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Counteracting the Witch Hunt in Managing the Reception of People Seeking Protection: The "Trieste Model"

Introduction

The large flow of migrants fleeing their countries and heading to Europe as a consequence of armed conflict, internal turmoil, economic crisis, or terrorism is a phenomenon dating back to the early nineties.

It started with the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s, followed by the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in the same decade.

That first wave of destitute people rose further at the beginning of the millennium with the concomitant Greater Middle East crisis in Afghanistan and Iraq along with the sub-Saharan African diaspora, triggered by a mixture of extreme poverty, internal turmoil, and the evolution of terrorist groups.

The phenomenon was exacerbated at the end of 2010, sparked by the "Arab Spring" that ignited in the eastern and northern part of Mediterranean coasts.

Lately, the opening of the so-called Balkan route in 2015 that channelled hundreds of thousands of people from the Greater Middle East to the European Union (EU) through the Balkan countries, started a vicious circle of politically heated debate that continues to shake the very foundations of the EU and its human rights oriented heritage.

As a consequence, in 2015, at the peak of the humanitarian crisis, the issue of immigration surged on the list as one of the top concerns of European citizens – 58 per cent of Europeans said that immigration was the most important issue facing the EU.[1]

Since then, migration has become the main and sometimes the only topic in the political arena across Europe and abroad, influencing crucial votes such as the UK's referendum on Brexit, recent elections in Austria, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Italy, with anti-immigration parties gaining ground and mainstream parties often jumping on the bandwagon for more restrictive migration policies.

Although the waves of newcomers were mainly people seeking protection, many EU member states switched their migratory approaches from integration to repression in order to meet the pressure of manipulated public

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1   Cf. European Commission, European Political Strategy Centre, 10 Trends Shaping Migration, p. 20, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/epsc/publications/other-publications/10-trends-shaping-migration_en.

opinion,[2] redirecting it from many social and economic concerns related to the economic recession and progressive impoverishment of the middle class.[3]

Fortress Europe[4] further tightened both its eastern and southern borders, paving the way to an all-against-all combat that has been informally threatening the Schengen Agreement.

Eastern borders were protected by setting up kilometres of barbed wire, suspending the right to claim protection, while NGOs' search and rescue operation ships roamed the Mediterranean Sea, waiting for authorization to disembark the migrants on board.

What is clear in this scenario is that sound and fair policies to manage the inflows of migrants, both economic and those seeking refuge, are still lacking, but they are clearly needed.

Each European country plans and acts in the short term, only considering the needs of their population. Political leaders are proposing policies often reduced to buzzwords, where the apparently progressive slogan "help them at their home" is countered by the curt "push them all back", both forgetting the complexity of a phenomenon that requires a solid, determined and long-term strategy if it is to be properly managed.

All this is taking place in Europe as a whole, not only within the EU, which, over the last 25 years, has displayed the resilience of a civil society untiringly welcoming the flows of people long before the intervention of local institutions or international humanitarian aid. Civil society organizations have introduced and piloted innovative methods of managing the presence of newcomers on a voluntary basis, contributing to and refining the existing ones. Such experiences re-shaped and improved the rules, regulations, and laws drafted by sensitized policymakers, establishing a formal system of protection and support.

Against this background, this article considers the case of Trieste, an Italian town where a local NGO, the Italian Consortium of Solidarity (ICS) has been implementing a model for welcoming, hosting and integrating asylum seekers and refugees since 1998, from the time of Yugoslavian crisis.

The "Trieste Model" had primarily influenced the development of the Italian System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (*Sistema di*

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2   According to the UNHCR, the irregular sea arrivals have dropped to 102,800 in 2017 and 48,300 as of 30 June 2018. Cf. UNHCR, Refugees & Migrants, Arrivals to Europe in 2018 (Mediterranean), January-June 2018, at: https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/download/64891.

3   Cf. Stefano Volpicelli, Who's Afraid of ... Migration? A New Narrative of Migration, IAI Working Papers 15/32, September 2015, p. 2.

