

## *10. Immigrants' Reception and Third Sector*

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### **10.1 First Area: Political Pressure**

Through a troubled immigration reception process, although with some reserves and difficulties, in the present decade our country has become aware of having become a landing place for international migration flows. Several actors of the civil society have played, in different ways and on different levels, a relevant role in this process: social associations and movements, voluntary work groups and unions, church institutions and religious congregations<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, the transformation of our country from a place of origin to a place of destination of migration flows intertwines with the political, cultural and operational action of these subjects, inspired to different ideas and approaches, which cannot be completely included in the conventionally accepted definition of "third sector", but may be however comprised in a more extensive and necessarily fluid notion of organized solidarity.

Resistances, delays and ambiguity displayed by public authorities, to which well suits the definition of "reluctant importers" coined by Cornelius, Martin and Hollifield (1994) with reference North-European countries, have been at least partly balanced by a mobilization of the composite galaxy of social actors operating to build the dowels for immigrant population integration "from the bottom", trying also to contrast the enmity messages sent "from the top" by quite a few political and governmental bodies and by influential voices in communication and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Published studies on the role in this field of voluntary work, or more in general, non-profit organizations can be counted on the fingers of one hand. One of the most significant studies (which however has remained a typescript) is that carried out by Coses, 2002, referring to the province of Venice; another typescript, concerning Rome, was presented by Deriu and Lariccia (2004). Zincone (1999) mentioned this theme, and reference was made also in studies on housing policies, such as the study by Golinelli we extensively quoted in this chapter. In addition, we mention the annual inquiries carried out in Lombardy by the Regional Observatory for Integration and Multi-Ethnicity. However, institutions, press and public opinion seem more interested in this subject than specialized literature, so far.

At the same time, their pressure power on the political scene has produced non-negligible results in the re-definition of the law system, with relevant effects on some aspects of entry policy (such as the introduction in 1998 of a “sponsor”) and particularly, on irregular immigrants’ safeguard and inclusion. Zincone (2003) maintains that the Italian generosity towards irregular immigrants may be actually explained by observing the actors involved in the formulation of migration policies.

In the Italian public decision-making system concerning immigration, is very important the presence of an advocacy coalition, a sort of strong lobby of the weakest segments, a benevolent pressure group composed by a prevailing part of Catholic associations and trade unions, by progressive professional associations, by some magistrates and experts. This advocacy coalition mostly exerts its pressure for the safeguard of the interests of the most outcast party, the irregulars, and is prepared to barter the rights of early residents just to get something more for the outcast (Zincone, 2003: 13).

It is worth to add another remark. The achievements of this commitment to defend immigrants in an irregular status may be explained by the fact that this theme, more than others, lends itself to humanitarian actions, which in turn are attentively considered by the Catholic components present in both political wings and particularly sensitive to the appeals of advocacy coalition. But there is another reason: the action of organized solidarity has proved, in terms of results, congenial to a kind of regulation of the immigration, which as a matter of fact has prevailed in the Italian context (but can be found also in other countries), that is, an approach in which it is preferable to legalize *a posteriori* the situation of immigrants that, due to lack of political courage, cannot be admitted officially (Barbagli, Colombo, Sciortino, 2004; Caritas Ambrosiana, 2004). In this sense, considered from a certain distance, the mobilization of solidarity actors has well integrated, although not intentionally, with the characteristics (and the implicit meanings) of the Italian institutional control of migration processes.

We would also remind, among the possible ones, a recent example of the stand of solidarity actors in support to immigrants’ citizenship and integration. On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Acli, Caritas and Fondazione Migrantes submitted to the Minister of the Interior Pisanu a document including a set of proposals and suggestions for managing migration policies, aimed at overcoming emergency and precariousness logics. Out of the wide range of provided indications, we limit ourselves to briefly mention some suggestions referring to some of the most critical knots in the administrative management of the phenomenon of migration:

- residence visa valid for two years, with a doubled duration on any renewal, in order to expedite bureaucratic procedures and the workload of police headquarters;

