OUT OF PARADIGMS: THE ITALIAN REASONABLE WAY TO INTEGRATION

ABSTRACT

Italy's policies on immigration and immigrants have been the product of a variable combination of functionalist, repressive, identitarian and solidarist oriented measures. The result has been a "reasonable integration model" – i.e. not too rigid, ideological or pretentious. However, this model is likely to survive in the future only in a revised version capable of taking into account fears and concerns of nationals about immigration. Otherwise it risks being undermined by a xenophobic backlash, as has already happened with other moderate integration models.

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Italian immigration and immigrant policies[1] have never been inspired by a rigid paradigm; they have instead adopted a variable combination of functionalist (aiming at regulating immigration flows on the basis of the labour demand), repressive (aiming at preventing clandestine entries and illegal residence and at suppressing crime by immigrants), identitarian (aiming at preserving cultural and religious tradition and establishing preference for immigrants of national origin) and solidarist (aiming at widening immigrants rights) oriented measures (Di Gregorio and Zincone 2002, Zincone 2006a).

The first relevant Italian migration (*Law No. 943 of 1986*) treated immigrants mainly as workers (Colombo and Sciortino 2004); it granted them the same welfare rights as Italian workers, but did not deal with their cultural and social integration. Italian law-makers were forced to face that issue only a short time later. At the end of the 1980s the integration issue entered the political agenda abruptly, since social tension increased – as a consequence of uncontrolled squatting due to the lack of accommodation for migrants – and reached a peak when a Black labourer was murdered in a well-known tomato-farming area. These events led to the formulation of *Law No. 39* of February 28, 1990, which addressed the phenomenon in a new way: immigrants were no longer just considered as workers, but as individuals settled in the country, with the right to a decent life. However, central government did not provide concrete measures or public funds to implement their social integration, with the exception of financial resources allocated for temporary accommodation.

The negative feedback from the previous legislation, together with the need to comply with Schengen requirements for combating illegal immigration, were among the main reasons for the formulation of the new migration law passed in 1998, which is still the main piece of legislation regulating this area till the new centre-left reforms of 2006, despite the 2002 centre-right reform. *Law No. 40* of March 6, 1998, formerly *Consolidated Act No. 286/1998*, was the first act aimed at addressing a wide range of aspects of immigration and immigrants' integration. The model behind the Law was considered a "model of reasonable integration" (Zincone 2000a) – that is, not too rigid, ideological or pretentious. It considered integration as made up of two dimensions and political goals, namely integrity and interaction, which mean respectively: a) to preserve *personal integrity* and quality of life for immigrants as well as native citizens; b) to foster *positive interaction* between nationals and immigrant minorities, on the one hand, and between different foreign groups, on the other. The model could be broken down as follows (ibid).

Integrity as basic rights also for undocumented immigrants

The 1998 Law established the right/duty to education for minors regardless of their legal status and the access to "necessary, even if continuous" medical treatment for undocumented immigrants, guaranteeing anonymity by providing them with an identity card with a code number. Undocumented minors and pregnant women were entitled to complete health care and were exempt from expulsion. Furthermore, the Law allocated funds to the Public Health Units specifically meant for health care to illegal foreigners. These measures were strongly backed by the "powerful lobby of the weaker strata," an immigrants' advocacy coalition made up mainly of Catholic organizations, but also including unions, democratic lawyers and NGOs: they started out as an illegal practice at the local level under the pressure of members of the advocacy coalition and were gradually incorporated into increasingly formal acts until the inclusion in the 1998 Law (Zincone 1998).

