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Sailing against the *Law* Tides*

Implications of the 2018 Refugee Reception Reform in Small-medium Towns and Rural Areas in Italy

Magda Bolzoni, Davide Donatiello, Leila Giannetto

Abstract: Over the past decade, asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Italy were accommodated in reception facilities located not only in large metropolitan centres but also in Small-medium Towns and Rural Areas (STRAs). Italy's reception system evolved quickly to face the peaks of asylum applications, especially in the 2015-2017 period. At the same time, the changes in Italy's reception policies were pushed by the increased polarisation in the asylum debate, which, in turn, has led to great heterogeneity in the development of reception practices.

This paper argues that the reception-territory nexus is a critical dimension to focus on when investigating the implications connected to the arrival and establishment of asylum seekers and refugees. This appears particularly true in STRAs where the reception system provided new resources that, when well-managed, showed transformative potential, developing virtuous interconnections with the local territories and communities. These virtuous interconnections have, however, been affected by the continuous changes in reception policies and came to a critical juncture in 2018, when the so-called Security Decree entered into force. While further modifications are currently underway, such legislation profoundly affected the Italian reception system's functioning and working principles, creating new frictions and tensions among institutional actors and within the local governance of the reception system itself. We argue that the reform contributed to disrupting, both materially and symbolically, the previous virtuous combination of refugee inclusion and local development, especially in STRAs.

Our situated qualitative analysis – carried out between 2019 and 2020 through discursive in-depth interviews – investigates the interconnections between territory and reception in three small to medium-sized towns and rural areas before and after this regulatory shift. It does so by introducing a novel analytic framework, focusing on *symbolic* and *material* aspects *within* and *around* reception. The analysis suggests that the stress and disruptions connected to the regulatory changes have

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had a negative impact on the internal organisation of the reception as well as on the refugees' inclusion and on the chances of local development.

Keywords: Migrant reception and local transformations · Asylum seekers and refugees · Italian asylum system · Dispersal policies · Material and symbolic dimensions

1 Introduction

Following the sudden increase of asylum applications in 2015, Italy, like other EU countries, has increasingly adopted a dispersal policy allocating reception facilities in Small-medium Towns and Rural Areas (henceforth called STRAs). This recent dynamic has promoted studies on the implications that the reception of forced migrants may have for local territories. Although research has revealed discrepant reactions from local communities, the presence of refugee reception initiatives has also shown transformative potential, especially for non-urban territories where the arrival of forced migrants is a relatively new and challenging phenomenon. In the Italian context, some STRAs communities have been responsive settings in terms of activating and experimenting with innovative solutions for asylum seeker and refugee inclusion. What is surprising is that such virtuous interconnections between STRAs and the reception initiatives have also emerged as unplanned outcomes, enabled, but not intended, by the national laws. We are, of course, aware that this is only one part of the story, considering that public expenditures and the social risks of reception are highly debated in the political discourse and represent a controversial issue. However, the nexus between territory and the asylum-reception system has been scarcely addressed so far, especially outside large cities and in non-urban settings. Moreover, we believe the transformative potential of such a nexus should be further investigated and taken into account when analysing (and reforming) the reception system.

The so-called Security Decree, released at the end of 2018, steered the reception system in a different direction, putting its actual functioning at the local level and the virtuous interconnections that were emerging under pressure. These interconnections were neither recognised nor addressed by the regulatory changes. We consider the 2018 Decree not only a turning point in which the transformative potential of reception for STRAs territories and communities was jeopardised, but also as an analytical device: by putting under pressure, and sometimes disrupting, the existing interconnections between territory and reception, the 2018 Decree contributed to making these interconnections visible. On this basis, this paper proposes a qualitative analysis of three refugee reception experiences in STRAs across Italy to highlight the virtuous interconnections that were emerging between reception and territory and how the Decree has put them in jeopardy.

The paper contains seven sections. Following the introduction, the second section presents the legal and socio-political framework in which Italy's reception

system has evolved, while the third discusses the territory-reception nexus through literature, underlining the importance of exploring it in depth, especially outside large urban centres. The fourth introduces the analytical framework of the paper, proposing a model to analyse those interconnections that emerged from the virtuous management of reception in some STRAs and were then jeopardised by the 2018 Decree. The framework can be understood as a matrix consisting of the intersection of two pairs: *material-symbolic*, regarding the aspects that are observed, and *within-around*, concerning the orientation of the observation. The fifth section describes the methodology adopted and presents the case studies, while the sixth analyses the interconnections between territory and reception before and after the Decree in each of the case studies in the light of the analytical framework previously described. Finally, the conclusions summarise the main findings and propose a reflection on the paradox created by the 2018 Decree in which the need to cut expenses and promote security instead created further insecurity and fragmentation.

2 Italian reception system

Italy's reception system for asylum seekers and refugees[1] has a troubled, twenty-year history, constantly evolving under the pressures of increasing asylum applications (e.g., the peak in asylum applications following the Arab Spring, with 37,350 applications in 2011, and the Syrian crisis, reaching 128,850 applications in 2017)[2] and the high level of politicisation of asylum issues. Indeed, in the absence of a permanent organic view, Italy's reception system has evolved from being imagined as a locally managed and nationally organised system for both refugees and asylum seekers, aiming to provide high-level integration services, into a patchwork system in which reception standards differ for asylum seekers and people with recognised status of international protection (i.e., refugees) and are inconsistent across Italy (*Giannetto et al.* 2019; *Omizzolo* 2019; *Semprebon/Pelacani* 2019; *Openpolis/ActionAid* 2021). This situation has not been particularly impacted even by the transposition of Asylum Reception Conditions Directive 2013/33/EU[3] (substituting Directive 2003/9/EU), which left broad margins of discretion on the definition of national reception conditions. Today, Italy's reception system is sailing through troubled waters, still in search of a national organic (and stable) approach, often

1 The term "asylum seeker" refers to a person awaiting the determination of her/his legal status after applying for asylum. A person who has already obtained recognition of international protection is instead called an "international protection holder." While we are aware of the different implications, the terms refugee(s) and protection holder(s) are used interchangeably in this article, including in the definition: international protection holders with refugee status, subsidiary protection holders and people holding any national (in this case Italian) form of protection (i.e., *protezione umanitaria*, "humanitarian protection").

2 Data of the Italian Minister of the Interior (available at: http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/i-numeri-dellasilo).

3 Transposed into Italian law through Legislative Decree 143/2015.

leaving local stakeholders and their territories to find local solutions to an (inter) national issue.

