

## The Influence of the Host Country Local Characteristics at the Immigrants Integration

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### Abstract

*This research was conducted to examine the influence of the host country local characteristics at the integration of immigrants. The study has been focused at Siena province in Italy and the case of the Albanian immigrants has been examined. 36 Albanian immigrants were invited to participate in the in-depth interviewing process. 21 others have participated at 4 focus groups. The findings revealed that the provincial characteristics influence the immigrants way of integration. The level of social "closeness" of a locality, determined by historical, geographical, demographical, social and cultural factors, create the climate that influences the integration process of immigrants at that locality.*

**Keywords:** local characteristics, host country, immigrant, integration

### 1. Introduction

Local characteristics play a very important role at the level of the necessary space for the successful integration of immigration and their families at the host country. The historical, geographical and demographical characteristics of the host locality on one hand, and socio-cultural factors of the same locality, on the other hand, take a principal importance on the way that immigrants and their families try to be integrated at this locality.

Different localities, at the same host country, offer different opportunities for immigrants to be incorporated at the host society, and this is the reason why many immigrants, after being placed at a particular locality, and after have spent there their lifetime for many years, decided to move to another locality, in order to profit from spaces and opportunities this second locality offers.

This study aims to examine how the local characteristics of Siena province influences the process of integration of the Albanian immigrants and their families.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1. Recent studies about local integration of immigrants at Siena locality

Different studies have shown that integration is a process that depends from the territory (CNEL, 2012, p.2; Berti, & Valzania, 2010, p. 35). It is not a process that can be actualised in accordance with a theoretical successful model for all countries, but at contrary, the integration is shaped according to particular places, where different social actors are protagonists at everyday life. For this reason, the "shapes" that integration takes, are different from one territory to another, from a city to another, from a neighbourhood to another, based on the available sources and opportunities offered at local level (Berti, & Valzania, 2010, p 12).

Giovana Campanni also shows that the processes of integration of the immigrants are differentiated according to the local realities and the immigrant groups. She says that, in matter of integration policies, the structural policy of integration depends from the local institutions (Regions and municipalities). It is their task to give answers to the need for living quarters for newcomers, to help families on housing, to support the associations and offer meeting spaces, to give specific counselling on health problems, to train cultural mediators, to promote intercultural activities in cooperation with schools" (Campanni, 2004, p.10).

The matter of local integration of immigrants is clearly showed on the normative acts at local level, particularly in Italy. For example last years the Region of Tuscany has implemented regional policies in order to help the immigrants integration process. The Regional Law 29/09 is a positive stimulus toward practices of integration at this Region.

Two famous studies, the first one titled "The new confines of integration. Foreign immigrants at Tuscany" (Le nuove frontiere dell'integrazione. Gli immigrati stranieri in Toscana) and the other "The local dynamics of integration. Research experiences at Tuscany", (Le dinamiche locali dell'integrazione. Esperienze di ricerca in Toscana), have been published on 2010 and 2011 by Fabio Berti and Andrea Valzania, and can be considered a very important contribution for this issue.

Some other reports at national and local level such as: The Report of 2011 from Centro Servizi Volontariato Toscana, (CESVOT), titled "Cities and immigrants at Tuscany"; VIII-th Report of Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e Lavoro (CNEL) at Ministero del Lavoro e Delle Politiche Sociali, published on February of 2012, about the indexes of immigrants integration in Italy ; The Report of 2011 about the policies against the poverty and exclusion, actualized by Commissione Indagine Esclusione Sociale, (CIES) on Ministero del Lavoro e Delle Politiche Sociali, have done an important contribution at this subject.

From Albanian authors, professor Zyhdi Dervishi on 1997 has done a research at Siena province, about the role that locality characteristics play on cultural integration of Albanian immigrants (Dervishi, 2003).

The Report of CESVOT Siena, mentioned above, demonstrates some territorial characteristics, strongly connected to the culture and tradition that influence the immigrants integration at Siena locality. The division of urban spaces takes a symbolic value and a very important significance for the psychosocial dimension of inhabitants. Immigrants are dispersed mainly at rural zones, compared to the urban ones, and have not created ghettos and self segregated practices (CESVOT, 2012, p.391).

At the VIII th report of CNEL, published on February 2012, a clear picture of the indexes of the immigrants integration at Italian regions and provinces, is shown. According to this report the Tuscany region on 2009 held the second place on the classification of the index of general potential of integration (66.0), after the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (70.6), letting behinds 18 other Italian regions. At provinces level, from 103 Italian provinces, Siena held the 25<sup>th</sup> place with an index of 60.0 (CNEL, 2012, p. 29-33). At the same report is shown that Siena has a high indicator of familiar affiliation (75.1), being classified the 9<sup>th</sup> from 103 Italian provinces. On the other hand, the province of Siena shows a high index of familiar initiative ability (82.6), being classified the 16<sup>th</sup> from 103 Italian provinces. (Ibid, p. 98).