- permanent residence paper after five years of residence, in compliance with the European directive on this matter;
- extension from the current six months to one year of the period at immigrant’s disposal for finding a new job;
- urgent issue of ministerial guidelines aimed at standardizing the administrative practices of police headquarters, in order to stem the “constant and repeated” local discretionary power, which hampers immigrants’ achievement of the rights provided for by the laws;
- tax allowances for families who employ domestic helps and caretakers;
- overcoming of the “unjustified restrictions and bureaucratic procedures” concerning family reunifications, such as document authentication at the Italian consulate authorities in the countries of origin;
- release of immigration from the scheme of being a “public order” problem, by investing in overcoming the barriers represented by lack of knowledge of laws and bureaucratic procedures, besides cultural and language misunderstanding;
- housing policies in the position to involve associations, local organizations, employers, by destining 20% of the Social Fund of the Ministry of Welfare to immigrants’ integration policies;
- grant of the right to administrative vote and re-examination of the law on citizenship aimed at including minors born in Italy from foreign parents, and at reducing the provided for minimum residence period for submitting the application for citizenship grant to five years;
- enactment of an organic law concerning asylum, free from “restrictive logics”.

## **10.2 Second Area: Commitment to Knowledge**

A second action area in the varied galaxy of organized solidarity consists in knowledge production and cultural spread. Contrary to a well-rooted stereotype, which considers solidarity actors from the point of view of a generous, but slipshod, emotional mobilization, scarcely qualified in cultural terms, a great deal of information and knowledge on migration processes available in Italy is systematically produced by third sector subjects.

The most famous example is the annual Dossier on Immigration, which has come to the 14<sup>th</sup> issue in 2004, and has monitored the gradual realization of the new status of Italy in the global geography of migration processes. Initially edited by Caritas, Rome, led by Monsignor Di Liegro, this dossier has institutionally strengthened in these years, passing under the aegis of Caritas Italiana and Fondazione Migrantes of the Italian Episcopal Conference.

Those who study immigration in Italy, or simply want to have available up-to-date statistical data on this subject, cannot but resort to this fundamental

cognitive tool. The research team of the Dossier, coordinated by Franco Pittau, has become in recent years a reference point in the national debate, and has increasingly developed on a regional basis, in order to more accurately catch the territorial peculiarities of this phenomenon.

In this regard, we can remark that, in general, the production of statistic information in foreign countries is included in the range of competences reserved to public institutions, whereas in Italy it is ensured by a third-sector subject directly involved at different levels in actions in favour of immigrants. This represents another detail, sensitive to social actors' contribution, of the Italian model of immigration reception.

Over time, several non-profit actors specialized in the scientific-cultural area have begun research activities, as well as knowledge production, information and spreading actions. Among them, we obviously wish to mention first our Foundation with its annual Reports, documentation centre and publications, as well as its activities addressed to schools and local organizations and its cooperation with the Lombardy Region in the Regional Observatory for Integration and Multi-Ethnicity, and with several other central or local public institutions. Then, we wish to mention the Fieri institute of Turin, promoted by Giovanna Zincone, and the activities of Istituto Cattaneo of Bologna (particularly with a selection of studies yearly published in the series "Stranieri in Italia"). There are in addition many other organizations operating on a local scale in a field of initiatives ranging from research to training, journalism, cultural entertainment, even though sometimes they risk to create some confusion between study and research activities, with their work methods and standards, and social interventions or "militant" actions in favour of immigrants, which usually follow different logics and priorities.

We only mention, in this large context, the initiative carried out by the trade union Cgil, which through Ires, published three Reports on immigration (Pugliese, 2000; Leonardi and Mottura, 2002; Bernardotti and Mottura, 2004). Each one of these three reports examined in depth a peculiar aspect of immigrants' conditions: the first one, the question of inclusion in the labour market system; the second one, immigrants' relation with trade union action; the third one, the issue of discrimination in the labour market. A further confirmation of the link between political-social commitment and cognitive attention.

Finally, we would like to remind one of the "heavy fathers" in participation of the solidarity sectors in the efforts to know and understand migration phenomena: the Centro Studi Emigrazione of the Scalabrinian congregation of Rome, which among other things publishes "Studi emigrazione", the first and most important Italian specialized review in this area. Linked to other similar institutes promoted by the same congregation in other countries, either of origin or destination of migration flows, the Italian one translates into topical terms its ancient, qualified and uncommon care in connecting its social-pastoral action in favour of immigrants with an in-depth knowledge about this

matter. In the Italian case, the new orientation process of this review proves particularly significant, since it has passed from studying the events of Italian emigration to focusing chiefly on foreign immigration in our country, and has by now opened to the contribution and cooperation of researchers of different disciplinary and ideal tendencies.