Several phases can be distinguished in the history of Italy's reception system (*Marchetti* 2016; *Campomori/Ambrosini* 2020). Launched in 2002, it was initially inspired by bottom-up experiments in asylum-seeker reception implemented at the local level by third-sector organisations in cooperation with local authorities. They often emerged in response to the arrival of asylum seekers fleeing the Yugoslav and Kosovo wars. The first decade of the 2000s (first phase) was thus devoted to experimentation and the definition of a national reception system, which had at its core the *Sistema di Protezione di Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* (henceforth SPRAR – Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees).[4] SPRAR was based on the voluntary participation of municipalities in planning and implementing local reception projects that could then be managed by third-sector organisations. The SPRAR reception projects scattered across Italy created a national network of reception projects (partly) funded by the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services, with high standards of reception conditions and integration services (*Giovannetti et al.* 2019). SPRAR was designed as an integrated reception system, supporting asylum seekers and refugees on their path towards autonomy by involving not only different levels of government and stakeholders, but also the local population. This was also ensured by the dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees in small reception facilities (i.e., apartments), both in large urban centres as well as in STRAs.

The peaks in arrivals of asylum seekers following first the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 and then the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015 marked a second phase in which an emergency approach to reception prevailed (*Campomori/Ambrosini* 2020). Especially after 2014, the need for immediate accommodations for the newly arrived triggered chaotic experimentation with emergency reception facilities controlled directly by the Ministry of the Interior. Such reception facilities were named *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* (henceforth CAS – Extraordinary Reception Centres). In these centres, the quality of reception and integration services was defined by the public procurement procedures issued by the local branches of the Ministry of the Interior (i.e., Prefectures) and by the winners of said procurement procedures. This system triggered the creation of reception practices that vary from being ill-managed or plagued by criminal infiltrations (*Libera, Cittadinanzattiva and LasciateCIEntrare* 2016), to innovative and inspiring (*Galera* 2018), presenting a highly variable level in terms of quality of services and being managed by a wide range of actors, from hotel owners to third-sector organisations already involved in refugee reception (*Openpolis* 2019). Overall, the CAS system became widespread and covered around 80 percent of all the available reception places in Italy in the period 2014-2018. For example, in 2017, while 148,502 people were hosted in CAS facilities, only 24,741 people were hosted in SPRAR.[5] At the same time, however, it

4 Law 89/2002.

5 For an overview of the numbers of accommodations in the Italian reception system between 2014 and 2020 see: https://www.openpolis.it/numeri/le-presenze-nei-centri-di-accoglienza-tra-il-2014-e-il-2020/.

is important to stress that in 2015 the media and political discourse was still focused on the need to offer the best reception conditions to people fleeing conflicts and crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and the CAS system itself offered willing third-sector organisations the opportunity to provide high-quality services and to experiment in combining the reception and integration of forced migrants with territorial development, similarly to the SPRAR system, triggering social innovation. In sum, in this phase the vision at the basis of Italy's reception system was still to have a system where SPRAR and an integrated approach to reception had a central role, whereas CAS was an emergency appendix, deemed to disappear.

This changed in the third phase with the entry into force of the so-called "Security Decree" of 5 October 2018, signed by the then Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini, leader of the League party, and transposed into Law 132/2018. The transformations were anticipated by a backlash of anti-immigration and anti-NGO rhetoric (*Castelli Gattinara* 2017). The 2018 Decree translated this rhetoric by (apparently) cutting expenditures, de facto financing bigger reception centres and reducing integration services. In this framework, the CAS system became a structural part of Italian reception but devoted only to the reception of asylum seekers who could not access SPRAR (renamed SIPROIMI[6] due to the target change) anymore. As a consequence, the underlying idea of a reception system in which every stage of reception had the purpose of supporting the beneficiaries' path towards autonomy was dismantled. In this phase, the system imposed a physical separation between asylum seekers and refugees, a consistent reduction of funds allocated to reception[7] and the cancellation of integration services for asylum seekers. In addition, the Decree cancelled from Italy's body of law a form of national protection called *protezione umanitaria* ("humanitarian protection," widely granted to asylum applicants in the 2014-2018 period) and determined the expulsion of the holders of this form of protection from the reception system. These changes proved to be particularly vexing to virtuous practices of reception and integration (*Omizzolo* 2019; *Openpolis/ActionAid* 2021). Moreover, the cancellation of national humanitarian protection implied a significant increase in numbers of irregular migrants, with an estimated 600,000 people living in an irregular situation in Italy as of January 2020 and with an estimated increase of 70,000 people in this situation due to the 2018 reform, people often working and living in rural and peripheral areas, in informal settlements, without basic services and in precarious conditions (*Villa* 2018; *Roman* 2020). Overall, since 2018, asylum seekers and refugees cannot enjoy the same reception conditions: only protection holders and other vulnerable categories (e.g., unaccompanied minors) have been allowed to access SPRAR/SIPROIMI, its integration services and the dispersed accommodation model (*Giovannetti et al.* 2019). As also illustrated by the research,

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6 SIPROIMI stands for *Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e minori stranieri non accompagnati* (Protection System for international protection holders and unaccompanied foreign minors). For the sake of simplification, henceforth we refer to these realities as SPRAR/SIRPOIMI.

7 For a thorough analysis of the cuts in resources made by the 2018 Decree, see *Omizzolo* 2019.

this Decree constituted a watershed for many stakeholders involved in Italy's reception system.

The presence of refugees and asylum seekers in STRAs has become increasingly consistent from 2014 onwards, when a dispersal policy was implemented in Italy through the "National operational plan to deal with the extraordinary flow of non-EU citizens" (Agreement between the Government, Regions and Local Authorities, July 2014). While large urban areas still host the vast majority of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy, in 2019, around 20 percent of CAS (i.e., around 1,000 facilities) were placed in territories such as STRAs, remote from main urban areas and facing demographic, social and economic challenges (*Openpolis/ActionAid* 2021).[8] Moreover, almost half of the 1,189 municipalities that in 2018 formed the SPRAR/SIPROIMI network had less than 5,000 inhabitants (*Servizio Centrale* 2019). Dispersal policies have been implemented in Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, to ensure a certain level of "burden" sharing among regions and between urban and non-urban areas (*Campomori* 2018; *Semprebon/Pelacani* 2019). While the CAS system grew disproportionately in some areas due to the emergency approach of the first years of the "refugee crisis," with collective centres with high numbers of refugees appearing suddenly in abandoned hotels in remote areas with few residents, the SPRAR/SIPROIMI has always followed the logic of dispersed and small-scale accommodation, usually in apartments. The logic of dispersal (and of dispersed accommodation in small-scale facilities) is also implemented to promote more effective socio-economic integration of forced migrants (*Campesi* 2018) by facilitating opportunities for interaction between residents and newcomers and by supporting the autonomy and self-organisation of beneficiaries (*Giovannetti et al.* 2019). Several CAS were established following the same logic of SPRAR centres thanks to the commitment of third-sector organisations (for Tuscany see *Berti et al.* 2017; for Trentino see *Boccagni et al.* 2020; for Liguria see *Gianfreda* 2021). The distribution of reception facilities and the quality of housing are crucial aspects that reveal the close interconnections between the philosophy by which a reception model is inspired (*Marchetti* 2016) and the role the "local" can play (*Giovannetti et al.* 2019; *Omizzolo* 2019; *Herslund* 2021; *Meer et al.* 2021).

