(Un)planned mixed neighbourhoods in Milan: integrationist discourse and the threat of the ghetto

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In the city of Milan, Italy, *via Padova* and *Sarpi-Canonica* are two neighbourhoods were cultural diversity became visible and caused concern in the local political and media debate. *Via Padova*, a working-class area with one of the highest share of immigrant residents, has been subject to a stigmatization process after clashes between groups put a strain on in it in 2009. *Sarpi-Canonica* – simplisticly defined as the Chinatown of Milan – is a middle-class neighbourhood which saw the growth of Chinese wholesale; after conflicts raised over the functions of the neighbourhood, a renovation project was started.

Drawing from these two cases, in this paper we explore the discourse about diversity and mixed communities according to neighbourhood and city key informants: the representations provided by policy-makers and social partners are insightful on the Italian discourse about the "ideal" model of interaction and living together between diverse residents.

A quite shared integrationist/intercultural approach shows that diversity is accepted but not encouraged, while pluralism should be tempered by an attention to social cohesion and minority specificity should blend into the majority. So, social faults are seen as due a) on the one hand, to an inadequate diversity management by public institutions; b) in a more blaming way, to the (self-)isolation of some minorities.

Drawing from interviews, policy documents, and literature, we will show how the fear for ghettoisation is related to the *ethnicisation* of public space: a visible and "separated" diversity is somehow considered more dangerous than socio-economic inequality, and this grounds local policies and initiatives that may compress diversity.

PRELIMINARY DRAFT

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Introduction

In this paper, we analyse policy discourses, initiatives and practices of living together in two neighbourhoods of Milan, Italy, where the share of migrants is particularly high for the national and local context and where, overall, an inflamed political and media debate targeted these two districts, with blaming discourses towards minorities from an immigrant background that have been settling there.

We will analyse how a national integrationist discourse – that is generally labelled, even though with different nuances as "intercultural" – copes with the rise of minority connotations within urban districts, and the development of mixed communities.

Notwithstanding a blurred national policy frame, and an important role played by local actors, we will notice a certain consistency of the integrationist discourse, that uses "social cohesion" as a way to temper and control pluralism and the public manifestation of diversity. When applied to mixed neighbourhoods, this discourse is shaped as a fear for ghettoization – a label that is used to categorize a large bunch of forms of visibilization of minority diversity in public space.

We will ground our analysis on qualitative research materials produced within different projects: in particular, we will analyse interviews made with neighbourhood and city key informants (policy-makers, experts, members of NGOs) in 2013-2014 within the project DIVERCITIES[1] and material from an on-going research on a social mix housing project in via Padova.

To frame our analysis, at first we will introduce immigration (§ 1.1.) to and immigration policy in Italy (§ 1.2.). Then, we will analyse our two case studies (§ 2.1., 2.2), and the policy initiatives (§ 2.3.) and the political debate (§ 2.4.) that developed around them.

In the discussion and conclusion (§ 3), we will sum up findings about the local effects of the Italian integrationist approach towards mixed communities.

To classify national policy discourse and agenda, we refer to the typology in Syrett and Sepulveda (2012), and we will classify Italy as oscillating between a non-policy approach, that ignores diversity, and sees immigrants as temporary and informally tolerated; and an integrationist approach, where diversity is accepted but not encouraged and emphasized. We will operationalize this approach through the analysis of integration initiatives focussing on "interculturalism", "social cohesion" and "integration", trying to disentangle the meaning in local practice of these concepts.

On the other hand, the measures we studied will be analysed in the frame of a typolgy of urban policy to foster "just diversity", based on Fincher & Iveson (2008) and Fainstein (2010), as reinterpreted within Divercities project (see Tasan-Kok *et al.* 2014).

Additionally, we will frame the nuances of the Italian integrationist discourse, focussed on the concept of interculturalism, within the literature that analyses the backlash against multiculturalism (Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010). According to some scholars, interculturalism is seen as a correction of the multiculturalist discourse that is gaining momentum in the political discourse (Meer & Moodod 2012) and can provide a pragmatic fine-tuning of multicultural policies with a greater role played by interaction and accommodation processes (Taylor-Gooby & Waite, 2014).

Actually, in the political and public discourse worries about the erosion of social cohesion are often related to the cities and neighbourhoods' growing social and ethnic diversity, related to the presence of ethnic minorities or international migrants. In the UK, a "community cohesion agenda" has emerged in the aftermath of street disturbances in ethnic neighbourhoods in cities in northern England. The community cohesion discourse considers that the maintenance of cultural difference can negatively affect social cohesion bringing groups to conduct "parallel lives" and that solution should be found in overcoming differences and strengthen "inter community interactions and relations" (Flint & Robinson 2008; Philipps 2006).

In countries of more recent immigration flows, as Italy, "communitarian" discourse and public policies have not emerged clearly, while a more vague and general reference to social cohesion is

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1DIVERCITIES is funded by the European Commission, 7th Framework Programme (Project No. 319970). See www.urbandivercities.eu

indeed present. The growing social diversity of neighbourhoods, related to the presence of international immigrants, has gone hand in hand with an increasing political anxiety about security and order issues, leading to interventions aimed at repression and control (Ambrosini 2013) and social mixing inspired urban policies, meant at diluting immigrant presence and reducing their visibility in public spaces (Briata 2014).

In this respect, our point is that we cannot taken for granted what is intended as "interculturalism", since it can have many nuances – from a conservative multiculturalism (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997), close to an implicitly assimilationist non-policy, to a quasi-multiculturalist pluralism.

In particular, our point is that the focus on "social cohesion" can hide nativist stances, i.e. the subordination of minority and immigrants rights and chances – considered less deserving as less part of the host society – compared to those defined as autochtonous and "more legitimate" members of the society (Castro 2004). In this respect, interculturalist emphasis on social cohesion can be part of a coercive discourse of exclusion and subordination, even though presented as a pragmatic and sympathetic welcoming policy strategy.

1. Framing migration in Italy

1.1. Some background data

According to the National Institute of Statistics, in 2013 foreign residents in Italy are some 4.4 million. If non-resident regular stayers and undocumented migrants are added, an estimate of some 5 million foreigners (8% of the population) can be made (Ismu, 2012). Foreigners were 1.5 million ten years before and less than 400,000 according to 1991 Census. Even though the economic crisis slowed down new entries, these numbers are the outcome of a steep growth, that in Western Europe the last 15 years was second just to the Spanish one.

This growth was matched with a change from a transient to a labour migration, and then to permanent settlement. There has also been a gender rebalancing, partly due to some feminized flows (e.g. from Eastern Europe), but also to family reunifications: at first the number of minors grew, then also newborns. More than 60% of non-Italian minors are born in Italy, and almost 20% of newborns have a foreign parent (Unar, 2013).