4   "Fortress Europe" was a military propaganda term used by both sides during the Second World War to refer to the areas of Continental Europe occupied by Nazi Germany, as opposed to the United Kingdom across the Channel. Currently, within Europe, the term is used as a pejorative description of the state of immigration into the European Union. This can be in reference either to attitudes towards immigration, or to the system of border patrols and detention centres that are used to help prevent illegal immigration into the European Union. Cf. Autonomous rear Entrances to Fortress Europe?! *Indymedia UK*, 1 October 2006, at: https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2006/10/352363.html.

Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati, SPRAR), a system based on decentralized accommodation in small premises (apartments). This system contrasted with standard accommodation in camps. Then, when the flows increased in 2011 and the SPRAR projects could not accommodate all the incoming people, Trieste coped successfully with the emergency by reviving the same model of reception. This experience served as a basis for the formal inclusion of the model as part of the Italian asylum policy, "Centres of Extraordinary Reception" (*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria*, CAS).

This chapter expands the discussion and analysis of the benefits and positive impact of decentralized accommodation in times of political distress and impotence in relation to a phenomenon that will reshape the European demographical composition.

This contribution comprises this introduction, two main chapters and conclusive remarks. Chapter one introduces the historical and social context that led to the creation of the Italian system for the protection of asylum seekers and refugees. Chapter two digs into the Trieste Model, an example of good practice where the collaboration of local civil society and institutions has been moving out of the emergency situation, successfully taking an extraordinary solution into the mainstream. Conclusive remarks will stimulate discussion about practices for the reception of those who will become, temporarily or permanently, European residents.

The Italian System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers

Italy, due to its geographically strategic position, has become the main gateway for migrants coming from Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Greater Middle East.

Italy received the first flows from the Balkan Peninsula in the early 1990s and then massive influxes from North African shores from the early 2000s.

The sea routes were the main focus of attention from the media, but in reality, the Balkan route has always been active, with thousands of migrants crossing the Balkans from Greece to Italy, Slovenia, and Austria.

Although generating legitimate concerns for the autochthone Italian population directly affected, before 2014 neither the authorities nor public opinion ever generally considered these southern or eastern flows a national priority. This was probably because, for many years, Italy perceived itself as a country of transit rather than a destination. In fact, out of the hundreds of thousands who arrived, very few remained on Italian territory, preferring to move northbound towards other European destinations such as France, Germany, Sweden, and the UK.

To summarize briefly, it can be said that after the initial improvisation in the 1990's, in the new millennium, Italy moved towards a more regulated system for the protection of asylum seekers.

Admittedly, before 2000, it was possible to draw a clear distinction between asylum seekers and refugees on one side, and migrants[5] on the other. Not all the newcomers were asking for protection, but rather became invisible after being registered by the authorities at the port of landing.

Over the years, with the increase of instability in many regions of Africa, Asia, and the Greater Middle East, the number of asylum seekers grew at a steady rate[6] and "there is little to suggest that the dramatic rise in asylum seekers seen in 2015 and 2016 will soon abate. In part this is due to ongoing persecution, conflict, and human rights violations in numerous countries of origin."[7]

Therefore, the protection system in Italy was modeled following these sudden changes, and it was designed as follows:

1) Accommodation in hotspots at arrival, at the point of registration. Introduced as entry accommodation points for all migrants aiming to divide asylum seekers from migrants, in reality the hotspots are located only in the South of Italy (Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Trapani, Augusta, Taranto Crotone, Reggio Calabria, Palermo, Messina, and Cosenza). The juridical nature of these centres has never been completely framed by the law and many wrongdoings in their management (violence, maltreatment, lack of proper information for asylum applicants, careless handling of applications etc.) were denounced by NGOs dealing with the protection of migrants.[8]

2) Transfer to nearest accommodation premises for those claiming asylum protection, usually in big camps called CARA (*Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo/*Centers of Accommodation for Asylum Seekers) that

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5   An asylum seeker is an individual who is seeking international or country protection (refugee status, subsidiary or humanitarian protection). An economic migrant is someone who leaves his or her country of origin in order to find a better life and not fleeing persecution. Although they do not fall within the criteria for refugee status and are not entitled to receive international protection, nowadays many people are fleeing countries run by repressive regimes where injustice and inequalities do not allow for the full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of human rights, refugee and international humanitarian law.