3 Migrations and the reception-territory nexus: a literature review

In Italy, as in other European countries (*Doomernik/Glorius* 2016; *OECD* 2018; *Glorius et al.* 2019), the attention to the reception-territory nexus has only recently shifted to extra-urban areas, after a period in which the "local turn" in migration studies – giving emphasis on sub-national governance, policies and implementation – had favoured the focus on medium-large cities (*Scholten/Penninx* 2016; *Caponio et al.* 2018) and, more importantly, rarely considering the asylum issue.

[8] Further data are available at https://www.openpolis.it/numeri/la-presenza-dei-richiedenti-asilo-in-rapporto-alla-popolazione-residente/

The considerable flow of forced migrants to the EU in the last decade and the situation of national asylum systems continuously under stress have, on the one hand, encouraged scholars to more deeply explore reception policies and their implications for the local level (*Hinger et al.* 2016; *McAreavey/Argent* 2018; *Haselbacher* 2019; *Ambrosini* 2020; *Gauci* 2020). On the other hand, the permanent state of emergency characterising governmental responses, especially in Italy (*Castelli Gattinara* 2017), has undermined the potential for the emergence of a debate about the places where asylum seekers are hosted (*Crawley et al.* 2019; *Omizzolo* 2019). Major urban areas have always played an attractive function for migratory flows, even if – especially after the 2008 financial crisis – they increasingly represent problematic and impoverished social contexts. But small and medium-sized towns and rural and peripheral areas – often isolated, with limited public transport access, poor in services, unprepared to welcome migrants and without previous relevant experiences of intercultural dialogue – have recently gained the limelight in studies about asylum seekers and refugee reception. The recent regulatory changes (i.e., the 2018 Security Decree), moreover, have introduced transformations in the reception-territory nexus that have yet to be fully investigated.

In many extra-urban Italian territories, the arrival of forced migrants is a relatively new phenomenon, taking place in contexts often characterised by economies in distress or with ongoing projects for a reconversion of historical production activities, traditionally not interested in nor attractive for foreign labour. Furthermore, Italian small-medium municipalities and territorial authorities have faced a welfare state retrenchment, with a reduction of funds for local-level policies in a regime of dramatic cuts in public spending (*Citroni et al.* 2019). Also, for these reasons, refugee reception in STRAs constitutes a particularly challenging issue (*Glorius* 2017) that needs to take into account multiple elements, from attitudes of local communities towards the newcomers (*Zorlu* 2017) to initiatives aimed at turning rural areas into welcoming spaces for migrants (*Ponzo* 2020). STRAs communities have sometimes emerged as responsive contexts in terms of activating and experimenting with innovative solutions (*Galera et al.* 2018), processes that could be more problematic for large cities where responses are usually more anchored to political legacy and to the specific political orientation of the local government (*Darling* 2017). No a priori assumption should be made on the interconnections between the reception of forced migrants and territory based on the scales of the context (i.e., cities vs. STRAs). Preconceived distinctions between solidaristic small towns and hostile cities or between adverse extra-urban communities and more tolerant urban contexts are misleading and unfruitful. However, there is no doubt that in Italy reception in extra-urban areas has followed different trajectories and has attracted the interest of scholars. The result is a varied and original body of literature, which mainly revolves around three interrelated issues: the presence of (forced) migrants in small-medium towns and rural areas; local governance of the reception of forced migrants and policy implementation in STRAs; the transformative potential of reception initiatives with respect to the territories in which they are located, in terms of socio-economic change.

The first stream highlights that many foreigners come to settle in municipalities often not exceeding a few thousand inhabitants (*Balbo* 2015; *Bonizzoni/Marzorati* 2015). Scholars have observed, for example, how the small size of municipalities affects interactions between residents and foreigners, even without integration policies (*Ostanel/Fioretti* 2017; *Semprebon et al.* 2017). Another interesting argument is that in STRAs, given proximity and frequent opportunities for contacts, the resolution of conflicts and the positive conversion of initial aversion seem to be more likely because separation and opposition show a lower tendency to crystallise compared to urban contexts (*Natale et al.* 2019; *Ponzo* 2017).

The second stream is rooted in the literature on the governance of migration at the local level (see for example *Caponio/Borkert* 2010; *Scholten/Penninx* 2016; *Zapata-Barrero et al.* 2017) and looks at both the vertical and the horizontal dynamics between different levels of governance and different actors. In Italy, after the 2015-2017 period, the reception of forced migrants has become an increasingly contentious policy issue, involving a plurality of local actors, both public and private, and various bodies and levels of government (*Ambrosini* 2020; *Campomori/Ambrosini* 2020). Regarding governance, scholars have paid much attention to the actual functioning of reception systems at the local level, in particular looking at the development of collaborative relationships between municipalities and third sector (*Marzorati et al.* 2017), the emergence of new forms of inter-municipal cooperation as a response to the emergency frame in which national strategies are adopted, the fragmentation of initiatives on the same territory and the lack of supra-municipal coordination (*Martini/Bartolini* 2020), the role of mayors and the mechanisms of convergence/divergence between different local experiences of decision-making and policy implementation (*Giannetto et al.* 2019; *Haselbacher/Segarra* 2021).

