Immigrant integration policymaking in Italy: regional policies in a multi-level governance perspective

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Abstract
This article contributes to the debate on the 'local governance turn' by considering a recent immigration context: the Italian case. We analyse integration policies and governance processes in three regions: Lombardy, Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna. The aim is to shed new light on the multi-level governance relations that shape immigrant integration policies, taking into account the interdependencies of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of multi-level governance. The analysis points out the emergence of different multi-level governance arrangements and highlights the relevance of institutional and organisational factors in accounting for local differentiation. General traditions and established public–non-governmental organisation relations in the social policy field, the internal organisation of the regional administration (specialised staff versus general bureaucratic apparatus), and the role of ideology appear to make a difference. The implications of this analysis for multi-level governance scholarship are discussed, emphasising the need for a middle-range theory approach.

Points for practitioners

Multi-level governance is considered by policy scholars as a promising approach to make sense of increasingly complex policymaking processes, implying the interaction between different levels of government and between public and non-public actors. By considering the politically sensitive immigrant integration issue, this article attempts to point out how multi-level governance relations concretely take shape at the regional level in Italy, and which factors account for regional differentiation. Our study suggests that contextual and organisational factors are particularly relevant, that is, social policy

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traditions, the regions' internal organisation and the individual civil servants' attitudes. Nevertheless, politics should also be carefully taken into account.

Introduction

Since the emergence of a scholarship on migration policy in Europe in the mid-1980s (see Hammar, 1985), the nation-state has been assumed as the 'natural' context of development of immigration (Brochmann and Hammar, 1999) and immigrant policies (Castles and Miller, 2003). With regard to these latter, the notion of the 'immigrant integration model' has experienced particular success (for a critical appraisal, see Duyvendack and Scholten, 2012). Yet, at the beginning of the 2000s, a different perspective started to gain momentum, emphasising the centrality of the local level as the appropriate locus for the analysis of integration dynamics (see the Introduction to this special issue).

In this emerging literature, the notion of multi-level governance (MLG) has been applied so far in a descriptive and intuitive manner (Zincone and Caponio, 2006), often to simply indicate that different institutions, placed at various levels of government, intervene in policymaking. Migration scholars seem to have just started to reflect on the theoretical implications of their analyses for the study of policy processes in complex multi-level settings and vis-a-vis a particularly politicised issue such as immigration.

This article, by looking at immigrant integration policymaking in Italy, intends to make sense of the emergence of different MLG arrangements: the products of the interactions taking place across different levels of government, the so-called vertical dimension, and between the different public and non-public actors, that is, the horizontal dimension. As a consequence, we postulate the necessity of more in-depth investigation to identify the influential factors in determining specific arrangements in different regional contexts.

In the next section, we clarify our approach and propose an analytical framework to examine MLG arrangements for immigrant integration. In the third section, we describe the multi-level framework of immigrant integration policy in Italy from a diachronic perspective and argue for the crucial relevance of the regions (details on the methodological approach are also provided). We then move to a description of MLG arrangements in three regions – Lombardy, Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna – considering the relationships between regional governments, local authorities and non-state actors. The fifth section is dedicated to a discussion of the research findings, in particular, the factors that account for the emergence of different types of MLG in the Italian regions' integration policies. The final remarks highlight the contribution of this study to the MLG literature more generally.

Making sense of MLG arrangements for immigrant integration: an analytical framework

Over the last three decades, the national state has been deeply transformed by challenges to its centralised nature, as well as its hegemony in policymaking processes. On the one hand, the parallel processes of supranationalisation, with the emergence of the European Union (EU), and regionalisation, or devolution in a wide sense, made the relations between state, supra-state and sub-state units more and more complex and interdependent; on the other hand, new actors, that is, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or private associations and international capital markets, began to have a say in decision-making and implementation phases, thus nurturing a growing interdependence between the state and non-state actors. The concept of MLG gained consensus in this scenario; starting with the seminal work of Marks (1992), the concept has been applied first and foremost to analyse and explain how the EU integration process actually functions, and thus to challenge the assumptions of competing intergovernmentalist and functionalist theories (see Schmitter, 2004).

Parallel to this prevailing research stream on Europeanisation (for a recent review, see Stephenson, 2013), other strands of literature in political science employ the concept of MLG to emphasise the limits of governmental authority and claim the need for more flexible forms of coordination between independent and yet mutually interdependent actors (see Hooghe and Marks, 2003). Federalism and local government studies are particularly relevant: the former examines the optimal allocation of authority across multiple tiers of government; whereas the latter focuses mainly on the appropriate size and division of functions for an efficient provision of public services. As is clear, in both strands of literature, a normative understanding of MLG prevails.