Integrity as equal rights for legal immigrants

The pre-requisite of this goal consisted in making the status of legal immigrant viable. Before 1998, the overly restricted annual planned inflows and the complexity of the procedures for obtaining a residence permit for working purposes[2] hindered legal entries, encouraging illegal ones. The 1998 Law introduced a job seeker's residence permit[3] and centre-left governments (1996-2001) increased the quotas for planned annual inflows.[4] A permanent residence permit, which could be obtained after five years' legal residence, was introduced. In the event of job loss, immigrants were given the opportunity to remain in Italy for one year to search for another job and to sign on for the dole.[5] Furthermore, the children and spouses of immigrants holding at least a one-year residence permit were authorized to join them immediately, and the relatives of reunited families were allowed to work.[6] The 1998 Law also confirmed equal treatment for regular immigrants and citizens, not only with regard to civil rights, but also social rights. In that way some elements of the republican assimilationist model, based on the universalistic recognition of individual rights, were also introduced (Zincone, Caponio and Carastro 2006). In order to ensure these rights were actually implemented, the Law set up the National Fund for Migratory Policies, 80% of which was given to the regions, which in turn transferred most of it to local public administrations and NGOs. This measure was needed. Before the 1998 Law, local administrations were not provided with enough funds. In spite of this, since the mid-1980s, integration policies had been implemented mainly on a local level by public and non-profit actors. The role of local actors, regions and municipal governments in this matter increased further as a consequence of the decentralization of the welfare system at the beginning of the 1990s. The initial lack of funds meant the burden of integration policies fell on local resources, giving rise to a high degree of territorial differentiation. The capacity to respond to the integration challenge depended on the degree of commitment and mutual understanding between public and non-profit local actors – which still influences the consistency of rights actually enjoyed by immigrants at the local level (Zincone 1994, Zucchini 1997, Zucchetti 1999, Cespi 2000, Campomori 2005, Caponio 2003, 2004, 2006, Ponzo 2004, 2006). Although the 1998 Act greatly improved "integrity for legal immigrants," it strayed from this goal as far as the right to local vote was concerned. In fact, while the Bill allowed documented immigrants residing in Italy for at least five years to participate in local elections, this measure was eventually expunged to avoid conflict with the centre-right opposition. The government, however, promised to approve it at a later date. The centre-left majority also promised to pass the reform of the *Nationality Law*,[7] facilitating the naturalization of immigrants and their children (Zincone and Di Gregorio 2002).

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Positive interaction based on legality and security

Law No. 40/1998 introduced measures to combat clandestine and illegal migration as well as smuggling and trafficking, and immigrant criminality in general. More precisely, it reinforced repressive measures against illegal entries, introduced various forms of forced expulsion, and included the possibility to hold undocumented immigrants in special detention centres for up to 30 days in order to be able to identify and repatriate them.[8] However, centre-left policy-makers underestimated the impact on public opinion of immigrants' criminality and their high rate of presence in prisons.[9]

Positive interaction based on pluralism and communication

The 1998 Law, on the one hand, provided for some elements of multiculturalism by allocating funds to teach foreigners their language of origin and support multicultural activities[10] – though these activities did not prove to be particularly adept at fostering better understanding and communication between native citizens and migrants. On the other hand, in order to avoid a "segregating" communitarian policy, *Law No. 40/1998* allocated financial resources to set up free courses in Italian as second language for adults[11] and provided for the use of support teachers for foreign pupils in schools.[12] In this way, the Law included a certain degree of "integrative identitarism," which calls for immigrants to learn the national language in order to avoid cultural and social segregation (Zincone 2006a), i.e. a sort of "societal oriented assimilationism" aimed at fostering equal opportunities in terms of access to jobs and education (Zincone, Caponio and Carastro 2006). Furthermore, the presence of "cultural mediators" was provided for in schools and public offices to adapt these services to the different needs of their new users. However, although cultural mediators have played a relevant role, their professional profile is not yet regulated by national legislation and they are thus at risk of being used as unqualified social workers or as mere interpreters. Despite all these improvements, a fundamental element to pursue the goal of "interaction based on pluralism" was left out: the approval of the *Bill on Religious Freedom*. Though some of the rights which should have been established by this

Act (such as the approval of reserved areas in cemeteries or the building and funding of religious buildings) have been granted by general laws, other measures (such as the respect of major festivities, the granting of space and time for prayer in the workplace, and the provision of food prepared in line with the different religious precepts in school and company canteens, etc.) have been left to the discretion of private firms and municipal governments (Ferrari 2000, Aluffi 2004). Furthermore, some issues end up by being ruled on by the courts – like the presence of the crucifix in public offices and schools which, according to court rulings, cannot be rejected since it is considered a symbol of civic values of tolerance and respect – or being disciplined by soft laws. For example, since the *Public Security Consolidated Act* forbids the use of hats in pictures for identity cards, in 1995 an internal instruction of the Ministry of Interior exempted hats or headcovers worn for religious reasons, like the *hijab*, if facial features are visible, in line with the rules applied to nuns (Zincone 2005, Aluffi 2004).

As far as the implementation of integration policies was concerned, *Law No. 40/1998* foresaw the involvement of civil society organizations both as providers of integration and social measures (together with public actors) and as intermediaries, following a sort of "indirect integration" model, i.e. a model in which the State devolves part of its competences to civil society organizations (Zincone 1992). As a consequence of the weakness of immigrant associations, the role of representing immigrant interests has been played by Italian associations, by what we have defined the immigrants advocacy coalition, the "powerful lobby of the weaker strata" (Zincone 1998). For a long time this benevolent lobby focused its efforts on protecting the most vulnerable, i.e. irregular migrants. The success of this strategy produced a series of amnesties – in 1986, 1990, 1995, in 1998 soon after the approval of the *Law No. 40* and in 2002 during the centre-right government – bearing the risk of rewarding illegal rather than legal behaviour and of feeding a vicious circle attracting undocumented migrants.[13] This in turn has fostered negative attitudes in public opinion towards immigrants by highlighting emergency aspects instead of normal, positive processes of integration. However, more recently the "benevolent" lobby has also begun to press in favour of legal immigrants, since many former *sans papiers* are now settled and documented.