The third stream, to which this paper aims to contribute more directly, focuses on the implications that the reception of forced migrants may have for local societies. In this perspective, the reception of asylum seekers is considered a powerful social phenomenon that can activate adjustments or more significant changes in the local territory where it unfolds. Unlike other studies that are more focused on migrant reception conditions and trajectories, some recent work has analysed the impact on and the evolution of hosting communities, taking into consideration some emerging positive effects triggered by the arrival of forced migrants due to dispersal policies. Although the question of the costs of reception is often present in the political debate as an extremely controversial and unpopular matter (see section 2), the economy of reception also includes some "benefits, such as the creation of jobs, the socio-economic (and cultural) contributions for local communities and host society as a whole" (*Ricard-Guay* 2019: 2). In particular, recent studies emphasise that rural and marginal areas usually benefit from the setting up of reception facilities (see also *Arfaoui* 2019 on France), not only because they bring new job opportunities and revive the private rental market, including the recovery of underused shelters (e.g. old and abandoned hotels), but above all because the presence of migrants can sustain local public services (e.g. post offices, schools, transport) and economic activities at risk (e.g. small shops, handicrafts). This is true especially in those areas experiencing a strong demographic decline, such as some rural and mountain areas

(*Ostanel/Fioretti* 2017; *Ponzo* 2017; *Caroli/Tortia* 2018; *Dematteis et al.* 2018; *Perlik/Membretti* 2018; *Omizzolo* 2019). Furthermore, recently in extra-urban contexts there has been an active mobilisation of civil society, a return to citizens' protagonism and a new will to actively contribute to the challenges of one's own territory (*Fontanari/Borri* 2017). This partial awakening of civil conscience has in some cases resulted in the creation of regeneration and renewal programmes of small, disappearing towns (*Elia/Jovelin* 2017; *Sokoll* 2018; *Driel* 2020).

These interconnections between reception and territory are at the centre of the analytical framework introduced in the next section. By referring to the transformative potential of refugee reception for STRAs, in the next paragraph we propose a matrix to frame and address such interconnections, both in terms of (unexpected) positive effects as well as disruptions connected to the Security Decree. It is important to stress that we do not imply that the experiences of reception in STRAs before the Decree were all positive; examples showing critical issues along different dimensions have indeed emerged across the country and have been differently tackled (see among others *In Migrazione* 2017; *Openpolis/ActionAid* 2021). Moreover, the positive outcomes of reception in STRAs have often emerged not as a result of the national reception policy but rather thanks to the combination of vision and practices of different actors (i.e., managing institutions, reception operators, civil society, third-sector organisations, representatives of municipalities and public local actors), able to do so within the regulatory setting existing before the 2018 Security Decree. In this view, we consider as virtuous interconnections those developing through synergies and collaborations between reception management/organisation and various stakeholders of STRAs, favouring dynamics of local change. The Security Decree appears to have then challenged, if not disrupted, these positive trends.

4 Analytical framework – a proposal

The matrix we propose allows us to offer an analytical framework to examine both the positive implications of reception for STRAs and the critical outcomes of the regulatory changes introduced by the 2018 Decree. This framework is grounded in both a deductive and an inductive process. It emerges both from a review of the literature, as seen above, and from an empirical exploration of practices in different areas of Italy in the period following the so-called "refugee crisis" (see also section 5, footnote 9).

The matrix is formed by the intersection of two pairs: *within-around* and *material-symbolic* (Fig. 1). The first pair (*within-around*) refers to the *orientation* that our look takes, the setting in which we observe the elements at the centre of our analysis, distinguishing between the internal setting of the reception structures and the territorial setting in which such structures are embedded. The second pair (*material-symbolic*) helps us categorise the *aspects* of a (positive) reception system and its interconnections with the local context by considering a material, concrete dimension and a symbolic, immaterial one. This matrix should be seen as

Fig. 1: Interconnections between reception and territory

	Aspects	
Orientation	*Material*	*Symbolic*
Within	- Staff and organisational structure of the managing institution - (Internal) services and activities of the managing institution - Form of accommodation	- Philosophy and vision of reception and integration - Worker-beneficiary relationship
Around	- Local economy and job market - Reuse of accommodation facilities and lodgings/housing - Local networks and relationships	- Community self-perception as welcoming space (civic society) - Empowerment and sense of belonging - Civil society engagement

Source: own design

an analytical device to structure and organise the analysis of the interconnections between reception and territory, keeping in mind that the dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but rather often overlapping, insomuch that a certain reception practice may present both material and immaterial aspects and may be observed within or around the reception managing organisation.

The first box (*within* + *material*) concerns the internal characteristics of the reception structures in terms of organisation, functioning and services supplied. This dimension is the main focus of the official evaluations of the reception facilities (*Badella et al.* 2019) and it has also been at the centre of their academic analysis throughout time in Italy (among others *Accorinti* 2015; *Omizzolo* 2019; *Semprebon/Pelacani* 2019). The second box (*within* + *symbolic*) refers to the meaning assigned to the concepts of reception and integration by the people working in and managing reception facilities and to the overall philosophy of the managing institution, which structures and is expressed through the material aspects of the first box (*Accorinti/Spinelli* 2019; *Bontempelli* 2020; *Giacomelli* 2021; *Giudici* 2021; *Marchetti* 2016). In our analysis, these two dimensions allow us to shed light on the attempt of institutions that have been acting not only as food and shelter providers but also as humanitarian organisations, following an approach focusing on the integration and autonomy of beneficiaries and, more concretely, adopting the guidelines of the ordinary reception system (SPRAR/SIPROIMI) as point of reference also for the emergency ones (CAS projects). This means, for example, a broad and diversified staff, with a low workers-beneficiaries ratio and multidisciplinary and transversal teams to tackle the different challenges connected to reception and integration. Before the 2018 Decree, a number of services were offered by several CAS to all beneficiaries hosted, following the SPRAR/SIPROIMI model, such as legal aid, Italian language courses, linguistic and cultural mediation, job counselling and

training. Also, several CAS in STRAs embraced the small-sized and dispersed accommodation model of SPRAR/SIPROIMI.

