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Immigrants in agricultural sector in Sicily: the experience of *Sicilia Integra* project

The overview of the most relevant literature on migration, whose main issues were human rights, work in agriculture, cultural and social inclusion, highlighted one common point: the need to foster the legal work of migrants as a driver for social integration. This finding was confirmed by a CREA-PB survey that, after outlining the role of foreign workers in Sicilian agriculture, has emphasised how their state of isolation derived mainly from their bad housing conditions directly connected to illegal employment. The evaluation of the project “*Sicilia Integra*”, which was born under the patronage of the UN to include young immigrants in urban agriculture activities in Sicily, was carried out through the SWOT methodology for verifying if it could be spread in the Sicilian region.

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1. Introduction

The migratory flow in Sicily is incessant and the consistency of immigrants that arrive on the Italian and, mainly, Sicilian coasts is growing. The phenomenon has repercussions on the territory and in different social aspects (fight on origin rights and fund utilization, rising irregular immigrants, “caporalato” and illegal working, etc.).

Sicily is represented by chronicles as a landing place or a simple passage for immigrants but there is a permanent or semi-permanent component that is strongly linked to the presence of foreign workers engaged in agricultural activities. In any case, immigration data show a constant growth of the migratory phenomenon in the region. The agricultural work of immigrants in Sicily is widespread in the most productive and intensive areas¹, which correspond to land characterized by specialized and value-added agriculture related to the cultivation of vegetables, vines, olives and citrus fruits (Macaluso, 2016). In the Sicilian inland, conversely, the foreign labour is more limited and more often targeted at low-skilled activities, often in the livestock sector.

¹ Especially in the provinces of Ragusa, Syracuse, Trapani and Catania.

In the region a “welcome system” and specific project initiatives are being studied to counteract the emergence of phenomena of discrimination, racism, protest or civil indifference with the aim of finding solutions that contribute to the sustainable development of the territory. There is a territorial vision and shared view of opportunities related to the presence of migrants that could be training in Sicily.

In this context, *Sicilia Integra* project is developed, with a very deep humanitarian value that carries the principles of solidarity, democracy and pluralism; it is focusing on training courses specifically targeted at young immigrants and at the same time young Sicilian unemployed people with training in agricultural sciences. The goal of the project is to prevent discomfort and to encourage the encounter, listening to each other, sharing and integrating through respect for cultural diversity and individual creativity. This initiative constitutes a true “social innovation” in accordance with European policies aimed at protecting and promoting human rights and communities.

At the core of *Sicilia Integra* training course, organized through a participatory design process, the sustainability of organic and regenerative agro-food systems and agriculture as an integral part of the territory. This confirms the role that this sector plays in the economy and society in terms of positive externalities, that is, benefits to the industries and the community. Within the project, a methodology has been developed for problem solving and “cooperative learning”, emphasizing the active involvement of immigrant students in group work and group success, methods widely used to improve preparation and education; furthermore, the project will support the students in the acquisition of cognitive skills with the creation of an urban social garden (Guarnaccia *et al.*, 2018).

Therefore, the paper analyses the phenomenon of immigrant workers in agriculture in Sicily and the activity carried out by the case study “*Sicilia Integra*”. This project could represent a model of socio-labour inclusion of immigrant workers in agriculture, that is part of a variegated framework of possible operational schemes experimented in different countries for trying to tackle the complex and articulated problem of social and working integration of migrants.

Sicilia Integra model would create in the next future a partnership between immigrant workers, student’s association and Sicilian organic companies with the aim of promote political and cultural changes towards the growth of consciousness and active citizenship and the care of rural areas.

2. Review of the literature on immigration and work in agriculture

The immigration and agriculture binomial has been widely explored in literature, in which it is possible to reach a multitude of contributions made in

different spatial and temporal contexts and with a political, sociological, economic, anthropological and ethical perspective.

All this is due to the fact that every historical era saw the emergence of migratory flows from well defined territorial areas (e.g. Europe v/ s America; Asia v/s Europe; Africa v/s Europe) and for the populations affected by these processes agriculture has represented a sector of easier entry (providing no particular barriers to entry and/ or because traditionally these populations came from poor areas to agricultural vocation), able to offer a precise occasion of social redemption and the possibility of producing typical food goods of the diet of the country of origin.