6   According to UNHCR the number of forcibly displaced people has increased by over 50 per cent from 2007 to 2017. Today this population is 68.5 million people worldwide. Cf. UNHCR, Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2017, p. 4 and 2, at: https://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf.

7   Michael Kegels, Getting the balance right: Strengthening asylum reception capacity at national and EU levels, Migration Policy Institute Europe, Brussels 2016, p. 4, available at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/getting-balance-right-strengthening-asylum-reception-capacity-national-and-eu-levels. Cf. also United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase, 18 June 2015, at: https://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html.

8   For more insights, cf. Amnesty International, Rapporto Hotspot Italia, 3 November 2016 at: https://www.amnesty.it/rapporto-hotspot-italia/, and the ASGI press release "Hotspot di Lampedusa: violati i diritti dei migranti" (Hotspot in Lampedusa: migrants' rights violated), issued on 6 July 2018, at: https://www.asgi.it/allontamento-espulsione/hotspot-di-lampedusa-violati-i-diritti-dei-migranti/.

are still operative, even though they should have been suppressed and replaced by SPRAR projects.

2b) Transfer to a centre for identification and expulsion for those not claiming asylum protection. These centres are very limited. The majority of migrants whose asylum requests have been rejected in the hotspots receive a decree of expulsion and are supposed to leave the country within seven days.

3) Gradual decentralization in SPRAR projects for integration of asylum seekers on Italian (and European) territory.

The SPRAR system was conceived in 1999, starting with bottom-up initiatives of decentralized or widespread accommodation in small structures such as apartments and small communities implemented by local NGOs. The system became more formalized in 2001 through an agreement between the minister of interior (MOI) and the Association of the Italian Municipalities (*Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani*/Association of the Italian Municipalities, ANCI) and formally institutionalized in 2002, when the SPRAR system was recognized by Law no. 189/2002 and the programmes were co-ordinated centrally.

The decision to set up a SPRAR project relies on the municipalities, which are financially supported by funds from the Ministry of Interior. The projects depend on proactive collaboration between central (MOI) and local (municipality) governmental authorities together with non-profit organizations (NGOs, CSOs, social co-operatives) that are responsible for the management of the project and its activities.

The co-decision-making between national, regional, and local levels of government has made local authorities partners in the distribution of asylum seekers, rather than (potentially reluctant) executors of national decisions.[9]

The SPRAR projects are flexible and open to the creativity of local partners but must be implemented in line with the principle of "integrated reception" which is the backbone of the whole system. It implies the setting up of a local network where agencies involved in social, educational, labour, and health fields put their efforts together, aiming at the social inclusion and long-term integration of the beneficiaries.

Although visionary for its time (in the following years similar systems were implemented in Germany, the Netherlands, UK, and Norway) and expected to become the only model for asylum seekers' accommodation, this approach has not yet achieved this goal.

Not all Italian municipalities implemented a SPRAR project, because until 2011, the available places were sufficient to accommodate the asylum

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9   Cf. Ministero dell'Interno, Gruppo di studio sul sistema di accoglienza, [Ministry of the Interior, Study Group on the Reception System], Rapporto sull'accoglienza di migranti e rifugiati in Italia. Aspetti, procedure, problemi [Report on the accommodation of migrants and refugees in Italy. Aspects, procedures, problems], Rome, October 2015, p. 32.

seekers. Today, out of 7,954 municipalities, only 754 run SPRAR projects for a total of 35,881 beneficiaries.[10]

The other centres are still operating, thus creating an imbalance in the protection mechanisms and further steps from arrival to protection being granted that are provided in different territories.