The lower half of the matrix focuses on the interconnections between the reception and the local context, addressing implications and possible outcomes. The third box (*around* + *material*) brings attention to the material side of such interconnections, ranging from the implications for the local economy and services to the development of networks of public-private actors. Especially in remote areas, as previously seen, the emergence of a "reception economy" (*Bartolini et al.* 2020) revolving around the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees may be particularly meaningful and may boost the local economy. First, the reception system creates a new job market for local workers and/or workers coming from outside the territory, usually qualified, and attracts funds and investments that are then spent locally (*Bock* 2018). Second, the foreign newcomers, usually working age or younger, potentially bring new labour force to the area in the long run and increase consumers for local shops and craft businesses. Also, dispersed accommodation in apartments fuels the rental market of private houses that are often left empty, with a direct beneficial impact, especially relevant in depressed peripheral areas. These positive implications have been (in some cases) and might still be vital for areas characterised by isolation, economic stagnation, depopulation and aging (*Marchesini/Giovannetti* 2019; *Bartolini et al.* 2020; *Boccagni et al.* 2020; *Gauci* 2020). In such contexts, the arrival of new inhabitants may also create the basis for a (re)opening of welfare services and public provisions, also thanks to the support and involvement of locally rooted third-sector organisations (*Elia/Jovelin* 2017; *Galera et al.* 2018; *Martini/Bartolini* 2020). Moreover, the establishment and functioning of a reception project, as well as the multifaceted challenges and implications that it may pose, demand the involvement of a number of local actors (e.g. public institutions, third-sector associations, municipalities, businesses and local population). The need for a "local governance of reception" can be the starting point for the creation or strengthening of (new) local networks between the involved actors based on collaboration and trust. These networks can be then mobilised and used beyond refugee reception, becoming in itself a relevant asset and a driver of local change and social cohesion in STRAs (*Ricard-Guay* 2019).

Finally, the last box of the matrix (*around* + *symbolic*) focuses on the immaterial implications that the presence of reception may bring in STRAs. Whether planned (SPRAR) or initially unexpected (CAS), the arrival of migrants forces the local community to face the issue of diversity, but it also challenges the local community's self-perception, identity and vision of the future. Even if tensions and conflicts may arise from the arrival of forced migrants (and indeed, examples of this are not scarce), on the positive side this may also create the basis for encounters with diversity, allowing a wider and multicultural understanding of social cohesion and the creation of a "welcoming community" (*Sanò* 2018; *Whyte et al.* 2019; *Ponzo* 2020). Although counterintuitive, the re-discovery of traditional identities and activities may be supported by the presence of newcomers, too. Finally, the new challenges, people, funds, networks that reception quite necessarily brings into the local setting may translate into the development of forms of empowerment of

different actors, especially civil society and local stakeholders who can find new opportunities for engaging in the revitalisation of their territories (*Fontanari/Borri* 2017; *Caponio et al.* 2022).

5 Methodology and case studies

Despite its many weaknesses, the reception system in some STRAs has been able not only to promote social inclusion of refugees, but also civic engagement, cooperative networking and the revitalisation of local economies. Building on recent literature on the *transformative potential* of reception initiatives for STRAs territories and communities (see section 3), we take into consideration forms of *virtuous interconnections* between reception and territories, namely the positive (although often unplanned) effects that emerged after the setting up of reception facilities in STRAs. These positive effects emerged not only where SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects were set up – which could be expected to a certain extent considering that they are based on a cooperation between municipalities and third-sector organisations (bottom-up approach) – but sometimes (and more surprisingly) also around CAS, which instead follows a top-down process. Nonetheless, among the discourses in support and legitimisation of the reception system reforms by the 2018 Decree, the need to reduce public expenditure/costs for integration services and general accusations of receptions' poor (if not criminal) management and outcomes were very common, while its positive implications for local communities and territories were scarcely thematised. Our argument is that despite examples of poor management and critical issues, a positive combination of reception systems, refugee socio-economic inclusion and positive transformation of STRAs often emerged. Such a trend has, however, been challenged and possibly disrupted – both materially and symbolically, according to our analytical framework (see section 4) – by the regulatory changes.

To address these issues (i.e., the positive combination of reception and local transformations in STRAs and this trend's disruptions following the regulatory changes), we propose a multi-situated analysis of exemplificative and "eloquent" cases (*Bruschi* 2005), focusing on three cases of reception in STRAs in Italy. We start our analysis from organisations that have been managing reception projects for several years in order to investigate their transformative role and the local interconnections before and after the 2018 Decree. The case study approach allows us to explore a phenomenon in the context in which it is generated and reproduced, providing in-depth understanding of its characteristics (*Yin* 2003).

The three cases, all located in STRAs, are, respectively, in the North, Centre and South of Italy: Ivrea and Eporediese in Piedmont, Pistoia and Valdinievole in Tuscany, Irpinia and Sannio in Campania (Fig. 2). Italy is historically characterised by territorial differences with regard to models of economic development and social cohesion (*Bagnasco* 1977). Considering our interest in the reception-territory nexus, this choice was relevant to account for Italy's territorial variety. These three cases were investigated within a broader research project focusing on the implications

Fig. 2: Location of the three case studies

Source: own design

of the 2018 Decree on examples of virtuous reception-territory interconnections.[9] They have been selected on the basis of suggestions collected during a first round of interviews of key informants in the exploratory phase of the research. Moreover, the three managing institutions of the selected cases also belong to a national network of asylum rights advocacy.[10] The research – carried out between 2019 and 2020 – is qualitative in nature and includes the analysis of official documents (websites of the organisations managing reception, planning of their activities and composition of their staff) and discursive in-depth interviews (in person or online) with actors

[9] The research, funded by Fondazione Migrantes, aimed at investigating the implications of the 2018 Decree for the reception system in different Italian localities. A total of six cases were analysed, two for each geographical area in which Italy is traditionally divided, i.e., North, Centre, South. More specifically, the research involved Trieste, Valle di Comino and the Salento area. A more detailed illustration of the whole study is available in *Bolzoni et al*. (2020). While we thank Fondazione Migrantes and FIERI (International and European Forum of Immigration Research) for the support that made the research possible, all of the opinions and analysis presented here are that of the authors only.

[10] We do not disclose the name of the managing institutions involved in the research to ensure anonymity. For further details on the national advocacy network and its work, see www.europasilo.org.

involved in reception project management (managers and operators), associations and public officials (see the Appendix for the list of interviews).

Before delving into the analysis, in the following paragraphs we briefly describe the three cases selected, focusing particularly on the managing institutions involved and highlighting elements concerning the reception-territory nexus in each case.

The first reception initiative in Ivrea was launched in 2000 and was prompted by the arrival of people fleeing the Kosovo conflict. The managing organisation analysed here, a cooperative, was founded in the same period, immediately applying to become part of the SPRAR system. After that first experience, the cooperative undertook other reception initiatives in the wider area surrounding Ivrea (i.e., Eporediese area). By the end of 2019, the cooperative was managing three SPRAR/SIPROIMI (with about 100 beneficiaries) and three CAS (150 asylum seekers). As for these reception initiatives, the managing cooperative developed synergies with local actors over time (i.e., the Ivrea Municipality, the local social welfare consortium and the employment centre). Thanks to the vast network of relationships with key players in the area, the cooperative was able to adapt the reception conditions and services provided in CAS to those of SPRAR/SIPROIMI (despite CAS lower economic endowment), organising small reception facilities distributed throughout the territory and guaranteeing assistance to migrants in order to support the achievement of autonomy and their socio-economic integration in the local context.

