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The Potentials of Digital Collaborative Platforms for the Innovation of Refugees' Reception Strategies

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Abstract

The article presents a reflection on the possibilities that the information technologies and new apps developed in the context of the sharing economy may have in the processes of receiving refugees. In recent years, the narrative of migratory phenomena has emphasised the idea of an “out of control emergency”, negatively affecting the ability to imagine constructive answers to arising situations. After a review of definitions, numbers and reception practices in Italy, the article focuses on the inclusive models made possible by using digital collaborative platforms. The case of Refugees Welcome, an association that uses an online platform to connect people offering a room with refugees looking for a place in which to live is analysed in order to better understand its working model, using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. The conclusion provides a reflection on the potential that this kind of approach may have in promoting social inclusion processes and supporting active citizenship among all individuals both directly and indirectly involved in the association's activities.

Keywords: digital collaborative platforms, refugees, social inclusion, social equity, immigration.

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Introduction

The refugee emergency paradigm pervades contemporary media narratives, and policies assimilate long-established asylum seekers and newly arrived refugees with stable immigrants. A “culture of emergency hospitality” (Agier, 2015) is increasingly spreading, which risks marginalising programmatic initiatives aimed at an organised and structured reception and inclusion.

If on the one hand, technology amplifies the migratory phenomenon and its emergency aspects, then on the other it produces an “atomisation of the social actor”, shattering the individual into a thousand images. The refugee becomes “invisible”, their singularity and distinctive features ignored and forgotten. The migrant is part of an indistinct community, seeking refuge and appealing for grounds of solidarity in an undifferentiated way.

The perspective that we will take in this work is intended to explore the contribution that technology makes to the social equity and inclusion processes in the particular socio-political situation in which we live. We will ask ourselves, then, about the relationships that technology can promote and support in the web era in complex contexts such as migration.

The second paragraph briefly introduces the immigration and refugee phenomenon in Italy. Some quantitative data is provided, and the current system for receiving and granting humanitarian permits is described. The third paragraph outlines the current state of the debate on the sharing economy and on its relatively positive effects in the social sphere. We then move on (paragraph four) to highlight the impact that sharing platforms are already having in migration practices, paying particular attention to the role that aspects of sharing and cooperation can play in developing better reception strategies. These reflections concretely apply to the presentation of the case study (paragraph 5) concerning an association which, thanks also to the use of a sharing platform, promotes highly personalised and inclusive pathways for asylum seekers. The conclusions outline some suggestions regarding the innovative charge that sharing platforms can bring to the field of refugee reception, highlighting the strengths of the proposed model.

Reception of refugees in Italy

Until very recently, Italy has been a country predominantly characterised by emigration phenomena, both internally and to other nations: regional migration from the South of Italy to the North in the ‘60s and ‘70s, or emigration to the United States or South American countries in the ‘30s or, more recently, to “leading” countries of the European Union (Fiorucci & Catarci, 2013). On 1 January 2017 the incidence of foreigners in Italy was 8.3%, and that of non-EU foreigners was

about 5.7%¹, which is slightly higher than the EU average. Among the countries hosting more foreigners than Italy are Spain (9.5%) and Germany (11.2%), while those with the highest percentage of foreigners are Luxembourg (47.6%), Cyprus (16.4%) and Austria (15.2%).



Figure 1: Trend of the Italian population with foreign citizenship 2004-2019. Source: Istat, January 2019

Residence permits are primarily issued for work and family reasons

Less frequent, but of particular interest for the purposes of this analysis, are the permits issued to migrants who do not fall into the category of economic migrants, i.e. refugees and asylum seekers. Refugee status is granted “to any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951). The permit entitles, among other things, the bearer to work and to access the education system. The granting of subsidiary protection has very similar characteristics. Unfortunately, these rights, guaranteed on paper, are often not applied in reality, and those who obtain humanitarian permits often remain excluded from the world of work and education, failing to fit into effective social integration pathways.

In 2018, moreover, the percentage of rejection of humanitarian permits was 67%⁶. This proportion increased in 2019, reaching peaks of 80%. This data

⁵ http://noi-italia.istat.it/index.php?id=3etx_usercento_centofe%5Bcategoria%5D=4etx_usercento_centofe%5Bdove%5D=EUROPAetx_usercento_centofe%5Baction%5D=-showetx_usercento_centofe%5Bcontroller%5D=CategoriaecHash=d170833fd9cd864-e7f485bbe06b06416

⁶ http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/riepilogo_anno_2018.pdf

places Italy among the countries in Europe with the lowest percentage of asylum applications that result in international protection⁷.