These data show that the issue of immigrants integration at familiar context is very interesting to be explored at Siena locality.

## 2.2. Historical, geographical, social and cultural characteristics of Siena province

The Province of Siena is a province in the Tuscany region of Italy. Its capital is the city of Siena. Siena was first settled in the time of the Etruscans around 900 BC. It was first inhabited by a tribe called the Saina. (<http://www.palio-siena.com/palio-siena/history/>, accessed on 21 January 2013). Historically, the province corresponds to the former republic of Siena. It has an area of 3,821 km<sup>2</sup> and a total population of about 272.638 inhabitants. There are 36 municipalities in the province. The province is divided into seven historical zones. (<http://www.provincia.siena.it/La-provincia/Conosci-la-provincia2>, accessed on 21 January 2013)

The area is a hilly one: in the north is Monte del Chianti; Monte Amiata is the highest point at 1738 m; and in the south is Monte Cetona. To the west are the Colline Metallifere ("Metallic Hills"), whilst the Val di Chiana lies to east.

The chief occupations are agricultural (wheat, grapes and fruit) and silk culture. The wine known as Chianti is produced here as well as in other parts of Tuscany.

These historical and geographical characteristics of Siena have influenced the creation of a particular social atmosphere, almost ethnocultural from cultural point of view. This climate composes a very interesting factor that explains the incorporation process of immigrants at Siena locality.

The territorial affiliation at Siena context is symbolized at the relation that people of Siena have with *contrade*. A *contrada* is a district, or a ward, within an Italian city. There are 17 *contrade* in Siena, but many other municipalities have their own *contrade*. It is impossible for anyone, born outside of Siena to understand how important these districts are to their citizens. These districts were set up in the Middle Ages in order to supply troops to the many military companies (<http://www.palio-siena.com/contrade/>, accessed on 21 January 2013). As time has gone by, however, the *contrade* have lost their administrative and military functions and have instead become simply areas of localised patriotism, held together by the emotions and sense of civic pride of the residents.

### 3. Research methodology

36 Albanian immigrants, who live at Siena province, 19 females and 17 males, participated at the in-depth individual interviewing process. Other 21 Albanian immigrants, who live at the same province, participated at 4 focus groups. The interviewees were from 25 to 60 years old. Their living experience at Siena province were from 4 to 21 years. For choosing the sample the technique of snowball have been used.

The method used for gathering data in this study was the semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview was flexible and allowed new questions to be brought up during the interview. However, an interview guide, which is an informal "grouping of topics and questions that the interviewer can ask in different ways for different participants" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 195), have been prepared well in advance.

A part of interviews have been typed and then transcribed. Detailed information also have been written for all interviews and focus groups. For data analyzing the thematic analysis have been used. The processes of coding and thematization have helped the analyze of semi-structured data. Coding is the primary process for developing themes within the raw data by recognizing important moments in the data and encoding it prior to interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998).

### 4. Findings and discussion

#### 4.1. The influence of historical, geographical and demographical characteristics on the space integration of Albanian immigrants

The province of Siena si evaluated form a part of interviewees as a place that offers a calm life, at a limited territory with a small population density. When they speak about the place where they live, the immigrants compare it to the place of origin, showing the similarities and differences. Some of them demonstrate their experiences before immigrating, in order to identify characteristics of Siena locality.

*Montepulciano is a very beautiful city, has many tourists, but is smaller then Durrës, the city where I lived before I immigrated. Montepulciano has few inhabitants, is a small and antic city, the streets are narrow. At the beginning, I thought the city was not warm. The nature was beautiful but the (social) life was missed. I missed the life I had in Durrës, that frenetic life, cars, noise, people. Is completely another thing, do you understand? But, then I liked that calmness (of Montepulciano) (E.N., female, 33)*

*In my opinion Siena is similar to Gjirokastra. You should go up and down though rock streets. I feel good in Siena because is a small city, with few inhabitants, a very systemized city that offers a calm life (E.B. female, 25)*

*Some people say "our youth passed here..." because Siena is a small place. In my opinion, if everybody knows how to organise its life, creating the necessary contacts (with people,) he can make a adequate life, wherever it can be. If you live in Tirana, for example, you will have your friends, your job, you will frequent the same places and will not visit the entire city at you everyday life, because it is impossible ... (D. L., male, 28)*

The interviewee immigrants, according to their point of view and their life experiences, see the life at a small locality sometimes with "rose sunglasses" and sometimes with "black ones". Some of them say that, living at a small place, where the contacts with autochthonous are more frequent and personal, creates good spaces for being involved at the social locality life and this creates better opportunities for integration.