At the same time, the origin of migration flows changed. In 1991 immigration was mainly from Morocco, Tunisia and Philippines; ten year after Albanians, Romanians and Chinese grew to the top of the list; nowadays Romania is the first country of origin, and Ukraine entered the top five. This leaves us with a remarkable diversity of immigrant groups, mainly non post-colonial (with a limited "pre-socialization" to Italy) and non-EU. While new flows arrived, the older ones stabilized: nowadays two thirds of non-EU holders of permits of stay have been in Italy for 5 years or more (*ibidem*).

Immigration to Italy is mostly a labour migration, with features that place it within a "Mediterranean" model (King, 2000). Yet, "Italy is in a more advanced phase of the migration transition" (Baldwin-Edwards, 2012: 150) than other Southern European countries. While agriculture, building industry and services play an important role, immigrants are employed also in industrial small business, consistently with Italy's manufacturing specialization.

This grounded also specific settlement patterns: even though the metropolitan areas of Rome and Milan account for some 17% of Italian foreign residents, the distribution (especially in Northern and Central Italy) is particularly scattered, and also larger cities do not see big concentration and segregation areas.

At the same time, Italy shares with other Mediterranean countries immigrants' participation in low-skilled, low-wage, labour-intensive jobs: foreign workers are more than 10% of the workforce, but 35% of unskilled workers (Saraceno et al., 2013). Almost half of migrant workforce is inserted in the tertiary sector. Immigrants' employment has been also disproportionately hit by the crisis. As a reserve army of labour, immigrants have been the first expelled from the labour market and from standard jobs. The crisis had a "more of the same" effect, accumulating further discrimination in wages, labour and contractual conditions. This has significantly widened the gap between immigrants and natives in terms of poverty and material deprivation. Eurostat shows that in EU-15 Italy is second just to Greece in the share of adults at risk of poverty and social exclusion – both for nationals and for foreigners (46% vs. 38,9%). This implies that foreigners are the weakest group of a weak labour market.

At the same time, Italy is an important Mediterranean entry door for refugees and asylum seekers migration, especially when socio-political crises and wars hit peoples leaving in the area: it has happened with the Balkan crises in the 1990s, and it is happening now. According to sources from the Ministry of Interior, migrants landing in Southern Italy summed up to some 100,000 in the first 8 months of 2014 – from Syria, Somalia, Palestine, Egypt, Sudan...

Even though labour and refugee flows can be separated from an analysis and policy point of view, in the public and political debate they overlay and blur, setting the tone of emergency and security-based responses – as we will see in the next paragraph.

1.2. Immigration policy

The institutional counterpart of this Mediterranean model of migration is a late and undefined immigration policy – and an even latest and more blurred immigrant policy, unplanned and with a poor legal framework (Calavita, 2005; Peixoto et al. 2012).

As an emigration country, immigration was not really an issue in the Italian political debate till the 1990s. From then on, the politicization of the migration issues was more a hinder to a pragmatic

policy than a boost to an immigration agenda, while the new pressure on welfare institutions found limited answer. Actually, the political and media discourses towards immigration have seen a frequent negative politicization, usually associated with a media hype on undocumented migration and/or crime – with an influence on law enforcement and on the actual practices to diversity and immigration. This grounds the fact that policies for recognition – and not rarely policies for equity – have been often limited by a "control agenda" (Grillo and Pratt, 2002).

So, Italian immigration policy has been wavering between security concerns, humanitarian claims (expressed by NGOs, the Catholic Church and trade unions) and functionalist perspectives (carried on by pro-business social and political actors) (Zincone, 2011). Immigrant policies, in turn, have been affected by a general weakness in the structuring of the Italian welfare state. An early formal definition of social rights, equalizing migrants and citizens in the access to labour market, education, health and (contributory) subsidies, has not been matched with equal access in practice. Scanty expenditure on social services, together with a territorially variable provision, affected newcomers in welfare, too. In this respect, migrants' problematic access to welfare mirrors the shortcomings of a residual, family- and category-based welfare state (Kazepov, 2010).

The outcome of this regulation is a system that considers migrants temporary in terms of immigration policy, while granting formal rights in some welfare fields, although with an inconsequential and territorially variable implementation.

Does this make up an Italian model of integration? If we think about grand narratives dominating the European debate (the English race relations, the French *intègration républicaine*) the answer is probably no. However, we can see a "mode" consistent with Italy's political culture and welfare state-making – defined as indirect, implicit, subaltern (Ambrosini, 2001; Calavita, 2005; Caponio and Graziano, 2011) – developed more by chance than by design, with an accumulation of local practices, inconsistent national measures, accelerations due to EU influences and court judgments.

The lack of a proper institutional management underlies a "molecular" integration process. As the state has often left local authorities alone in facing migration-related challenges, local policy networks acquired a relevant role (Campomori and Caponio, 2013).

Hence, the local is the arena where most of the participation and integration policy and practice takes place, with a poorly coordinated and effective multi-level governance arrangement.

Though, despite a winding policy-making, a policy puzzle has been incrementally created. In the relevant literature, as in the policy implementation, we can see quite a widespread refusal of traditional European models of integration, whether assimilationism or multiculturalism, in favour of an "intercultural" mid-way.

Such a model has been outlined in relevant policy documents-- the most detailed description being document by the Ministry of Education and drafted by the National Observatory for the Integration

of Foreign Pupils and for the Intercultural Education in 2007, '*The Italian Way for Intercultural Schools and the Integration of Foreign pupils*'.

> '*Choosing an intercultural perspective means we don't limit ourselves neither to assimilation strategies, nor to offsetting measures for immigrant pupils. […] The Italian way to interculture keeps together the ability to recognize and appreciate the differences, and the search for social cohesion, with a new idea of citizenship fitting the present-day pluralism, where a special attention is given to build up a convergence towards common values*'

A more conservative view (rather oriented to a "law and order" approach) of "interculture" can be found in a more recent document, the '*Plan for integration within security. Identity and encounter*'. Released in 2010 under the last Berlusconi government, it is the last general plan on diversity issues published by an Italian government. It is more consistent with neo-assimilationist trends in present-day European policy-making on immigration issues, where the responsibility for integration is mainly individual, while the focus on systemic causes is considered 'ideological'.