If we examine the data, it therefore emerges that the numbers are not as high as they might seem according to the media narrative: even if the number of applications for protection and asylum has increased in recent years, only a portion of them are actually accepted (Colombo, 2019).

Over the years, Italy has unconsciously developed an “isomorphic model” of hospitality (Ambrosini, 2018) that delimits internal and external spaces at national borders, that tries to define what is inside and what is outside, and that delimits not only physical but also cultural, economic and religious territories (Foucault, 2017). The extent to which this model responds to the needs of a constantly-changing, ubiquitous, increasingly technologically-advanced global society that is always “in transit” (Augé, 2015) is unclear: does it make sense to draw the boundaries of what is inside and what is outside in today’s world?

Meier (2017; 2016) suggests that we imagine boundaries as “institutions” in the broad sense, defined, determined, historically and socially lived, which, as such, have a mobile and dynamic nature in space and time. Cuticca (2015) imagines “elastic borders” that stretch, contract and multiply. Since 1991, more than 28 thousand kilometres of new international borders have been established, and another 24 thousand kilometres have been subject to restrictions and demarcations (Barry and Gullarmou, 2016). We could think of “polymorphous and non-linear” borders, which, because of their polysemantic character, hold political, military, legal, economic, religious, ideological and social functions. The migrants in this “floating mosaic” are on both sides of the borders, playing the role of “people in transit” and constituting real “communities in transit” (Augé, 2015). Can such communities in transit be accommodated according to evolved reception models that do not simply refer to the satisfaction of basic needs? The responses that society puts forward today can essentially be traced to two attitudes: the “progressive” attitude that tends towards solidarity and inclusive objectives, and the “sovereign” attitude that sees immigrants as a threat to stability and national order, and prefers individualism to the community sharing of goods and services; denying otherness in the name of safeguarding one’s own country.

Sharing economy and collaborative practices

In observing the phenomena that are having higher impact on shaping socialisation and development practices and models, the matter of collaborative technologies is particularly topical. The debate on the sharing economy has been relentless in recent years (Swedberg, 2000), and the potentials of an economic

⁷ Data from the Ministry of the Interior, processing by lenius.it

development model based on collaboration and exchange has, in turn, fuelled worldwide debates and conferences.

The term ‘sharing economy’ seems to be based not on a linear model of goods and services, but on a “circular” model (Bonomi *et al.*, 2016) that brings reciprocity into play (Pais & Provasi, 2015), stimulating, and at the same time enabling, the creative and generative capacities of consumers who go from “consumers” to “prosumers”, i.e. consumers who play an active role in the conception, production, supply and consumption of goods and services (Arvidsson, 2003). Without going too deeply into the complex debate about the sharing economy, we think it is important here to say that this is a loose definition. The debate often recalls the classical theories of “gift economy” or “mutual exchange” (Gouldner, 1960; Polanyi, 1957; Simmel, 1907) or literature on “social capital and trust” (Coleman, 2005). However, the concept of a sharing economy seems to expand well beyond such references, transcending classical theoretical boundaries and reaching new experiential dimensions, all to be explored. Perhaps offering us a terminological loophole is Schor (2014), who defines the sharing economy as an “umbrella definition” covering a variety of digital platforms and offline activities.

Here we would like to ask ourselves about the innovative potential of collaborative platforms in relation to migration: to what extent and in what ways can these platforms impact on migration phenomena?

Pais and Provasi (2015) have highlighted how collaborative practices do not differ so much according to the kind of goods or services they manage, but rather on the basis of how they stand according to the Polanyian level of integration of reciprocity (Polanyi, 1957): i.e. the extent to which one collaborates and in what ways. Since platforms stimulate collaborative behaviour, they trigger attitudes that are more oriented towards instrumental motivations or even towards deeper motivations of reciprocity and relational exchange, typical of the gift economy or adhering to the principles of solidarity and charity (Mura *et al.*, 2019). It’s not that the platforms exclude personal interest, typical of any attitude aimed at consuming goods, but rather encourage a stronger sense of belonging and mutual recognition among those who take part in the collaborative process (Parigi & State, 2014).