*At the beginning I had little knowledge on (Italian) language. The work and people helped me. In Montepulciano (people) are very friendly. Because of living at a small place, people have possibilities to know good and fast each-other. When you go to bigger cities people are more untrustable and do not offer much, in contrary, at small cities you have the possibility to see and meet everyday the same people and they are more available to help you. The everyday conversation with people and work helped me to learn within some months the Italian language. (E.N., female, 33)*

Other interviewees see the life at a small locality as a disadvantage, because a small place do not create many opportunities for personal development. It offers a calm life, but not dynamic, offers an organised but a monotonous way of living, and all this motivates the immigrants interest to change their migratory project and to be replaced to somewhere else, maybe to return to the place of origin.

*Siena is a small town and offers many commodities, but here you become stressed because you have no important problems. I go at work by walking, making a promenade, without losing time. I need just 20 minutes for going from home to work because the city is so small. The everyday life is just a routine. I have decided, after 3 months I will turn back (to my origin country) ... (A.H. female, 28)*

Some immigrants see Siena locality with a more pragmatist view. They consider the opportunities that Siena offers, as valid to them, because they fulfill their needs and interests. Immigrants who have lived at rural zones at country of origin, have found work mostly at agriculture sector, which is very developed at Siena province, and consider it as a priority that Siena territory offers for practicing a profession they know.

*In Tropoja I dealt with the village life, and now in Siena I deal with agriculture. My prior experience helped me because the agriculture comes from village and I felt familiar to it. (G.K. male, 34).*

Between the interviewees there were some who have immigrated for study reasons. Some of them see Siena as a place that, after all, offers good study opportunities, especially when it has to do with special study programs that deal with local characteristics.

*My living experience in Siena has been and still is very positive. I think I have made the right choice because I study archeology and I feel lucky for studying at Siena University, because it is one of the best in this field and it gives me the opportunity to combine the theoretical field with the practical one. (A.L. male, 25)*

#### 4.2. The Albanian immigrants attachment with contrade of Siena

As I explained below, the "attachment" with a *contrada* is a significant part of attachment with Siena culture. The attachment with a *contrada* can be developed naturally because of the cohabitation with the traditions of the zone where immigrants live for years. The Italian researcher Mara Tognetti Bordogna has emphasised that the feeling of belongings compose a symbolic field that changes during the immigrant experience (Tognetti Bordogna, M., 1994, p. 5-139). Also Berry on his studies stressed the idea that *cultural changes*, that form the heart of acculturation concept, influence the immigrants lives (Krishnan, A., & Berry, J.W., 1992, p. 187-212). However this research showed that very few immigrants, who participated at this study, see the active engagement at a *contrada* as an integration strategy at Siena locality. This research also showed that, from members of one immigrant family, children and young people show more interest about the *contrada* organizations. Professor Dervishi on his book "Sociology of culture, I", stressed the idea that young people have a higher psycho-cultural "flexibility" for being adapted within the cultural environment of another culture, and as a result, they have more possibilities to be integrated on the host society (Dervishi, 2003, p.15).

*My second child is baptized in contrada, but me and my wife not. It has no sense for us at this age to do it. It is absurd. Everyone, at every age, can find itself in contrada, but for children is different. The child who came (in Siena) 5, 10 or 14 years old, grows up and continues normally (the life) attached to contrada (A. P., male 57).*

*Usually I do not show interest about contrada, just sometimes, but my children yes. I have 2 girls and they feel autochthonous. They were born here, in Siena. They are members of contrada of Istrisce, but I do not. Sometimes my wife tells me to follow contrada parties, but, to tell the truth, I don't like them (T.B., male, 52).*

*The bar I manage is frequented by members of Torre's contrada here in Siena, because this bar is located exactly at Torre's contrada neighborhood. I think, when Palio's activities will start, me and my Italian friend, who is co-owner of this bar, will be baptised at this contrada. But, I don't know if I can, because I'm Muslim and I don't like to convert my religion. If this is not a condition, I will do it, otherwise only my friend will be baptised. (D. L., male, 28).*

Anyway, for the immigrants of first generation, notably for them who have immigrated for employment reasons, the active participation at *contrada's* activities, is seen as very difficult, because of the obligations the *contrada's* life asks and the lack of time the immigrants have. Their daily focus is concentrated at work and this condition them to actively participate at the social life of locality where they live.

*I typhus for Gracciano's contrada at Montepulciano, but I have not been baptized on it. I participate as a spectator, but not at the activities organization. Taking part at the organization is not an easy think, because you should be dedicated*

to it. There are many things to do, cooking, preparations for flag raising ...many things. But I like very much to see the famous Palio. (E.N., female, 33)

Some of interviewees think that the tradition of *contrada* symbolizes the tradition of family. There is not important if a *contrada* connects or not people who have blood relations with each other. Members of *contrada* have strong spiritual relations, that are stimulated from *contradual* membership and that creates a friendly and affective environment, as at a big family.

