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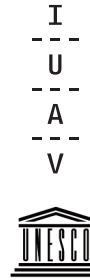
SMALL-SIZE CITIES OF DIFFERENCE. AN EXPLORATORY INQUIRY IN THREE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Adriano Cancellieri



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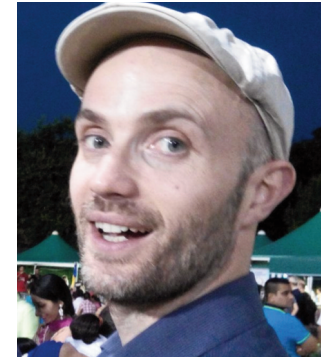
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Introduction

Since 1970s, immigration has been one of the main determinants of European social and demographic transformations. Throughout the 1990s, migration literature in Europe focused on immigrants 'integration' at a national level and remained largely unconcerned about the different local experiences. From the middle of 2000's onward, there has been an increasing awareness that the inclusion of migrants takes place first and foremost at the local level. As a result, there has been a growing number of studies on local policies and social practices in specific cities (Caponio and Borkert, 2010).

However, this body of research has almost exclusively looked at middle-size or, more frequently, large cities and metropolitan areas such as London, New York, Sidney and Los Angeles (Sassen, 1991, 2002; Dear, 2002) ignoring the effects of immigration in smaller cities (Short et al., 2000). Yet, in many cases, small-size cities appear to be the new gateway cities for migrants (Price and Benton-Short, 2008).

While the relationship between migration and global cities is relevant, since the 1990s the number of migrants has risen significantly in many small-size cities, driving an unexpected socio-political complexity (Bell and Jayne, 2006). The trend is perceptible in several European countries (Hoggart and Buller, 1995; Fonseca et al., 2004; Hussain and Stillwell, 2008). In the UK (Taylor and Rogaly, 2004), Spain (Morén-Alegret, 2005) and Greece (Kasimis et al., 2003), the increasing inflow of immigrants is connected to agricultural related activities in rural areas and small-size cities. After a first period of metropolisation, international migrants in Italy have largely settled in small-size cities, following the dispersed urbanization and industrialization pattern peculiar to the country. A similar trend can be found in Western non-European countries. The USA, a country where migration has traditionally headed to metropolitan areas, in the last fifteen years experienced an unprecedented flow towards rural areas and small-size centres for migrants, particularly Latinos (Fennelly, 2008; Carr et al., 2012). The same dynamic can be found in Canada (Carter et al., 2008), New Zealand (Spoonley and Bedford, 2008) and Australia (Hugo, 2008). Notwithstanding this transformation, research continues to focus mainly on metropolitan areas and large cities as the only places of 'living with difference' (Valentine, 2008). The multicultural, the diverse, and the



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1. Two international workshops were organized in Spain: 'Foreign Immigration in Small Towns and Rural Areas' in Barcelona, 19th October 2006 and 'Integration and Sustainability in Small Towns', in Azores, in 12-16th September 2011. In Germany, a nationwide comparative study ('Integration potential in small towns and rural districts'), conducted by the Schader Foundation in cooperation with the German Association of Towns and Municipalities and the German County Association and, more recently, in Italy, a three-year project (2013-2015), called 'Small-size Cities And Social Cohesion: Policies and Practices for the Social and Spatial Inclusion of International Migrants', coordinated by the professor Marcello Balbo (University Iuav of Venice).

benefits and tensions related with them, are seen as the domain of large cities. Most scholars and politicians evoke 'smallness' just as a synonym of social homogeneity and social closure: a condition sometimes idealized and romanticised as authentic and 'traditional' (Cloke, 2004; Garland and Chakraborti, 2006) in contrast to the risks of large cities. Other representations stigmatize smallness as a weakness that produces marginalisation, conservatism and social exclusion. In both cases, in small-size cities, ethnic minorities become invisible and their needs and experiences are unimportant subjects of study and policies.

This paper is part of a recent slight reversal of such trends and tries to integrate the literature on migration with the literature on small-size cities¹. Up to now, the limited literature on the topic resulted in rather ambiguous outcomes. Some scholars highlight that the low population density that characterizes small-size cities negatively impact on the extent and range of social, cultural and institutional services (Jentsch, 2007) and that people's concerns for the protection of local values "may stimulate and strengthen exclusion, racism and discrimination" (Dey and Jentsch 2001; Reimer et al. 2007). On the contrary, Morén-Alegret (2008) emphasizes that for some migrants it is better living in a small locality, because people know each other, they find less problematic circumstances in daily lives, more security and trust among neighbours. Moreover, these new small destinations offer greater chances of home ownership (at lower cost) to immigrants, for example in North America (Kandel et al., 2011).