The different contributions have treated the following themes:

- human rights and migration, with focus on working conditions and the recognition of the universal principles of man (Renaut, 2003; Eurispes-Col-diretti, 2011);
- the right to health and immigration, with attention to the health implications and because of the large migratory flows and the planning of effective interventions of public health (Schenker, 2010);
- contractual rights and immigration, with reference to the forms of labour (regulated and non-regulated areas, the occult and blatant), rights/ duties, duration, protections and exploitation (Amnesty International, 2012; CGIL, 2013; Butti Al Shamsi *et al.*, 2018);
- work in agriculture and cultural integration and social integration of immigrants (Gidarakou *et al.*, 2011; Foti *et al.*, 2013).

In several contributions emerge some common considerations on the use of immigrants in agriculture, even not regular. Agriculture has become the chief side and back door through which most of the immigrants from the world's major countries of emigration came (Martin, 1994), but also as a tool for the development of the agricultural sector (Saloutos, 1976). For these reasons it is important to foster legal employment, a mechanism allowing more significant integration.

The empirical evidences refer to the USA (Taylor, 1992), Spain (Hoggart and Mendoza, 1999), Greece (Lianos *et al.*, 1996) and Italy (Cillo, 2014). It is shown that the immigrant is often selected for agricultural work in low paid and with few competences, in coherence with the maximization of the expected profit by employers of agricultural holdings. In Spain, most African workers are employed in unskilled short-term jobs with low salary often associated with poor social conditions. In Greece the analysis – given the importance of the work immigrant in all sectors – was conducted for the level of skill and status of immigrant workers. In Italy the case studies pointed out how vulnerable is the position of immigrant workers due to a legal gap which exposes them to blackmail from employers to the extent of accepting non-standard

conditions of work, regardless their administrative status (regular and not). Such situations can be observed for illegal workers (hoping to regularize their position), legal workers (who are afraid of losing their job and consequently their residence permit) and seasonal workers (who fear of compromising the renewal of the residence permit for the next year) (Cillo, 2014).

The acceptance of low wage levels is also related to rural areas development in countries with an advanced economy inside of which change facets, languages but also widespread knowledge that end up becoming the spillover of development (Martin *et al.*, 2006; Pulina and Timpanaro, 2012; Scuderi *et al.*, 2014).

In Italy, for its strategic position and the copious flow of immigration, can be observed many situations of serious exploitation of the work during the step of recruitment in agriculture (Ciaperoni, 2011). Most of these factors is mainly attributable to three cases: (a) the growing restrictions to legal entry in Italy for work imposed by immigration policy; (b) the growing randomization of labour relations, exacerbated by the economic crisis; (c) the racial segmentation of the labour market (Cillo and Toffanin, 2014). The route of the exploitation is drawn from the seasonality of crops along Italy and Europe (Basso and Perocco, 2003; De Martino *et al.*, 2016), exploitation is often accompanied by conditions of life “unethical” and from the legal measures to be little effective to control the phenomenon (Colloca and Corrado, 2013). Is then recalled the need for public intervention with a view to integrated multilevel and for achieving higher levels of legality to this market (Conti Nibali and Alteri, 2008; Toffanin, 2009; FLAI-CGIL, 2013). The public support could be aimed, for example, at encouraging a partial re-population of mountain areas abandoned by the indigenous population (Membretti, and Viazzo, 2017). The abandonment of agriculture has inevitably contributed to the abandonment of small agricultural artifacts (terraces, water drains, etc.) that make crops possible and protect soils from erosion (Cavalli, 2016). Furthermore, concrete examples of reception and integration in agriculture and rural areas have been carried forward both by public (Recosol, 2017) and ecclesiastical bodies and by private individuals in regions strongly affected by migratory phenomena, such as Sicily and Calabria (Ricciardi *et al.*, 2018). About working inclusion of migrants in agriculture, an interesting experiment was conducted in Canada, in 2007, through the launch of a pilot project between Community-university to train and involve the senior immigrants in Small Plot Intensive (Spins) - Farming, a commercial approach to urban agriculture (Beckie and Bogdan, 2010). The SPIN method, accurately described in a manual (Satzewich and Christensen, 2005), provides for the reseeded of the soil after harvesting, allowing the cultivation of two/three crops per season. Although organic certification is considered optional in the spin farming approach, it is required to