This study intends to contribute to scholarly debates on MLG by adopting an analytical and empirical perspective. To date, empirical studies on MLG have primarily considered EU cohesion policy and environmental policy (Piattoni, 2010). The few studies applying this concept to immigrant integration (see Hepburn and Zapata-Barrero, 2014; Joppke and Seidle, 2012) focus on the relations between central state and regional institutions, whereas regional governance has not been investigated. To address this gap, in this article, we undertake an in-depth study of regional policymaking processes on immigrant integration; we look at both the governance dynamics in relation to local authorities and to NGOs.

An influential attempt to define empirical instances of intergovernmental relations is represented by Hooghe and Marks's (2003) two MLG (ideal-)types. Type I regards general purpose government and resembles the conventional federal system, while Type II has the shape of a task-specific government, designed around a certain policy issue, for example, school districts and health units, but also irrigation farmers or software producers. The two concepts are conceived as having in mind MLG mainly in the field of Europeanisation and internationalisation, where examples of Type II jurisdictions are abundant. Our focus on sub-state

governance makes it difficult to adopt this model. In its turn, the comprehensive analysis of Piattoni (2010) proposes a plotting of the conceptual space of MLG on three axes whose origins are in the ideal-typical sovereign nation-state. The first axis is about decentralisation, the second indicates internationalisation processes and the third portrays the movement away from the clear-cut distinction between the public and the private (Piattoni, 2010: 27–30). Considering this scheme, our analysis can be placed primarily along the first and third axes, that is, sub-state devolution processes and state–society relations. Bache and Flinders (2004: 3) define MLG exactly as the intersection of these two axes or dimensions: the centre–periphery or vertical dimension, which signals increasing interdependence between governments at different territorial levels, that is, the 'multi-level' aspect of the concept; and the state–society or horizontal dimension, emphasising the growing interdependence between public and non-public actors at a specific level of government (Agranoff, 2013), that is, the 'governance' aspect of the concept.

These two dimensions are crucial in order to describe and analyse MLG dynamics in their complexity, yet few analyses have consistently taken both into consideration. In this article, we propose an operational definition of these dimensions that will enable the identification of different types of MLG arrangements. The vertical dimension can assume either a top-down or bottom-up direction. In other words, if and to what extent MLG challenges hierarchy (Piattoni, 2010) is a matter of empirical analysis and cannot be established a priori. Regarding the horizontal dimension, this can be operationalised by looking at the level of involvement of NGOs in the decision-making process, that is, the degree of collaboration or separation between public and private-sector organisations. In the case of migration, NGOs usually represent crucial partners for sub-state authorities, yet coordination with them cannot be taken for granted, but must be assessed empirically. Different degrees and modalities of collaboration between the actors involved are likely to occur.

By crossing these two dimensions, it is possible to draw a space for MLG where, as pointed out in Figure 1, the vertical and the horizontal dimensions can be represented as two continuums, going, respectively, from more top-down to more bottom-up intergovernmental relations, and from more distant to more collaborative public–non-public actor relations. Two opposite MLG arrangements can be identified. Borrowing Hooghe and Marks's (2003) labels, Type I MLG is characterised by top-down relations on the vertical dimension and separation on the horizontal dimension. For both dimensions, control rather than devolution or collaboration prevails. In contrast, Type II MLG is bottom-up-oriented and marked by collaboration, highlighting a more participative arrangement.

However, these two opposite ideal-types do not exhaust possible configurations of MLG. Therefore, the question arises of what factors can account for different types of MLG. Considering that migration is a highly politicised issue, the first factor that must be taken into account is politics. Right-wing anti-immigrant parties are likely to be more concerned with keeping control over immigrant
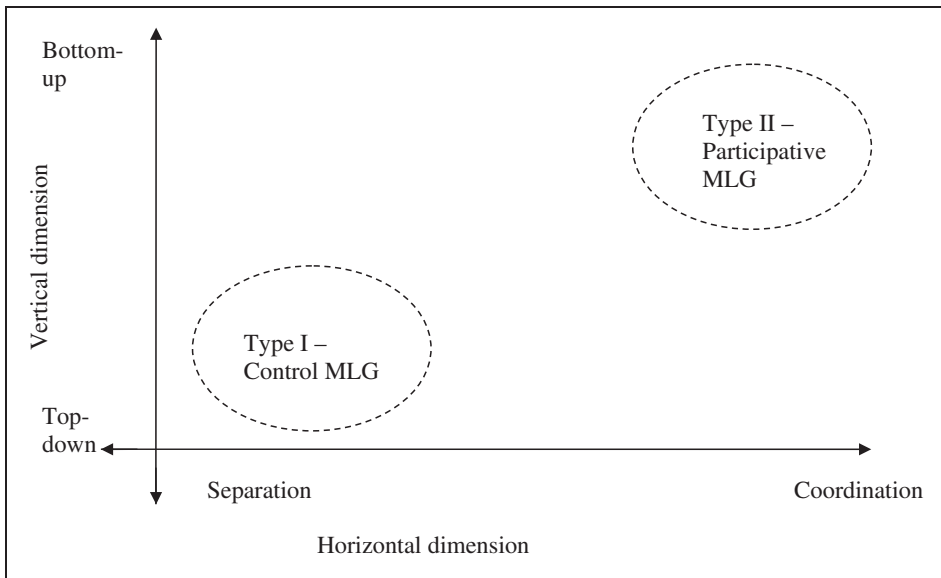
Figure 1. Types of MLG arrangements.