Furthermore, the increase in instability in many African, Asian, and Greater Middle Eastern countries generated a large inflow of asylum seekers, thus putting the protection system under stress, considering that it was not yet fully operational.

In order to bypass these drawbacks and accommodate legitimate requests for asylum, Italian institutions had to find an "emergency" solution: the Centres of Extraordinary Reception (CAS). These centres, created in 2015[11] as a temporary response to the sudden and unexpected arrivals of asylum seekers, soon became the ordinary accommodation of asylum seekers awaiting vacant places within the SPRAR system.[12] Just like SPRAR projects, the CAS projects are funded through the "National Fund for asylum policies and services",[13] but the similarities end here. Indeed, attempts to enforce the introduction of such projects was repeatedly refused by the authorities, backed up by the local population.

Politically speaking, the decision to start-up a CAS relies on the central authorities, through their local representative, the *Prefettura* (the territorial office of the central government), opening calls for tenders to agencies that can be *non* as well as *for* profit. This undermines the pact of mutual co-operation between governmental organisations' local and central agencies and the civil society established with the SPRAR project, and leads to social conflict among the autochthones, who perceive the decision as being imposed by the central authorities.

Another critical point represented by the CAS system is that, unlike in the SPRAR system, there are no guidelines for the accommodation of asylum seekers. This means that the standards of accommodation in CAS are inconsistent. In some locations, asylum seekers are hosted in big, isolated camps, left alone waiting for the Asylum Commission's decision on their asylum claim. This form of reception, usually run by big NGOs or private companies,

10   Data available on the SPRAR website at: https://www.sprar.it/i-numeri-dello-sprar.
11   Decreto Legislativo 18 agosto 2015, n. 142 [Legislative Decree no.142 of 18 August 2015] (the so-called Reception Decree), in: *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, at: http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/09/15/15G00158/sg.
12   As of 23 January 2017, the Italian Protection System (as a whole) accommodated 175,550 persons, of which 14,750 (1.8 per cent) in structures of first accommodation, 136,978 (78 per cent) in CAS, and 23,822 (14 per cent) in SPRAR.
13   Agencies managing the CAS and SPRAR projects receive approximately 35 euros for each person accommodated. In some cases, the CAS projects receive less, but this mostly depends on the tender. The 35 euros must cover all the costs of the provision: accommodation, clothing, food, vocational training, transport, etc. The beneficiaries receive a daily allowance ranging from 1.5 to 3 euros.

often exacerbates the tension of both residents of the camps and the local population. Violence, due to the extreme level of frustration of inactive people literally wasting their lives, is reported inside and outside the premises. Those who do get out wander around in groups and are confronted with hostility from the locals in a climate of distrust, fear, and concern. As a result, the process of integration in the recipient society is heavily hindered.

It is easy to understand that populism is gaining ground as a result of this limbo, negatively influencing current and future integration. A clash between the two groups, as a self-fulfilling prophecy, is only a matter of time.

In other territories, asylum seekers are accommodated in small structures or apartments and benefit from the same services envisaged by the SPRAR system. Most of the time these projects are managed by CSOs integrated into the territories, thus investing the resources in serious integration and social inclusion-oriented projects. This virtuous and ethical approach, often financially backed up by the same CSOs through fund-raising campaigns, allows the implementation of a concrete integration process involving the whole social fabric.

This is the case of Trieste where, thanks to the commitment of the Italian Consortium of Solidarity (ICS) and local CSOs managing both CAS and SPRAR projects, it has been possible to set up a virtuous circle involving other CSOs and many local agencies as partners, networking to welcome and accommodate asylum seekers; a commitment that, over the past 20 years, has turned into a positive model for the reception of asylum seekers and the integration of refugees.

From Good Will to Practice: Welcoming Asylum Seekers in Trieste

Trieste is a town of approximately 200,000 inhabitants. It is located a few kilometres from the Slovenian – once Yugoslavian – border, and has always been a crossing point to northern Europe.

