

Migratory Flows and Neapolitan ‘Informality’

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze the relationship between immigration, Neapolitan surroundings and legality from an original and specific point of view. Naples and the surroundings are affected by a high degree of “informality” that often translates into infringement of multiple laws and regulations. The question arises as to whether such peculiarities of the Neapolitan area could, at least partially, influence some aspects of migratory flows such as migrant’s entry, stay and exit or even affect the “quality” of the migratory flows. This study, that applied both quantitative and qualitative research methodology to analyzed migrant integration within a context where regulations are often not followed, brought us to conclude that despite informality/illegality is recognized as an opportunity by some migrants, the economic and legal context of the Neapolitan area (with all the consequences related to urban safety, and working rights and opportunity) are at the same time attracting and repelling peculiar migratory flows, playing a strong and ambiguous role within the social integration issue.

Keywords: migrations, informality, Naples, crime, integration

I. Immigration and crime

I. The relationship between immigration and crime, as well as between migration and ‘social disorder’, is often observed from a single, classic perspective. The socio-criminological perspective often sees immigrants as possible carriers of problems with respect to the context in which they are inserted, especially as bearers of deviant behavior. The internalization of different customs and habits, together with the conditions of financial hardships and also of social marginality in which they often find themselves, actually makes the probable generation of cases of friction with the new territory they enter statistically significant, despite other driving factors – including that of full social promotion, to be achieved even through adaptation, if not through integration – counterbalances this dynamic. Moreover, the condition of clandestinely, common to many of them, can prevent their admission in the regular labor market (as in the housing market), directing them towards forms of irregular or even more or less illicit economic activities. On this, not much has been questioned about the influence of some territorial characteristics, on the ‘level’ and ‘quality’ of the operating legality, on the movements and practices of migratory provisions. This paper intends to analyze the relationship between immigration, territory and legality from an original and specific perspective. One especially wonders whether some peculiarities of the Neapolitan territory – which appears to be characterized by a high degree of ‘informality’ that often involves multiple violations of rules, in particular on the administrative level – can, at least to some extent, guide the migratory movements. This in relation to the arrival, permanence and departure of migrants and with respect to the selection of the same ‘migratory form’, that is to say of certain characteristics existing in the individual communities of immigrants concerned. If the attempt to investigate the subject of integration – through both a quantitative and qualitative research method (Pascali *et al.*, eds., 2019) – within a context marked by widespread practices of singular (mis)application of rules, shows that informality, if not illegality, represents an opportunity recognized by the migrants themselves, it is also worth noting that the Neapolitan economic and legal condition and its consequences, also in emotional-cultural terms, regarding the perception of urban security and the actual possibilities of individual promotion, especially on a work-level, seems to be a main factor toward the attraction or rejection of peculiar migratory flows, thus playing a highly ambiguous role in terms of social integration.

II. “Informality” in Naples

II. First of all, it is necessary to define what ‘informality’ refers to in this paper: a very broad set encompassing a transversal range with respect to strict legal parameters, and one that is also ambivalent with respect to that of full social deviance. Without generalizing, the reference territory still seems to be characterized by the presence of continuous infractions at different legal levels, primarily on the administrative level, which however do not necessarily give rise to a profound violation of social norms but, on the contrary, are sometimes socially accepted or at least widely tolerated dynamics.

Again, behaviors arise and are reproduced which, despite their legitimacy, would be subject to stronger ethic-social reprimands in other Italian regions. To begin with, as for the characteristics of what can be defined as ‘Neapolitan informality’, it must be noted their connection to the fields related to disorganization and consequent social adaptation that affect – and not necessarily overlap – those areas of life on the margins of legality as well as those of the actual perpetration of crimes and multiple administrative violations (Di Gennaro *et al.*, eds., 2018), also in consideration of a non-negligible permeability between the different types of offenses (Pascali 2018).

It should also be taken into account, in relation to the reference environment from a socio-legal point of view, that this is a context where the presence of a “free area of degradation and widespread illegality” has been reported (Frascani 2017: 47), that – in a proliferation of illicit practices linked to the rarefaction of controls and institutional protections – does not seem to affect only the (albeit extensive) strictly marginal Naples (Tizian 2018). In fact, despite frequent exaggerations concerning a ‘notorious’ exceptional dangerousness (and despite strong fears about common petty crimes that do not always correspond to real, current dangers), we note an inadequate repression against even serious acts (Cervasio 2017), also because of their size and the few law enforcement measures materially available, as well as, in some cases, due to the distortive effect of mental orientations toward an improper ‘paternalistic understanding’, sometimes linked to a general attitude of passive tolerance and quiet let live. This situation is, on the one hand, characterized by an endemic proliferation of ‘getting by’ practices (adaptation to daily occurrences, not necessarily through legal means, but, on the contrary, often Merton-like innovative: Merton 1949), which also act as social shock absorbers; on the other hand, we see the persistence of weak government institutions that, due to corruption, incapacity or impossibility, haven’t been able to restrain these phenomena in the absence of fully sustainable economic-legal development policies. In light of the above, a dense, highly significant territorial particularity has emerged, one that seems to be very relevant and evident also for migratory dynamics. From the general ‘tolerance’ of others, make-do seems to be a peculiar category that actively crosses the topic of immigration. Let us see how.