integration issues, whereas left-wing parties, usually more favourable to immigrants' rights, will be keen on participative arrangements. Scholarship on policymaking, however, has questioned the centrality of politics, while pointing out the relevance of other factors, such as a particular policy legacy and path-dependency dynamics (March and Olsen, 1984; Pierson, 2000). Immigrant integration is a recent policy issue in Italy and Europe more generally when compared to other social policies; as a consequence, institutionalised MLG arrangements in welfare policies are likely to considerably influence policymaking dynamics in this area.

At the same time, organisational factors, such as public officials' personal commitment and the presence of an enabling bureaucracy (Adler and Borys, 1996), can also make a difference. In this respect, our study contributes to the literature that highlights a change in the administrative function, from command and control to a more enabling role, aimed at supporting social actors' initiatives (Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014; Peters and Pierre, 1998).

As is clear, in this article, we seek to go beyond descriptive understandings of MLG in order to build a research agenda that can explain different MLG types or arrangements. To this end, we need to address how interdependence between different levels of government, on the one hand, and between state and society, on the other, takes place in different contexts and why. As we shall see later, regional migrant integration policy in Italy represents a showcase that can contribute to a better understanding of MLG local arrangements more generally.

The MLG of immigrant integration policy in Italy: an appraisal

While already envisaged in the 1948 Italian Constitution, the regions were only concretely implemented in 1970 when they were accorded legislative powers within state law limits.[1] Reforms in the sense of greater administrative decentralisation took place starting in the early 1990s, and culminated in a proper political devolution with the 2001 reform of Title V of the Constitution. The reform envisaged a quasi-federalist state structure and assigned to the regions complete authority on matters of social policy, immigrant integration included.

This devolution of powers to the regions actually reflected the key role that they had de facto assumed since the first two immigration laws, approved in 1986 and in 1990, respectively, which simply delegated immigrant integration more or less explicitly to sub-state levels of government. With the 1998 Immigration Law, approved by a centre-left coalition, the responsibility of Italian regions in this policy area was finally acknowledged and a specific fund devoted to regional immigrant integration measures was established (about €34 million per year). These measures had to be agreed upon by local tiers of government, which, in turn, had to find agreements with civil society organisations regarding programmes' actual formulation and implementation. Following the 2001 Constitutional reform mentioned earlier, the regions became fully responsible for deciding which lines of intervention to prioritise in the social policy field, and, therefore, if and to what extent to engage in supporting immigrants' integration. At the same time, relations with local authorities became more complex due to the social assistance reform approved in 2000 (Law n. 320/2000), which envisaged a participative process in formulating local welfare policies. The regional territory has been divided into 'social zones', that is, task-specific units, composed by local authorities. In order to receive regional funding, the social zones are expected to approve their own social plans (*Piani di Zona*), following the regional guidelines. According to this social assistance reform, the participative process should imply the active involvement of third-sector organisations and other institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.), which are ensured a significant say in decision-making. Nevertheless, since the mid-2000s, the national government has sought to regain some influence over the immigrant integration policy field. Since 2006, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Policy has signed special agreements with most Italian regions that have prioritised the issue of Italian-language learning. Further reinforcing such an approach, in 2009, the fourth Berlusconi government introduced the Integration Agreement (IA), which must be signed at the moment of the request for a first residence permit and commits the immigrant to fulfilling specific integration requirements within two years.

This re-centralisation turn seems to have led to a certain decoupling (Scholten, 2013) between national and regional policies, in the sense that these often contradict or conflict with each other. On the one hand, the regions contested the attempts of the national government to bypass them; on the other, the national

government started to contest the constitutionality of regional laws on immigration (this happened in Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany). The conflict became stronger when the IA was introduced. Presented in the public debate as an instrument to select and reward 'good immigrants', that is, those who were willing to integrate, it clearly contrasted with the approach of some regions, such as Tuscany, which foresaw social integration for all immigrants living within the region, even undocumented ones (Ronchetti, 2011).Thus, the MLG of immigrant integration policy in Italy is characterised by a complex and contradictory structure: devolution to local tiers of government and to civil society is still a cornerstone in all matters of social policy; nevertheless, immigrant integration has become, at least at first glimpse, a national (and increasingly European) priority, which the national government seeks to control, therefore contradicting the new quasi-federal institutional structure. Notwithstanding these contradictions, the regions remain crucial institutional nodes for the shaping of immigrant integration policies.