> '*We are suspicious of a cultural approach where the encounter takes place among social, ethnic and religious categories, ideologically freezing out individual responsibility in being responsible for the encounter with the other. […] To build up a long-term civic engagement, in a context of growing social pressures, we can just rediscover in our past its basic conditions, revaluing our roots. […] This vision, that we call Open Identity, […] overcomes, on the one hand, the multicultural approach (according to it, different cultures can live together by staying juxtaposed and perfectly separated) and, on the other hand, the assimilationist approach, that aims at neutralizing traditions in the society, in favour of the hosting one)*' (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, Ministero dell'Interno, Ministero dell'Istruzione dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2010)

The main difference between the two documents and approaches, is that the second makes explicit what the common ground is (the national tradition), while the first one is ambiguous, leaving possibly more room to pluralism. This swaying among assimilation and pluralism in Italian interculturalism is exactly what is considered its weak point in the national literature: the risk of this model is that it turns into a halfway in its implementation. Assimilation requirements are not matched with policies to contrast inequality and to support inclusion, while ethnicization trends – strengthened by difficult access to citizenship – are not matched with minority recognition policies,

which results in culturally-based inequalities (Bertolani & Perocco 2013).

Furthermore, discrimination and racism are still an issue, underrated in the public arena. Likewise, institutional discrimination is rampant, and allowed the rise of discriminatory policies, especially at municipal level (Ambrosini, 2013).

The "security laws" passed in 2008 and 2009 strongly reinforced the institutional grounding of discriminatory practices (e.g. in the unequal access to social and civil rights for some groups, especially undocumented migrants), that have been just partially eroded in recent years thanks to judicial decisions and the reception of EU rules.

1.3. Linking the national model to local practices

The linkage between macro-trends of migration, the meso-level of national regulation and the micro-level of local initiatives and interactions is framed via *rescaling* processes and the hyper-diversification of contemporary cities (also) due to migration.

This diversification of migration has also a territorial dimension, that spreads migration in different locales and in different forms, within and outside traditional gateways. The needs of post-industrial economies at national and regional level do conflate with institutional regulation of migration (usually national) in creating place-specific mixes of fluxes, openings and closures (Hollifield 2004; Alexander 2007).

This means also an increasing territorialization of immigrant and immigration policy, that has anyway wider effects, since what happens in a place is tied to more general processes of fragmentation of rights and their accessibility. In a poorly coordinated governance system, as the Italian one, this effect is utmost.

So, in the remaking of scalar configurations, also cities and neighbourhoods have a role in controlling and steering migration, "deflecting" fluxes (Light 2006) and policing migrants, and their visibility in the public space (Varsanyi 2010). The explicit and implicit devolution of responsibilities and State rescaling support differentiated treatments for "diverse" populations, not only through the classical national channel of the access to citizenship, but also through local regulations of denizenship, pertaining labour, housing, and cultural rights.

As a consequence, local initiatives and practice have a relevant role in the frame of national approaches to migration – in the intersection between economic (e.g. housing and labour markets) and institutional processes (e.g. in the agenda setting, in the accessibility of rights). On the other hand, migrants themselves are "scale-makers" (Glick-Schiller & Caglar 2011), that don't just undergo economic and institutional processes in host countries, but also influence them with their transnational links, unplanned actions and interactions, intra- and inter-group networking.

Milan is no exception in this: as the Italian city more inserted into globalized economic flows as a

hub, it is part of a model of regional competitiveness that attracts different types of migrations: the integration and the marginalization of some, "diverse", immigrant and mobile groups can play a role in some economic sectors, cutting labour costs and/or contributing to the internationalization of supply chains.

This model of integration may explain the micro-segregation and ethnicization processes that we use as case studies here: a subordinate integration into the labour market is intertwined with unequal housing markets, and the role played by informal and institutional barriers in accessing better opportunities and information; a reactive networking and the residual position in labour and housing markets can favour close-knit settlements in some blocks.

2. Representations of diversity at city and neighbourhood level: political discourse and policy practice

As a consequence of the above mentioned model of integration, we can state that Italy cannot be considered so much a latecomer in migration policy (having now some 30 years of debate on the issue), but it's still a laggard in defining a strategy. We maintained before that the local level plays a relevant role in making up the actual national policy line. Though, this come more *de facto* than according to a precise strategy. Actually, also at the local level diversity as such is not thematised in relevant local policy documents nor by interviewed key informants.

This has ripple effects on actual initiatives, since such a weak strategy is matched with limited prioritization and resources. At municipal level, the only recent background institutional discourse can be traced back in the electoral programme of the coalition winning the municipal election in 2011 (see § 2.3.) – anyway with important problems in its implementation, as we will see below. The local strategy emerges therefore more via approved initiatives rather than via a strategic plan.

Since "diversity" is not an issue by itself in most Italian policy-making arenas, we will set our analysis mainly on our interviewees' **representation of diversity** more grounded in specific case studies. During our fieldwork, we noticed some difficulties – especially in the views of key officials and policy-makers – to build up an explicit, articulated and reflexive discourse on diversity. Most interviewees are more keen at presenting projects and specific cases rather than to define a broad set of priorities in diversity relations and diversity management. Consequently, there are initiatives addressing diversity (or, at least, some types of diversity), but within a poorly explicit general frame.

In order to address this potential problem, we inquired our interviewees with common stimuli, eliciting their view on specific cases that have been at the centre of the local political and media debate as portraying diversity in an ambiguous way. Our questions aimed at understanding the principles underlying their opinion and arguments on positive and negative dimensions of such

cases.

These cases we inquired our interviewees about are Sarpi-Canonica and Via Padova. We asked them how they see the deployment of diversity in these two neighbourhoods, much debated in recent years in Milan. Before going through the interviewees' representations, we provide a description of the two neighbourhoods and the recent urban and social processes that have affected them.