### **10.3 Third Area: Operating Activities**

In public opinion, the most popular and known activities the world of solidarity carries out in favour of the immigrant population are those in the area of services to persons.

It is not possible to provide reliable data on the quantity and quality of these services. However, it would be wrong to set these services against a supposed public institution absence. Along with mostly “light” services, totally self-financed or based exclusively on volunteer personnel, there are several services, particularly the most demanding and expensive ones, carried out with a public financial support, based on partnership agreements or tenders for contract. In the first area, there is a prevalence of base groups and voluntary work associations, while in the second one prevail social cooperatives and foundations.

According to the data of the third census on social-welfare services connected to the Catholic church (Sarpellon, 2002), to which also the last Report on Poverty in Italy refers (Rovati, 2003), the share of services of Catholic imprint prevalently addressed to immigrants totals 8.9% and especially concentrates in newly established services, so that “we might even say that many of these new services have been generated by this growing demand” (Malaguti *et al.*, 2003: 356). The weighted average of estimates concerning foreign immigrants’ service enjoyment, provides a 19.2% datum out of the total number of beneficiaries of services connected to the Catholic church. Access share considerably changes from one type of services to another, and therefore four different groups of services can be identified as regards the incidence of immigrant population on all beneficiaries:

- a first group of services in which immigrants’ presence is below 10% out of the total. It includes old people’s homes and disabled persons’ institutes (where the foreigners’ share does not reach 3%), besides therapeutic communities, daytime centres for drug addicts and family advisory centres (where foreigners reach 8.5%);
- in the second group, immigrants’ incidence ranges between 10% and 15%. This group includes school assistance services and minors’ residential institutes;
- the third group, where the foreign component ranges between 23% and 33% out of the total number of beneficiaries, includes other services ad-

dressed to minors (socialization centres for minors at risk, residential communities, homes for troubled youth), healthcare services and reception centres for adults;

- in the fourth group, foreign users reach variable shares ranging between 30% and 55% out of the total. This group includes listening centres, labour market inclusion services, daytime services for primary goods distribution. A case apart are first aid and reception centres, in which immigrants are about 60% out of the total (Niero, Amici, 2003: 130).

It is difficult to make a quantification, but it is however possible to identify with greater analytical details, within a changing and many-sided variety of experiences, some intervention classes, on the basis of some empirical inquiries our Foundation has carried out in those years (Ambrosini, 2002; 2003). We can identify:

A) *Activities operating on the front of reception and response to primary needs:*

- *first aid services*, such as soup-kitchens and associated services (showers, wardrobe, social secretariat, etc.) aimed at solving the first immediate survival problems encountered on their arrival by immigrants who find themselves penniless, lacking of reference points and not aided by effective social networks, giving them also the possibility to orient themselves in the Italian society and try to find the ways to enter the labour market;
- *accommodation reception services*, which try to develop from forms more linked to emergency (dormitories for the homeless, shelters for the poor) to more structured secondary reception forms (hostels for low-income workers, community homes), sometimes addressed to specific categories (for example, single women with children), up to the form that somebody calls “third reception”, more independent, stable, particularly addressed to families with minors, which have reached a relatively advanced stage in the consolidation process of their stay in Italy;
- *reception and inclusion and social recovery paths* for immigrant categories invested of particular safeguard rights, such as refugees, unaccompanied minors, women victims of traffic in human beings for sexual exploitation purposes. In those cases, accommodation is usually integrated by training interventions, psychological support, accompaniment in social and work inclusion processes;
- *outpatients’ departments and healthcare services*, chiefly addressed to immigrants without residence permit, and hence, not cared by public health services, except for emergency cases.