In any case, we can conclude that *Law No. 40/1998* fitted the "reasonable integration" model quite well, even if some relevant elements were subsequently toned down or left out. In order not to lose support in the run-up to the 2000 regional and 2001 general elections, the centre-left government smoothed the dimension of "integrity as an equal right for legal immigrants" and underlined the aspect of "interaction based on security." It strayed from the first of these two dimensions by limiting some social rights to citizens and long-term residents,[14] making the conditions for obtaining a permanent residence permit much more demanding,[15] and breaking the promise to grant long-term residents easier access to citizenship and the right to vote in local elections. As a consequence of the latter – which was subject to much criticism by Italian scholars – until the centre-left returned to power in 2006, political participation of immigrants was mainly limited to the initiatives undertaken by some municipalities, which established consultative bodies or assistant councillors,[16] while the number of naturalizations has remained very low.[17] On the other hand, as far as "interaction based on security" was concerned, the fight against illegal traffic was improved by enabling the confiscation of means of transport used and making compulsory the arrest of those caught in the act.

In the 2002 reform, more attention was given to repressive-legalist stances. The improvement of "positive interaction based on security" was pursued by increasing sanctions against clandestine and irregular migrants and by extending the possibility to hold undocumented migrants in the special detention centres up to 60 days.

While the "reasonable integration" model was not completely fulfilled by the centre-left government, it seemed destined to be deeply revised by the centre-right coalition (2001-2006). During the electoral campaign the coalition announced a reform of *Law No. 40/1998* inspired by functionalist, repressive and identitarian stances. In 2002 the foretold reform was eventually passed (*Law No. 189* of 2002), but it altered the 1998 centre-left Law less than might have been expected, especially as far as social and integration measures were concerned[18] (Zincone 2000b, 2006b, Colombo and Sciortino 2003).

In fact, even if the 2002 reform was inspired by identitarian stances, the basic principles established by the 1998 Law concerning integration and social measures were not changed, retaining the multicultural elements without introducing assimilationist ones and maintaining most of the welfare provisions already granted to regular and irregular migrants. The most relevant changes concerned pensions,[19] council houses[20] and the National Fund for Migration Policies. In particular, this last provision consisted in incorporating the Fund into the National Fund for Social Policies, eliminating the mandate to use part of this to finance measures in favour of immigrants, and reducing its size considerably. This increases the power of regional and local authorities to decide which social and integration policies have to be financed, and to what extent, with the risk that these measures might not be implemented. Nevertheless, the decision to merge the

two Funds could be seen as part of the general trend in progress since the 1990s, with immigration policies increasingly devolved to regional and local authorities, and the move to blur the distinction between social policies in favour of native citizens and those addressed to immigrants.

In the 2002 reform, more attention was given to repressive-legalist stances. The improvement of "positive interaction based on security" was pursued by increasing sanctions against clandestine and irregular migrants and by extending the possibility to hold undocumented migrants in the special detention centres up to 60 days. However, the vicious circle of illegal entries was boosted once again by another amnesty for undocumented foreigners (2002), passed under pressure from employers and the "powerful lobby of the weaker strata."

At the same time, identitarian and functionalist stances were emphasized, making the "integrity for legal immigrants" goal more difficult to achieve. The 2002 Law fostered a sort of guest-worker and co-ethnic model, similar to the one adopted by Germany in the past and now enjoying a sort of revival at EU level, by tightening the link between residence permits and employment,[21] abolishing the job seeker's residence permit and reducing from one year to six months the period of unemployment tolerated. It also raised the years required to obtain a permanent residence permit from five to six, called for a more frequent renewal of residence permits and shortened their duration.[22] Thus stability and security for legal immigrants decreased. Moreover, in order to avoid the arrival of foreigners who might put pressure on the welfare system, the 2002 Law forbade reunification with relatives up to the third degree of kinship and made reunification of parents dependent on a lack of other children who could take care of them in their country of origin. On the other hand, the centre-right government reserved larger quotas of annual inflows to seasonal workers and eased the procedures for obtaining this kind of residence permit.[23] Furthermore, in order to screen the inflows better and support the economic integration of new migrants, *Law No. 189/2002* stated that education and job training programs could be set up in the countries of origin by local and regional public authorities, employers' associations, trade unions and NGOs, and foreigners who took part in these programs had a priority entitlement to receive a visa to work in the sectors concerned in the training.[24] Finally, reflecting a closed attitude to migration phenomena and a sort of "ethnocentric identitarism," the centre-right government introduced the co-ethnic principle in favour of immigrants of Italian origin in the annual inflows decrees and applied a two-plus-three-year moratorium for workers coming from new EU member states. Though in the end it was obliged to greatly increase the annual planned entries under pressure from employers and the "benevolent" advocacy coalition, leading to the 2006 inflows decree that allowed 170,000 non-EU workers and another 170,000 workers from new EU member states to enter the country, in addition to arrivals due to family reunifications.