There is no lack of criticism of collaborative platforms; some scholars, in fact, have highlighted that the relational dimension, although present in platforms, produces a low-quality social capital (Fenton, 2013; Parigi & State, 2014). Moreover, it seems that the exchange model does not prevent transaction costs, i.e. it does not lack social conflict and selective exclusion processes (Benkler, 2004), which Simmel (1907) previously highlighted in gift theory.

If we analyse the motivations that lead to collaborative participation, different kinds of “reward” emerge: an economic one, an environmental one, and a social one. Research by Owyang and Samuel (2015) shows that the economic aspect exerts the greatest leverage for collaborative participation on platforms. A French study (Parguel, Lunardo, & Benoit-Moreauc, 2016), on the other hand, shows that

bartering, reusing and sharing goods is not necessarily related to more conscious forms of consumption or attitudes more sober, sustainable and inclusive. Parguel's research highlights how the sharing of a good or service can often be coherently traced back to forms of compulsive consumption and attitudes of over-consumption. As far as relational exchange is concerned, we refer to the empirical studies of Fenton, and Parigi and State, which show a rather "low" social relational quality in the processes of sharing economy that are mediated by platforms.

In the light of this brief information, we note that, despite the enthusiasm for the potential inherent in the exchange economy, based on assumptions of reciprocity, there is no lack of opposition and criticism, which would highlight negative consumption patterns with limited social and exchange potential.

Sharing platforms and the promotion of the social inclusion of migrants

As recalled by McAuliffe, Goossens, & Sengupta (2017), the Fourth Industrial Revolution is reshaping economy, social interactions and collective security, as well as fuelling the importance of international migration. Here we must not neglect to reflect on the relationship between technology, with a specific interest in platform cooperativism, and migration processes (Leung, 2011) with respect to the latter's "enabling force" on migration.

Several studies (Codagnone & Kluzer, 2011; Borkert, Cingolani, & Premazzi, 2009; Hamel, 2009) point out that ICT is able to diversify and increase expatriation opportunities, facilitate travel, and foster new ways of reception and integration. Pervasive connectivity, which is increasing accessibility, changes the way migration is undertaken and perceived (Collin & Karsenti, 2012), and the migrant is no longer an "uprooted subject", but a "connected" one (Diminescu, 2007).

Digital applications and platforms support these processes. McAuliffe, Goossens, & Sengupta talk about the amplification of migration, highlighting the influence of the use of apps on migration and decision-making processes, despite the risk of feeding connections with traffickers and fostering lawlessness. Among the best-known applications are InfoAid, Refugermany, Refugeeinfo.org and RefAid; others are featured on appsforrefugees.com. Applications developed with the direct collaboration of migrants and refugees themselves (i.e. Arriving in Berlin) and other more institutionalised applications are also emerging, such as MigrationApp, which was launched by the International Organisation for Migration in 2017.

The main objectives of these apps are: to improve migrant trajectories, identify and facilitate administrative processes in the destinations, simplify migration processes, and support inclusion processes. The "migrant issue" is also addressed by experiments related to the blockchain, which "[provides] cost savings and traceability of information flows, and [reduces] transaction times" (Ko & Verity,

2016; Talhouk, Garbett, & Montague, 2018). Digital platforms “match” supply and demand between peers, allowing underused/unused resources to be put back into circulation (Schor, 2016; Hamari, Sjuklint, & Ukkonen, 2015; Botsman, Roger, 2010). Without going into detail, it should be remembered that the phenomenon of sharing economy, initially welcomed with enthusiasm as a new economic model based on collaboration, sharing, savings ethics and a solidarity approach, is now being criticised for the monopolistic development of some platforms (Srnicsek, 2016; Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Bauwens and Kostakis, 2014). Here, however, we will limit ourselves to observing the socio-relational aspect of the phenomenon (Böckera and Meelen, 2017; Hamari, Sjuklint, & Ukkonen, 2015), which is linked to the issue of social inclusion mediated by ICT. In fact, while there are platforms that are assuming an increasingly corporate aspect, extracting value from the resources made available by users, it is also true that others, with a more collaborative and collective approach, are oriented towards solidarity exchange and inclusion.