The tolerance and openness of the local population, charismatic leadership, and the political base were the most important aspects in the foundation of Trieste's open model of mental health hospital wards aimed at the full integration of psychiatric patients. Since the early 1970s, such social innovation played an international benchmark role in community mental health care.

In 1993, during the war involving the members of the SRFY, the ICS started providing hospitality to refugees coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina and other areas of conflict. In 1998, in the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis, Trieste faced the arrival of thousands of refugees. The municipality of Trieste reacted by setting up temporary accommodation in an unused school, handing over the management to the ICS. That experience would become one of the first projects influencing the foundation of the future SPRAR system.

Since the inception of the SPRAR system in 2002, the ICS has been managing the SPRAR project in Trieste. It has a capacity of 120 places for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Italy through the Balkans.

As discussed in the previous chapter, over the years and with an increased number of asylum seekers, the SPRAR system was not able to accommodate all those seeking refuge, imposing the search for other solutions.

Once again, the ICS was ahead of its time. In 2011, during the "North Africa Emergency" and long before the formal foundation of the CAS projects in 2015, ICS provided decentralized accommodation for refuge seekers in small structures. The model was similar to the SPRAR project, avoiding accommodating beneficiaries in camps or big hotels, as was the case in many other Italian territories.

This allowed them to avoid double standards of accommodation, with refuge seekers benefitting from the SPRAR provisions while others received just basic forms of shelter.

Over the following years, when the unexpected flows of asylum seekers consolidated, the experienced collaboration between the ICS, the municipality of Trieste and the *Prefettura* allowed the territory to overcome the emergency and respond in an orderly fashion.

From 2016, the municipality of Trieste, after a political reshuffle resulting from the municipal elections, moved to more conservative positions and abandoned its collaboration with the established network of institutions. It also reduced the places in the SPRAR project from 120 to 90.

However, the ICS's collaboration with the *Prefettura* continued, the existing network was slightly modified and further expanded, including a faith-based organization (Caritas Foundation) and three social co-operatives (2001 Agenzia Sociale, La Collina, and Lybra). The places lost in the SPRAR system were replaced by an expansion of the places available through the CAS system.

The current CAS project run by the ICS and its partners is again revolutionary. In addition to shelter, health care, food, and clothing, all the asylum seekers also benefit from legal support, language courses, formal education, and vocational training, which is important for their access to the job market.

Furthermore, the ICS model of CAS envisages the involvement of a large number of volunteers for leisure initiatives (always aimed at integration with the autochthone population) and of agencies for education, health, and labour in the territory, both non-profit and governmental. These are included in a wide and dedicated network where citizens have an active role and feel a greater sense of ownership for the project.

Designed in this way, instead of remaining in a dystopian limbo, the CAS project turned into a preliminary step prior to the enrollment of beneficiaries to the SPRAR project. This proved to be a good strategic move, as the former asylum seekers, when granted a form of protection, could prolong their stay by joining the SPRAR project and moving forward in their integration process. In

258

this way, Trieste became the only place where asylum seekers could be gradually integrated into the social fabric through a unique system combining CAS and SPRAR potentialities, as originally planned by the institutions.

The other entirely new aspect of the CAS project designed by the ICS resulted in accommodation of the beneficiaries in a number of small structures such as apartments and small hostels in the city centre. The majority of the other CAS projects still accommodate beneficiaries in former barracks or converted warehouses, usually on the outskirts of town.

This choice was made on the basis of a simple principle, already observed through the management of the SPRAR project. The benefits of accommodating asylum seekers in small structures, located in the city centre, are threefold:

1) Tensions that generally trigger violence and aggression commonly observed in the big camps are reduced when beneficiaries live in small communities and are responsible for cleaning their accommodation, shopping for their food, and cooking. They are in control of simple daily activities unlike in the big camps, where residents passively spend their days while other, paid staff are fulfilling their needs, cleaning the facility, cooking, or more often distributing meals cooked elsewhere.