The case of Pistoia and Valdinievole refers to reception initiatives led by a cooperative active in the social services since 1995 whose first SPRAR experience dates back to 2014. The SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects managed by this cooperative at the time of the research were three (with around 130 beneficiaries in total), all through a consortium specifically created with other cooperatives in the same area. In 2015, the management of CAS facilities was added, reaching a peak of over 200 beneficiaries. The cooperative has an integrated plan to organise reception, which involves accommodation in small structures spread throughout the Valdinievole territory, initiatives functional to the social integration of beneficiaries, job placement services and opportunities for traineeships. The same approach was adopted for people hosted in CAS. In CAS facilities, a numerically consistent presence of operators was granted to ensure beneficiaries' access to the local community and adequate support to their socio-economic inclusion process.

The case of Irpinia and Sannio refers to a local network of third-sector organisations managing, at the time of the research, eleven reception projects (SPRAR/SIPROIMI) in as many different municipalities scattered among Benevento and Avellino provinces. By choice, they never managed CAS facilities and they started operating in the reception system with SPRAR projects in 2014, also in response to the poor management of existing CAS in the area (*Cresta/Greco* 2018). The network adopts the small-sized, dispersed reception approach, renting out (mostly private) apartments where a maximum of 5 people each are hosted, for a total of 249 available spots. The area is classified as "remote" by the Italian government; an area characterised by depopulation, lack of services and jobs, significant distance from main urban centres and, as such, eligible for specific funds and place-based interventions

related to the National Strategy for Remote Areas (SNAI), part of the EU programme 2014-2020 (*UVAL* 2014). The associations and cooperatives previously working in the field of social inclusion proposed the inclusion of asylum reception projects within a broader plan of integrated local welfare supporting a network of "small welcoming municipalities."

6 From virtuous to disrupted? A situated analysis of regulatory changes' implications

Drawing from the qualitative research and referring to the analytical framework previously illustrated, in this section we analyse the virtuous interconnections between refugee reception and STRAs as well as the challenges and disruptions following the 2018 regulatory changes. We bring each case as exemplificative of *material/symbolic* aspects *within* and *around* reception, as illustrated in our analytical framework. As we have focused our attention on virtuous cases, elements of the four pairs are present in each of them; however, every case allows us to more precisely highlight specific interconnections between reception and territory and their changes after the Security Decree released at the end of 2018.

6.1 Ivrea and Eporediese (Piedmont)

The cooperative managing reception in the area developed over time several collaborations with the Municipality of Ivrea, the local social welfare consortium, the job centre and various training and employment agencies. Thanks to collaborations with local stakeholders, the cooperative was able to adapt the services offered in the CAS to those of the SPRAR/SIPROIMI. As for the *around* + *material* dimension, a social agricultural project was also launched – with the launch in 2017 of a second independent cooperative dedicated to this agricultural entrepreneurial activity – which provided the opportunity for some protection holders to get jobs in the agricultural sector as skilled farmers and the possibility to offer internships to over 50 asylum seekers. The trainees were able to acquire skills through specific training and then complete their professionalisation through a "learning by doing" experience. This economic activity reveals the virtuous interconnections between reception and the local community, in particular addressing issues such as territory management and enhancement:

> When the agricultural social farm was born in 2017, people called us to offer their uncultivated land for management: it is a project still on-going and through which we have built a network. The goal is to create a sort of district of municipalities that have a fruit and vegetable tradition and with specific products to promote. [...] Private citizens involved had personal relationships with the cooperative, in fact a public tender was never necessary to obtain the land: we only used word of mouth [...]. We invested in agriculture because the beneficiaries' competences

> could be used in this field: we did it first through the provision of socially useful jobs (e.g. a social vegetable garden in a small town), then we took another path [business] because it is known that this is an area with a lot of unexploited agricultural land. [Int_2_IE]

This proactive approach had to deal with the economic axe of the 2018 Decree. Concerning the *within* + *material* dimension, the budget cuts for the reception of asylum seekers forced a rethinking of the internal services provided, which also implied a significant reduction in operators' actions supporting the social and economic integration of beneficiaries. Among the services that had to be downsized were job placement, professional training, workshops with stakeholders for the development of relational and soft skills and paid internships.

> In the past we could think of proposing a training internship funded by the company [identified through a scouting activity in the area] and then it was no longer possible: so, we strengthened collaborations with external training agencies to include beneficiaries in other projects but turning to them we could only involve people who already knew the language... so those who had more difficulties were excluded. [Int_3_IE]

In addition, the budgetary cuts affected the possibility for the cooperative to buy public transport tickets, therefore limiting beneficiaries' opportunities of movement. This mobility limitation has had, in turn, an impact on the ability of beneficiaries to reach and attend vocational training courses.

Yet one of the most obvious effects of the 2018 Decree concerns the *around* + *material* dimension and, in particular, the potential increase in burden and expenditure for local public services. Indeed, the removal of national humanitarian protection holders from the reception system and the cuts of integration services for asylum seekers left local authorities (municipalities, job centres, health and social services) to cope with an increased demand for social assistance, low-threshold and services for the most vulnerable, also in absence of cultural mediators.

Within this problematic post-2018 framework and thanks to the engagement of the local civic society over time, the cooperative tried to address this shortage through the involvement of local associations and volunteers (*around* + *symbolic*). This involvement seems, however, not able to counterbalance the downsizing:

> Volunteers have always participated, even because in difficulty we always do a little more. They were already there before and now even more. They had built relationships with the beneficiaries, there were those who hosted asylum seekers on Sunday for lunch, those who took them on trips ... ties persist but the beneficiaries are very, very disturbed, they do not feel free, there is a feeling of closure, about the why of this … "why is this happening in Italy? We came here to feel free ..." [Int_1_IE]

The new restrictions also had an impact on a *within* + *symbolic* dimension. A sense of frustration has spread among operators as they have been witnesses of the failure of a reception model developed in synergy with local economic and social actors. Moreover, the regulatory changes undermined the notion of a sort of ideal path from reception to integration that had developed over many years of experience, especially for CAS. Rather than going along with this downward repositioning of the service, the cooperative decided to abandon the management of CAS (it has not participated in the Prefecture's latest calls for bids) and to only continue management of SPRAR/SIPROIMI.