Fig. 1. Map of Milan[2]
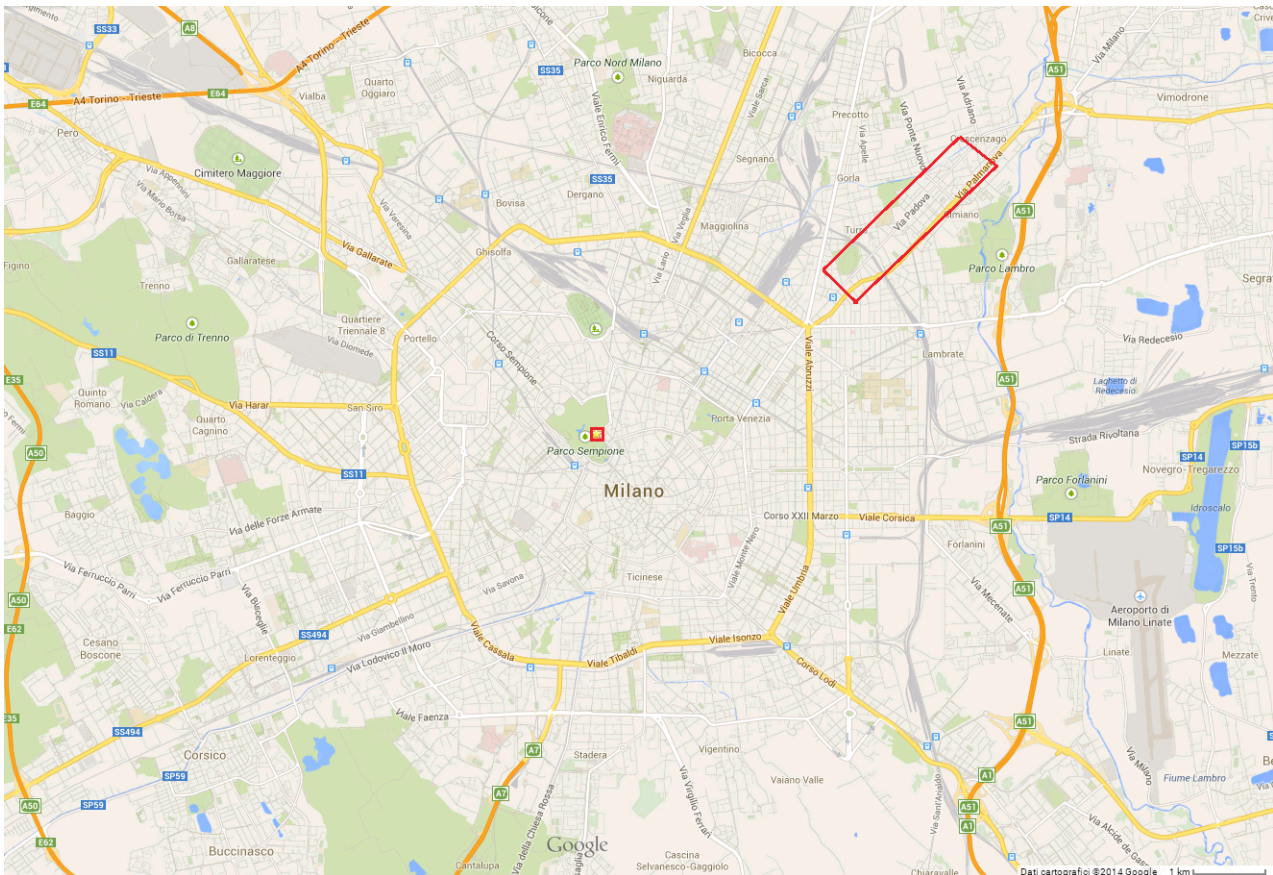
2.1 Sarpi-Canonica neighbourhood

Sarpi-Canonica is an historical, middle class neighbourhood, close to the centre of the city of Milan, just before the Sempione city park. The neighbourhood is defined as the Chinatown of Milan, yet it lacks the characters of Chinatowns in other world cities: the resident population is in fact Italian for the 90-95%, while the Chinese presence is mainly visible in the commercial activities (Manzo 2012). The neighbourhood also lacks the architectural elements (such as gates) which mark the urban space of Chinatowns as tourist attractions (Aytar & Rath 2012)

Over the last years Sarpi-Canonica neighbourhood has faced contentious dynamics between different groups – Chinese retailers and Italian residents – over different uses of public space and neighbourhood functions (corner shopping, residential, wholesaling). The functional mix –

2 Case neighbourhoods are highlighted in red.

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residential and productive – has been a characteristic of the neighbourhood since the beginning of the 20th century, when this area was integrated in the urban knit of the city. The Chinese presence is also very ancient: the first Chinese migrants settled here in the 1920s, attracted by the presence of workshops and cheap accommodation; they were employed in textile activities (silk) and leather making. The neighbourhood started to transform from the 1950s, with a first real estate development, that strongly intensified in the 1980s when Sarpi-Canonica, as other historical neighbourhood, became attractive for middle class residents, leading to an expulsion and substitution of the lower class population (Monteleone & Manzo 2010).

During the 1980s and 1990s new commercial activities run by Chinese people (bars, restaurants, groceries, bags shops etc.) appear. Lately, in the last 15 years, whole sale trading shops have spread in the neighbourhood, mainly in the narrow streets around the central Paolo Sarpi avenue (ibidem)[3]. Over the last years the neighbourhood has experienced a progressive separation between Chinese retailers and Italian (mainly home owners) residents: a separation between the ground floor – where the shops, both whole sale and not are – and the higher floors where people (mainly Italian) dwell. The whole sale retailers with their loading and downloading activities indeed used to cause annoyances to the local mobility. Over the years, residents have increasingly complained about the occupation of public space, traffic congestion etc., asking public authorities for more police control and even the displacement of the whole sale activities. Organized protest against the whole sale trading have been organized by the residents' association "ViviSarpi" (Live Sarpi) which was founded in 2005 by the neighbourhood committee established 6 years earlier (Manzo 2012). Along the concrete problems related to the whole sale trading, the Italian residents protest was imbued with identity and safety issues, referring to a Chinese "invasion", the overturn of the neighbourhood local identity, the immigrant threat to safety (a very common discourse in Italy since the 1990s).

As a response to the Italian residents requests, the local authorities have taken different measures in the attempt to eradicate Chinese wholesalers from the district (*ibidem*): mainly intensifying control on loading and downloading activities, prohibiting the use of lorries etc. Chinese retailers have felt more and more the target of the local police special attention and repression, until April 2006 when their exasperation led to a violent revolt, with a march in the street gathering around 2 hundreds people.

After the revolt, who hit the news in Italy and abroad, local authorities tried to reach an agreement with the Chinese whole sale traders, proposing to create a commercial platform in the peripheries (of the three areas proposed, the closest was 12 km from the neighbourhood). As an agreement was not reached, the authorities decided for a zoning measure, aimed at discouraging specific activities

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3 The settlement of the whole sale activities have been favoured by a national law for commercial deregulation at the end of the 90s and the substantial incapacity of local authorities to govern urban on going transformations through city planning policies (Briata 2014, Monteleone & Manzo 2010).

and uses of public space, such as those related to whole sale trading (Briata 2014): a limited traffic access zone was initially established in the neighbourhood and finally, in 2011, via Paolo Sarpi was made a pedestrian street. As a consequence of these measures, a few Chinese whole sale traders have moved while other have converted their activities into retailing. Currently, the neighbourhood is experiencing a process of (further) gentrification and increasingly becoming a leisure and night life area.