2) The social fabric, with beneficiaries forced to get in contact with the local population and their everyday habits, is enhanced. Beneficiaries learn how to relate to their neighbours, and how to buy food, cleaning and hygiene items in the same local shops. The local population, by meeting refuge seekers coming from different countries with different traditions, habits, and customs, might modify their "original" prejudice and diffidence,[14] which is largely the product of unscrupulous politicians and media.

3) The whole economy of the city benefits, since all the money invested in the ICS-run CAS and SPRAR projects is funneled into the local economy. The apartments are rented from local citizens, and food and cleaning items are bought in local shops, while in the camps, large subcontractor agencies usually provide cleaning, food, and security, bypassing the community and channeling funds directly to the agency. The ICS personnel are not employed to do what the guests can do for themselves. Instead, they are dedicated to promoting their social inclusion by facilitating, sometimes even negotiating, a relationship with the local community for the various administrative procedures that they

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14 This has also been observed in Germany, another country where accommodation is decentralized. In the words of Andreas Germershausen, Commissioner of the Berlin Senate for Integration and Migration: "We see that wherever there is no contact with asylum seekers, the opposition to asylum seekers is stronger than where people already have personal contact." Does housing asylum seekers apart from locals increase tensions? *Debating Europe,* Started 15 March 2017, at: https://www.debatingeurope.eu/2017/03/15/housing-asylum-seekers-apart-locals-increase-tensions/#.W3cumS1aa34.

have to undergo, assisting beneficiaries with the choice of language courses and vocational training and providing general assistance with daily living, including how to spend leisure time.

Finally, the ICS model privileges the use of the local educational, health and, leisure agencies. Unlike many CAS projects carried out in big camps, where each service is provided in-house, in Trieste the guests are enrolled in already existing schools or training agencies that serve the local population. They are registered with a family doctor[15] where they have to report their health problems. They enroll in local clubs to participate in their preferred sports.

All important aspects of living are shaped in order to bring protection seekers as close as possible to the local population. The figures presented demonstrate the impact of such an initiative.

The Trieste reception systems, SPRAR and CAS together, can accommodate a maximum of 1,250-1,300 people. The has increased by approximately 400 places during the last two years with the gradual rise of accommodation for families, which now represents 30 per cent of the total number of newcomers. Opening the system to families has proved a good strategic move since families, especially those with children, are usually accepted more readily by demographically older local populations.

One thousand three hundred protection seekers are conspicuous in a city the size of Trieste. Notwithstanding the number, their presence has gone unnoticed since the inception of the CAS project.

The decentralized accommodation system is organized in two types of premises: emergency and operational.

The former comprises medium-sized premises that could host 95 people, and two hotels. These facilities work as mini-hotspots, not in the sense of segregating asylum seekers from migrants, but for understanding which structure can better accommodate them for their successful integration.

The latter are small communities and apartments planned for those who have initially spent a few weeks in the former.

Small communities are necessary, because many guests need an adaptation period to familiarize themselves with the new habits and customs of the local community. The ability to take care of themselves in a new environment is the main objective of the reception programme, and this is achieved with time. Furthermore, some beneficiaries need the constant presence of staff because they might be in need of more attention due to trauma experienced along the journey to Europe or in their country due of origin, or because they are young (one third of the guests are 18-25 years old).

Apartments are suitable for guests who are progressing their integration process. They have achieved a good level of autonomy and just need to be

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15   General practitioner in Italy.

supported by the ICS staff in planning their future and facilitating their relationship with local authority agencies for administrative and bureaucratic procedures.

The existing operational system, which has 116 apartments and 13 small collective premises, is trying to meet as many needs as possible. Even the apartments are not considered the same. Accommodation for each new guest is carefully considered based on the location, number of guests, nationalities, and staffing capacity. The profile of staff members is also different, from age to qualifications. Both men and women work with the guests and, on some occasions, the gender of the staff member makes the difference. Some guests fit better with more experienced support staff; others need the energy and the "camaraderie" of younger staff. Some staff are more competent in dealing with young people, others with people with health problems or psychological fragility.