B) *Information, Guidance, Basic Education Services:*

- *counters* aimed at providing useful information, guidance, advice and aid in preparing documents and in bureaucratic procedures (for residence permits, registration in the national health service, family reunifications,

etc.); in the recent past (autumn 2002-autumn 2003), as in previous circumstances, as regards irregular workers' amnesties (Caritas Ambrosiana, 2004). To information services, we may also add their function as guidance filters to other services and for the rationalization of responses to immigrant citizens needs;

- *Italian language teaching* and acculturation to our country, besides the institutional offer of the public school system (adults' education), through a capillary spreading over the territory, a large method variety, and an opening towards (currently) irregular immigrants;
- *after-school activities and other educational interventions addressed to minors*, which represent a new intervention area, in which solidarity actions confirm their ability to catch emerging demands, by conforming pre-existing institutions and initiatives (De Bernardis, 2005): in this case, these activities have already begun operating for the integration of the second generations;
- *intercultural mediation*, particularly addressed to school, health, employment services, carried out by specialized associations and centres, through a significant involvement of specially trained and learned immigrants. Along with mediation, we may add all the different initiatives aimed at making know and appreciate the cultural expressions of the immigrant populations.

C) *Interventions on the labour market through a mediation between labour demand and offer:*

- *credit and sponsorship* to employers, who are in different ways urged to trust in immigrant workers; this activity sometimes is extended through interventions aimed at solving difficulties and lack of understanding, particularly during the first inclusion stages in the labour market;
- actual *mediation* activities between (Italian) demand and (immigrants') offer, mostly concentrated in the area of domestic, healthcare and assistance services, partly carried out by specially established associations, and partly by organizations and subjects having different institutional purposes, as a collateral activity<sup>2</sup>;
- *vocational training* for weak segments, to which also immigrants are brought back, mostly organized by Foundations or other social-private organizations, usually with a public financial support (European Social Fund, Regions);
- *safeguard against employers' unfair or discriminating treatments* and support in claims for rights (in this case, trade union organizations and the foreigners' departments established within them are particularly in-

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<sup>2</sup> In this regard, a non-recent inquiry, which examined 71 listening centres, particular base structures of Caritas Ambrosiana almost exclusively based on voluntary work, identified support to job search among their most widespread activities, with by 77.5% affirmative answers (Ambrosini, De Bernardis, 1998).

volved).

Another significant distinction concerns the organizational history of these initiatives. Part of them (soup-kitchens, dormitories) were established to aid Italian outcasts and have ancient roots, but have found themselves to cope with an immigrant population lacking of any reference point. Some of them have simply readapted their offer, through minor adjustments, whereas some other one have completely rethought their mission and their adopted organizational models. New initiatives have been developed in recent years, which have mobilized new energies with the explicit purpose of facilitating foreign immigrants' integration processes. We wish to consider these organizational processes more in detail.

#### **10.4 Tendencies and Developments**

Since several experiences of aid to immigrants have developed within traditional charitable institutions, particularly of Catholic imprint (soup-kitchens for the poor, dormitories, parish listening centres), this has contributed to legitimate these initiatives, but also presents a few problematic implications. For immigrants, inclusion in these contexts involves a loss of status. In order to be aided, young and healthy persons, active in the labour market, are put on the same footing of the Italian homeless or outcasts, and are helped and sheltered in forms and places originally conceived for the latter.

However, inquiries prove that even traditional charitable activities are able to reorient themselves and innovate their services addressed to new beneficiaries. Charity work continues to be supplied, even through very simple forms and large involvement of volunteers, while at least four innovative tendencies are emerging:

- There is a tendency to extend the range of provided services, in the name of taking on in a more global manner the needs of persons: activities of social secretariat, advice on bureaucratic procedures and access to rights begin to spread, even though within an extremely varied framework. Though several activities are forcedly aimed at meeting primary subsistence needs, we can however remark a propensity to introduce, wherever possible, also promotional actions aimed at encouraging beneficiaries' inclusion in the labour market and independence<sup>3</sup>.
- Currently, service specialization, concentration and professional improvement processes are taking place. Furthermore, there is a growing cooperation focused on structured projects among different organizations

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<sup>3</sup> This activity is neither easy nor exerted everywhere. We have in any case met with first aid services, which have established relations with temporary work agencies, or with employment centres and other organizations linked to the vocational training systems. Actual mediation services with labour demand have also been promoted in some cases.

in partnership with public institutions. However, also in this context quite a few problems begin to rise, such as the question opposing low-threshold services to services aiming at meeting the requests of particular beneficiaries' categories and particular needs. This creates tension between extreme opening and access selectivity. Targeted services are in fact selective in principle, and their specialization can be hardly reconciled with indiscriminate reception and aid. Usually, these services take their place at a later stage after the entry in our country and aim at meeting particular needs, basing on specific projects and the contribution of qualified staff. An example of these services are rehabilitation communities for the victims of traffic in persons or unaccompanied minors.