use organic methods to reduce the costs associated with the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and to promote greener production systems, economically and socially sustainable. This approach was considered as ideal to foster the inclusion of senior immigrants in the commercial approach of urban agriculture in the city of Edmonton. The aim of the project was the occupational integration of senior migrants in the urban agriculture (a significant presence in urban Canada is recorded), to tackle some of the economic and social problems of these subjects, contributing at the same time to the evolution of the local food systems and to the creation of community inclusion. The attention towards this age group of immigrants was caused by the significant increase in their presence in Canada, estimated in 2006 in a quarter of the population of immigrants, in turn equal to 19.8% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2006). The evaluation of the results was carried out with qualitative interviews to senior participants, to the coordinator of agricultural activities and organizers of the Community, following the steps of implementation and training of local groups. The results of the project confirmed on the one hand the health benefits of the elderly who carry out horticultural activities and, on the other, positive socio-economic impacts of urban cultivation in the management of immigrants, providing new knowledge in economic, social, environmental and health aspects.

Other qualitative assessment on the inclusion of migrants in agriculture was made in Greece, where in the last thirty years have been welcomed in rural areas more and more foreigners.

17.5% of immigrants in Greece work in agriculture and represent 90% of wage-labour in agriculture. Strategic and innovative, therefore, appears the role of migrants in the Hellenic rural areas, where the organization of migrant work takes on different connotations according to the different local production systems. Very present in flat areas specialized in intensive agriculture and in the island regions, the migrants have the capacity to adapt and respond to the seasonal needs of the local economy (Lovoi, 2018). A study conducted in two different Greek areas analysed attitudes and perceptions of both the subject of demand and offer of work on various aspects of the migrants' integration into the local socio-economic system. The results show that farmers are positive regarding the contribution of immigrants to agriculture but have points of view "defensive" and attitudes rather ambivalent, ethnocentric in relation to a local multicultural company. Instead, the points of view of immigrants denote a positive perception of their integration into the host society (Gidarakou, 2011).

Finally, another aspect worthy of attention in the literature is that concerning the validation of work integration best practices of immigrants in the agri-food sector. New practices in the inclusion and integration of immigrants

in society are often carried out within well circumscribed territories, through adoption of sustainable agricultural techniques inspired by the principles of agroecology and the valorisation of local agro-biodiversity, the application of the principles of the circular economy and the promotion of initiatives that have a clear employment impact for disadvantaged people, such as migrants (Shreck *et al.*, 2006). Often these initiatives are implemented with innovative training methods, based on the construction of local networks and partnerships, as in the case under study (Depedri, 2012; Bonifazi, 2017).

An interesting pilot action, supported by the ESF and FAMI programming, is represented by the Inside project (*INSerimento Integrazione NordSuD inclusionE*), aimed at experimenting with a model of structured interventions of integration, growth and inclusion of working partners of immigrants holding International protection, hosted in the SPRAR system (Protection System for Asylum seekers and Refugees). Financed in 2016 by the General Directorate of Immigration and Integration Policies of the Ministry of Labour, through *Italia Lavoro* and the National Migration Policy Fund, the project, finished in July 2018, it has been proposed to reinforce the multi-level governance of employment policies, involving reception stakeholders and those dealing with labour policies in order to define a model of intervention replicable for the programming and implementation of socio-occupational integration pathways aimed at holders of international protection. Furthermore it aims to trigger processes of empowerment and autonomization in their context of work and life.

The project has allocated € 3.7 millions for activating 672 internships for socio-occupational insertion providing a contribution of euros 5,500 for placement in a six-month internship project of every immigrant who holds international protection.

The success of the project, which can be considered for the programming of active policy measures intended for vulnerable individuals, consists primarily of the national management of the action and the sharing of the entire route to central level between administrations and those who have competence in the field of socio-occupational policies of the holders of international protection. The project, then, succeeded in encouraging the attainment of housing autonomy, resulting in the escape from the host system and to ensure that the work was not perceived only as a source of income and emancipation, but as a tool to demonstrate the value of their skills and abilities and to gain more visibility in the social context of arrival (Ministry of Labour and Anpal Services, 2018).

Also relevant is the Immigration Initiative promoted by *Fondazione con il Sud*, under the “Special and Innovative Projects” intervention. In 2014, the first edition was promoted, through which around 3.7 million euros were allocated for 13 social and labour integration projects for immigrants in the

southern regions (Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Apulia, Sardinia and Sicily).