We will now try to conjecture some of the main future trends. The "reasonable integration" model, after the (soft) revision carried out by centre-right government, is likely to be restored and reinforced by the centre-left coalition which returned to power in April 2006. First of all, the new government is going to re-establish some of the elements that grant "integrity for regular immigrants" by making legal entries and residence more practicable. The link between residence permit and employment will be made more flexible.[25] Furthermore, the new centre-left government has already decided to abolish the two-plus-three-year moratorium on the free circulation of migrants from new EU member states, and to grant residence permits for working reasons to the 350,000 migrants who had applied for it on the occasion of the 2006 inflow decree but whose applications were not accepted because they exceeded the already very generous quotas established by the previous centre-right government (170,000 entries). Yet, this last provision appears to disguise some sort of amnesty, since almost all those applications were actually made by migrants already working in Italy without a residence permit.

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With regards to "integrity for legal migrants," the centre-left coalition is going to fulfil the promises concerning long-term residents, which were put aside after the 1998 Law was approved. It intends to grant non-EU migrants the right to vote in local elections, while the Ministry of Interior has already prepared a reform bill of the *Nationality Law* which foresees an easier naturalization of foreigners and their children by reinforcing the *jus soli* principle and reducing the length of residence required, but offsets this more favourable treatment by the introduction of both language and integration requirements and the restriction of the access to nationality through marriage. The government affirmed that it also intends to implement EU Council Directives concerning long-term residents (2003/109/EC) and family reunification (2003/86/EC) – in practice it will just restore the 1998 Law in these matters. At the same time, "integrity as basic rights also for undocumented immigrants" will also be improved thanks to the reform of the special detention centres introduced in the 1998 Law in order to guarantee more humane conditions. Finally, "positive interaction based on pluralism and communication" is likely to be reinforced by the eventual approval of the *Religious Freedom Act*. This is the case provided that the present government, which has a very narrow majority in the

Senate, gets enough parliamentary support to pass these measures.

Summing up, Italy seems to have embarked on the path of a "reasonable integration" model. However, the model is likely to survive in future only in a revised version, a version capable of taking into account fears and concerns of nationals. Otherwise it risks being undermined by a xenophobic backlash, as has already happened with other moderate integration models.

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Notes

[1] Immigration policies establish the requirements to entry and residence in a country, while immigrants policies concern the endowment of rights enjoyed by immigrants living in a country (Hammar 1990).

[2] The employers had to recruit foreign workers in the country of origin without knowing them.

[3] These workers could enter the country sponsored by private individuals, regions, municipalities and associations listed in the relevant register. Sponsors had to deposit a financial guarantee, offer appropriate accommodation and pay the contributions for public health insurance. The permit lasted one year.

[4] 58,000 in 1998 and 1999; 83,000 in 2000; 89,400 in 2001.

[5] We note that in Italy the unemployment rate of migrants is only a few percentage points higher than that of native citizens (11.5% compared to 7.8% in the last quarter of 2005, ISTAT), in spite of their higher labour turnover and weaker social integration. In a recent article a prominent economist, Tito Boeri, maintains that, always according to ISTAT data, 9 out of 10 immigrants between the ages of 15 and 64 are employed, while rates for nationals are of just 7 of 10 (T. Boeri, "Tre segnali sull'immigrazione." *La voce*. www.lavoce.info/news, 24/07/2006).

[6] Relatives allowed to come to Italy through family reunification were spouses, children if minors, parents if economically dependent on the person living in Italy, dependent relatives up to the third degree of kinship who are unemployable in accordance with Italian legislation.