- By the evolution and rapid ripening of migration flows, the foreign population begins to be different and to make more articulated requests. The solidarity sector tends therefore to readjust its service provision in compliance with these new requirements. Sometimes this involves rethinking the organization mission, service organization, supply structures. A typical theme is the passage from first aid and reception (single males with temporary migration projects for particular purposes), to more varied intervention forms addressed to increasingly stable population segments.
- Aid provision tends to become more demanding towards beneficiaries. Through often difficult modifications in the original organization mission, charity lavished with absolute gratuitousness tends to stream into more structured and varied forms: data collection and identification of beneficiaries, issue and distribution of access cards (for example to soup-kitchens and associated services), time limits for benefiting from the service (shelter provision), establishment and application of behaviour rules. There is also a tendency to emphasize immigrants' responsibility and involvement. In some cases, also immigrants carry out voluntary work in favour of other immigrants, and gain benefits from this activity in terms of social acknowledgement and image<sup>4</sup>. Indiscriminate reception, totally free of charge, without return, has become the object of widespread criticism, or usually is brought back to the rank of a valid practice only during the very first stages of reception. What in fact people fear is that beneficiaries may lose their sense of responsibility and sink into dependent and passive attitudes. Besides the economic effects, in cases such as shelter provision, requests for reimbursement and personal commitment in the organization service are considered as activating measures, in the position to establish a more mature and equal relation between organizations and immigrants.

The range of provided services is characterized by constant development and by the effort to conform them to the continuous changes occurring in the im-

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<sup>4</sup> We had the opportunity to assess it, for example, in Genoa in some demand and offer mediation services in the house-help and healthcare sector.

migrant population's profile, where stabilization processes go along with new migration flow arrivals, the risk of falling back into precariousness is likely, the achievement of the longed for residence visa is immediately followed by further requests (such as family reunification and, later on, children education) and by the entry of other immigrants in an irregular status. The passage to professional work do not eliminate the need for voluntary contributions and widespread citizens' participation in the promotion of some fundamental human rights.

### **10.5 The Hardest Knot: House**

The most widespread, continuous and demanding intervention requests in the considered period have concerned houses. Many, often unsuccessful, attempts and efforts have been made in this area. Considering the actual difficulty of this theme, it is interesting to go through the major experiences of housing integration started by solidarity organizations in partnership with public authorities, but also – in some cases – with private subjects. Golinelli (2004) has brought back the most recent local initiatives on housing and immigration to some categories, basing on their complexity levels, on requested competences, and on their “replicability” elements in different territories from those in which they have been first tested.

- *Social housing actions*: initiatives undertaken by private subjects aimed at building or (more often) running a particular property in favour of individuals in conditions of discomfort, mostly with the support of public financing. This is the “historical” intervention area on immigrants' accommodation discomfort, the area in which the most significant experiences, despite their criticalities, have been carried out.
- *Recovery, renewal and restoration activities*: initiatives aimed at recovering and reusing decayed properties, chiefly carried out by foundations or private organizations with considerable financial resources.
- *Social real estate agencies*: projects – often the result of more or less articulated partnerships – aimed at encouraging a “normal” entry in the free market, through tools in the position to guarantee and overcome house offer barriers (brokerage and/or social accompaniment activities, but also financial guarantee forms and instruments).
- *Re-qualification of decayed areas*: actions included in local development and Community integrated programmes, mostly financed by EU.
- *Local, regional and national networks*: network actions, confrontations and exchanges among different local contexts, such as those that have been boosted by Community programmes, or within sector networks that already existed in the cooperative movement, in Catholic associations, etc.