However, neither the apartments nor the small collective premises host guests who are all the same. They are mixed as much as possible in terms of nationality, age, and vulnerabilities. The model of ethnically coherent settings, tailored to young people or those with psychological vulnerabilities, is not considered a good basis for an integration-oriented project.

The system is economically very effective, given that out of the annual budget of approximately 17 million euros, almost 100 per cent goes back into the local economy.

For example, the budget for the year 2017 was as follows:

- Renting apartments from local landlords, including housing utilities and maintenance, amounted to 17 per cent of the total budget. In a city where hundreds of apartments are vacant, this represents an important component of many families' income;
- Daily life expenditures, including food, clothing, linen, personal hygiene, and house cleaning, amounted to 20 per cent of the budget. As already mentioned, that money is managed and spent directly by the guests in the local shops;
- Transportation amounts to six per cent of the budget. Guests receive a monthly ticket for the local transport service – an important source of support to the local system that operates for the whole community;
- Integration-oriented expenditures, including schooling, internships, labour probation, initial rent contribution for those leaving the reception system and becoming autonomous, health care and cultural mediators amounted to ten per cent;
- Salaries of 240 regularly employed workers amounted to 32 per cent of the budget. The money remains in the local economies, as the workers are members of local society, living and contributing locally and paying taxes;

261

-    Administrative office costs such as bank, mail, stamps, renting, maintenance, or taxes amounted to 15 per cent.

However, the budget spent for either SPRAR or CAS, managed in a decentralized manner, fuelled the grimmest political speculation and consequently the manipulation of public opinion. Populists claim that asylum seekers receive 35 euros per day, negatively affecting the Italian economy.

However, the 35 euros they receive per day is not their allowance, it is the total amount per person given by authorities to the agencies managing SPRAR or CAS projects. On the contrary, migrants financially support the local population that largely benefits from their presence.

As has been demonstrated, apart from the most important humanitarian reasons, decentralized reception is economically effective, which is why it should be prioritized over the big camp solution where, in recent years, many scandals of mismanagement and corruption came to the surface.

It would be unfair, after having praised the Trieste model, not to mention some critical issues that are still affecting the reception and integration of the protection seekers.

Most of these issues are more political than operational.

Firstly, the imbalance between SPRAR and CAS has been mentioned already. Although the services provided in Trieste are more or less the same, what makes a significant difference is the period that a person can receive benefits from the system. In SPRAR projects, guests can rely on six months of accommodation and support that can be extended for another six. In the CAS project, beneficiaries can stay until they receive all the documents (identity card, residence permit, health card, passport) needed to live and move autonomously throughout the EU territory. In Trieste, the decision has been taken to provide six months of accommodation and support automatically after issuing protection to all the CAS guests, otherwise it would be difficult for a person to attain the necessary "tools" to live an independent life in such a short period of time. The best outcome would be achieved through the combination of the two projects, CAS and SPRAR, but the shortage of places makes it impossible for the majority of protection seekers.

Another significant hindrance is the scarcity of special premises for people with psychological or psychiatric vulnerabilities. During the last six months, the number of people with post-traumatic stress disorders (of any kind, but mainly due to the violence they were exposed to at home and from the hardships experienced during the trip) increased. These people are in need of specific, long-lasting, specialized treatment in order to overcome the past and prepare for a new future. These treatments are currently very scarce in Italy as a whole.

Finally, there is no provision for further supporting beneficiaries at the end of the period of accommodation in their CAS and/or SPRAR. Too often, people who are serious about investing in their future in the country remain

262

without support. In exceptional cases their stay under protection is extended, but the formal emergency nature of the CAS does not anticipate this becoming standard procedure. In order to overcome this gap, the ICS is carrying out parallel projects, only partially supported by governmental funds, aimed at bearing the initial costs of independent housing for those who are settling in Trieste. With just a little more investment, many former protection seekers would have a better chance to plan their future in Trieste seriously, therefore "paying back" the support they have received.