The foundation's objective is to finance projects focused on the socio-economic integration of immigrants and related social emergencies. The main goal of the projects must be the full integration of immigrants, who must be actively involved in project activities so that they can enhance their skills. The financed projects aim on support for self-employment in the agri-food sector, the launching of productive activities on confiscated goods, the creation of social enterprises and the opening of retail outlets or, for example, the creation of reception centres.

3. Consistency of the phenomenon of migrant workers in Sicily

Over the last few years, the immigrants' presence has always shown increasing rates that sometimes have been very high, though they have been dramatically reduced from +44.9% in 2009 to +4.5% in 2015.

Immigrant workers, in addition to agriculture, which is one of the sectors with a higher level of foreign labour, are committed to carrying out mainly low-skilled jobs in different sectors: services (cleaning, catering, domestic collaboration, elderly care), non-advanced tertiary activities (small repair shops, service stations, etc.) and small business.

CREA-PB survey (Tab. 1-2) shows that in 2015, 47,038 foreign workers (both non-EU and new EU citizens, Bulgarians and Romanians in particular) employed in agricultural activities provided a total of 4,750,000 working days. The number of days worked by non-EU workers only, net of those provided by EU workers (equal to about 2,110,000), totalled approximately 2,640,000. 1,334 non-EU workers and 1,919 EU workers, totalling approximately 520,000 days, are employed in processing/ marketing activities and agritourism.

In Sicily, 75% of foreign labour is employed for harvesting, especially in vegetables crops, viticulture and olive growing, with some differences at provincial level depending on production specificities. There is no substantial difference in the origin of workers employed in harvesting and in other operations, while there is a specificity for the livestock sector in which non-EU labour (Indian workers) prevails and it is concentrated mainly in the provinces of Enna (beef cattle breeding) and Ragusa (dairy cattle breeding). Vegetable crops, with about 1,710,000 work days, or 36% of the total number of days worked by migrant workers in Sicily, is the sector where foreign labour is mainly employed: approximately 1,050,000 days for open-air cultivations (22% of the total), and about 660,000 days for greenhouses (14% of the total) (Macaluso, 2016).

So, it is no coincidence that there is a strong concentration of foreign agricultural workers in the province of Ragusa and, in particular, in the municipi-

Tab. 1. Non EU workers employment in Sicilian agriculture by sector – 2015 (number of workers).

	Activity										Overall total
	Agricultural activities per sector										
	Livestock	Vegetable crops	Tree crops	Nursery	Industrial crops	Other crops or activities	Total	Agritourism and rural tourism	Processing and marketing		
Trapani	124	840	3,841	170	0	55	5,030	45	90	5,165	
Palermo	155	272	495	0	0	106	1,028	192	91	1,311	
Messina	106	160	427	202	0	35	930	101	15	1,046	
Agrigento	62	150	1,249	0	0	52	1,513	47	26	1,586	
Caltanissetta	40	386	174	0	0	30	630	30	20	680	
Enna	110	41	60	0	0	31	242	16	10	268	
Catania	54	175	2,086	59	0	65	2,439	183	148	2,770	
Ragusa	165	8,240	373	230	0	102	9,110	96	105	9,311	
Syracuse	86	2,339	77	75	0	42	2,619	65	54	2,738	
SICILY	902	12,603	8,782	736	0	518	23,541	775	559	24,875	

Source: CREA-PB survey.

Tab. 2. New EU workers employment in Sicilian agriculture by sector – 2015 (number of workers).

	Activity							Overall total		
	Agricultural activities per sector									
	Livestock	Vegetable crops	Tree crops	Nursery	Industrial crops	Other crops or activities	Total			
								Agritourism and rural tourism	Processing and marketing	
Trapani	90	350	2,237	44	0	40	2,761	22	89	2,872
Palermo	15	339	690	0	0	90	1,134	98	139	1,371
Messina	25	58	469	349	0	65	966	85	25	1,076
Agrigento	5	442	2,065	0	0	95	2,607	36	36	2,679
Caltanissetta	5	991	236	0	0	190	1,422	31	58	1,511
Enna	47	257	91	0	0	142	537	11	0	548
Catania	5	375	1,944	144	0	140	2,608	141	486	3,235
Ragusa	20	7,634	664	228	0	90	8,636	81	417	9,134
Syracuse	5	2,710	37	44	0	30	2,826	41	123	2,990
SICILY	217	13,156	8,433	809	0	882	23,497	546	1,373	25,416

Source: CREA-PB survey.

palities of Santa Croce Camerina, Vittoria, Acate, Scicli and Ragusa, the so-called “transformed strip” where it is concentrated the bulk of vegetable production which is followed by citrus crops (740,000 days, 15.5%), olive growing (642,000 days, 13.5%) and viticulture (730,000 days, divided into 470,000 days for wine grape and 260,000 for table grapes, 10.0% and 5.4% respectively).