- *Collective accommodation*: this last category – but actually the first one, considering its history and “emergency” level – concerns the wide-ranging and diversified experience of low-threshold (first) reception (Caritas, 2004); these structures often were not able to resist to dependency drifts, face to face with a mission – temporary permanence and accompaniment in the “free market” – that could not be always travelled over (or could not be suitably pursued). Still nowadays, these structures – either in the traditional form of reception centres, or in the most innovative ones (hostels, guest rooms, etc.) have not lost their reason for existence, particularly referring to the latest migration flows, or to the most vulnerable categories of the entire foreign population.

Two further categories of local “transversal” initiatives, which in different ways may combine with the above ones, can be identified in social house accompaniment, on the one hand, and in the establishment of rotating guaranty funds, on the other hand. The former, a well-known and “well-oiled” tool, which however is not always effectively tried out – or does not give results in accordance with expectations – is perhaps the one that better expresses the “typicality” of social-private interventions, from a complementary point of view compared to public interventions. In recent years, several local solidarity-oriented realities have tried not to limit themselves to “the assignment of a house, but to extend their action over time, trying to face and solve also the cohabitation problems with the local population and those related to the inclusion of immigrants in the Italian housing system, to which foreign tenants are completely unaccustomed (fulfilment of bureaucratic obligations concerning gas and electricity connections, payment of bills, house maintenance, punctual payment of house rentals and expenses, understanding of house expenses). The purpose being that of leading tenants to become fully independent in running their housing needs and their relation with the community in which they live” (Golinelli, 2004: 88).

On the other hand, the creation of financial guarantee tools is an area that collects an increasing number of reflections and experimentations, if it is true that – as we read in the above contribution – “guarantees are the real problem in finding houses to rent to immigrants” (and, as regards immigrants themselves, in independently finding a house).

## 10.6 Participants’ Profile

An analysis of the forms of intervention towards immigrants may also contribute to shed light on a side of the solidarity offer that has remained somewhat in the shade: the biographical profiles and the motivations of volunteers and operators engaged in this area.

Inquiries do not provide us with quantitative results, considering both the

scarce investments made in research in this area and its heterogeneous and variable forms of participation<sup>5</sup>, but however give us some cues in identifying some typical participants' profiles, as follows:

- *The traditional volunteer*: this is the figure we find particularly in the oldest institutions, established for different purposes, which have found themselves in the last fifteen years to deal with immigrant populations. These volunteers are mostly of Catholic origin, usually middle-aged or elderly women. Despite its placing among low-threshold services, traditional voluntary work however includes also young people, who do not have any particular experience or competence, but are prepared to offer their availability and enthusiasm. These volunteers approach immigration as a situation of poverty, conforming to it, as much as they can, their own “tool-kit”. On the other hand, the weakest and marginal fringes of immigrant population revitalize the offer of charitable actions that do not require a high preparation level or specialized competences and quite often materialize in donations of goods and services responding to primary needs: warm meals, packs of food, clothes and furniture. Also the personalized offer of time, listening and attention builds a bridge between the habit of mind of traditional voluntary work and some immigrant persons' needs, such as that of being listened to, feeling welcomed in a foreign country, establishing some personal relations, finding points of reference for different needs.
- *The committed citizen*: this is, instead, the citizen who has approached voluntary work more recently, sometimes directly from the world of immigration, considered as an emblematic place of the new kinds of poverty and the challenges of our time. It is in average younger, educated and professionally skilled. In part, it comes from a Catholic education and from an ideal reference to the church's world, but there are also several laymen and activists or former-activists of the left-wing parties who look for new ways in which they can express their ideal passion and aspirations to active citizenship. Obviously, there are also persons who come to social commitment experiences without having followed a particular religious or political training process. Typically, these are the subjects who mobilize and respond to public appeals in the emergencies produced by contemporary urban life, finding in immigration an actual and congenial ground for their commitment. Winter emergency shelters, camper night-time service

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<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact, participation runs up in particular circumstances, such as in the case of the support given to the irregular immigrants' regularization campaign (autumn 2002 - autumn 2003). Furthermore, in most cases, volunteers operate in activities established before and independently of immigrants' arrival: some typical examples are soup-kitchens, listening centres, after-school activities. These services almost never participate in institutional tables, are not registered or censured as “services to immigrants”. Volunteers, too, do not present themselves as operators in this particular area, although the foreign population forms by now, as we could see, a considerable share of beneficiaries of those services.

for the homeless, street units for aiding prostitute women, counters for regularization procedures, are few typical mobilization example of this kind of voluntary work. Concerned citizens in possession of a certain background of competences are also active in some less “heroic” services more linked to everyday life integration, such as the schools of Italian, which are one of the most widespread and capillary forms of local society activation face to face with the arrival of foreign populations. These persons also play an active role in the promotion of special actions aimed at meeting immigrants’ requirements, such as local associations, small reception centres, etc. In some cases, the active citizenship component prevails. It includes citizens in the position to express an organizational leadership, relying on social institutions and forces, as well as to make local society aware. They are an evidence that voluntary work action is not an alternative to the search for political solutions.