In this study, we focus on three regions in the north of the country that had already started to approve programmes on immigrant integration by the end of the 1990s: Lombardy, Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna. Since we are interested in analysing institutionalised systems of MLG, we have omitted southern regions, where interventions in this policy field are far more intermittent and poorly institutionalised (Campomori and Caponio, 2013). The selected regions present a number of similarities that enable us to keep some variables as constants and to focus on the possible factors accounting for the emerging of different MLG arrangements. In particular, the regions belong to the most economically developed part of the country where the welfare system and the bureaucratic apparatus are quite efficient.

However, Lombardy, Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna show considerable differences in terms of social policy traditions and arrangements. Whereas in Lombardy, Catholic organisations have always been able to autonomously provide a good level of social assistance to disadvantaged groups, immigrants included, in Emila-Romagna, civil society associations have traditionally been more dependent upon the public sector. Piedmont lies somewhere in between these two opposite models.

Last, but not least, the three regions display different political orientations and have adopted a different framing of immigration and immigrant integration (Campomori and Caponio, 2013). Since 2000, Lombardy has been governed by a centre-right majority including the Northern League, a highly vocal anti-immigration party, while Emilia-Romagna has been governed by centre-left majorities. In the case of Piedmont, a shift occurred in 2005 from a centre-right to a centre-left coalition. This latter was defeated in 2010, by a new centre-right coalition headed by the Northern League. We are particularly interested in testing whether the supposed greater openness of left-wing parties towards immigrants' integration (Emilia-Romagna and Piedmont during 2005–2010) or, on the contrary, the presence of a government officially opposed to immigrants' rights (Lombardy and Piedmont during 2000–2005 and 2010 onward) can affect MLG relations and how.

The empirical investigation has taken into consideration the period 2001–2010. The main data source is represented by the three regions' annual and tri-annual immigrant integration programmes, which are the documents where the regions set their agenda on immigrant integration. Other official documents and grey literature have also been considered. On the basis of this preliminary analysis of the official documents, key actors in each region were identified (e.g. politicians, regional officers, local civil servants, leaders of NGOs, etc.), and in order to grasp a more accurate understanding of regional policymaking processes, at least five interviews were carried out in 2010.

MLG in regional policymaking

Lombardy: a control MLG type

Throughout the 2000s, the Lombardy region has framed immigrant integration mainly in terms of assimilation, putting particular emphasis on access to general services and, since 2008 (as we shall see later), on issues linked to language learning and civic integration. In contrast, projects taking into account immigrants' cultural background, for instance, community link workers in public services, have been undertaken 'more stealthily, because some things cannot be openly disclosed' (Caritas Ambrosiana, Milan). This scarce emphasis on cultural issues appears to be consistent with a more general philosophy that conceives of immigration as a cross-cutting social issue with regard to social services.

The approach is that of promoting inclusion into general policies while avoiding specific measures. For instance, general policies for minors de facto also apply to the foreign ones; there is no need for ad hoc actions. Then, of course, there are also specific and targeted projects, but the rationale is one of pursuing general social policies for all the population living in the region (civil servant at the Lombardy region Immigration Service).

In the region's bureaucratic structure, immigration is located in an office concerned with issues of social disadvantage and assistance more generally, as is clearly indicated by its denomination: Immigration, Detention and Poverty (*Immigrazione, carcere e povertà*). This office is composed of just two officers, a senior and an executive one, and is responsible for the drafting of policy guidelines, which have to be agreed upon by political actors, that is, the appropriate councillors.

Regarding MLG dynamics, and in particular the vertical dimension, until 2005, the implementation style was rather decentralised and from the bottom up. A large share of the regional social policy budget was regularly assigned to the Local Health Units, which are administrative branches of the regional health system. These Local Health Units were requested to take the immigrant integration issue into account in their social services plans. In 2005, the social assistance reform (Law n. 328/2000, see earlier) started to be implemented: the regional social budget was assigned to the newly created social zones with no mandatory commitment to spend it for any specific social policy priority. The Local Health Units still continue

to receive a small budget for the undertaking of specific interventions requiring coordination at a higher level than that of the social zones.