To the purposes of this paper it is worth to mention that what was clearly a conflict about different uses of public space, has been presented – in the media and political discourse – as a clash between an ethnic minority and the Italian population (Briata 2014, Monteleone & Manzo 2010). Moreover, the local authorities have showed to be unable to mediate and reach an agreement with the Chinese citizens, insisting in proposing an image of them as an homogenous community; instead, a number of different positions cut across the group of the Chinese retailers (Briata recalls the presence of 16 different association of Chinese retailers) as well as different point of views and needs are present among the Italian residents and shop keepers; finally it is worth to mention the presence of ALES, an association of traders which gathers both Italian and Chinese traders.

The new local administration, in power from 2011, has not questioned the measures enforced by the precedent administration. Yet, they have showed to be more open to dialogue with the different actors involved, as some initiatives they have promoted testify: the round table *"Towards a nicer and liveable neighbourhood for everyone. Resources and perspectives fro the Bramante-Canonica-Sarpi area"* was organized in November 2012. In this occasion the City councillors have debated about the future of the neighbourhood with the Chinese vice consul, the president of the Coordination of the Milanese neighbourhoods' associations, the president of ViviSarpi, the president of Giulio Aleni association (a Chinese association for cultural integration), and the president of the association "via Padova è meglio di Milano", that we will present in the next section[4].

2.2 Via Padova neighbourhood

Via Padova is a four km avenue, located at the centre of a triangle-shaped urban area in the northern-east part of the city. It is delimitated by two big avenues, Viale Monza and Viale Palmanova, both ending up in Piazzale Loreto.

Annexed to the city of Milan in 1923, it has been traditionally an immigration area, with internal

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4 Another relevant project is "Beyond Chinatown": it is an on going project started in 2012, funded by the EU, with Comune di Milano as one of the partners; the project mainly focuses on Chinese second generations, and aims, among other things, at reinforcing social participation, sociability and encounter between young Italian-Chinese and Chinese newcomers.

flows from the southern and eastern regions of the country, first, and international flows from Europe and other continents starting from the 1980s.

Until the 1970s it was a working class neighbourhood. Recently, it has attracted middle class residents, who have settled in apartment blocks that rose up next to poorer and traditional working class buildings. A marked social and functional mix is evident (Arrigoni 2010).

The wider neighbourhood has one of the highest percentage of immigrant residents at a urban level, corresponding to roughly 30% of the local population (against an average percentage of 16%)[5]. This is why Via Padova is considered as *the* Milanese multiethnic neighbourhood par excellence.

The actual avenue can be roughly divided into 4 sections: the strong symbolical physical boundary represented by the railway bridge separates the first more lively and dense part from the more peripheral ones; it is in this "multiethnic pentagon" (ibidem, p. 175) that the immigrant population concentrates (up to 50% of immigrant residents live in a few blocks) and is most visible in public space, due to numerous "ethnic" shops and commercial activities – with no consistent concentration of specific geographical origin, but what can be defined as a situation of "superdiversity" (Vertovec 2007).

In February 2010, Via Padova hit the headlines when a young Egyptian man was murdered by another guy from the Dominican Republic, after a futile discussion on the bus. The body was left 5 hours on the ground waiting for judiciary disposition; the difficulties to proceed with a rapid burial as the Muslim religion foresees, provoked anger among the young man's comrades, leading to a night of street disturbances with burnt cars and broken windows. These episodes strongly contributed to the negative and stigmatised image of the neighbourhood.

The then centre-right led local administration dealt with emerging problems by introducing measures centred on security and public order, and in particular, ordinances and regulations aimed to limit shops opening hours[6]. At the same time, police checks were carried in the buildings where immigrant were most present and the centre-right wing parties and groups marched in the streets asking for "safety and legality".

Local associations counteracted it by showing the problem in Via Padova was not the foreigners, but the lack of public action in social integration. Since May 2010, they have organised a yearly festival, "Via Padova è meglio di Milano" (via Padova is better than Milan - VPMM) with the involvement of more than 50 associations and institutions in order to promote social cohesion and "overturn the neighbourhood stigma". In 2013 VPMM has become an association, gathering local associations, retailers, groups and citizens which span on a wide political spectrum, as one of the aim was to claim autonomy from the traditional political fronts: parishes, the Casa della Carità

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5 Data refers to 2011 (Milano Statistica 2011).
6 The ordinance issued on 18th March 2010 was aimed at "prevent and contrast urban decay and to guarantee urban security and safety".

(House of Charity)[7], the Casa della Cultura Islamica (House of Islamic Culture), the Officina Theatre, Comitato Vivere in Zona 2 (a district residents' association), the association 'City of Sun – Friends of the Trotter Park' among many others.

While experiencing understandable problems of organization – due to fact that many different actors are involved and via Padova being a 4 km street – and also scarcity of funding, the festival has attained a good public visibility. Yet, one of the problems seems to be the inclusion of citizens in the organizations and participation.

> *"The festival is once a year for two years, it's a festival for social cohesion which is trying to root in the territory, to become a territorial actor; (...) we needed two years to focus the aims… at the beginning the idea was launched and the organized structures, cooperatives, churches, schools and libraries have immediately subscribed. Citizens instead there were only a few… I was a citizen that already worked in the neighbourhood. (Informer, VPMM)*

As a mean of organizing such a complex context, and to gain visibility, the Festival is divided in four "poles" which corresponds to four different parts of the street. One of the "poles" is constituted by the Trotter Park, a public park where the association 'City of Sun – Friends of the Trotter Park' (CSFTP) a volunteering association founded in 1994 by parents and teachers of the school 'City of Sun'[8], operate. Born to lobby for the preservation and renewal of this historical heritage and school, over the years the association has focused on education, cultural heritage and environmental activities; later it has mobilized for public education and finally the focus shifted more towards community commitment and social cohesion, also to reverse the stigmatization of Via Padova made by anti-immigration politicians.

CSFTP's point of view on diversity is based on the acknowledgement of diversity as a constitutive part of the neighbourhood and the park, that has been long a meeting place of people from different social classes, origins, backgrounds – including gender. As the President of the Association claims:

> *"Beside integration, I would consider social cohesion as a goal of this association: the school, the association, other institutions – here [in the park] there's a world, like a fish tank. That is: a microcosm where different species and plants live together – and that has a reason in its diversity, since*

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7 It is a Catholic foundation founded in 2002, providing social services and organizing cultural events, with a focus on socially disadvantaged groups.
8 The school in the park was created in 1922 (on the site of a former trotter) to allow disadvantaged children to be taught in a healthy environment.

diversities together made up its beauty".

Somehow paradoxically, a CSFTP's weakness is that it is too much focused on the park, failing to connect with the neighbourhood at large and opening to other activities, not only related to children and parents.