The objective of this paper is to recognize that "living beyond the multi-ethnic metropolis poses a particular series of challenges for minority ethnic residents and prompts a distinct range of responses, reflecting the specific social, cultural, economic, political and material situation" (Reeve and Robinson, 2007, pp. 551-552). It explicitly focuses on how urban smallness affects the social and spatial inclusion of migrants and addresses the challenges and opportunities small-size cities face because of immigration. It starts with a brief explanation of urban 'smallness', adopting a context specific notion, followed by the results of an exploratory research conducted in three European small-size cities (Urbania, Italy, King's Lynn, England and Vence, France).

The main features of the migrants' insertion and conflicts with the local population are discussed, as well as the policies and practices adopted by local institutions and social actors. In the following part, the paper analyses the risks and resources small-size cities face due to the presence of migrants. In the last section, the paper points to further research directions and to possible ways to translate some risks accruing from the presence of migrants into opportunities for the city.

The research

The meaning of 'smallness' changes significantly from country to country. In Italy, the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) refers to

small-size municipalities as places with no more than 5,000 inhabitants; according to the Spanish Population Census, small-size cities are municipalities with between 10,001 and 25,000 inhabitants (Morén-Alegret, 2008). In North America, the United States Office of Management and Budget speaks of 'micropolitan areas' referring to the territories centred on a core town with a population of 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants. Finally, the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics defines small cities as "small population centres, with a population between 1,000 and 29,999 and a density of at least 400 persons per square kilometre".

Smallness is a relative term that refers to population size, but also to physical isolation from larger urban areas. Since smallness is a context specific notion to be set against the regional and national contexts, the paper adopts a flexible relative perspective, more than a static size perspective. In other words, it uses smallness as a heuristic concept in a Kantian way: it "does not give us any information respecting the constitution of an object, it merely indicates how, under the guidance of this idea, we ought to investigate the constitution and the relations of objects in the world of experience" (Kant, 1855, pp. 411).

Considering that every small-size city is part of a specific economic, social and political context, the paper draws from an exploratory research carried out on three European small-size cities selected for their high percentage of migrants: Urbania (Italy), King's Lynn (Great Britain) and Vence (France). The research included both quantitative analyses on secondary data and qualitative interviews with public administrators, local government officers, NGOs members and migrants as well as fieldwork conducted in the three different contexts².

Urbania, Italy

Italy has been for many years a country of emigration. Since the late seventies, it has become the destination for growing number of migrants from different countries. In the beginning, the phenomenon mainly involved the largest cities, particularly Milan and Rome. Since the 1990s, however, a large part of migrants started to settle in smaller cities, pulled by the scattered urbanization and industrialization of the country.

The 2011 Census shows that the percentage of migrants residing in municipalities with less than 50,000 inhabitants is quite significant (61.4%). Moreover, the 20th Statistical Dossier on Immigration (Caritas/Migrantes, 2010) highlights that no large cities appear among the 25 municipalities with the highest percentages of migrants. From 2002 to 2011 the number of migrants in cities with a population of 5,000 to 50,000 inhabitants increased at a much higher rate (262.2%) than in large cities with more than 250,000 inhabitants (189.6%, Istat data elaborated by ANCI-IFEL).

The small-size city of Urbania (pop. 7126, Istat data 31/12/2012) is a clear example of this dynamic. It is located in the so-called 'jeans valley' of the

2. Urbania, in May 2012, Vence, in September 2012, King's Lynn, in January 2013.

3. In Marche only 16 out of 239 cities have more than 20,000 inhabitants and only one, Ancona, slightly more than 100,000.

4. Istat, 31/12/2012.

5. Data of Urbania's Register Office.

Marche region, where the presence of migrants in small-size cities is significantly more relevant than in the larger urban centres³. The 'jeans valley' includes a number of small-size cities with a high concentration of small firms that used to work on the washing, sandblasting and ironing jeans trousers for national brands, in addition to some wood and mechanical industries, as well as a dynamic building sector. The economic dynamism of the area spurred international migration: according to the most recent data in Urbania migrants represent 13.2% of the total population, well above the national (7.5%) and the regional average (9.4%)⁴. The first wave came predominantly from Morocco and Albania; but since the 2000s, the majority of migrants originate from Moldova and Romania (especially women involved in care work).

For years finding a job has been easy, especially in the so-called '3D activities' (dirty, dangerous and demanding). Migrants filled manual, low-skilled and low-paid jobs in local industrial districts, (Paba and Murat, 2006; Andall, 2007) acting as an alternative to investment in research and management that would be needed to compete in the increasingly international market (Barberis, 2011; Barberis and Cancellieri, 2012). Urbania is a clear example of the 'segmentation theory' (Hoggart and Mendoza, 1999) stating that the access to specific employment positions is defined by social positions of power.

Finding a house has never been a problem in Urbania. In the historic city centre the population has declined from approximately 4,000 residents in the 1950s to only 1,000 by the middle of the 1980s leaving behind a dilapidated and affordable housing stock that migrants could easily access. At the beginning of 2000's two out of three Moroccans and nine out of ten Albanians lived in the city centre⁵. Thus, migrants filled the voids left by autochthonous people in the housing as well as the job market.