Furthermore, and again since 2005, on the basis of an agreement with the Ministry of Welfare and Labour Policies, the region began to promote a special project for learning the Italian language, *Certifica il tuo italiano* (Certify your Italian). This has been implemented primarily by the Provincial Centres for Adult Education, which are public institutions responsible for the development of vocational training programmes at the provincial level, together with local authorities and third-sector organisations.[2]

Hence, since the mid-2000s, the region has been displaying a more top-down style, introducing its own 'special projects' to be implemented in the entire regional territory. Nevertheless, local tiers of government continue to be responsible for the drafting of local social services plans, and are therefore autonomous in deciding if and to what extent to consider immigration issues. Furthermore, coordination between the region and the local authorities in the decision-making process appears almost non-existent:

> I've been dealing for 12 years with the issue of trafficking women but I could never discuss it openly with the region. Actually, I never took part in any roundtable or meeting on the issue, apart from one week ago, when we had to deal with the North Africa emergency. (Public official in a local authority)

As far as the horizontal dimension is concerned, according to the partners interviewed, the Lombardy region, and in particular the bureaucratic staff of the social services department, is on top, and NGOs are on tap. Only a few selected third-sector organisations are admitted into the decision-making and implementation process; control rather than collaboration prevails. A highly centralised policy-making style can be observed, which, moreover, seems to be strongly influenced by the personal commitment of individual officers:

> There are no associations involved in the pluriannual planning [of the Lombardy region]. At least my association is not involved, even though we are responsible for the evaluation and monitoring of last year's interventions. In particular, the region has asked us to provide advice about possible improvements to the current situation, but I'm not sure this will be taken into account. (Cooperativa Progetto integrazione, Milan)

> In recent years, the Lombardy region has assumed a role which I see as one of control or maybe even 'of command', and what is worse, without continuity, only from time to time. There isn't any strategy, but rather just the goal of reducing services and constraining the role of NGOs and civil society.... There is no coordination: coordination means that you gather together all the different actors who are working on the issue and try to steer them according to some strategic goal; this is not the case at all. Roundtables, when established, are not relevant. Decisions are just taken in terms of

> funding: how, when and to whom . . .. However, the commitment of individual officers
> is crucial: if he/she believes in the project, he/she will probably find a way to continue
> it in the maze of regional policies. (Caritas Ambrosiana, Milan)

A key actor in decision-making processes is the Regional Observatory for Integration and Multiethnicity (*Osservatorio Regionale per l'Integrazione e la Multietnicità* (ORIM)), established by the region in 2000 and run on the basis of an agreement with the Institute for the Study of Multi-ethnicity (*Istituto per lo studio della multietnicità* (ISMU)) Foundation, a research institute that was founded in Milan in 1992.[3] ORIM has a mandate not only to analyse the development of migration phenomena in the region, but also to identify, along with regional officers, priority actions for funding and selecting applicant NGOs and monitoring the projects realised at the local level. In its role as the overseer of ORIM, ISMU has intertwined and preferential relationships with regional officers, in contrast to most NGOs, which, as pointed out earlier, experience difficulties in having their voice heard.

Emilia-Romagna: a participatory MLG type

The prevailing frame of the Emilia-Romagna region with regard to immigrant integration can be labelled as a 'would-be citizens frame' (Campomori and Caponio, 2013), meaning that this region has given prominence to immigrant social participation and to – moderate – cultural recognition. To give an example, regional Law n. 4/2004 introduced the Regional Consultative Committee for the Social Integration of Immigrant Citizens and recommended to local authorities the promotion of similar participative projects. Unlike Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna has always regarded immigrant integration as a specific issue, which ad hoc policies and services had to address. As a consequence, this region has regularly approved immigrant integration programmes throughout the last decade. Moreover, in Emilia-Romagna the bureaucratic organisational structure is under the authority of a specialised office, that is, the Service for Immigrant Reception and Social Integration. Established in 2002, the Service has a staff of six persons dealing with all facets of migration phenomena, from trafficking and asylum policies to immigrant integration. The head of the Service, in particular, has been working on immigration since the early 1990s, and has thus achieved considerable expertise in and commitment to the topic. He has gained considerable authority on the issue of immigrant integration and is often invited to give seminars and to participate in conferences.

Notwithstanding the prevailing ad hoc approach, in recent years, the idea that immigration should be regarded as a cross-cutting issue for social policy, and that it should be dealt with by existing services, has also gained momentum in Emilia-Romagna:

> Our approach to immigrant integration is linked to developments regarding social
> policy more generally. Municipalities are now establishing so-called 'social

information desks'; therefore, we think that these should consider immigrant integration. However, to work with immigrants, the 'social information desks' will need also some specific knowledge of the relevant laws. (Civil servant at the Service for Immigrant Reception and Social Integration, Emilia-Romagna)