6.2 Pistoia and Valdinievole (Tuscany)

In the case of Pistoia and Valdinievole, we examined the case of a local cooperative with long-lasting relations with other key players in the area and part of a larger local consortium of organisations managing reception locally. In the past, the consortium was able to maintain a common approach among SPRAR and CAS facilities and to support a model based on synergies between local cooperatives managing reception and municipalities, training institutions, employment centres, social welfare services and civil society associations. Virtuous interconnections between reception and territory emerged, especially with regard to the design of socio-economic integration and autonomy paths for beneficiaries. This was possible thanks to the small scale and dispersed accommodations for beneficiaries, language courses, professional training, job placement activities, organisation of intercultural dialogue events and opportunities for contact with the resident population. This approach to reception not only benefited beneficiaries but also the hosting territory and its community, favouring the creation over time of a "welcoming space." This approach is in line with the model adopted by the Tuscany Region, which, since the early 1990s, has been trying to address migration through a model of integration alternative to the national one (see *Bracci/Valzania* 2016), more recently proposing an integrated reception model to host refugees and asylum seekers on the whole regional territory (*Berti et al.* 2017; *Pettrachin* 2022). To raise the quality of reception standards, the cooperative set up work teams with differentiated profiles and skills, providing beneficiaries with a composite package of services and guaranteeing continuous accompaniment by the operators. At least, this was the approach until the entry into force of the 2018 Decree.

As regards the *material* aspects (with intertwined implications both *within* and *around*), the cuts in funds for CAS according to 2019 Tender Specifications caused a budget revision that required a reorganisation of the staff (through dismissals and non-renewal of contracts) with a consequent loss of skills. Believing these material conditions not compatible with the quality standards adopted in the past, the cooperative supported a shared political action for which no one belonging to the consortium took part in the new calls for bids of Prefecture (at the time of investigation, the extension of the mandate continued, with a reduction of the pro die per person quota of about 20 percent): this also reveals a deterioration in the relations – previously very collaborative – with this territorial government body.

The interviewees agree that the Decree of 2018 heavily impacted the role of operators and therefore the relations with beneficiaries. In particular, in CAS reception, the content of the work carried out with beneficiaries changed: our interviewees emphasise this aspect, specifying that the operators not only had their duties modified but also experienced a change in the deeper meaning of their role, which we can refer to the *within + symbolic* dimension.

> As for CAS, the Salvini Decree has changed the content of our job, there are no more resources for integration, but only basic services can be provided: that is not our job. For the organisation it was necessary to review (downwards) number of hours, employment levels grading, tasks of work teams ... it is clear that the needs of beneficiaries are the same and have not changed. They are still living in the same area. They have more difficulties now to interact with people and institutions without learning the language as they could before, as well as with the labour market integration support of course [...] Management has changed radically, and we have serious difficulties with beneficiaries who are used to those standards of services. (Int_1_PV)

Moving away from their original mission, the operators feel they have become a sort of guards, an unwanted reconversion which, moreover, adds to the stress and uncertainty. Working in reception facilities becomes more and more bureaucratic and less and less relational, imposing the logic of providing accountable services through careful control over the beneficiaries.

> The Prefecture has not reduced or downsized requests, the bureaucratic burden is the same but with a 20-30 percent cut of resources! It has become a kind of surveillance: schedules, signatures, declarations, forced shifts ... sometimes we feel like police, too, then we remember that we are social workers and that we actually have another type of role. (Int_3_PV)

Finally, if we consider the *around + symbolic* dimension, some negative implications seem to have emerged as a consequence of the politicisation of reception and anti-immigrant rhetoric, with an intensification of mistrust and hostility that were previously rare. Episodes that make steps backwards clear from the point of view of the integration perspective of migrants. As in the view of social worker interviewed:

> I was with a friend of mine in a square but we didn't know the way well; we met a lady: “Hello lady, excuse me ...” and suddenly she said, “Don’t talk to me! Don’t talk to me! You steal our money, go home!” (Int_5_PV)

6.3 Irpinia and Sannio (Campania)

The reception projects in the Irpinia and Sannio case were developed by a network of third-sector cooperatives and associations that included these projects in a broader (strategic) plan of local welfare. In this process, public funds for refugee reception and for local redevelopment were combined. A manifesto was elaborated and a network of municipalities sharing such a vision was created. The associations' network also promoted the development of community co-ops involving both national and refugee residents as ideal output of the reception projects. Five community co-ops in five different municipalities have been created already, involving former guests and national residents and operating in sectors relevant for the local economy. More generally, regarding the *around* + *material* dimension, the establishment of reception projects contributed to reinforcing the local job market, allowing young residents to stay put and find a job in their hometown, to changing the shrinking demographic trend, with new residents that stayed in the area even after the end of the reception project, to inhabiting previously empty buildings and to supporting and developing the establishment of new services (i.e., small markets in remote municipalities). Moreover, it was the spark that ignited the creation of a network of public and private actors, within and across small municipalities, which then focused not only on the refugee reception but on a broader strategic plan of local welfare and re-development (see *Cresta/Greco* 2018; *Euricse* 2020). Referring to an *around* + *symbolic* dimension, this has led to the chance to develop a discussion, led by the associations' network, among public and private actors, local stakeholders and residents on the local identity and vision for the future that has created the basis for playing a more active role in the local transformations.

> Two dreams have met that never would have imagined to meet: the youth of ***, who were ready to leave already, and those coming from abroad, who would have never imagined arriving here. [...] So we worked on the idea of the future life in Europe of those who arrived here, because the risk was that they would see us only as a transit. [...] And we worked on the SPRAR operators too, so they would consider themselves long-term local development operators rather than short-term welfare social workers. We hired locally, as much as possible, exactly where SPRAR were established, and [...] we said 'you are not a SPRAR operator who has to work for refugee reception and when the project finishes[11] everything finishes, you are an operator of local development, who has to work for a project of local development that is activated thanks to refugee reception'. (Int_1_IS)

[11] The reference is to the fact that SPRAR projects used to be funded for 3 years, then requiring a new application.