Friendship and kinship ties contributed significantly to the arrival of migrants: the large majority of Moroccans come from only one province (Khouribga), most Albanians originate from the region between Durazzo and Scutari, and the Macedonians are from the Gostivar.

In most cases, migrants moved to Urbania after settling some years in larger cities upon their arrival to Italy. This flow is generally linked to the fact that housing is more affordable and living is less tense (IFEL-ANCI, 2011). Some of the migrants interviewed in the frame of the research put great emphasis on the calmness and the support offered by local institutions and associations, as well as by individuals and families. A young Moroccan clearly stated that his father settled in Urbania "because it is quieter, it is quieter! It is better here for the families!" (Mounir, 14/11/2012).

Segmented integration and exclusionary practices

In a small-size city like Urbania, children of local residents and migrant families attend the same kindergarten, the same primary school and the same secondary schools. Coffee shops too are relevant places of

socialisation where young people of migrant origin mix and part with residents. In small-size cities these territories are inevitably contact spaces where 'prosaic negotiations' are compulsory (Amin, 2002: 469).

The presence of migrants is also evident in the parish church, a central institution in the local community: one priest and several nuns are Nigerians, a second one comes from Madagascar and the priest who manages the oratory is from Colombia. In fact, the church is the only place at the local level where migrants hold some power.

One more meaningful sign of the socio-demographic transformations of Urbania is the high number of 'mixed marriages' between Italians and individuals from more than 20 nationalities. The phenomenon concerns particularly some nationalities, as stressed by the person in charge of the local welfare services: "Moldavian and Romanian women come here alone with their sons and daughters; they are often without their husbands whom they refer to as drunkards and lazy; here they can find a new partner, start a new life" (Irene, 18/11/2012). In fact, a part of the migrant population is no doubt recognized as a complete part of the local society. Some migrants have also become local characters like the Moroccan newsagent who only speaks the local dialect.

On the other hand a large number of migrants continue to be marginalized. First, part of young migrants has become part of the local micro-criminality involved in fights, small thefts, drug dealing and vandalism, the so called 'new rainbow underclass' (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). These are multicultural young groups unified by low schooling performances, low occupational attainments and deviant behaviours. However, most young people who are sometimes involved in little incidents with Italian youth, prefer to mix with people from the same country in particular Moroccans and Albanians. Indeed, "contact is a necessary but not sufficient condition for multicultural understanding" (Amin, 2002). In the city centre one can see groups of young and adult people gathered on the basis of ethnic origin avoiding any interaction with migrants from different origins. Thus, the condition of young migrants is ambiguous, oscillating between positive 'integration', downward assimilation, isolation and conflict.

Secondly, the situation of older migrants, especially Moroccans, is often characterized by an even more radical ethnic closure. Many of them gather in the main square, preferably around dinner-time when there are only few Italians around. The same holds true for Moroccan women and their children who meet in the main park and do not interact with Italians people, leading almost 'parallel lives'. It is the *parochial territories* of 'ethnic' encounter in public spaces Lofland (1998) refers to.

There is a sort of mistrust among different groups: migrants are considered too visible in public spaces and are accused of 'socio-geographical transgression' (Cancellieri and Ostanel, 2015) because they transform the local traditional landscapes in nodes of globalisation and territories of

6. Urbania borders with the only municipality of Marche region ruled by the Northern League, the Italian most openly racist party.

difference. As expressed by a Moroccan man: "when the Italians see you are talking to other Italians, everyone looks at you and talks about you. At the end it is better to let it go!" (Mustapha, 18/11/2012). Gossip and social control, indeed, could be more strongly perceived in small-sized cities (Dreby & Schmalzbauer, 2013).

Local politics in Urbania

Italy has developed a piecemeal approach to the issue of immigration. The lack of a clear policy at the national level produced a variety of forms of territorial governance making local situations complex, especially in a period of economic crisis and severe reduction of local welfare policies (Triandafyllidou et al., 2007).

The Municipality of Urbania has been sensitive for years to the challenges raised by migration. In the 1990s it was one of the first municipalities to accept an elected migrant as a member of the municipal Council with consultative powers. In 2000 it started a two-year project for the integration of migrants funded by the Marche Region, specifically appointing an Italian councillor to manage the project. One project result was the publication of a book that collects many life stories of migrants living in town.

Since the 1990s (with a 2004-2009 interval) a leftist 'visionary mayor' has dominated local politics refusing all conservative images of the city as an inward and narrow-minded small city. The opposition has at times tried to counter his power riding the national and local anti-migration wave⁶, but with no success.

However, this inclusive migrant policy did not last long: having a migrant councillor from the migrant community was only putting up a facade than a way to provide migrants with some power in local politics and to foster their inclusion. Particularly so with the Italian Councillor for Immigration whose role came to an end with the completion of the specific project he had been appointed for.

Since the middle of the 2000s, migration has turned increasingly marginal in the local policy. In some cases the municipality adopted some strict rules towards migrants such as the norm granting a rent subsidy only to people who have been residing for at least five years in the Marche region or for at least ten years in Italy.