III. “Migration poles”

III. Despite the economic problems, even the territory of Campania and that of its capital have become consolidated areas of settlement for foreign workers and their families, one that is defined by increasing stability. In fact, Naples has long been the region’s main center of attraction, which, in turn, is among the regions of southern Italy that are preferred by immigrants as their destination (Ministry of Labor and Social Policies. *et al* 2016: 5). Some of our research data show that a peculiar situation has arisen. The vast majority of respondents (80%) declared a coincidence between the year of arrival in Italy, the year they arrived in Campania and the year in which they settled in their current place of residence. Thus, a form of ‘targeted immigration’ has been profiled, which seems to prove how the Neapolitan context assumed the quality of a specific migratory place of choice. As we question what elements may influence this choice, we could analyze the well-known reflections on the qualification of the Neapolitan area as ‘sponge city (Benjamin *et al.* 1925), historically subjected to an incessant work of reciprocal hybridization with stimuli (originally) unrelated to it. In this sense, the city itself – which, especially in its central parts, does not show clear residential segmentations oriented to total socio-cultural divisions between foreigners and natives (Boccagni *et al.* 2012: 118 ff.) – ‘is contaminated’: Naples itself would appear, in these ways, ‘integrated’. Therefore, spatial conditions of (obligatory) mixing, together with the presence of pre-Fordist and post-Fordist traits in the organization of work, would produce largely shared spaces of non-formal rigidity in the relations of many types, thus contributing, among other things, to socially create a particular condition of relationality of what is ‘thrown together’ (Massey 2005), one that would avert the explosion of tensions and despite the absence of shared cultural models (Morlicchio 2018). Thus, it seems that we are in the presence of an at least partial incessant negotiation of even one’s own identity (see Dal Lago 2005). Being accustomed to ‘absorption’ and to a multi-faceted reality, as well as to the sharing of a multiplicately problematic space, would therefore make the identities of the immigrants in the area ‘less unusual’. From the immigrants’ point of view, it is however possible to hypothesize, in the Naples-area, a greater easiness of integrating in the widely spread middle-lower classes (the so-called downward assimilation: Portes 1996; Portes *et al.* 1993:74 ss.). This too can be the basis of the transition from the condition of ‘being migrants’ to ‘being inhabitants’ (Amato *et al.* 2009).

In all this, however, only a quarter (24.5%) of immigrants said they wanted to stay in the area permanently. Still 75.8% stated that they have no intention of moving elsewhere within the next 12 months. This apparent contradiction between will and facts can be (at least in part) interpreted by examining the feature of ‘informality’ present in the territory. In fact, this vast set of informality/illegality can sometimes be used, even more at an individual or family level, as an element of facilitation with respect to projects of sustenance or partial development and in the multiplication of practically viable pathways. A pervasive non-respect of different types and levels of rules seems to benefit a condition of irregular entry into the territory. Furthermore, a specific permeability of different areas of non-regularity, which concerns, first of all, a mixture in these terms between the groups of ‘locals’ and foreigners, also seems to be present. Emblematically, let us consider the case of undeclared work, for which in the considered area there is a socio-economic fabric that certainly

differs from that of other territories (Orientele Caputo *et al.* 2009: 40 ss.; Formez Pa 2015), such that the work irregularly performed by immigrants is inserted in a specific way, 'welding' itself with pre-existing manifestations and generating dynamics with singular features (*amplius*: Isfol 2014). All this would also favor particular forms of chain migration. From the point of view of immigrants, it is obvious that – whether intertwining or moving in parallel – different pressures, reasons and effects are at play, such that are related and deriving also from different cultural, family, economic and administrative situations. Opposed reactions to the same reality can also be easily observed.

The particular 'resolution' of individual and collective issues, as well as being a remedy for imbalances and adversities, can also often lead to the creation of new problems and to the aggravation of old ones. With regard to acted mental attitudes, these seem to move between the dynamics of acclimatization and openness and, albeit to a lesser extent, of closure and intolerance, for what concern both the natives and the immigrants.