Conclusions

Migration has always been part of human life. Its features may change, but it cannot be stopped, only managed. Nowadays, Europe lacks an agreed agenda, a master plan for welcoming and integrating newcomers fleeing from violence and/or inequality. While politicians are mostly wasting time crying for the moon, civil society is taking a stance and acting.

The previous pages portrayed the Trieste model: not the only good practice of decentralizing the reception of asylum seekers in Europe, but one of the most interesting. It is a bottom-up initiative revealing how constant collaboration between the three essential pillars of civil society, local authorities, and central government forms the basis of any sound plan. The role of CSOs, given their closeness to the ground, is to analyse the situation and experiment with viable solutions. The role of local authorities is to back up the CSOs' work by including them in a regulated framework and financially supporting them. The role of the central government is to transpose good practices into laws and regulations.

In the case of Italy, in order to take full advantage of the positive aspects listed above, the system needs to be strengthened further. The measures are well known to the authorities since, according to the already quoted report on the accommodation of migrants and refugees in Italy, "the CAS project should be formally merged with the SPRAR system. Nothing prevents this development that could be implemented through the enlargement of the current SPRAR places and a series of incentives for the Municipalities that haven't yet joined the SPRAR network".[16]

Furthermore, in 2016, one year after the report quoted above was released, and in line with it, the Plan for Integration issued by the same Ministry of the Interior reads:

> For the purposes of an effective integration support policy, it is urgent to overcome the extraordinary reception projects (CAS) and to increase the participation of more municipalities in the SPRAR system. For the period

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16 Ministero dell'Interno, Rapporto sull'accoglienza di migranti e rifugiati in Italia, cited above (Note 9), p. 96 (author's translation).

required for the SPRAR system to become the only reception system, the CAS will have to approve their services and activities aimed at integration (language training, work and service orientation) to those offered in the SPRAR system.[17]

Furthermore, to move forward with a process of full integration, specific policies concerning housing in the post-reception phase are needed. As already mentioned, once refugees have obtained recognition or rejection of their status, they are expected to leave the reception centres within a short period of time. Support for relocation into independent housing is therefore crucial for refining the integration process, and failing to take care of this aspect would jeopardize all the efforts made by the community.

The Trieste model offers some help to other European countries that do not have the same models of accommodation, especially those bordering the EU to the east, and are now facing the same impact of asylum seekers. The SPRAR model has a wider perspective, overcoming borders. It is clear that the any territory can absorb a large number of people in a limited period but the opposite is also true: that not all the asylum seekers accommodated in a particular territory want to invest in their future there. In any case, wherever they find themselves, they should have the opportunity to get accustomed to a place with a different culture, language, and traditions. Whatever their aims, they will not be completely unprepared and they will build their life and relationships with hosting societies upon existing, if not entirely solid foundations. This means that the effort put in by one territory has a potential benefit for other territories across Europe.

The Trieste model is therefore a lesson learnt that could be easily transferred and replicated, because it is based on responses built according to simple rules of civil co-operation, where each social body plays its part in a coordinated manner and towards a common goal: in this case a safe and welcoming environment. Sound and honest policies are needed, and the irrational exaggeration of the sense of threat that is fuelling anti-immigration sentiment and a climate of intolerance and xenophobia needs to be stopped.

However, the election of a populist coalition in June 2018 paved the way for a campaign to dismantle the decentralized accommodation, and the CAS system will be rolled back, reverting to the old-fashioned system of overcrowded camps. If this attempt is successful, it will bring the Trieste model to an end and the current witch-hunt will be more likely to continue.

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17 Ministero dell'Interno, Dipartimento per le Libertà Civili e l'Immigrazione [Ministry of the Interior, Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration] Piano nazionale d'integrazione dei Titolari di Protezione Internazionale, [National plan for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection]), Rome 2016, p. 16 (author's translation).