Coping with migration is quite difficult for a small-size city like Urbania, especially in a period of declining resources. For this reason, local authorities have looked at inter-municipal unions as a way to face the current situation. The 'Mountain Union of Alta Val Metauro', brings together nine municipalities and in 2010 established an inter-municipal immigration office, located in Urbania to help migrants with administrative procedures. In a few years it has become an important point of reference for migrants who live in the area.

The 'Ambito Territoriale Sociale' (Socio-Territorial District) was established by the Regional Social Plan in 2002⁷, with the task of promoting the

implementation of the national and regional policies and to integrate social and health services, with a specific focus on migrants.

After many years of life, the District initiative is still in progress as revealed by the head of the municipal social services of the Municipality: "it is not so easy to work within the District; there are many different municipalities together. We face many problems to share the service management with others!" (Irene Tegli, 18/11/2012).

This institutional patchwork typical of Italian migration policy did produce some solutions, but at the end of the day it appears too fragmented and overlapping (Allulli and Tortorella, 2013). The networking process of small-size cities is now in a 'dangerous' in-between situation and migration is one of the most relevant fields of action to test their capacity to cope with this crucial urban and social challenge.

King's Lynn, Great Britain

Great Britain, for a long time has been an immigrant receiving country. International immigration to Great Britain traditionally involved London and the South East region. However, since 2004, a new and distinctive wave of immigration from Eastern and Central European countries has headed to small towns and rural areas. Due to the entry of Poland, Lithuania and Latvia into the European Union, labour migrants from these countries has been in high demand from labour-intensive agricultural production (Holman and Schneider, 2008).

One of the most important 'new immigrant gateways' for Eastern and Central European migrants is King's Lynn, a medieval sea-port and market town of 42,800 inhabitants in the county of Norfolk, east England. King's Lynn has experienced a rapid increase of new migration (Byrne and Tankard 2007; Reeve and Robinson, 2007) and despite the economic crisis, it is one of the English towns where migrants continue to arrive (Leapman, 2007).

According to last census data (2011), the foreign born population of King's Lynn and West Norfolk is 7% of all residents, the main nationalities being Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish and Bulgarian.

King's Lynn is important for agriculture and agricultural-related industries, including food processing, and it has always been a centre for fishing and seafood industry. The new wave of immigration to King's Lynn is strongly channelled along occupational lines in the food-processing sector. The introduction of just in time delivery systems and the extension of the farming season to meet demand coming from powerful buyers, such as supermarkets and hypermarkets, has resulted in a greater need for a flexible labour force (Rogaly, 2008).

Exclusionary processes in a small-size city

The presence of large numbers of migrants has become a contentious issue in King's Lynn. According to a recent research (Fordham Research, 2007) King's Lynn is one of the British areas where migrants would prefer

7. The 24 Districts created by Marche Region have two main organisms: the Mayors Committee and the 'Coordinator', appointed by the Committee.

not to move to because of racism acts. Many residents complain that there are too many non-English speaking children in schools, too many Eastern European people hanging around the town centre in the middle of the day and too many immigrants who "take all their jobs"⁸.

Migrants usually live in houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) in distinct parts of the city, with very little choice about the location and the quality of housing. HMOs are one of the most visible features of migrants in King's Lynn and their poor external conditions are one of the symbols of the foreign population marginalisation and exploitation (Taylor and Rogaly, 2004). Furthermore migrant workers are "isolated in ethnic labour markets where there are few opportunities for social interaction with UK natives or other long-term residents" (Markowa and Black, 2007, pp. 33).

The propaganda of the British National Party exacerbates the sentiments of local inhabitants against migrants. In 2012 an attempt by some councillors to grant permission for a new mosque in King's Lynn was narrowly defeated after a hearing on the matter dominated by British National Party objections. Stephen Tweed, the BNP's Local Party Organiser for Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, objected to the creation of an Islamic centre in an old pub in King's Lynn, because it would be "exclusive, it will not be for the general public, it will be for Muslims". A BNP parliamentary candidate, David Fleming, asserted "we are talking about rural Middle England, not Brick Lane!".

The still dominating 'romantic' representation of small-size territories as socially homogeneous "is never simply the recognition of cultural similarity or social contiguity but a categorical identity that is premised on various forms of exclusion and constructions of otherness" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, p. 13).

Several scholars highlight the nature of the hostility towards 'strangers' in the context of English countryside (Agyeman and Spooner, 1997; Ray and Reed, 2005) and the resistance of rural communities to newcomers (Chakraborti, 2010), in particular in some areas such as Devon and Cornwall, Northumbria, Cumbria, Durham and North Lincolnshire.