IV. Ambivalent relationship

IV. These theses were also examined through a qualitative analysis, which enabled us to take a closer look at the phenomena. What emerged from our study seems to point to identifiable links between illegal immigration, illegal work and local illegality, such that would facilitate a specific type of migratory flows and permanence. Additionally, a specific habit of widespread trust in others (regardless of their administrative condition), the importance given to the indications coming from their own knowledge-networks, as well as practices that are far from constrictive and inspective, be them formal or informal, would also play an important role in this direction. Some of these assumptions seem to be fairly punctual findings drawn from the statements provided by respondents. In fact, the themes of the absence of repression on several levels, the presence of a vast area of irregular work and the existing deviance, which are seen both as harbingers of opportunities and limits, were often described by respondents with great spontaneity. One of the pull factors appears to be a practical facilitation deriving from a 'weak' legality, whether eluded or declined ('adapted') on the spot and according to specific logic and interests. This element, while undoubtedly acting as a factor of attraction (Giuliano *et al.* 2014: 243), also gives rise to complex issues regarding a conformed and integrated permanence, hereby understood as hindering the promotion of immigrant legality and playing a role in a certain refusal of the immigrants themselves towards their host territory, its customs (broadly understood) and part of its culture. Moreover, such a state of irregularity, at times so profound and dilated, may attract migrants with considerably low plans (already oriented towards carrying out medium and low-level jobs) of a short duration, in addition to conditions (of departure and arrival) characterized by social and economic marginality. In fact, a large part of the subjects who answered the questionnaire had a low education. Precisely this characteristic should therefore be related to the particularity of registering a long and privileged permanence in the territory that does not always result in a perfect or at least adequate integration.

V. Concrete possibilities and effective integration

V. In summary, despite the deep-rooted problems of the territory (and, therefore, the habit of living with them, the reactive forces they have caused), on the one hand they act as facilitators but on the other they cause discomforts and even micro-conflicts, which sometimes pose a great obstacle towards a full integration. From another perspective, complications and hardships, albeit with their specificities, seem in some respects to unite in the city, both the foreign and indigenous population. In this case, the two groups do not appear very distant (which leads us to state that the road to integration is not always based on a decisive and progressive improvement of the economic conditions of immigrants, but also on the recognition of the other within a common socio-existential sharing); however, these very factors prevent the full realization of an effective upward social mobility that is at the base of the aspirations of economic migrants, such that drives them to (want to) leave the territory. If migrations take place primarily for economic purposes, it is clear that the simplicity in finding an irregular job (as an irregular migrant) in a given territory can act as a stimulus to choose it (Pugliese, ed., 1996). Given, however, that the objective of a legal stabilization is strongly based on the presence of a regular job (Ambrosini 2011: 35 ss.) – not easily obtainable in the territory being discussed –, the consideration of the overall picture is reversed (Pane *et al.*, eds., 2000). The actual job opportunities, alongside available housing options, would therefore not fully guarantee the achievement of a dignified life. Ultimately, it would seem that the introduction into a territory where economic and social expressions are made possible even for irregular migrants, (Idos 2017: 181 ss. And 399 ss.), definitely play a peculiar role. The 'sustainability' of an allocation in conditions of irregularity, however, can be part of a project where it also includes the plausible objective of a future regularization, taking into account that, in the Italian national context, there is a greater probability that an immigrant entering or residing in an irregular way will eventually become regular, compared to those who will actually be expelled from the country (Colombo 2012: 165).

Based on the above, it is important to underline how the Neapolitan economic and legal condition, along with what it raises both in emotional and cultural terms as well as administrative practices, seems to contribute to the origination of a migration movement both in entry and exit.

VI. Extended irregularities and risks of criminal attraction

VI. It should be emphasized that the widespread irregularity/informality of economic and social relations can increase as much as mitigate the risk of carrying out crimes. Thus, if undeclared employment unfortunately constitutes a ‘typical’ model in some territories, such to be well connected with a condition of administrative irregularity (Censis 2000: 59), those who find themselves in this last category could be less subject (compared to other areas where a distinction is clearer between the sphere of legality/regularity and its opposites) to a shift towards illegal practices.

In other words, the drive to carry out some crimes normally linked to the condition of being irregular (Pinotti 2015) could be less pressing in a territory where economic and social expressions are also possible from irregular citizens (Idos 2017: 181 ss. And 399 ss.). In this regard, it is worth remembering that the lower incidence of crimes committed by foreigners in the southern regions of Italy has been connected not only with the greater possibilities – even informal – therein available to adapt and fit-in, primarily as related to work and housing plans, but also with the presence of a general degree of lower social expectations, as well as of less clear social differentiations, with consequent reduction of the risks of deviant behavior, according to the theorists of social disadvantage and relative (de)privation (see Barbagli 2008: 195). An additional help comes from the diffused and organized native criminality – which conveniently moves within the framework of an extensive informality – whose strength conveniently aims at hegemonizing the presence of irregular immigrants to its own favor (for example: Melorio *et al.* 2016, as well as Dna 2017: 767). Therefore, on the one hand there are comparatively fewer crimes committed by immigrants in the Neapolitan territory, on the other hand there is the specific risk of a varied and differentiated inclusion in the organigrams of criminal organizations. Furthermore, even though the responses and data collected during the research seem far from representing serious situations of exploitation and illegality involving immigrants, this should not lead to the assumption that such scenarios are not present or that they can be irretrievably weakened over time, but instead that they may be less evident in some parts of the territory.

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