Finally, processing and marketing activities and nursery sector do account for about 9% and 8% respectively of the working days. As far as the livestock sector is concerned, which employs 80,000 working days, the prevalent activity is the stable management, while in the farmhouses the most widespread activity is room cleaning and upkeep.

After 2014, which has been a disastrous year for Italian olive production with the consequent fall in labour, there was a 26% increase in the number of working days spent in the sector. For citrus fruits, the increase was even greater (+36.5%), while the rates recorded for vegetables (+4.5%), table grapes (+2.8%) and nursery (+3.0%) are more moderate. The data for the other sectors are actually stable.

Regarding the origin of workers, the North African component, predominantly Tunisians and Moroccans, is a historical presence in the regional agriculture but few years ago new EU workers, mostly Romanian and Albanian and to a lesser extent Bulgarians and Poles, have increased very quickly until 2013. In the last few years a trend shift in new EU workers employment has been observed followed by a rebalancing of the two components (in 2015 a substantial equality in the two groups of workers has been recorded: 23,541 non-EU workers and 23,497 new EU workers). Nevertheless, the conflicts between the two national groups did not stop because EU workers are willing to accept job conditions far from contractual terms, both in terms of wages and working hours. Because of this situation we observed a sharp downsizing of previous labour union’s achievements obtained in favour of North African workers. In parallel, the so-called “gray work” has increased, that is the work carried out in presence of a contract – but with wages, number of working days and actual working hours per day far from what has been declared – has risen.

Livestock farming, especially dairy farming, represents a separate case because foreign labour is predominantly, if not exclusively, Indian, whose presence in Sicily is a relatively new phenomenon.

The working period varies depending on the production sector. Since non-EU labour is predominantly employed during harvest phase, the peak in recruitment is recorded in summer-autumn, except for the open-air vegetable crops for which harvesting begins at the end of winter. The working day length almost always goes beyond the contractual one, and it is often more than 8-9 hours (especially in vegetable farms) or even 10 hours as for livestock

farms. So, in most cases, the declared working time is lower than the actual one. Even today, especially in vegetable crops (tomato and potato harvesting in particular), workers exploitation is not uncommon and the illegal work intermediation system, the so-called “caporalato”, still persists.

If we consider exclusively non-EU labour force, on average, little more than half is tied to a regular employment contract and receives a remuneration equal to the union wage. For some sectors such as greenhouse crops, fruit and vegetable processing and agritourism, there is a higher incidence of regular contracts but most of non-EU workers is employed seasonally and with remuneration far from the union wage (the effective average wage is around 30 euros per day, with a minimum of 20 euros, in comparison with the union wage that is 48-50 euros).

However, migration flows represent an important resource for the national economy; between 2011 and 2016 the increase in craftsmanship of immigrants (+8.3%), also represented by gardening firms (+74.5%), mostly Romanian and Albanian, has fought the fall in the entire sector (-7.8%). This is linked to the rise of the foreign resident population, which increased about 1.4 million units (+37.5%) between 2010 and 2015, totalling 5,014 million people, equal to 8.2% of the Italian population (Direzione Generale dell’Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione, 2016). The positive trend is also maintained on the employment front, which in the two-year period 2014-2015 saw an increase in contracts of indefinite employment of more than 34,000 units for foreign nationals of Community origin and more than 30,000 units for non-EU foreigners, which definitely links with the incentives provided by the 2015 law of Stability, art. 1, paragraph 118, and by l. 23/2015.

Foreigners who work regularly in Italy, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data, are more than a million, and are predominantly made up of people who are transferred to their family or other people of the same ethnicity. From a professional point of view, most immigrants (52%) are employed in the so-called “low skilled” jobs, which involve almost executive tasks. Mostly engaged in subordinate work, in 80% of cases, foreign workers have the status of a worker and only 0.9% have a managerial or framework qualification; 10.2% of non-EU employed persons, on the other hand, carry out self-employment, which is mostly the case for small and medium sized commercial enterprises.