Migrant workers are not necessarily solely on the receiving end of prejudice. Some years ago two Lithuanian children from the local comprehensive school sprayed racist graffiti with the writings "*White powers*" and "*Nigers out*" in two King's Lynn main estates where there are numerous migrants. Many social workers have also uncovered significant tensions between new migrants and minority ethnic populations, and between different groups of migrant workers notably Polish and Lithuanians (Paul, 18/01/2013) and between the more established Portuguese community and Polish newcomers with the latter group accused of accepting lower wages (Stenning et al., 2006).

Some local authorities have more firm responses to racism than others but racism generally is not seen as an issue. The image of idyllic and problem-free country (a folk society, Redfield, 1947) isolated from globalization

dynamics endures (Neal, 2002; Ray and Reed, 2005) and contributes to hide the phenomenon (Holloway, 2007). At the contrary, in 2007 'The Sun' published an article entitled 'Slaves of King's Lynn' depicting the almost slave condition under which illegal Chinese migrants were working and portraying the presumed quiet, respectable and conservative town of King's Lynn as a "hub of an international human-trafficking network" (Harvey, 2007).

Local politics in King's Lynn

The UK is characterized by a very significant gap between national policy discourses about social cohesion (Commission on integration and cohesion, 2007) and the local policies where a market-oriented and neo-liberal approach usually prevails.

Furthermore, the new spaces of immigration, such as King's Lynn, are 'blank' spaces in terms of policy experience on multicultural and social cohesion issues. Local institutions in these areas are largely inexperienced in handling migration, since in the UK much of the expertise on managing immigration and community cohesion is based in the main cities.

In King's Lynn, migrants are metaphorically accused of 'jumping the queue' especially for the provision of social housing and public services in general. Small-size cities appear to be largely unprepared to cope with the "scale, pace and newness of change" (Byrne and Tankard, 2007, p. 8). Typically, in the Greyfriars Primary School, where the percentage of pupils with English as a second language has increased to over 30%, the maternity services are particularly under strain (West Norfolk Partnership, 2008).

In this difficult context it is worth noting the absence of policies by the local government⁹ in charge of providing public services. In King's Lynn, the main role is played by some important charities. KLARS, a NGO set up in 2000 by a group of local people who employ Portuguese, Polish, Russian and Lithuanian speaking professional workers in order to reduce language barriers and to help migrants residing in the area. Another important Charity is Purfleet Trust which offers support and training to current and potential homeless people, and provides migrants with various services, such as housing advice, language classes and support in training and gaining access to the labour market.

Borough boundaries inevitably limit the effectiveness of local policies and are irrelevant for a large part of migrants (Martin, 21/01/2013). As a response to this condition the nearby Breckland district council has set up a 'Citizen's One Stop Shop & Mobile Bus' that utilises a fully equipped bus to deliver services to migrants who are difficult to reach by local institutions. The bus operates three days a week across the District and in other four market towns and rural communities.

In King's Lynn a good example of inter-municipal service is the MELO, the Police Minority Ethnic Liaison Officer. MELOs are instituted by the Norfolk

9. King's Lynn and West Norfolk is the local body government. Its council is based in King's Lynn and includes King's Lynn itself, together with 102 surrounding parishes.

Constabulary to broaden its response to the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. They are present in each police sub division and their duties include responding to all incidents related to racial harassment. They are non-uniformed and the majority of their time is spent making informal visits to local people. Their role is to take a proactive approach by liaising BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) groups and the local society (Pat, 20/01/2013). These policies seem very promising and are strongly relevant in small-size cities, but they are, as of now, black swans in specific local contexts. The King's Lynn case study mainly suggests that the smallness can be very dangerous, particularly if it is inserted in a neo-liberal political approach.

Vence, France

As a former colonial empire, France has attracted migrants from Europe, Latin America and Africa since the 19th century. Like in the UK, in France immigration has always been a metropolitan issue for the Greater Paris region (Île-de-France) and the main urban areas, namely Marseille. However, the size of immigration flows over the years has been so vast as to involve also many small-size cities. In the 1990s, Gaspard outlined the deep socio-demographic changes Dreux had experienced, the *petite ville*, where she was the mayor, and how it had to adapt to the rise of immigrant communities (Gaspard, 1990). In France, a country with more than 36,000 municipalities and the lowest European average number of inhabitants per municipality, the 'small-size city' is a very pertinent issue.

A clear example of how much the issue of immigration has transformed small-size cities is the PACA region (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur), at the southern border with Italy. Migrants in the PACA region have both settled in larger cities such as Marseille and Nice as well as in smaller ones. The first waves of migrants arrived from Italy, Spain and Maghreb. Recently the evolution of immigration has led to the arrival of populations from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from African countries.

The PACA region is well known for being a stronghold of far-right extremist parties that support the resentment against the 'fear of migrant invasion', fuelled by the anti-Muslim sentiments post-9/11 and the anti-Arabs narratives related to the colonial past. Recently, a documentary ('Mains brunes sur la ville', www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiWrlQvzrTc) filmed the effects of extreme right parties' government in two of PACA's small-size cities (Orange and Bollène in Vaucluse Department).