- *The Thirdworldist militant*: it may be identified in a subject, usually young or young-adult, who arrives to social commitment in favour of immigrants from gaining awareness of the relation between North and South of the world, in its double value of a protest against injustice on a planetary scale and a particular attention to cultures “different” from the hegemonic western culture. These volunteers form the most engaged wing, in cultural and political terms, of the galaxy of voluntary work in this area. This group includes cultural travellers, who see in immigration particularly an opportunity to meet with the others, militant anti-racists and pacifists, supporters of the no-global and new-global movements, who place this kind of voluntary work in a dimension of contiguity and communication with the social movements. The ground *par excellence* of these forms of voluntary work is represented by intercultural activities, interethnic associations, actions of protest against xenophobia and racism, initiatives in defence of immigrants against discriminations and abuses. In different forms, we find them however also among those who take part in aid activities that may be brought back to other forms of voluntary work, including the traditional ones, thus confirming the fluidity and interpenetration of solidarity action forms in contemporary society (Ambrosini, 2005). A category that is placed in an intermediate position between Thirdworldists and traditional volunteers is that rooted in missionary commitment, a solidarity action field of ancient origins and religious features, which has developed in the direction of a particular sensitivity to unequal development matters and Third World redemption. The case of “fair and solidarity trade” product promotion evidences an interpenetration among missionary commitment, new Thirdworldism, and base initiatives for a globalization “with a human face”. In this cultural background we can also find different forms of sensitization and initiatives on the immigration front.

**Table 10.1 - Social commitment types in the immigration area**

	<i>Traditional volunteer</i>	<i>Concerned citizen</i>	<i>Thirdworldist militant</i>	<i>Specialized operator</i>
Supplied services	First aid: soup-kitchens, listening centres	Emergencies, dedicated services	Advocacy services, intercultural activities	Different services in agreement with public organizations
Approach to immigration	Form of poverty similar to traditional ones	New poor, weak citizens	Experience in cultural diversity; solidarity with the victims of planetary injustice	Populations which have the right to particular services requiring specific competences
Kind of competences	Low threshold: empathy, availability to service (organizational skills in responsible persons)	Availability to border engagements, operating and organizational skills	Marked in the sense of intercultural open-mindedness	Professionally qualified in the socio-educational area, sometimes specialized
Relation with political commitment	Weak, but increasingly aware of legislative aspects and political knots	Tendency to connect social commitment with political commitment	Contiguity and interpenetration with the social movement area	Widespread, but increasingly distinguished from professional competence
Socio-professional profile	Mostly middle-aged and elderly women; different educational levels; linked to Catholic institutions	Mostly adult, educated men, with reference points in the church or in political experiences, sensitive to active citizenship	Young and young adults sensitive and prepared as regards globalization and "different" cultures	Educated young persons from the two previous categories

- *The social operator in multi-cultural contexts*: it represents, to a great extent, a development of the two previous categories in a professional sense. It is usually a young person who has met immigration through its personal commitment in voluntary work, starting sometimes from civil service. Increasingly often it has fulfilled an appropriate course of study, particularly in the sector of socio-educational services, and sometimes in more specialized areas, attending courses on immigration and intercultural relations. This operator works usually in social cooperatives and in foundations supplying services to immigrants with the financial support and on behalf of public institutions. It suffers the precariousness and discontinuity of most initiatives in this area, exposed to the hazards of project financing, changes in political majority and to the replacement of the politically responsible contacts. It is, however, increasingly equipped from a professional point of view, in the position to develop projects, interact with institutions, build local networks, and take part in consultation tables. The participation in the announcements of competition of the European Social Fund has proved a considerable incentive in accelerating these development processes, which lead to distinguish the professional components of services to immigrants from the area of voluntary work

commitment (Ambrosini, 2005). A class of social entrepreneurs specialized in developing and managing services to immigrants is taking shape. These entrepreneurs are able to look for a sustainable balance between public service and enterprise logic, between ethic commitment and economic rationality, between solidarity militancy and professional competence.