> *"(...) Trotter (...) is a "pole" which was already constituted before by itself, but a "pole" which is a little bit of an enclave because it lives in its cocoon (...) the first year the final event [of the festival] was organized there, it was a success because it is appropriate place... but one had to enter inside to see it, the street was not involved (...) they are advantaged because being a school and the teachers being very active, they can easily have a public, which are the users of the school; while the others [organizers of the festival] have to struggle... the "pole" [of the Trotter] coincides with what they always do, they don't do anything specific or special for the festival"* (Key informant, VPMM)

Despite this and other problems - related to the internal organization of the association and the difficulties in involving minority members in the association management and programming - the capacity of CSFTP to consider diversity as a constitutive part of Trotter identity (hence flexible and accommodating different groups) is quite remarkable. Spaces of interaction created seem effective, since coping with needs common to different target groups (e.g. after school activities) without 'segregating' specific categories of users.

2.3 The change of local government: a shift of paradigm?

The measures taken in Sarpi-Canonica and via Padova contentious situations exemplify the approach of the previous Milanese local administration towards immigrant presence and diversity[9]. Coherently with the national discourse, which have associated the concentration of immigrants in certain neighbourhoods with issues of safety, urban decay and the risk of petty crime, local policies and discourse at the local level in Milan have not promoted diversity nor endorse the positive impact of immigrant presence in the city. Urban conflicts in Milan as in other Italian cities have followed a well known script: in front of the feeling of loss of control related to urban transformations (social, demographic, commercial etc.) those who occupy a relatively advantaged position (Italian established

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9 Since immigration has become a relevant phenomenon in Milan, and before the current centre-left administration, the city has been governed by: '93-'97 Marco Formentini – Lega Nord; '97-'06 Gabriele Albertini – Forza Italia; Letizia Moratti –Forza Italia/PDL).

residents in general) invoke the intervention of public authorities to restore a social order that cannot be attained through endogenous and informal social processes. Municipal authorities are generally requested to enact repressive and preventive measures to soothe conflict and restore a semblance of control over the urban environment, 'neutralising' the outsiders (IReR 2006, Allasino et al. 2000). In the last 15 years Milanese local authorities have shown to be unengaged with immigration-related changes in the city and have remain committed to a parochial and ethnocentric vision of it, also missing the opportunity to promote diversity as an economic asset (Marzorati & Quassoli 2012).

Milan has had a relevant change in local government in 2011, when – for the first time since the introduction of the direct election of mayor in 1993 – a leftist coalition won the elections. The new mayor, Giuliano Pisapia, is a libertarian lawyer, also committed to minority rights.

Pisapia has won the elections after an electoral campaign in which diversity management related to urban policies has been a very heated issue: immigration (e.g. the management of high concentration areas), religion (e.g. the building and location of a mosque), ethnic diversity (the Roma encampments), sexual orientation and new families (e.g. the local register for civil partnerships).

> *"This local government came in office after a campaign where issues like a great mosque, Via Padova as an interesting place were mentioned. Hot issues, that were able to create discontent, are in the political programme" (SW).*

The leftist coalition – with an inflamed rhetoric typical of campaigning, that focus more on cleavages than on continuity – pointed it out under the 2011 election:

> '*Parochialism and closure are not a destiny, but the outcome of an inept and short-sighted ruling class. Projects for international cooperation and Expo can be an extraordinary chance to start a new season*' (Comitato Pisapiaxmilano, 2011).

The change brought by the new administration in the approach to diversity issues seem to be radical. In particular, initiatives related to immigrants and LGBTQ rights mark a radical change with the past. In this respect, politically committed interviewees have observed:

> *"In the new local government diversity is not contrasted to normalcy. The multiplicity is a richness that has a part in the belonging to the urban community" (FDC).*
>
> *"For years there was a narrow-minded administration: for years the 'Chinese challenge' in Milan was just the Chinese wholesaling in Via Sarpi! [...] The change in the discourse and approach to diversity has been radical and fast"*

(CS)

"With the new administration there's a new attention. The round tables with the previous one was frustrating: they didn't even faced up to you, or addressed you directly" (HT)

"We found a local administration that was not used to work on citizenship problems. In the previous legislature, immigration issues were classified under 'disadvantaged adults'! Disconnecting immigration and disadvantage changed the perspective inside the administration" (GW)

Quite a number of interviewees, anyway, do underline also continuities. As for the contents of the diversity policy, initiatives like the participation into the network of Intercultural cities – that also held its second meeting in Milan in 2007 – or the programme "Milan for co-development", aimed at linking immigrant communities, local organizations and international cooperation, were both signed by the previous mayor. On the negative side, the rhetorical turn was not always matched with a change in policies – e.g. in the case of Roma, still stigmatized and marginalized.

As for the governance of diversity, some interviewees focus on lasting problems of departmentalism, and delegation to non-governmental actors – in case with a change of nuance according to the local political majority: more about delegation and 'big society' ideas with the right-wing local government, more about social participation driven by public institutions with the left.

A slow change in practices can be connected to institutional inertia and to an unfavourable institutional frame (e.g. a limited legitimization at national level). And we can identify also an influence coming from the state of the political debate, where the anti-diversity discourse – especially anti-immigration one – is considered effective in the electoral arena. So, it is considered "wise" not to raise issues that can be used by populist and xenophobic movements, keeping a "low-profile".

"I worked in the strategic planning of [name of European capital], that was exactly based on the idea of diversity [...] This is an issue in Milan, too, but there's no strategic plan based on these keywords [...] Making diversity an explicit issue is a political problem. If you draw a plan on diversity, on the other side there will instantly be someone telling you: 'Mind normalcy! Why should you mind about marginal fringes?' There's a part that considers diversity as a negative value" (RG)

Another critical issue is related to the fragmentation of policies and the uncoordination of practices. In particular urban policy strategy, that should lead renewal of dilapidated and disadvantaged neighbourhoods is widely disconnected from a policy strategy towards immigration, diversity and

minorities, which is often up to welfare and security policy. It's not a case, for example, that national resources dedicated to local (city and neighbourhood) integration programmes (e.g. the European Fund for the Integration of migrants – EFI) is managed through the Ministry of Interior, that allocates resources to local public and private actors, usually operating within welfare policy.

Though, in Milan coordination between urban and social policy is partially achieved just via the subsidiary role of some important non-profit players, e.g. the Cariplo Foundation, that issues also calls for community development (Semprebon 2014). Nevertheless, also in this case diversity management is taken into accountm but hardly as an explicit priority, and this becomes a problem in the continuity of actions addressing mixed communities.