Refugees Welcome, Home4Refugees and CALM are among the latter. Although they have arisen, a bit like Airbnb, with the aim of bringing supply and demand together, they have distinguished themselves for their social, supportive and inclusive character, as well as for their ability to promote the creation of social capital, encouraging the encounter between host families and refugees. Airbnb, meanwhile, has placed a greater emphasis on the speculative aspect, and short-term rent is having a heavy impact on cities (i.e. gentrification, Disneyfication and hotelisation) (Gant, 2016; Sans & Quagliari, 2016). However, in recent years, Airbnb has also been promoting a more supportive approach: since 2012, the “Airbnb Disaster Relief” program has been active, as well as the “Open Homes” initiative as of 2017, thanks to which the Airbnb community welcomes victims of environmental disasters, wars or famine for free (AirbnbCitizens, 2017).

In this perspective, our attention is focused on Refugees Welcome, which helped to launch the Open Homes program in Milan together with the Milan municipality and the Community of Sant’Egidio. The platform allows volunteers host in Italy to connect with refugees looking for a place to stay, promoting a culture of hospitality, integration, and social inclusion.

The case of Refugee Welcome

Refugees Welcome is a non-profit organisation that somehow bends the conceptual framework of the sharing economy to respond to two of the main concerns that characterise Europe’s refugee issue: the aspect of housing and that of inclusion into the host country’s culture.

The process is articulated; since hosts and refugees must be screened, they must complete a questionnaire about their background, country of origin, age, spoken languages... and they must also meet in person to ensure compatibility. It

is important to overcome stigma and prejudices against refugees for a successful match. In a 2016 Pew Research Centre report, it emerged that more than half of the respondents in eight of the ten European nations surveyed believed that incoming refugees increased the likelihood of terrorism in their country. The report also highlighted that the refugee issue has featured prominently in the anti-immigrant rhetoric of right-wing parties across Europe (it has been considered one of the major driving forces behind the UK's Brexit vote to leave the European Union). For Greece and Italy in particular, which have become primary entry points into Europe for migrants in recent years, PWC's 2016 Global Attitude survey demonstrated that people in these countries generally expressed negative views toward refugees following the 2015 migration surge, fearing terrorism, crime, and job losses. The attacks in Paris and Brussels and the anti-immigrant rhetoric of right-wing parties across Europe fueled public fears about terrorism, creating a kind of mental link between the refugee crisis and the threat of terrorism. The next Pew Research Centre global survey, conducted in the spring of 2018 in 10 EU countries, shows, on the contrary, a different feeling, highlighting that a majority of people in Europe support taking in refugees who are fleeing violence and war, while disapproving of the way in which the European Union has dealt with the refugee issue. As pointed out by Mareike Geiling, co-founder of Refugees Welcome Germany, in a CNBC interview (Wee Sile, 2016)⁸: “[For] people interested in our [organisation], they know that there is not a big difference if you live with a Syrian, or with a French or Swedish person. We're all just human beings looking for a room”.

This short explanation was necessary to understand the context, in terms of refugees' reception, that the organisation faces in doing its job.

Methodology

The nature of the phenomenon of interest and the data available enabled the use of a mixed type of research methodology: through a qualitative analysis (Fischer, 2006; Park & Burgess, 1921) we tried to get as close as possible to the social actor's perspective, while quantitative data made it possible to summarise the main characteristics of the subjects participating in the initiative.

The quantitative dataset was provided by the organisation and is comprised of the answers to the questionnaire that all subjects involved in the platform (as hosts, guests or volunteers) were required to fill out when registering with the platform. The main aim of the questionnaire is to provide the information needed to profile and match hosts and guests, and as such the questionnaire is composed of a mix of open and closed questions, regarding the respondents' personal data, motivations, expectations and skills. About 5000 questionnaires were collected

⁸ <https://www.cnbc.com/2016/08/18/refugees-welcome-aims-to-use-sharing-economy-to-ease-europe-immigration-crisis.html>

between 2016 and 2019 and were included in the analysis, which was carried out using NVIVO and SPSS.

Once the main topics of interest were identified, the Italian founder and the chairman of the association were interviewed in order to gain a deeper understanding of 1) the organisation's general structure, 2) the intervention model, and 3) the connection with the territory.

