native' inhabitants of this peripheral area. Indeed, the arrival of new residents has made it possible to keep open some basic services that the whole community enjoys, such as the school and after-school services, the post office, and the ATM service. But also, activating important connections between newcomers and older residents triggers processes of exchange and support between the two populations and, in some cases, an extension of networks. Indeed, not infrequently, the networks of the two distinct populations have been shared in the community, expanding opportunities for both; a role that is (and should be supported even more) also useful for community welfare policies aimed at the resident population as a whole. Such local welfare policies enhance the community's resources, becoming an active resource that grants broader rights and empowerment to the population.

Yes we have noticed that there are more people now, every year we see the difference in the place, there are more and more people. There are many things that have changed, especially the decoration of the houses. Then more houses were built, even in a different way, nicer. People's behaviour has also changed compared to before. In the sense that they now know something about our

religion, about the Muslim religion. Not like before, when they had so many questions to ask. Now these questions are much less, in the sense that they are used to seeing us, how we are dressed, with the scarves and everything... we who are here have goals, the same thing the local people have, they have these goals about us. In the sense that together we create a community, united. It's an exchange, they have goals on us and we have them on them. (refugee, resident in Camini, 15 June 2021)

More recent studies, focusing on the role of migration in shrinking areas (Winders, 2014; McAreavey, 2017; McAreavey & Argent, 2018), have shown that the presence of this 'new' segment of the population together with local non-profit organisations, which operate as crucial actors in fostering inclusion and social cohesion, can lead to generative welfare (Zamagni, 2015; Mitchell, 2022). Camini is a good case study for this, as the reception centre managed by the social cooperative 'JungiMundu' hosts 118 migrants out of a total population of 810 people. Thanks to the presence of this number of people, some public services (post office, school, etc.) were (re)activated. In addition, the cooperative employs 40 people, offering services to the entire community. The increase in population, both in terms of newcomers and returning Italians, has also allowed the village to regenerate, economically and socially, creating connections between different cultures and traditions that had almost disappeared. Despite the wide debate on the key role of the third sector in territorial welfare policies and on the generative capacity of the foreign presence in NIDs, further empirical studies are needed on the role it can play in the marginal territories of Southern Italy. The value of this article is an attempt to fill this gap.

It is therefore necessary for reception organisations in Italy to move away from a purely paternalistic vision and put aspirations at the centre (Appadurai, 2004), together with projects related to migrants' life paths. Individual aspirations and skills when combined with local development needs can increase the development capacity of the territories themselves. It is therefore crucial to pay attention to the propulsive regeneration that new inhabitants can bring to these territories, strengthening participatory processes for the entire community (including migrants), whose condition otherwise remains subordinate to the systems in which they are embedded. Moreover, since most reception initiatives are supported by local actors and especially by the third sector, it is necessary to implement the existing place-based approach with a greater variety of public and private actors, moving from an emergency framework to a logic of long-term planning. This is particularly significant for the migrant⁸ population, as the reception beneficiaries do not choose Camini as their destination but are assigned to municipalities according to availability. Although only a small proportion of these choose to stay in Camini once the project is over (often due to the limited work and living opportunities that this municipality

⁸ here we refer to migrants and not asylum seekers and refugees because we are referring to the foreign population residing in Camini as a whole. Thus, although most of these are asylum seekers and refugees hosted in the SAI project, a very small number, a few units, also refer to those who decide to stay (sometimes only temporarily) once the reception period is over.

can offer), they nevertheless develop a sense of belonging to the place and the community.

These political aspects can and are influenced by media narratives and stereotypical representations of migration. These imaginaries oscillate between victimisation and criminalisation of the migrant, between pity and fear, often without a direct relation to the evolution of the phenomenon in quantitative terms, nor an effort to enhance the phenomenon as an opportunity rather than a problem (Musarò, 2017; Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2022). In contrast to an excessive spectacularization of migration, a media underrepresentation of inner areas emerges. However, despite this difference in terms of visibility and invisibility, what the two aspects have in common is their distorted representation. In this context, reception initiatives represent a potentially propulsive force to overturn these representations and propose an ‘imaginary other’, capable of enhancing the link between migration and shrinking areas in an alternative way. In short, migration can be a factor capable of influencing and supporting development processes. Policies should assess migration not as an opportunity to be exported everywhere, without considering the local specificities and aspirations of migrants and local communities. This is even more important considering the growing populism linked to austerity measures and unemployment, also exacerbated by the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has led to the increasing marginalisation of inland areas and the vulnerable conditions of their communities.

Conclusion

The aim of the article was to analyse how the presence of non-EU migrants in shrinking Italian areas plays a possible role in local sustainable development, arguing that what is portrayed as a ‘problem’ may turn out to be an added value. Furthermore, it aimed to investigate the role of the community in the governance of local welfare practices and its capacity to produce social innovations for municipal policies in favour of newcomers and older residents. The revitalisation of shrinking areas must invest in processes capable of creating sustainable and inclusive development that improves community well-being (Vecchiato, 2015; Gui, Vecchiato, 2022).

The Camini case study revealed the existence of a wide range of activities characterised by their multidimensional sustainability, i.e., conceived in terms of social justice. Therefore, these initiatives can represent an innovative form of local generative welfare for regions in decline (Vitale, Bifulco, 2003; Gui, Vecchiato, 2022), capable of supporting sustainable development processes by recognising the aspirations and rights of residents. Indeed, it is not possible to tackle the marginalisation of a territory through a single strategy, but integrated policies are needed that are able to initiate a process of change based on people’s generative capacities and not only on administrative solutions.

The condition of marginality (particularly present and evident in some rural territories and in Southern Italy) strongly influences the dynamics and processes, and even more the approach to the issue of migrants’ inclusion. The processes of abandonment of these territories in the past have favoured a vision of migration as a “resource” not only for the maintenance of productive realities, but also for the

revitalisation of these places and for the survival of services with unprecedented synergies. Local practices and innovative approaches to managing inclusion, as in the case of the social cooperative in Camini, in these territories have made it possible to modify local trajectories, exploiting the territory's latent resources and using them to adapt and modify (path-breaking/shaping) the trajectories to which they seemed destined.

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Declarations

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing of interests.

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