The political turn of the new administration may have included pluralist elements in a prevalent integrationist policy view, and in case a new activism in areas where non-policy or exclusionary policies were in practice.

> *'the foundations of big social problems (like loneliness, addiction, poverty, a full social life for the disabled, the support and promotion of aging, the integration of migrants) can be found in the cultural maps, income and power structures, social cultures, the quality and intensity of relations [...] a society made up by isolated individuals, mutually distrustful, fearful about diverse people, feeds a situation that increases social problems, weakens the chance to cope with them, follows repressive shortcuts [...] a secular political approach allows them society to be not only more just, but also to progress faster and to be richer, as the experience of the largest European metropolises show' (Doc_6).*

Yet, the mainstream view policy-makers have on diversity frames it more as a problem than as a resource. The nuances of the discourse change according to the type of diversity taken into account, being the most problematic when immigrant and ethnic diversity is considered.

Foreign immigrants not belonging to the creative and upper classes are hardly seen by interviewed policy makers as bringing a potentially positive contribution to the city. The focus is mainly on inequality, discrimination and risks for social cohesion, even though there are some (scanty) signs of a cultural change taking place in some city-level initiatives.

In general equity and equal opportunity policies aimed at reducing disadvantages associated with diversity are rated more positively than policies for recognition or favouring encounter. There are indeed some formal praises on diversity as enrichment, and of the need to create tolerance and to overcome conflicts in order to live in an urban environment. However, diversity is mainly seen as a

negative issue "*to ride over*" (Respondent A1_6).

> "*What do you mean by diversity? Disadvantaged target groups and populations?*" (Respondent A1_4)
>
> "*Diversity is a problem beyond certain thresholds. There's an effort to look at immigration as an opportunity, but it causes problems that cannot be kept hidden.*" (Respondent A1_3)

Therefore, we can maintain that the shift of paradigm is only partial, as the main approach is still integrationist/intercultural, given that recognition is often a subordinated priority to social cohesion and interaction, that more or less implicitly includes the idea that diversity should be controlled.

2.4. Representations of diversity in neighbourhood policy

We have to consider different nuances that our interviewees give to the relation between neigbourhoods and diversity in Milan. In a way, it is not considered just negative. Diversity is considered a challenge, with both risks and opportunities. The risky side is inequality, and the concentration of disadvantaged groups in mono-functional districts. Opportunities are related to the appraisal of the contribution that diverse people can give to social cohesion and the local economy in mixed neighbourhoods.

There's a strand of recent housing policy – using policy tools different from the traditional council houses – focussing on the mix of different urban populations and community animation to support their living together: young couples, retired elderly, students and disabled people in the area of housing and development policy are seen as groups whose role can be appreciated if they are supported in dedicating time and skills to the community (Semprebon 2014).

So, in comparative terms, housing policy does share a more diversity-aware vision than other policy areas. The main focus here is on "functional differentiation and diversity", taken into account for the risk of accumulation of disadvantages and of having poverty "stuck" in mono-functional areas, potential ghettoes. Though, as mentioned above, diversity often is not a primary focus in social housing or neighbourhood renewal. Rather, it is seen as a disturbing element to be taken under control. In this sense, the attention paid to diversity is somehow "reactive", and targets its potentially negative meanings in policy management. Positive aspects of diversity just refer to specific groups that the city should attract – not so much to existing cultural and social diversity. A quote from a key official in housing policy can be a good example in this respect.

> "*In the management of public housing, the main focus is on diversity as a*

problem: paying attention to ghettoization risks; answering the demand of different targets. When we think about the public building stock at large, and the maximization of its value, we think about another kind of diversity: creative, cultural, social (even antagonist) groups, and the non-profit sector" (Respondent A1_3)

As a consequence, most interviews also show that when neighbourhood diversity is matched with the *ethnicisation* of public space, diversity is seen more as a real danger than as a challenge. In this respect, our key informants support predominantly and implicitly an integrationist approach, where diversity is accepted but not encouraged. Pluralism should be tempered by an attention to social cohesion – and social cohesion usually and implicitly refers to the worries of natives, and to the need to blend minority specificity by mixing with the majority (even though not to the point to support assimilation).

Ethnicisation is strongly associated to "ghettoisation" (where the concept does not refer primarily to poverty and stigmatization, but to separateness), while *mixité* and the promotion of dialogue are to be supported. The frequent use of the concept of "ghetto" is not so much associated to poverty and stigmatization, but mainly to an "unrelated diversity".

The echo of riots in UK and France is somehow present in policy-makers' mind, and their goal is to avoid spatial concentration of visible minorities – starting from the advantage point that Milan has a low territorial segregation (Motta 2005; Musterd 2005; Mingione *et al.* 2008).

"*Milan is a multiethnic city: almost 20% of the population has a foreign citizenship, numbers are much higher in some neighbourhoods and overcome 50% in some blocks. Though, there aren't significant cases of urban segregation: [in the same neighbourhood] there are Milanese middle-class families, Italian or foreign working class families, immigrant small entrepreneurs... you cannot even tell who makes the cultural hallmark of a neighbourhood, because even where a group prevails – as in some case with Chinese migrants – there's anyway a large number of Philipino, Latino-Americans, Arabs, Egyptians...*" (DC)

Though, some "micro-ghettoes" worry our interviewees: Roma encampments, individual buildings where migrants or poor people concentrate. Also the mention of security issues and blaming for "self-segregating" may be associated discourses. This applies to the case of *Sarpi-Canonica*, where the "bi-national" representation of a middle-class neighbourhood is considered by some more risky, and anyway less advisable, than the multi-ethnic encounter in a poorer area like *Via Padova*.

Examples of this discourse can be drawn from excerpts referring to these district. When talking

about Milan's "Chinatown", which is not a poor, dilapidated neighbourhood, ghettoization is not associated to inequality, but to visibility of diversity.

> "*A tribal drift is always dangerous* [...] *Urban spaces must be social spaces*" (Respondent A2_1)

> "*The problem with Via Sarpi is that it is not diversified enough.* […] *We may see two options: one is the ethnicisation, creating a Chinatown. But this option was not appreciated by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, neither Italian nor Chinese. Perhaps the latter just wanted to avoid conflicts, and self-censored themselves? Don't know [...] The other one is about diversification, working on the Italian and Chinese commercial offer. The pedestrianization has this goal, to create a shopping attraction. And this was the goal, also because the neighbourhood is much more complex than Chinatown. There's a growing Arab community, there are young households and students, since the rents are still affordable. It's a chance to create a plural and interesting – but not poor – area, which is quite rare in Milan.*" (Respondent A1_2)

Interestingly enough, as already noted thoroughly throughout Europe by Koopmans *et al.* (2005) also claims from minority members tend to share this common frame. Minority key informants show that the integrationist discourse is quite pervading, even though it may contain an implicit subordination of minorities to the national culture.