As for the vertical dimension of MLG, in Emilia-Romagna, this has always been characterised by a high degree of devolution of decision-making and implementation to the local level. In the early 2000s, the provinces were the main recipients of regional funds: the region indicated a list of general priorities among which the provinces could choose the ones on which to concentrate their efforts and draft a provincial plan accordingly. However, since 2003, immigration has been undertaken by the social services plans (the *Piani di Zona* mentioned earlier), and according to the regional programmes, at least 13% of the share of the social policy budget that they receive from the region must be devoted to this issue. The provinces continue to be responsible for the promotion of specific actions, such as: intercultural communication and anti-discrimination projects; the vocational training of social workers dealing with immigrants; the reception of unaccompanied minors; immigrant association consultative committees; and migration phenomena monitoring and observation. In any case, both the social zones and the provinces have complete autonomy in deciding the actions to be prioritised, which are usually identified with input from the third-sector organisations working in the field. As a consequence, with regard to the horizontal dimension, responsibility for coordinating with local stakeholders, at least until 2004, was left to local-level authorities (Campomori and Caponio, 2014).

As anticipated earlier, in 2004, a new regional law on immigration was drafted, which was preceded by rounds of consultation with local-level authorities and civil society associations. To institutionalise the participation of stakeholders in regional policymaking, the law introduced the Regional Consultative Committee for the Social Integration of Immigrant Citizens, composed of representatives of the local authorities, Italian NGOs and immigrant associations. The immigrant integration programmes are first drafted by a technical committee composed of the regional officers (20 in total) who are responsible for immigrant integration issues in their area of expertise, for example, education, health care, social assistance and so on. These programmes are then discussed in the Consultative Committee, where the invited stakeholders can comment and make suggestions. Furthermore, with some of the stakeholders, there are also regular informal relationships:

The Regional Consultative Committee represents an opportunity for us to convey our point of view and I have to say that the participants' different standpoints are carefully taken into account. During the consultation for the 2004 immigration law I proposed to insert a paragraph on immigrants' entrepreneurial activities which was accepted (it is now par. 16). The issue of language learning for instance has been discussed in the Consultative Committee and has emerged as a crucial need both for immigrant associations and for the representatives of Italian entrepreneurs. (Confederation of Italian Handicraft Associations)

> The Consultative Committee has some 150 members representing different institutions and civil society organisations. We are represented, but I think the Committee is too big to seriously allow stakeholders to articulate their position. Consequently, the region also undertakes informal relationships with a number of more prominent organisations, such as the cooperatives of services providers. We [the unions] are also consulted informally from time to time. (Emilia-Romagna branch of Anolf, National Associations Beyond the Frontiers)

As in Lombardy, the interviewees underscore that the expertise and the availability of regional officers is important: the possibility of building networks and actively participating in regional policymaking processes depends on 'the involved people'. However, personal and informal relations are not the only channels of access to the decision-making process. The Consultative Committee, even if devoid of any decisional power, still represents an institutionalised setting, establishing a more cooperative and participative MLG arrangement compared to Lombardy. Civil society organisations and local authorities are directly involved in the process of defining regional policy priorities, even though concrete actions to be pursued are agreed upon at a territorial level in the end; however, in this respect, local tiers of government enjoy a considerable margin of manoeuvrability in the course of implementation processes.

Piedmont: a mixed configuration

The Piedmont region has always considered immigrant integration as a specific social issue that requires ad hoc policies and services. As a consequence, throughout the last decade, it has regularly approved regional immigrant integration programmes. In 2010, though, following the victory of the centre-right coalition led by the Northern League in the May regional elections, a shift occurred: a specific budget is no longer devoted to immigrant integration policies, nor has any specific programme been approved. Similar to Lombardy, mainstreaming has become the prevailing approach:

> The new political executive [*giunta regionale*] has clearly stated that general services, those available to the general public at the territorial level, also have to be opened to immigrants. Italian citizens and regular immigrants alike can have direct access to social services; there is no need for supplementary services. (Head of the Social Policy Department, Piedmont region)

The task of drafting the immigrant integration programmes has always been carried out by the Service for the People at Risk of Poverty and Social Disadvantage (*Interventi a supporto della popolazione a rischio e delle fasce deboli*), where there was a small unit working on migration made up of three civil servants and one senior officer. At the time of our research, this unit was responsible for managing three projects funded by the national government: two on Italian-language learning

and civic integration (one of which was funded by the European Integration Fund through the Ministry of the Interior); and one on the protection of smuggled women. Therefore, the administrative unit in charge of the programmes was not particularly specialised on integration, but dealt with immigration issues more generally. As emphasised by our interviewees, the programmes have always been drafted on the basis of the guidelines provided by political executives, signalling the prominence of politicians in immigrant integration decision-making.