Vence (pop. 19,281) is a small-size city of the Alpes-Maritimes, the PACA department with the high percentage of migrants (12.7%) and a long history of immigration. In Vence, there are large numbers of Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Algerians, and above all Tunisians, who arrived in the 1960s and the 1970s. Migrants have been involved mainly in the agriculture and building sectors.

The city is part of the Riviera where not only many French people but also others, have settled after retiring: many 'second homes' (20% of the total)

scattered within the municipal boundaries characterize this small-size city. Small and medium building enterprises, as well as the tourism sector (e.g. restaurants, hotels), are the main city's economic activities.

Assimilation and the quest for authenticity: parallel lives and socio-spatial invisibility

Vence is a city with a long history of immigration. However, the previous waves of immigrants from Italy, Spain and Portugal have been almost forgotten and assimilated while the more recent wave of immigrants from Maghreb is seen as a public problem (Frigoli, 2010).

There are two groups of migrants from Maghreb that are strongly marginalized. The first one are the so-called 'chibanis', ('white hair' in Arabic dialect), Maghreb workers who arrived during the country's 'thirty glorious years'. This presence of elderly migrants is a specific characteristic of the PACA region: according to the 2013 Social Atlas, one migrant out of three in the region is over 60 years old and the average age of migrants is 48 years, well above the average of the local inhabitants (41).

The 'chibanis' have poured asphalt on roads, built social housing and produced millions of spare parts on assembly lines: "many Tunisians as well as Portuguese worked in the 1960s and 1970s in the building sector but now they have retired. Thanks to these populations we have the town. Thirty years ago the French people did not work. Tunisians and Portuguese built the town!" (Jacques, 14/09/2012).

Vence is where many chibanis live after working in heavy and unhealthy jobs (Bouhalli, 2011, Moussaoui, 2011). Contrary to popular belief, the majority prefer to stay in France, where their children live and where they can take advantage of a comparatively better welfare State. Some would choose to travel back and forth between countries and only a small part would like to retire in their country of origin (Attias-Donfut, 2006).

Many of the chibanis in Vence come from the same Tunisian village, M'Saken, and have family and friend relationships. When sitting in Place Clemenceau, the main town square at certain hours, they are separated from local residents, despite fifty years of cohabitation in the same small-size city. A large number of old people of North African origin also group together in the local mosque situated along a road just outside the town centre. Vence housed one of the most ancient prayer halls, in a marginalized and decaying area of the city granted by the local Catholic Church. For the past twenty years, Muslims have requested a more appropriate place of worship, but as recently admitted by a municipal councillor, it is not politically convenient to recognize this right: "before the municipal elections it will be very difficult to expand the worship places for Muslims. It is not very wise in an electoral campaign!" (Gilles, 14/03/2012).

A second marginalised group of North African descent are the young, originally known as 'beurs' because of their Arab-French, bi-cultural identity. In Vence the youngsters of migrant origins without diplomas face

great difficulties in getting a job. They have low schooling performances and low occupational attainments, sometimes becoming involved in petty crimes (Vence Urban Contract for Social Cohesion, 2007).

As underlined by the local imam, “these young people are French but if they are not recognized as a part of the French society, they are induced to look at their culture of origin staying forever with other Maghreb and Muslim people” (Mohammed, 22/03/2013). In Vence, many young people of North African origin live in the historic town centre that has been abandoned by French families, the only place in the town where they can find an affordable place where to stay. The presence of young people of North African origin in public spaces and in the streets of the city centre is perceived as threatening by the local population.

A local councillor made it clear that he is very conscious of the negative aspects of such concentration of migrant youth and claimed that the municipality is trying to counter their marginalization: “We must not create a ghetto where we marginalize this population. We have to disperse them throughout the entire city” (Gilles, 21/03/2013). In order to do so, the Municipality recently approved a CUCS (Urban Contracts of Social Cohesion) between the State and the communes that identifies various social and urban development projects in deprived neighbourhoods. The contract has been strongly contested by the autochthonous people because it means recognizing that social cohesion is a problem (Gilles, 21/03/2013). Vence is a touristic town that flaunts its image as a peaceful and secure place: it is the ‘City of Art and Azur’ in the middle of French Riviera.

In fact, Vence values foreigners insofar they are artists or intellectuals, or better yet, if they are tourists or owners of a holiday home. The presence of foreigners is considered a source of enrichment when it is a fleeting and discreet presence. The municipality holds the presence of different cultures as a trademark for the city and each year organizes two important events, the ‘Nights of the South’ and ‘Vence feasts its cultures’ (Frigoli, 2010).

In both cases the otherness is mainly aestheticized and disembedded from the everyday life (May, 1996): the presence of the ‘other’ is accepted and even appreciated as part of an abstract and romanticized lifestyle, but when relation with otherness means social suffering and conflict, it remains hidden. Poverty is rarely beautiful, particularly for holidaymakers looking for a presumed ‘authentically’ historic environment inhabited by ‘original’ residents (Brown-Saracino, 2004). The removal of social conflicts and inequalities lies beneath all strategies of rediscovery and invention of the authenticity of a (small) place. As a consequence, migrants and their daily difficulties are condemned to ‘invisibility’ (Frigoli, 2010).