[7] The *Nationality Law* (Statute No. 91 of 1992), which is now under reform (see below), is inspired by the principle of preference for foreigners of national origin. In comparison with the previous, the 1912 Law reinforced the *jus sanguinis* principle by requiring three years of residence for aliens of Italian origin, four years for aliens from EU countries and ten years for aliens from non-EU countries in order to apply for Italian nationality. The *jus soli* on reaching the age of 18 was limited by the requirement of a legal residence entitlement at birth and a continuous presence in Italy. On the other hand, acquiring citizenship through marriage is much easier in Italy than in other EU countries, encouraging marriages of convenience.

[8] This provision was also introduced to comply with Schengen requirements.

[9] In 2002, 52.3% of Italians thought that an increase in the number of immigrants would lead to the spread of crime and terrorism (Bonifazi 2005).

[10] Intercultural education has been especially fostered in schools, acknowledging students' language and culture of origin since the early 1990s by issuing leaflets (Dutto 2000). We note, however, that the Roman Catholic religion is on the curriculum of State schools, as provided by the 1984 Concordat between the Catholic Church and the Italian State. Nevertheless, attending religious education lessons is not compulsory. As a consequence of agreements with other religious denominations (as yet there is no agreement with the Islamic religion), a course on other religious traditions or lessons on religious issues and on religion as a phenomenon can be held on demand (Aluffi 2004).

[11] According to the latest data available, in 2001-2002 79,819 migrants attended Italian language courses in public adult education facilities (Centri territoriali permanenti), (about 6% of regular immigrants present in the country in that year). Data on the attendance of the courses set up by non-profit organizations is not available.

[12] In 2004-2005 4.2% of students in public schools were foreign. Their performance was lower than that of their Italian classmates: regarding the pass rate, in 2004-2005 the difference between foreign and Italian students was -3.36 percentage points in elementary schools, -7.06 in middle schools, and -12.56 in high schools (MIUR – Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research 2005). Nevertheless, Italian concern for the possible negative effects on children's education due to the presence of foreigners in classes seems to be limited since in 2001, 61% of native citizens thought that this factor represented an occasion for updating the education system and for improving education for all students (ISPO 2001). However, concern could increase as the number of foreign students in schools rises.

[13] We have to remember that approximately two-thirds of migrants living in Italy are estimated to have spent a period of unauthorized stay (Blangiardo 2005).

[14] The centre-left government disowned the INPS (National Institute of Social Security) circular which stated that immigrants were entitled to poverty benefits, while the law in favour of maternity (No. 53 of 8 March 2000), which granted benefits to single mothers and for the third child, restricted those rights to immigrants holding a permanent residence permit.

[15] In addition to the five years' legal residence required by law, the immigrant had to have always held a residence permit for a permanent work contract. This requirement is hard to meet in an economy which expects the labour force, and especially immigrant workers, to be flexible.

[16] They are elected representatives of immigrants who have the right to participate in sessions of municipal council, to intervene on any item on the agenda, to make proposals and interpellations, but do not have the right to vote. Thus their powers, like the ones of consultative bodies, are limited.

[17] From 1991 to 2004 just 120,000 foreign citizens acquired Italian nationality, 13.4% by residence and 87.6% by marriage (ISTAT – Ministry of Interior)

[18] A synoptic table of the two laws is available on the FIERI Website (www.fieri.it/ktml2/files/uploads/servizi/legislazione%20Italia%20ASGI/normativa_in_materia_di_immigrazione/quadro_sinottico_engl.pdf).

[19] Foreigners who return to their own country without having reached the minimum necessary to receive benefits (20 years of contributions, and a minimum age of 65 years), lose all their contributions if they have been members of the retributive or mixed system; only if they have been members of the contributory system can they get back what they have paid in.

[20] In order to apply for them, the non-EU foreigner must hold at least a two-year residence permit, while before this condition was absent.

[21] More precisely, the 2002 Law introduced the "unified contract of employment and residence," which implies the obligation for the employer to guarantee accommodation and cover the cost of return to the worker's country of origin in the event of dismissal.

[22] Residence permits became renewable only for the same period for which they were issued (previously they were renewed for twice that period), and in any case for not more than two years (more precisely, not more than nine months for seasonal workers, one year for temporary workers and two years for workers with permanent contracts and self-employment).

[23] Foreigners who can prove that they have come to Italy for at least two consecutive years to perform seasonal work can obtain a three-year residence permit for this purpose with the indication of the period of validity for each year.

[24] Until mid-2006 this provision was implemented by only three Italian regions in an experimental way and on a very small number of migrant workers in Sri Lanka, Moldavia and Tunisia. In July 2006 the government extended it to the whole national territory.

[25] Since the renewal of residence permit often takes months, the government has decided to extend the validity of the permit until the renewed one is delivered. Furthermore, it is going to reintroduce the job seeker's residence permit.