Results

The model of intervention of Refugees Welcome Italia

Our research shows that the RW model is quite complex. When people obtain refugee status or other forms of protection in Italy, and leave the hospitality centres that may have hosted them up to that point, they are not yet fully independent and encounter a moment of vulnerability and marginalisation that can compromise their first steps of integration in their new country. The most vulnerable targets are young adults, foreign boys that came to Italy alone as minors and who, after spending time in dedicated centres, have to move in to adult centres where their integration paths risk being interrupted.

Refugees Welcome, through its website, allows people to register and become part of a community supported by a team of highly-qualified professionals who are responsible for finding the best possible match between willing hosts and refugees based on the needs and characteristics of both. This match occurs through a rigorous and punctual working methodology, which is being constantly improved thanks to the feedbacks from all the actors involved: families, refugees, facilitators, and association employees with whom the group work throughout Italy.

The main aim of Refugee Welcome is to make refugees autonomous, to value human capital without wasting the opportunity to provide the individuals involved in the reception with an enriching experience. The implicit benefits of this model are to be found in the cultural change inherent in the welcoming methods, in the incentive to change the way in which refugees are viewed, and finally in the ability to positively impact on prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination. The RW model is, therefore, an interesting social phenomenon that highlights innovative inclusion methods that may be of interest to cultural sociology.

The organisation's structure is articulated: it includes statutory bodies, a local management and staff, and various managerial roles. One of the characteristics that distinguishes RW from other similar organisations is its extensive territorial coverage.

A summary of the interviews conducted shows seven regulatory moments in RW's activities: (1) registration on the platform is voluntary; (2) phone interview (a facilitator calls the person who has registered in order to understand his/her expectations and motivations regarding the possibility of receiving a refugee); (3)

training (families interested in hosting are invited to participate in a training course that offers a fundamental moment to get to know each other, to be adequately informed about the reality of the refugees, to ask questions and to learn about cohabitation stories that are already in progress); (4) home visit (after the first phone call and the training course, a home visit to the future hosting family occurs, in order to get to know them better and see the environment in which the refugee will be living); (5) matching (if the previous steps have gone well, the family can be matched with the refugee. The combination is based on the characteristics of the family and the refugees themselves, who have been previously interviewed and selected by the RW's facilitators. The factors assessed range from individual and personal aspects to work and daily requirements); (6) face-to-face meeting (once a potential combination has been identified, a series of in-person meetings occur, always mediated by RW, in which the family and the refugee get to know each other and decide whether to start living together or not. These appointments are fundamental in building the trust on which cohabitations are born); (7) cohabitation begins (if the meetings are successful, cohabitation can begin. The family and the refugee sign the hospitality contract, a document that is used to plan cohabitation and to define all the specifics at best).

Other important steps implemented after the beginning of the cohabitation are: (1) launching the autonomy project that seeks to re-orientate the refugee's path in life, in terms of resuming studying, finding a job, or attending a vocational training course; (2) crowdfunding: Refugees Welcome does not provide a financial contribution for the host families. It is, however, possible to launch a fundraising campaign, such as a crowdfunding, to support cohabitation expenses: by involving friends and family, it is possible to collect small donations to cope with everyday life; (3) end of the cohabitation: the period of stay is 5 months; when the deadline approaches, the situation is evaluated and if the refugee is not yet independent, and the hosting person cannot continue to host him/her, the organisation finds another host.

The whole process is followed, monitored and facilitated by local teams. In fact, this type of model includes different actors: (1) People who decide to become a host (families and individuals) are involved with the organisations for a total of 6 months. The hospitality involves welcoming refugees at home and offering them meals and support, subject to availability; (2) Refugees: for them the cohabitation period is an invaluable opportunity to become independent and acquire, through the support of the family and the organisation, the skills required to develop autonomy; (3) Volunteers verify potential weaknesses in the migrant's autonomous path and encourage them to renew their attitudes and skills (Donati and Colozzi, 2006; Ambrosini, 2004). They act as control and stimulus at the same time (Chomsky, Herman, 2014; Sartori, 2007; Parson, 1981; Durkheim, 1973); (4)

Activists: are a social group that includes all those who, by getting engaged locally, give life to new inclusive and extensive organisations. These social actors organise events and raise funds. They pursue, among other things, the aim of satisfying a certain need to belong to a specific social community; with the latter they share a certain line of thought and conduct, which is expressed in the exemplification of a welcoming model, built on satisfying the needs of individuals and on exercising active citizenship. Adherence to a programme and conduct constitutes the glue of collective action that forms the programmatic ideology. The activists, contributing to a “new” narration of the figure of the migrant, give life to complex formations, behaviours and gestures that deal with difficult and uncomfortable situations. They thus stimulate renewed historical meanings with respect to existence and human relations (Althusser, 1970).