Agriculture represents the productive sector in which the largest number of contracts for foreign workers (+35.7%) is launched in 2015 and in the two-year period 2014-2015 there has been an increase of both Community workers (+17.9 %) and non-EU workers (+13.7%). These data show that the agricultural sector also has many irregular migrant workers. There are several reasons why immigrant labour represents an important proportion of the total number of

workers employed in the agricultural sector: the low-skilled work demand for the activities that immigrants often carried out in the country of origin; the not formal context, where it is not necessary to have an excellent knowledge of the Italian language.

Despite the presence of foreign agricultural workers in Sicily is to be considered historical, we are very far from a true integration of migrants in the social structure. The project “Presidio” of Caritas has highlighted that, where illegal work is prevalent, one of the most serious issues remains the housing conditions (Carchedi *et al.*, 2015). Often the accommodations, where even families with children live, are represented by structures located mostly within the same farm where migrants work (shacks, warehouses, garages with plastic or Eternit coverings void of any habitability requirements). It represents a state of isolation that makes the presence of workers almost invisible, preventing contacts with the local population, and even worse, seriously reducing their ability to access minimum health services.

4. Initiatives for labour inclusion of migrants in agriculture

In the last few years, in order to deal with the extraordinary flow of immigrants in our country, there is growing attention, both from public institutions and private associations, for the improvement of the national reception system and the socio-occupational integration also in the agricultural context. The rural world represents historically the most privileged place for social, educational and/or work-related activities with people in discomfort. By l. 141/2015, which states the provisions on social farming, this type of activity finds regulatory recognition in a dedicated law.

At national level there are increasing numbers of initiatives that offer integration opportunities for immigrants from EU or non-EU countries. These are different depending on the subjects from which the initiative (public or private) and, therefore, from the source of funding, the people to whom it is addressed (women trapped, immigrants who have obtained international protection, etc.) and, finally, of the type of planned activities (direct farming, participation in processing, packaging and trade, urban gardens, etc.).

Because of the importance that this phenomenon has in the Italian context, as a result of the focus and workshops organised on the theme, within the National Rural Network 2014-2020, a specific survey was also initiated to identify National projects of social agriculture aimed at the socio-working integration of immigrants. The survey, initiated in the framework of the project “Eccellenze Rurali”, is designed to tell experiences of good use of Community funds in support of rural development, in which agriculture is not only seen

in its economic dimension, but as a thread conductor of a scenario made up of farms and courageous entrepreneurial choices, on the one hand, and life of the local community and territorial context on the other.

There are a lot of initiatives of protection that are born on ideas of individual immigrants. For example, the case of the Benin City Women's Volunteering Association, born out of the will of some Nigerian women to find freedom, challenging their aggressors and abandoning the road. Thus, 15 Nigerian women began to dedicate themselves to tailoring with reusing materials, and then also to engage in other activities such as catering and Nigerian and African ethnic cuisine, and finally a vegetable garden within the "Codifas" urban garden in the city of Palermo; in future projects there is to cultivate an urban garden and to deal with the processing of vegetables.

Faced with the various initiatives promoted by direct stakeholders, there are also the integration projects supported by public institutions and non-profit organizations. *Sicilia Integra* project, born from a meeting between the London NGO Gaia Education and a professor of Department Di3A of Catania University, is an exemplary case. The guiding idea is to provide an answer to the migrant crisis, supporting its socio-economic integration, providing a training and employment opportunity for young unemployed Sicilian people as well. *Sicilia Integra*, by linking to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, COP21 and Europe 2020, aims to contribute to the fair and sustainable development of Sicily by supporting the integration and active inclusion of young Sicilians and migrants.

This development is based on the idea that migratory flows (humanitarian crisis), as well as the high level of unemployed Sicilians (economic and financial crisis) could be a great opportunity for changing Sicilian economy. Project actions aim to create economic opportunities in organic farming through the implementation of capacity building activities for sustainable communities, agroecology and marketing of organic products.

This project started in December 2015 with training activities focusing on the sustainability of organic agri-food systems; the project has been divided into several actions:

- creating a Sustainable Development Training (ESD) pathway to support the professionalization of migrants and young Sicilians in emerging European organic markets;
- building an inclusive, decentralized and transparent system of governance and long-term relationships between the various actors involved;
- definition of circular economy schemes that can connect local food systems with European buyers and European organic markets.