Local politics in Vence

Traditionally the assimilation model does not look at migrants as a target group in terms of provision of access to public services and welfare rights. Accordingly, in Vence, the migrants’ role in the city history has never been

recognized (Frigoli, 2010) and their voice is strongly underrepresented in local institutions, as highlighted by the ‘mosque affair’ mentioned above. Notwithstanding, France is well known for the role its central government plays with respect welfare policy, much of which is more or less directly addressed to migrants. The main document is the ‘Regional Programs of integration of immigrant populations’ (PRIPI) that define the collaboration between state, local authorities and private organizations to promote the integration of migrants. Such programs are essential to support the constitution of local networks and to create economies of scale that small-size cities cannot achieve by themselves.

The first PRIPI of the Provence-Alpes-Côtes-d’Azur region dates back to 2003. The new program, drawn up in October 2010, addresses four main issues: raising the awareness on integration processes, newly arrived migrants, learning French, and employment and housing, with a particular view on women and ageing migrants. The main local officials from the central government as well as the Municipality show little interest in this plan. Between 2010 and 2012, the Prefect also has never participated to the executive board meeting that he was supposed to preside and both levels of government are reluctant to engage their services in the implementation of concrete measures.

Another important law is the Solidarity and Urban Regeneration Act (SRU), adopted in late 2000, that establishes that municipalities with more than 3,500 inhabitants (1,500 in Ile-de-France) located in agglomerations with more than 50,000 inhabitants comprising of at least a municipality with more than 15 000 inhabitants, have to set aside as social rental housing at least 20% of their housing stock by 2020. The percentage should increase to 25% by 2025. As a matter of fact very few municipalities in the Alpes-Maritimes region have achieved this objective. In 2002, Vence was at only 4.2% and from 2002 to 2007 the municipality had to pay 840,000 euros as a penalty. For this reason in the following years the city decided to invest in social housing rather than pay thousands of euros in penalties¹⁰.

A transversal reading: assimilation, parallel lives and hostility

The research highlights the specific difficulties encountered by three small-size cities to face immigration. Given the differences that exist among the three case studies the paper does not intend to compare the policies implemented in Urbania, King’s Lynn and Vence, with respect to international migrants. Nevertheless, some common elements do emerge. Small-size cities attract immigration due to two main factors: the first is the presence of employment opportunities mainly in small-size and medium enterprises and in agricultural related activities; the second is the availability of cheaper housing, especially in the historical city centres often left behind by autochthonous people who have moved to the more modern and comfortable housing in the city recent expansions.

10. A similar situation arose in the nearby town of Saint-Paul-de-Vence, one of the oldest medieval towns on the French Riviera. Having exceeded 3,500 inhabitants, it had to comply with the SRU law. However, many residents were keener to preserve its presumed authenticity and pushed to maintain the extremely low percentage of social housing (0.2%). During a meeting organized to protest against the idea of constructing new social housing: one person stated “we rather have the municipality to pay penalties than accept social housing projects [...] Or else we are going to draw unwanted people which will inevitably change a territory like ours, where everyone knows each other and all live with pleasure” (Raso, 2012). This is a radical sign of the ‘dangerous alliance’ between the quest for authenticity and exclusionary practices.

In Italy, small-size cities like Urbania are only rarely the migrants' first destination. Instead, they are where migrants move with their families after some years upon their arrival in the country. Small-size cities are perceived as more calm and friendly places where relationships are easier to establish and more relaxed. In Urbania proximity inherent to living in small towns provides greater opportunities for social interaction: people do their shopping in the same local markets, crisscross in the often only square and park, children go to the same kindergarten and primary school. Thanks to these places of everyday social contact and encounter, there has been an integration process, though often segmented: a gradual, sometimes rough, insertion of certain segments of migrant population.

On the other hand it emerges clearly that small-size cities are not problem-free contexts. Social strains owing to linguistic, religious and other cultural differences are magnified when immigrants move into small communities where native populations have been living for generations. Close contacts in small communities may create opportunities for mutual understanding, but they may also reinforce indifference, hostility and even conflict (Lichter, 2012). In many cases, such as in Urbania and Vence, local residents and migrants live in the same public spaces but conduct a sort of 'parallel life' creating parochial territories of 'ethnic' encounter (Lofland, 1998).

In other cases, for example in King's Lynn, the arrival of large numbers of migrants is a contentious issue that has provoked overtly racist behaviours. In all three contexts migrants are considered too visible in public spaces and are charged with 'socio-geographical transgression' (Cancellieri and Ostanel, 2015) as they transform the local traditional landscapes in territories of difference, disrupting the sense of community.