The 2018 Decree disrupted this emerging combination between refugees inclusion and local transformation. Having only SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects, the associations' network didn't register job losses or team variation among its workers, even though the services and goals of each have changed (*within* + *material*). However, as SIPROIMI projects could host only refugees (and therefore asylums seekers and those with the former humanitarian permit couldn't stay and wouldn't arrive any longer), the number of presences in each project decreased and empty spots (already funded) were recorded, with implications for the local economy, too (*around* + *material*): "in this last year we haven't reached the critical number [of presences], the threshold we needed for activating a change" (Int_1_IS). Also, a few of those already hosted in the projects or present in the area apparently fled overnight towards large and more anonymous cities. The change of direction introduced by the regulatory change, the transformation of the rights and possibilities linked to the different status, together with a rhetoric generically criminalising migrants and the reception projects, produced a climate of uncertainty and precariousness *within* and *around* the reception (*symbolic* dimension).

> Up until last year we considered it as a form of, as a tool in support of our population. Some of the initiatives have been useful and relevant for us, but with the reform we have no certainty anymore. Yes, that's the sensation, not having any certainty, therefore you no longer plan, you no longer programme even [...] We had managed to create this community co-op [...] they renewed the old communal villa [...], the public soccer field that had been abandoned for twenty years [...] so the SPRAR has been a tool to meet some needs of the territory that would otherwise remain unaddressed. While today it's... we just don't know what it will be, this thing that had instead become an integral part of our territory. (Int_3_IS)

Such a climate appeared to have weakened the positive trend of local transformation, networking and protagonism that was circulating among the public and private actors of these small municipalities. Rather than a loss for asylum seekers and refugees the major loss here seems to be for the remote areas that were initiating a process of transformation through reception projects.

> Everything stopped. The municipalities that have believed in the manifesto, everything stopped. [...] A positive chance that was emerging was just stopped, because an ideological decision of disinvestment was made. All of the positive things that were moving just stopped. (Int_1_IS)

7 Conclusions

Italy's reception system has sailed through rough waters in the last decade. Changes in asylum application numbers have been met by the Italian governments

with abrupt changes in asylum policies. The local actors involved in the reception system had to adapt not only to the changing norms and flow of resources, but also to the polarisation of (national) political positions on the issue. In particular, public and private actors of STRAs, territories which have been at the forefront in hosting asylum seekers and refugees, identified and made use of the opportunities created by these changes and then struggled to ensure the survival of reception practices, bringing together social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees and local transformations.

This paper has aimed to address the territory-reception nexus and to contribute to the literature by shining a light on the virtuous interconnections that can and did emerge (under certain conditions) in small-medium towns and rural areas (STRAs). We have done so by considering the 2018 Security Decree a turning point that disrupted such emerging virtuous interconnections and, in so doing, contributed in making them visible. To approach the analysis, we proposed an analytical framework to investigate the *material-symbolic* aspects of the territory-reception nexus that can be observed both *within* and *around* reception practices. We then grounded this framework into the analysis of the empirical material collected in reception cases located in three STRAs: Ivrea and Eporediese, Pistoia and Valdinievole, Irpinia and Sannio. While all the dimensions of the analytical framework were investigated, we can here summarise that each of these cases is exemplificative of specific combinations. The case of Ivrea and Eporediese reveals how the 2018 Decree's budget cuts for the integration services for asylum seekers, coupled with the cancellation of the national "humanitarian" form of protection had a strong impact on the *around* + *material* dimension, leaving local authorities with the burden of assisting the former beneficiaries who were excluded from reception. The case of Pistoia and Valdinievole instead highlights the effects on the *within* + *symbolic* dimension: the 2018 Decree indeed gave the final blow to the relationship between beneficiaries and reception operators. Particularly within CAS, operators express their disappointment not only for the *material* changes they had to endure (e.g., reduced salaries, less working hours, downgrading), but also for the new role of "guards" and providers of only essential services, not having the time or resources to follow the paths of each beneficiary. The case of Irpinia and Sannio more explicitly shows that the transformative potential of the reception facilities and of the asylum seeker and refugee presence was recognised and integrated in a broader process of local transformation that brought together different public and private actors *around* the reception and gave a boost to local development. Similarly, it underlines that the Decree affected this process from both a *material* and *symbolic* point of view, disrupting a positive trend that was taking shape.

In conclusion, the constant changes and the absence of an organic view of Italy's reception system has brought not only chaos, corruption and poor management of reception, but also – under certain conditions – leeway to experiment with new and virtuous interconnections between reception and territory, especially in STRAs. The 2018 Security Decree, with the goal of reducing expenses and ensuring security, de facto burdened local administrations by excluding a significant number of forced migrants from reception and integration services, cancelled or jeopardised the

chances of STRAs to benefit from the positive transformative potential of well-managed reception, and, overall, left an impoverished and more fragile reception system, which is not able to guarantee the rights and security it sought to ensure.

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Appendix

Tab. A1: Interviewees: case studies (Ivrea and Eporediese; Pistoia and Valdinievole; Irpinia and Sannio) and key informants

Case	Interview Code	Type of actor	Form	Phase	Main focus
Ivrea and Eporediese					
	Int_1_IE	Manager – cooperative	In person	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_2_IE	Project manager – cooperative	In person	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_3_IE	Worker – cooperative	In person	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_4_IE	Worker – cooperative	Online	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
Pistoia and Valdinievole					
	Int_1_PV	Project manager – cooperative	In person	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_2_PV	Worker – cooperative	In person	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_3_PV	Worker – cooperative	In person	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_4_PV	Worker – cooperative	In person	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_5_PV	Worker – cooperative	Online	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception

Tab. A1: Continuation

Case	Interview Code	Type of actor	Form	Phase	Main focus
Irpinia and Sannio					
	Int_1_IS	Manager – cooperative	Online	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_2_IS	Project manager – cooperative	Online	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_3_IS	Mayor of Small Town	Online	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_4_IS	Confessional organisation	Online	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_5_IS	Worker – cooperative	Online	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_6_IS	Worker – cooperative	Online	Fieldwork	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
All					
	Int_1_All	Representative of national confessional organisation	In person	Explorative	Changes within/around reception and case choice
	Int_2_All	Mayor of Small Town	In person	Explorative	Reception/territory nexus
	Int_3_All	Representative of national refugee rights advocacy organisation	Online	Explorative	Case choice
	Int_4_All	Expert/Researcher	Online	Explorative	Material changes within/around reception
	Int_5_All	Expert/Researcher	In person	Explorative – Analysis	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception
	Int_6_All	Representative of international organisation	In person	Explorative – Analysis	Validity of the analytical framework
	Int_7_All	Project manager – cooperative	In person	Explorative	Material/symbolic changes within/ around reception

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