5. Methodology

The evaluation of the performance of *Sicilia Integra* project was carried out with the help of the SWOT methodology, which, as is well known, is a widely used technique for territorial analyses, the evaluation of regional programs (such as those developed in the EU Rural Development Policy) and strategic and operational marketing.

This analysis, aimed at detecting the main strengths and weaknesses within the project as well as the opportunities and threats outside the project considered, was supplemented by a variant of the adopted SWOT by Roberts and Stimson (1998) and defined by Gambelli (2007) in a study on the Impact of Support Policies for Organic Farming in Italy with the aim of filling the available information sources at a territorial level on a given phenomenon, through the use of knowledge and/ or judgments expressed by different stakeholders involved.

The original study by Roberts and Stimson, which have defined the Multi-Sector Analysis or Multi-Sector SWOT Analysis (MSA), set itself the objective of measuring the competitiveness of drivers contributing to regional development, at sectorial and intersectoral level. The model is linked to the “matrix theory”, a widely used theory in mathematics and economics, to represent complex series of information and for simplifying notations (Leontief, 1953; Isard, 1960) and it identifies in Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) the best operational tool. The aim is offering to policymakers a valid alternative for the evaluation of multiple objectives that are determined or are measured with more than one traditional criterion. For this reason, MSA was used as a decision support tool to evaluate the results of a project, considering a range of predetermined criteria or variables (Nijkamp *et al.*, 1990; Stimson *et al.*, 2013).

Furthermore, the methodology was used in strategic business planning, marketing and area planning for the EU structural funds (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000), in assessments where the availability of economic, financial and structural data was particularly lacking (Zanoli, 2007). In the case of the evaluation of a project with a social purpose, such as *Sicilia Integra*, it is quite elaborate to measure objectively the intangibles that make up the invested capital. For this reason, it is necessary to manage the process in different steps: defining the field of analysis, using more criteria, identifying stakeholders, mapping and highlighting outcomes, evaluating impacts and results. In the case of planning linked to socio-occupational inclusion of migrants, it is more appropriate to overcome the assessment dimension linked exclusively to monetary value (Mulgan, 2010, Arvidson *et al.*, 2013) and open to a social perspective (such as in the case of the Social Return On Investment - SROI). Finally, with the prospect of integrating multiple analytical approaches for the evalua-

tion of the impact of the project of labour inclusion of migrants, has been realized the present study, based on the interaction between social subjects (interactive social research or action research), to integrate the currently available knowledge and plan subsequent analytical analyses (Elg *et al.*, 2015).

Operatively, we first proceeded to collect all the information available about Sicilia Integra project through a specially prepared questionnaire (general characters such as mission, vision, donor collaboration, etc.; organizational and management aspects, such as period, participatory planning, subjects, methodologies used, etc.; experience in creating a social garden, etc.). Based on this information, a few factors have been defined to describe the phenomenon investigated in a unitary manner both from the internal and external point of view and as a possible constituent factor. These exogenous and endogenous variables were collected within a new questionnaire submitted to various public and private subjects involved in the participatory design process, followed by *Sicilia Integra* and similar initiatives, invited to participate in a focus group, in which they have met with great attention on the problems of the general political climate, the participatory design process, the project's operational performance, the project results, etc.²

The invited experts were also asked to assign a score for each variable, ranging from 1 (= insignificant) to 5 (= very important), preceded by a + sign (= strength/ opportunity), - (= weakness/ Threat) and 0 (no weakness/ no threat). During the focus group activity, was paid attention to the containment of the emergence of any opinion leaders (the latter option to avoid) that could affect the judgment of other research participants. To verify what is said there is a Contrast Index (Gambelli, 2007), which varies between 0 = convergence in the evaluation and 1 = absolute divergence in the evaluation, calculated as follows:

$$IC_i = \left[\text{Max}_j (V_{ij}) - \text{Min}_j (V_{ij}) \right] / (V_{\text{max}} - V_{\text{min}})$$

Where $i = 1, \dots, n$; $J = 1, \dots, e$ and ($n =$ number of variables; $e =$ number of experts; V_{min} and $V_{\text{max}} =$ minimum and maximum evaluation). In this way even a single contrasting evaluation (if $IC_i > 0.5$) was detected and submitted to a subsequent individual interview. Through this set of qualitative judgments about the importance of each variable, we got the determination of numerical indexes by appropriate standardization.