Unlike the majority of cooperative platforms that offer goods and services, leaving adherence to the collaborative process to individuals and almost never intervening at the relational and social action level, RW alternates IT processes with social interaction processes. It highlights the individual’s choices, discusses them, shares them at the collegial level and, if necessary, endorses them at the community level. It intervenes in person at the locations where the welcome “service” exchange will take place, and ultimately develops an ad personam integration process around the individual.

In short, we could say that it uses the platform to offer a good/service, stimulate reciprocity processes, and activate relationships aimed at inclusion, just as is outlined for any other sharing economy process. Unlike other collaborative platforms, however, once stimulated, the instrumental motivation encourages and supports transformation and the generation of deep social relationships. Alternating collaborative processes at platform level with in-person social relation processes encourages a sense of belonging and mutual recognition of “host” and “hosted refugee”, supporting their roles as active social actors in inclusion processes, which is also thanks to the strong identity of belonging to the association.

Profile of the users: hosts, guests and volunteers

There are a total of 1675 “hosts” on the platform. The platform does not numerically distinguish between individuals and families, but rather understands “the host” as the social actor able to receive refugees and join the programme. 70% of the hosts are between 40 and 60 years of age, and in this quota 50% are over 50 years of age. The majority of the hosts reside in Lazio (15%), which, together with Lombardy (12%), Piedmont (9%), Emilia Romagna (6%) and Veneto (6%), forms about half of the sample. The most active urban centres are Rome (21%), Turin (9%) and Milan (8%). The remaining 50% of the sample is distributed among the other Italian regions.

Among the numerous professions in the sample, the most-represented groups are: employees in the public or private sector (17%), freelancers (architects;

accountants; consultants etc., 9%) and pensioners at 7%. A social weave, therefore, that can be traced back to the middle class, ready to welcome and make new experiences.

In the form that hosts fill in, they also include some personal details, characteristics and skills. Skills and preferences related to the educational area (20%) and artistic and cultural heritage (17%) stand out. Only 4% declare technological skills.

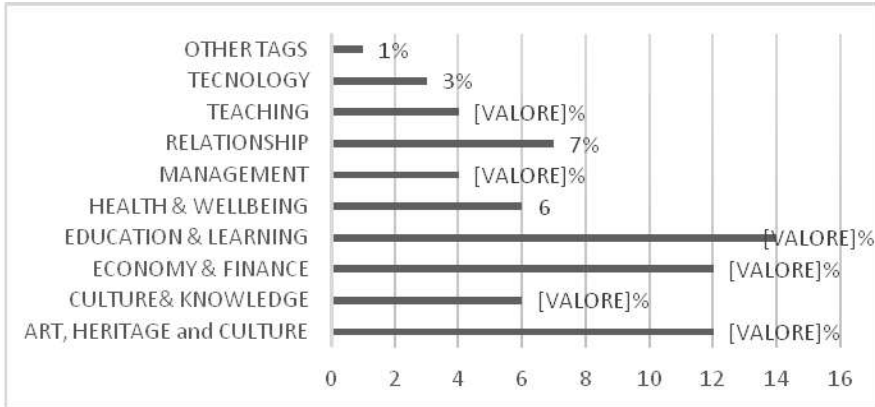


Figure 2: Distribution of “host entities” in relation to the declared competences (2016-2019)

There are 1510 refugees who took part in the RW reception programme (2016-2019). 18% of the sample comes from Gambia, 12% from Nigeria, and 9% from Mali and Senegal, followed by the Ivory Coast and Guinea (6%), Pakistan (5%), Somalia, Ghana and Afghanistan (3% each); while 8% do not declare its country of origin, and the remaining 20% arrives form other countries in the world.