> "*Emphasizing the ethnic features of a neighbourhood is risky: our bet for the future is to avoid spaces of belonging of individual communities, but mobile and intertwined communities*" (Respondent A2_1)

> "*The Italian solution is not a multiculturalism in the Anglo-Saxon way, that would allow a Chinatown. The Italian intercultural way doesn't love ghettoization; it's more about interaction in diversity than about a multi- that doesn't crossbreed*" (Respondent A1_2).

So, even for actors praising recognition of minorities, visibilization of diversity should be somehow subordinated to social cohesion: an "accommodation" can take place if diversity is limited, and interbreeding. So, their critical view on diversity management in Italy is more related to the fact that not enough has been done to create social cohesion than to recognize diversity – thus actly strongly

within the boundaries of the Italian integrationist model, that may prove to be stronger than it can be supposed by just looking at its blurred definition..

To sum up, in the case of *Sarpi-Canonica* interviewed key informants are aware of a possible pluralistic solution for the neighbourhood, but it has been played down in favour of a more integrationist discourse – with a vision shared by most of our interviewees, also the one from an immigration background (including Chinese). Interestingly, a positive functional diversity just means that different shopping facilities are available – while probably the functional diversity was higher before (when wholesalers were side by side with retailers).

It is interesting to compare the discourse on *Sarpi-Canonica* with the one related to *Via Padova*, that show how much the (progressive stance) of an integrationist discourse against ghettoization doesn't take into account structural inequality. As we said, *Via Padova* is much a poorer neighbourhood than *Sarpi-Canonica*, and underwent a very negative politicization. So, our key informants in the progressist field seem to appreciate more *Via Padova* than *Sarpi-Canonica* because of its rich NGO fabric and grassroots activism, that is considered as aimed at building a pacific living together.

> "*Via Padova is a case for the never-ending germination of social and cultural activities*" (FDC)

> "*Via Padova is more of a lab with a wide mix and interesting things happening in its surroundings: Trotter park, Casa della Carità, the Islamic Center...*" (SB)

> Via Padova is a "*true social lab, for its unique features: multiethnicity, retail network, cultural initiatives, historical working-class fabric, associations, churches... From that experience many ideas and suggestions have come, and they can be useful for the whole city*" (Doc_6).

It is interesting to note that she same recognition and appreciation is not given to the associations which are indeed present in Sarpi, not even when they entail Italian-Chinese mixing. At the round table on the future of Sarpi that we mentioned before (§ 2.1.) one of the person invited by the city council was the President of "Via Padova è meglio di Milano"; with the idea – we speculate – that the Sarpi-Canonica neighbourhood could learn from the via Padova "model".

Obviously, a discourse on the risk of ghettoization is also present for *Via Padova*, and refers to poverty and accumulation of disadvantages – and also to the limited public action to support diversity – all ingredients (wealth, public support) that were instead present in the renewal of Via

Sarpi. In Via Padova "*besides few positive cases* [...] *people tolerate each other with suspect, in an atmosphere of social dangerousness*" (DC), while in Via Sarpi "*hanging around is pleasant. It's a valuable area, becoming more valuable: even those that opened cheap shops are refurbishing. Chinese living there seem attached to the context: money and investments play a role.*" (DC)

So – and not surprisingly – on the one hand encounter of diversity is considered easier in wealthy areas, but, on the other hand, visibility of a specific cultural diversity is seen as jeopardizing social cohesion – perhaps even more than ethnicized inequality.

3. Discussion and conclusions

Local and national discourses on integration and interculturalism we analyse show a public discourse much more focussed on reducing negative effects of diversity on social cohesion, primarily through a nativist vision that requires adaptation from those labelled as "diverse", and secondarily working on social participation and inclusion by facing inequality. A discourse on recognition and appreciation of diversity and its potential positive role is much less present, and usually cames as a reaction to negative politicization, blaming and labelling of mixed communities operated by political entrepreneurs of fear.

The analysis of new discourses emerging after the last local elections show that there are signs of a changing discourse. It is mainly operated through symbolic policies, while actual measures able to affect practices are not yet so evident.

A path dependency in the organization of initiatives at national, city and neighbourhood level can hinder a more radical change. A shift in policy prioritization is not enough, in a context where actual resources and strategies are limited and blurred.

From a theoretical point of view, this also means a shift from a consolidated literature about the lack of an explicit policy model about immigration and diversity in Mediterranean Coutries, and in Italy, in particular.

Notwithstanding a "non-policy" in many areas of diversity and immigration management, and the lack of an explicit discourse on diversity, we can see quite a consistent approach underway.

Many interviewees complained about the lack of a clear integration model, even though we cannot downplay the consistent support for an integrationist model that emerges from both interviews and policy documents. This intercultural model, considered specifically "Italian" in its features, is reported as not grounded in traditional assimilationist or multicultural paradigms, and (somehow contradictorily) aimed both and recognizing diversity and to limit it in favour of social cohesion.

If the international literature raised some doubts on this model, but also showed that it seems to gain momentum as a pragmatic correction of multiculturalism (Taylor-Gooby and Waite 2013), it is not a point here to theorize about it. Rather, to understand what our interviewees mean by

"interculturalism". Even though there are different nuancens, what is common is the idea that cultural difference should have a (limited) public visibility only in a context of *mixité*. Therefore, formal praises for diversity go hand in hand with its limited recognition (Grillo and Pratt 2002). In this respect, policies considered as diversity-related may well be compressing diversity.

One of the keystone in this integrationist argument labelled as 'intercultural' is the focus on social cohesion: a quite shared idea is that social contact and mix are a basic condition for success, and hence there should be a specific attention on that side, since its achievement is not spontaneous.

Clearly enough, the just mentioned effort to foster social cohesion via social contact and mix is not by itself a proxy of an integrationist discourse. It may become such for the nuances it has: often this seems to imply that diversity should be kept under control, and mix and social contact are a way to achieve this goal.

This results from the many interviewees that consider a specific targeting of minorities only as ghettoising, and creating too much separateness at societal level. Sometimes, fostering mixes and social contact seems to be connected with a fear for negative politicization that may hit diversity policy and minority targeting, or with an implicit nativism that requires those classified as locals to be involved as (primary) policy targets, too.

Diversity seems to be considered positive, acceptable and enriching when it's not too much related to public visibility and inequality. Rarely there's an appreciation of minorities, especially those stigmatized, by themselves: the two discourses on inequality and recognition stay largely separated.

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