Considering MLG's vertical dimension with regard to immigrant integration, until 2007, we note a high degree of devolution to local levels of government: regional programmes provided very general policy priorities, while identification of the concrete interventions was assigned to provincial authorities, responsible every year for drafting more detailed immigrant integration plans. In 2007, though, the region took the initiative to promote an agreement with the provinces (*Protocollo di intesa*) in order to define more clearly the respective jurisdictions. According to this agreement, every year, the region, together with the provinces, must decide on the specific priorities to be pursued, selecting among those indicated in the regional triannual immigrant integration programme. In turn, the provinces have to approve an annual immigrant integration plan, which is agreed upon by the various public institutions (schools, Local Health Units, etc.) and private organisations working in the field. Thus, underscoring the vertical dimension, since 2007, the region has attempted to steer provincial policymaking to a certain degree. However, the provinces have continued to enjoy considerable autonomy in setting up their local plans, and coordination with other stakeholders has remained their own exclusive task:

> Before presenting the annual immigrant integration programme to the provincial executive for approval, we [provincial staff with authority on the matter] must discuss it in the Territorial Immigration Council,[4] but we also get in touch with those organisations that are not represented in the Council. We collect suggestions and critical remarks and try to revise the programme accordingly. This process takes more and less 20 days. (Senior officer, Province of Turin)

As for the horizontal dimension, during the centre-left government, direct consultation with NGOs and immigrant associations was sought in order to reform the 1989 Regional Immigration Law. Notwithstanding the fact that, in the end, the new bill was not approved, this participative process led to the establishment of informal contacts with the regional officers. In 2010, however, this informal dialogue reached a stalemate, and since then, relations between the region and civil society organisations have been characterised by increasing separation. In fact, while non-public actors are essentially regarded as partners in the implementation of the annual programmes at the provincial level, they are not perceived as counterparts in regional decision-making:

> We were contacted in 2008 by the Social Policy Councillor to provide our opinion on the text of the new immigration bill . . . and she appeared to be very interested in and

sensitive to our point of view. In any case, we were already in touch with the Immigration Unit officers, although we did not have regular meetings. (Association specialised in cultural mediation, Turin)

Before [in the years of the centre-left government], when the region had to decide what kind of policy to undertake, sometimes we asked for counselling, sometimes not; much depended on personal relations, you know . . .. Yet, there was at least some concern for pursuing some kind of concerted policies. Today [since 2010, with the new centre-right coalition in government], we have the impression that there is less dialogue. (Caritas Diocesana, Turin)

As is clear, a change in the attitudes towards NGOs occurred with the shift from the centre-right to the centre-left in 2005 and to the current new centre-right majority in 2010. The new executive led by the Northern League, by sanctioning the end of immigrant integration programmes, has de facto centralised decision-making authority, limiting interventions to those measures strictly linked to national funding.

Comparing MLG arrangements in Italian regions

In this article, we have attempted to go beyond a simple description of the processes of shifting jurisdictions and powers; instead, we aimed to account for the MLG dynamics taking place at a particularly critical level of government for immigrant integration policies in Italy, that is, the regional level. In the last 10 years, the regions have attempted to shift their responsibilities to local tiers of government and out to civil society organisations, while seeking to obtain more powers and resources from upper-level institutions, that is, the EU and the national government (see earlier). Yet, these processes have developed differently in the three regions considered, leading to quite distinct MLG arrangements.

In Lombardy, in the middle of the decade, the vertical dimension assumed an increasingly top-down direction while the horizontal dimension remained characterised by a separation between public and non-public actors, in the sense that these latter are regarded primarily as policy executors and far less as stakeholders. Control prevails, leading to a kind of MLG arrangement that is close to the traditional model of governmental authority and can be assimilated into what we called MLG Type I (see Figure 1). Emilia-Romagna represents the opposite configuration since it is characterised by a participatory-like MLG arrangement, where the strong bottom-up involvement of local authorities goes hand in hand with a greater openness of policymaking processes to the participation of non-public actors; therefore, it is close to (our) MLG Type II. The case of Piedmont stands as a mixed configuration since on the vertical dimension, the region has only weakly attempted to steer the local policy process, while on the horizontal dimension, stakeholders' participation has been intermittent and based on personal relations. The provinces have always enjoyed considerable autonomy in setting up their local plans and in pursuing collaboration with NGOs.

How do we account for such different MLG arrangements? The patterns described reflect, in many respects, the three regions' different traditions and policy legacies in terms of more general social policy (Fargion, 2005). Emilia-Romagna is traditionally among the most active Italian regions in the social field, and regional authorities have usually played a crucial role in programming and coordinating with local authorities and civil society organisations. Lombardy, on the other hand, can be characterised by a lower degree of activism and a stronger separation between public and private action. Piedmont stands in between, reflecting a long tradition of autonomy on the part of both local authorities and civil society organisations.