*I like the culture of Siena. I like contrade, because I think they compose a big family that links small families with connect relatives. Contrade connect people who live for years at the same streets (E.B., female, 25)*

This familiar vicinity, that is created within a *contrada*, is so strong, that becomes integral part of the *contrada* member way of living, including here the immigrants and their family members. This attachment and this strong affiliation, can direct the immigration project of the whole family, children of which are integral part of a *contrada*, and culturally integrated at the locality life.

*Families who have small children usually do not think to move (from Siena), because the children are grown up at this environment and some of them are part of contrade. This is specific for Siena. Children grow up and become strongly attached to the locality life and, thinking of them, mothers and brothers do not like to move, even if it may be very difficult for them to stay (at Siena) (A. P., male, 57)*

#### 4.3. The immigrants in front of "the ethnocentric closure" of natives

Almost all immigrants, that took part at this study, see Siena locality as strongly related to the traditions. According to them, this loyalty toward the tradition have created a kind of social closure of natives and on difficulties to accept easy the others.

*Siena has a particular way of living, comparing to the other cities. Is a very organized city and closed on itself. Sometimes I think with my self that Siena is similar to Korça (a city in Albania). Korca is a city, as I can say, closed, but when (a Korça native) knows you good, he considers you a friend, and he opens the home to you. The same is even for native people Siena. Firstly they are superstitious because they have their own life and their own way of organization, but if they know you good, they create a friendly and warm social atmosphere to you. They have a strong tradition based on neighborhood. We have had the same at Shkodra city for example, but now it doesn't function anymore. At contrary, Siena has preserved this tradition (A. P., male 57)*

This social closure of natives often is seen by immigrants as an obstacle for the integration process of them and their families. Many immigrants say that, this closure is reflected to the employment spaces for immigrants in Siena.

*Siena is a very small city and here in Italy people say that Siena is done for natives. That's why it is difficult, but not impossible, for many immigrants to find job. It depends from the sector. For example, if you try to find a job at banking field, you may face many difficulties, because here sons of a banker take the working place of their father. But I do not deny the fact that, here in Siena, are many Albanian people who have been graduated, in medicine for example, and work at Siena hospital or have their own medical clinics (E.B., female, 25)*

The other interviewees do not see that "cultural closure" as a characteristic related only to the society of Siena, but generalize it, stressing the idea that it is a characteristic of all Tuscany Region.

*People from Tuscany generally are reserved and closed, and whoever you are, at the beginning, you will face difficulties to penetrate at social locality environment (E. B., female, 32)*

But, how "harmful" is that "closure" for the immigrants? At what level Albanian immigrants feel prejudged because of this "closure"? How is it reflected at Siena locality, comparing to other localities (regions) in Italy? The interviewees showed that the "cultural closure" of Siena have influenced at the creation of a prejudged atmosphere for all non native people.

*Here in Siena, if people don't know you, do not trust you. When they learn you are foreigner, they react. They are sceptic and superstitious, but when they know you...i can say...they trust you. But however, you will never become a native . For me this is not e problem, I take it for granted and I go ahead. (D. LI., male, 28).*

*Siena is a small town and, as all other small cities, people know each-other and have a kind of closure, but this do not have to do with racism or something like that. This mentality exists even at my city of origin, in Kavaja. People here are unsociable with foreign people, even if it ia an American. Albanian immigrants, I know here in Siena, have a stable work or are students that make a normal life (N.K., female, 26)*

*What I have heard from my Italian friends is that, people from Venice and Lombardia are more superstitious, comparing to people from Tuscany. (T.B., male, 52)*

*This is an issue of the culture of a place. Tuscany is the place of culture, people are very educated and respectful (E.B., female, 25)*

Some other immigrants see the superstitiosity of people from Siena, not as result of ethnocentric culture that they have developed between members of their social groups, but as process that is shaped naturally from the lack of knowledge and contacts with a particular group (in our context with Albanian immirants group ), or from the firts judgements they have created about members of that group.

*There have been cases when I have felt prejudged. This occures and depends from the expermience that native people have had with Albanian immigrants. Are many of them that have a positive opinion because of the positive experience. This is a natural way of reaction (A.L., male, 25)*

## 5. Concluding remarks

As this study shows, local characteristics play an important role on opportunities created for the integration of immigrant at this locality. But, it is not the only factor that influences the immigrant integration. Many other factors such as: the sociocultural physionomy of immigrants group, socio-demografical characteristics of immigrants, lifetime they spent at host country etc., influence their way of incorporation at host locality. As an interviewee said, there is an Italian proverbial expression " Tutto il mondo e' paese" (The entire world is a country). That means that, there exists ways to harmonize the relations between "natives" and "foreigners". It depends from people to find them and to build bridges of interaction between each-other.

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