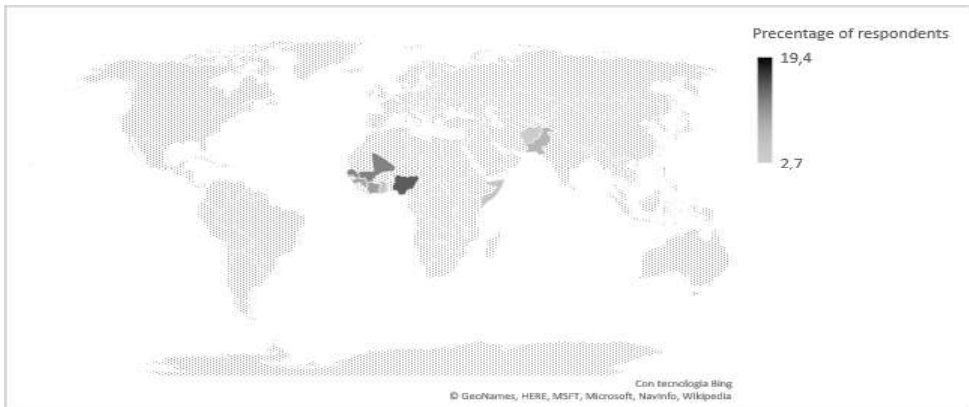


Figure 3: Country of origin of the respondents (refugees)

About a third of the sample does not declare its age (568 cases). Among the respondents we can see that the sample is overall to be considered quite young, with 33% of the guests between 18 and 23 years old and the remaining with age going from 24 and 58. 17% of the refugees live in Lazio; 16% in Lombardy and 10% in Piedmont: we note that the figure correlates perfectly with the percentages of host actors. Respondents firstly declared themselves as “in need of help” (19%), then “studious” (11%); “sociable” and “hard-working” (10%); and finally, “honest” (8%).

What emerges is the urgent need for help that exceeds the invitation to describe one’s own skills. The need for rescue is, therefore, dominant over any other social necessity.

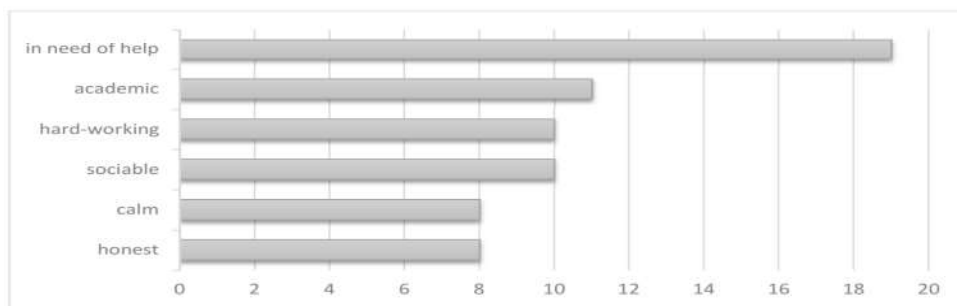


Figure 4: Declared strengths of respondents (refugees) (2016-2019)

The number of volunteers is 1515. The majority of the target group (65%) prefers not to give an answer to the age question. The rest are between 29 and 38 years old (11%), between 39 and 48 years old (7%), and between 19 and 28 years old (7%). Volunteers are very active in Lombardy (16%) and Lazio (15%).

The stated competencies relate to the field of humanities with a specific interest in “art and cultural and landscape heritage” (40%), and “music” (20%). Interest in scientific disciplines follows, with “economy” (14%) in particular.

To the question concerning the “motivation for collaborating” with RW, 51% of the sample responded that they “want to make themselves useful and available to those who need help”, and 29% stated that they “want to help those who flee”.

The propensity to develop their skills and knowledge moves more than half of the sample towards volunteering. Another 29% of the sample are motivated to collaborate with RW due to the individual need to show solidarity and altruism towards those less fortunate in life.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the focus on migration has become one of the key issues of our time: minorities and majorities clash on many issues such as civil and social rights, political representation, the right to education, the right to work, and many other issues that impact on social inclusion and individual well-being.

Factors such as skin colour and geographical origin seem to influence the hierarchy of reception levels. In fact, studying mass media, we notice that there is an insistence on the figure of an “ideal refugee” generally of Syrian origin, light-skinned, fleeing from wars and hunger (Colombo 2019). If we examine the data, however, we see that most of the migrants present in Italy today come from sub-Saharan areas of Africa. How is it possible to achieve social inclusion if one instils in individuals an idea of migrants that is far from the physicality and the real culture of origin of the latter? (Agier, 2016; 2018)

Several studies (Godin, Le Blanc, & Brugere, 2018; Könönen, 2018; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012) have highlighted how, even where the reception of migrants is achieved, it's not possible for them to carry out a project of life (Godin, Le Blanc, & Brugere, 2018). The contradictions that emerge in reception practices register difficulties experienced by the hosts in relating to and actively including migrants, as well as in laying the foundations for a fruitful exchange of experiences (Zanfrini, 2018).