## **10.7 A Final Balance**

It is quite difficult to outline a final balance of the work carried out by the galaxy of organized solidarity in the area of immigrants' reception, since comparable data on the range and the characteristics of these initiatives, as well as on the number of operators and beneficiaries are not available.

Basing on carried out analyses, it is however possible to make some concise comments. The role of voluntary solidarity, which was already definite at the dawn of the migration flows that were beginning to land in our country, has remained a more or less acknowledged, essential feature of the immigrants' reception and support to integration devices throughout this decade.

Its function is particularly significant as regards the weakest and marginal fringes of the immigrant population: actual refugees, asylum petitioners and those awaiting acknowledgement, irregular workers waiting for an amnesty, individuals lacking of support networks and in serious danger of social out-casting. Their survival, the response to their primary needs (from everyday meals to health safeguard), the possibility to undertake integration services rely on services provided by a network of basic welfare interventions. Many energies continue to be absorbed by primary aid interventions due to the continuous reproduction of this kind of needs and the lack of promotional actions, thus generating sometimes circuits of dependence. This contributes to characterize, in the mind of the public opinion, the activities in support of immigrants carried out by the different solidarity initiatives in actually charitable terms, beyond the intentions and the configuration of the provided services. The ties between third sector and basic aid to "poor" immigration are in fact a constant feature of the whole decade, but even more in the social representations of this phenomenon.

As we tried to document, the third sector has been actually characterized in this decade by the development of a qualified presence on at least two levels: a) investments in data analysis and interpretative reading of the complex migration phenomena, by giving birth or by strengthening dedicated structures; b) political pressure ability and interventions in policy-making processes, by establishing alliances among the different actors of civil society sensitive to the rights of immigrants.

Provided services, too, have developed and improved, quite beyond mere

first-aid actions. Three are the key words in this regard: *professional skill, planning, partnership*. In the first place, services employing paid and professionally qualified staff have undoubtedly grown. The third sector, also in the area of services to immigrants, does not coincide any more with voluntary work, and not even with improvisation or emotional mobilization. The development of specialized, permanent services, based on regularly employed staff (information and guidance counters, communities for minors and women subtracted to prostitution, street units, aggregation and educational support centres, training services, etc.) has coincided with the establishment and development of relations and synergies with the public system. This has involved developing planning abilities in organized solidarity, within which social co-operatives have particularly distinguished themselves. The idea of a self-referential social commitment world, scarcely inclined to planning rationality, incapable to cooperate with public authorities, belongs, if not actually to the past, to residual contexts or to the management of problems the public system is not able to include in its devices, such as assistance to irregular immigrants.

The most sophisticated form of construction of alliance and cooperation systems on the territory consists in the promotion of partnership networks among public institutions, social-private subjects, trade associations, trade unions and other actors. Even in this area, despite political reticence and resource exiguity, several interesting experiences have been started in these years.

All things considered, there is still a fourth "P" in the area of social commitment in favour of immigrants: *widespread Participation*. In other solidarity areas, the development of a professionally qualified third sector has overshadowed the contribution of voluntary work. In the field of immigration, the mobilization of voluntary citizens still remains considerable and continues to be fed by their response to appeals and emergencies. The establishment of professional services does not seem to extinguish base participation. We can notice this participation in different cases: from amnesty management to street units, from soup-kitchens to educational support services.

The phenomenon of immigration has consequently represented an important conclusive trial for the solidarity action in our country: it has mobilized its energies, has allowed it to play a relevant role also on a political level, has increased its visibility in public opinion, has also evidenced its limits and difficulties, sometimes providing a wrong image of it. If today immigration is laboriously going back into the normality of an advanced society, if refusal and prejudice seem to lessen, if immigrants can obtain a residence visa without falling into the spiral of social outcasting, a part of the merit for these results must be undoubtedly attributed to the solidarity actors of civil society.