Furthermore, based on our analysis, the internal organisation of the regional administration seems to be relevant. The presence of a professionalised staff, with specific expertise and long-time experience in social policy and migration, favours cooperative relationships and the establishment of horizontal networks, as clearly indicated in the case of Emilia-Romagna. Conversely, when the topic is treated by the general social assistance staff, there seems to be less interest in connecting with the other actors working in the field and promoting dialogue with them, as in the case of Lombardy and, to some extent, also in Piedmont. In addition, individual civil servants and policy practitioners seem to play a significant role in shaping governance arrangements. In Lombardy, their relative autonomy from elected officials, together with their recognised expertise, made it possible for these individuals to sometimes override the political vetoes on the feasibility of specific projects (e.g. cultural mediation), thus gaining the appreciation of non-governmental actors (who implement these projects).

As for the role of politics, considering only Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna, one might conclude that centre-right majorities have a preference for control-like MLG arrangements whereas centre-left majorities are more favourable to participative arrangements. Nevertheless, the case of Piedmont casts some doubt on this argument: in 2005, the shift from a centre-right to a centre-left majority led to only minor changes on the horizontal dimension. In fact, relations between the Immigration Unit officers and NGOs have always been primarily of an informal kind, even though during the centre-left period, the then-Social Policy Councillor also undertook formal consultations in order to reform the 1989 Immigration Law. Thus, shall we conclude that politics is almost irrelevant and MLG is a sort of 'party-free zone' (Deschouwer, 2003)? Looking more carefully at MLG dynamics, it is clear that politics in the highly contentious field of migration is far from being completely backstage. Our analysis has shown how, since 2005, the Lombardy region has sought to (re-)gain a role in the steering of immigrant integration policies, a shift that seems to reflect the increasing politicisation of the issue in Lombardy's political system, with the Northern League gaining increasing consensus throughout the second half of the decade and reaching a peak of 26% in the 2010 regional elections. In a similar vein, the victory of the Northern League in 2010 in Piedmont and the entering into office of a new government headed by this party has led to the complete relinquishment of the previous immigrant integration

policy. Clearly, politics matters when strong anti-immigrant parties gain leverage, imposing their own agenda or threatening to do so.

Conclusion: beyond Hooghe and Marks's Types I and II

Far from endeavouring to provide definitive answers on which factors account for MLG dynamics, this article has sought to contribute to the debate on what is empirically MLG and how this concept can help to make sense of increasingly complex policymaking processes, building a bridge between migration studies and developments in policy-oriented scholarship.

In this respect, a middle-range theory approach, aimed at identifying specific MLG arrangements and the explanatory factors accounting for them, appears to be a promising route to account for the local governance policy turn that has taken place in migration policy, but also in other policy fields. Type I and Type II MLG as originally proposed by Hooghe and Marks (2003) are quite unsatisfactory since they do not cover the range of possible local variations in MLG policymaking practices, but rather depict two contrasting ideal models. Our study has pointed out how policy processes can be far more complex and idiosyncratic. No evidence of a Type II MLG has emerged: the three regions can be regarded as variants of the Type I model, yet actors' relations within them differ considerably. The regions considered seek the involvement of local authorities and NGOs in dealing with the politically sensitive immigrant integration issue, yet whereas Lombardy sticks to a traditional hierarchical approach, Emilia-Romagna is characterised by a participatory arrangement and Piedmont by a system based on almost complete devolution to the provinces.

To explain this variance, our study suggests that contextual and organisational factors are relevant, that is, social policy traditions, the regions' internal organisation on the immigrant integration issue and the individual civil servants' attitudes. Yet, politics should also be carefully considered. In Lombardy and Piedmont, the presence of a successful anti-immigrant party seems to have led to a redefinition of existing policies and prevailing MLG arrangements. If this is a trait specific to this policy field or if it may also hold true for others is an open question, which requires further investigation, especially of a cross-sector comparative kind. In more general terms, MLG could well represent not a 'party-free' zone, but rather another contentious arena where politics is carried out by different means other than rhetoric and ideology.

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Notes

1. The five regions with a special statute (i.e. the border regions of Aosta Valley, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Trentino Alto Adige, and the two insular regions of Sicily and

Sardinia) enjoyed, on the contrary, greater administrative and legislative autonomy from the entering into force of the Constitution (Ventura, 2002: 114).

2. See: http://www.ismu.org/scheda-progetto-certifica-il-tuo-italiano/ (last accessed September 2014).

3. ISMU is one of the more long-standing and authoritative research institutes on immigration in Italy, traditionally working in close partnership with the Catholic University of Milan.

4. The Territorial Immigration Councils were established by the 1998 immigration law and are consultative institutions operating at a provincial level and headed by the Prefects, who appoint the members, that is, according to the law, representatives of the local authorities, other public institutions delivering services to immigrants (e.g. the schools), unions and employers' associations, NGOs, and immigrant associations. While formally present in all Italian provinces, the Councils have been criticised for their lack of representativeness and usually play a marginal role in local policymaking.

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