An inclusion process requires socialisation practices and the recognition of one's own and other's identity; it incorporates educational and social skills and requires broad, continuous and differentiated socialisation processes (Besozzi, 2016; Santagati, 2004; Durkheim, 1973). It is therefore necessary to invest in enhancing the individual's human capital: both the capital accrued in the country of origin and in the new destination. In an economic world oriented towards profit and service provision, such as the current one (Beck, 2009), skills and knowledge can be an opportunity for success (Dustmann *et al.*, 2011). At the same time, however, they can be highly discriminatory and generate inequalities (Christiansen and Jensen, 2019; Esping-Andersen, 2009; Beck, 2007).

Over the last 15 years, Italy has implemented various reception measures in order to ultimately bring about the SPRAR (The Protection System for Asylum and Refuge Seekers). The different intervention models predominantly seek to respond to the basic needs of care and help, without forgetting, at least on paper, the end goal of social equity, exercised above all through the right to education. In the meantime, the consensus on the democratic model has widened, and the idea of “active citizenship” and “national self-determination” has spread (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002).

We asked ourselves in the course of this survey whether it was necessary, therefore, to rethink reception policies; whether it would be necessary to design new organisational units responsible for receiving, in addition to those already present,

and whether cultural diversity, which is a social asset, could be preserved to some extent by monocultural narrative practices that often transcend the individual's uniqueness in favour of a homogenisation of social narrative.

We also wondered about technology, with specific interest in collaborative sharing economy platforms, and wondered if the latter could, to some extent, be a useful tool to stimulate inclusive processes. In contrast to what was found in other areas (Parguel, Lunardo, & Benoit-Moreauc, 2016; Paris & State, 2014; Fenton, 2013) the case study (RW) shows how technology can be an instrument of social integration with generative and creative potential, which, if used alternately with social collaboration processes and exchanging models and ideas, can be a support to social inclusion models. This is a dimension that obviously still requires a long exploratory journey, but which we believe is of interest for scientific investigation.

An alternation between in-person and remote actions, a sharing of the goods/service use model; an educational support for mutual relationship, an encouragement to exchange thoughts and ideas, and a mutual expression of affiliation with identity and the community seem to be the "engine" that allows RW to represent an innovative model for integrating individuals. This is not only with regard to the mere number of individuals received, but also to the ad hoc projects conceived and the extensive services offered locally without, however, pursuing what is commonly considered the strongest push behind the sharing economy, i.e. the economic push. In fact, RW is completely based on voluntary action and the idea of generating inclusion processes.

Familial hospitality is interpreted as the best way to facilitate the social inclusion of refugees in the host countries, overcoming the vulnerability and discomfort that usually characterise the refugees' status, and favouring the expression of personal potential, participation and the achievement of well-being. According to the organisation, the host family becomes a key turning point in the refugees' path to full autonomy; living with local people is essential in becoming part of a community and understanding the social and cultural context of the host country. From this first hub, refugees can easily create a new network of social relations, improve their knowledge of the language, reactivate human and professional resources, and start investing again in their own life project (in terms of study, job, professional training...).

The hospitality model proposed by Refugees Welcome is therefore based on sharing, communication and mutual knowledge between refugees and Italian citizens and it can help to combat prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. At the same time, hosting families have the opportunity to learn a new culture, help people in need, become aware and active citizens, and create new community bonds.

In the Refugees Welcome model, therefore, the artificial subdivision of the world into colonisers/colonised, developed/underdeveloped (Rist, 1997) and progressive/sovereignists is overcome in order to empower individuals and different biographical experiences, treasuring them and revealing an amalgam

of existential experimentations so exceptional that they represent, in any case, a cultural richness and a social asset to be shared, regardless of geographical origins or social status. We could say that the reception model devised by Refugees Welcome, taking advantage of digital technologies, encourages social inclusion through collaborative acts, and ultimately stimulates sustainable social development and integration.

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