The cultural framework of exclusion has been powerfully strengthened by some political parties. These 'political entrepreneurs of fear' play a particularly important role in small-size cities, where in fact most of them have built their strongholds. In Italy, it is mostly the mayors of small-size cities who have passed exclusionary ordinances (allowed by the government's 'Security package' in 2008 to increase urban security) (Ambrosini, 2012). The reference is in particular to the mayors' ordinances against the presumed inappropriate use of public space, many of which clearly address migrants and their use of public space.

In small cities, it is more difficult for migrants to have the right to be different and to reproduce their own cultural practices (Fischer, 1976; Reeve, Robinson, 2007). In fact, in all three case studies, migrants turned out to have very limited power in the local society and to be in local politics, including where some attempts to include them have been carried out, as in Urbania. In small-scale cities lacks a critical mass of migrants of a single ethnic group, "an ethnic niche economy and agencies providing migrants with opportunities to develop careers as culture brokers in the interests of specific ethnic groups" (Bonizzoni and

Marzorati, 2015). The end result is that local institutions feel very limited pressure to respond to the needs of the foreign population.

Even more, King's Lynn case study suggests that smallness can have critical drawbacks, fuelling racist behaviours and acts particularly if it is inserted in a neo-liberal political approach. In addition, the limited experience small-size cities have as spaces of immigration, as in the UK case examined, question the idea of smallness as a value added for handling the demand arising from migrants. The possibility for a small-size city to take on urban challenges especially under conditions of welfare cuts, is very limited. The small-size territorial areas tend to lack the agglomeration benefits and suffer severe limits of scale compared to larger cities (van Heur, 2011), lacking professionalism and specific skills.

A way to overcome the limits of local policies related to the immigration issue is to build local networks and explore solutions than go beyond city boundaries. In recent years throughout Europe, many multi-level territorial networks among different public and private actors have tried to reinforce small-size city spaces policies: the "Ambito Territoriale Sociale" in some Italian regions and the "Local strategic partnerships" (LSPs) in UK are some examples. Though sporadic and incomplete, they represent innovative institutional responses seeking new solutions to new challenges. We could say that immigration is one of the most relevant fields of action to test the capacity of small-size cities to set up collaborative actions in accordance with other cities.

Concluding remarks: converting risks into opportunities?

The paper underlines that small-size cities of difference have a great exclusionary potential and probably face more threats than large cities and metropolitan areas.

This risk is largely emphasized by the dominant idea that small cities are socially homogenous, and must remain so. This social construction of smallness "is by no means confined to academic discourse, media and literary images, and popular public perception but translates into, and influences, the actions and attitudes of those living there and the institutional practices of local services" (Reeve and Robinson, 2007, pp. 553). As a consequence, local institutions are not under any particular pressure to respond to the multicultural and intercultural issues that emerge within their boundaries (ibidem). This consequently means that an increasing percentage of migrants who live in small-size cities, are probably more at risk of social and political exclusion.

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that smallness offers some important opportunities. Two of them appear particularly relevant.

First, the cultural and relational potential of migrants in small-size cities is probably larger than in large cities and metropolitan areas (Lorentzen and van Heur, 2012). In recent years, with the emergence of an economy based on knowledge and culture and with the ubiquitous presence of new means

of communication, some scholars have highlighted the potential of the migrants. Many small-size cities attempt to avoid being marginalized on the global stage and migrants have international connections and easy access to their homelands, as well as their homelands' markets. Many young migrants speak several languages and have familiarity with a plurality of international spaces. These competences and global networks are usually disregarded and overlooked by policy makers. Migrants can be an asset in small-size cities and not just workers in dirty, dangerous and demanding jobs. Their linguistic, social and spatial capital, are latent resources that can be harnessed to create cultural and economic resources. The connections migrants maintain with their places of origin can be used as a factor of local empowerment, and not simply as an element 'contaminating' the traditional local values within a presumed homogeneity

Second, the sense of community and the geographical embeddedness and historical character that generally characterize small-size cities is certainly an asset. Though traditionally considered as exclusionary and conservative, local identity does not necessarily imply closure to newness and enclosing boundaries (Lazzeroni et al., 2012). Rather, it can be explicitly defined by multiple identities and histories, according to a 'progressive sense of place' (Massey, 2005), 'stretched' by populations that are partly shifting and diverse.

Through their mapping and remapping of urban space, indeed, migrants transform the urban fabric of small-size cities of which they are a part. They are spatial actors in that they try continuously to use and give new significance to urban space in order to carve out symbolic as well as material resources (Cancellieri, 2013; Cancellieri, 2014). In so doing, migrants create a meaningful relationship with the environment they live in (Brown and Perkins, 1992) that builds a sense of belonging and ownership. Thus, some of the questions arising from a deeper analysis of the specific conditions linking migration to cities of small size, concern the likelihood for a multicultural *genius loci* to emerge, the possibility of fuelling a sense of belonging starting from the everyday cohabitation in and the everyday use of the same place; as well as of building a sense of local community open to new populations.

These are open questions that could disclose spaces of policies in small-size cities of difference.

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