² The questionnaire was sent to various stakeholders involved in the design process, with the aim of collecting judgments and evaluations of the project, effects on the territory and about its prospects.

Two sets of indexes for assessing the influence of the internal micro-environment (strength/ weakness analysis) and the external macro environment (opportunity/ threat analysis) have been developed so that the analysis aims to forecast possible future scenarios through two synthetic indicators whose value varies between 0 and 1, and are the Strength-Weak Index (IFD) and the Opportunity-Threat Index (IOM):

$$IFD = \sum_{j=1}^F pp_{pi} / (F * P_{max}) \quad IOM = \sum_{i=1}^R pp_{pi} / (R * P_{max})$$

Where: pp_{pi} = score assigned to the i-th variable strength-weakness and risk-opportunity; F = number of variables for strength/ weakness; R = number of variables for risk/ opportunity.

6. Analysis of the main results

6.1 General characteristic of the project

To date, the project, funded by foundations and private subjects for a total of 91,000 euros, offers interesting results in the three lines of intervention envisaged and carried out at the *Il Nodo* Migration Centre in Catania.

The training courses, some in English, have highlighted the lack of training knowledge on the languages used (Italian and English), which did not, however, prevent the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge.

The methodology used was based on theories and methods developed within a network of good practices within Fairtrade, Sustainable Education, Ecovillage and Agroecological Movements. Sustainable Development Training (ESD) approaches have helped migrants and young Sicilian unemployed to reflect and act to achieve food security by promoting quality food and healthy diets, strengthening local economies and supporting small businesses and the viability of small businesses agricultural. Training-on-the-job activities have enabled migrants and young unemployed to develop new skills, improve their social status, and get in touch with the reality of regional organic farming.

The recipients of the training activities were 93 subjects, including 23 young unemployed Sicilians and 70 migrant asylum seekers and refugees received in the SPRAR system, including 26 unaccompanied minors in charge of social services (14 boys and 12 girls). Migrants came from the following countries: Bangladesh, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Ghana, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Bissau, Tunisia, Somalia, Ita-

ly, Germany, Greece and Romania. Overall, the group consisted of 19 women (20%) and 74 men (80%), divided into the following age classes:

- up to 18 years: 26 (migrant minors);
- 19-24 years: 51;
- 25-30 years: 7;
- 31-36 years: 3;
- over 36 years: 6.

Training lessons were kept, 60% in the classroom and 40% in the lab; lessons were articulated in individual activities (80%) and group activities (20%), such as plenary meetings, reflection activities, sharing of experiences and witness, ideas presentation and group design.

The place where cultural and social exchanges between the participants took place was a 3,000 square meter garden, given in concession by Consortium *Il Nodo* to the children who attended the 3rd course, pending the establishment of Cooperative. The garden, abandoned for over 20 years, has been the home of theoretical lessons and field activities that have led to the design and rehabilitation of the urban garden. The migrants and Sicilian youth learned how to develop a productive garden oasis system using minimum water and maximum fertility retention, and various microclimate opportunities. They recovered an old orchard with lemons, oranges, prickly pears and medlar trees and, by utilizing various composting techniques, established a vegetable garden with lettuce, onions, tomatoes, cabbages, broccoli, eggplants in an integrated design. The products obtained are sold to a purchasing group made up of employees of the Consortium itself. The course graduates, now empowered with design for sustainability skills, are planning to establish their own cooperative for organic garden management services, with some becoming trainees on urban garden design. The constitution of new cooperative is scheduled for September 2017.

6.2 Evaluation of the project results

The SWOT questionnaire was submitted to a sample of stakeholders (public and private) who had contributed to the participatory design process, which saw the birth of the *Sicilia Integra* project or experienced in the management of solidarity initiatives and Including immigrant subjects or professional engagement in centres of first reception of immigrants or public entities responsible for the organization of social gardens in the territory of the metropolitan city of Catania. So were involved with AIAB, the Sicilian Social Farming Network, administrative officials of the territorial areas involved in the project, national and international circular economics experts, university professors, sustainability experts and alternative cultural methods, of subjects

belonging to them to the onlus and SPRAR worlds, etc.; the survey involved 12 subjects and was carried out between September 2016 and March 2017.

The subjects involved showed a tendency for convergence on the variables considered as possible strengths/weaknesses, while greater contrast was found within the discussion and evaluation of considerable variables/ threats, as shown in Figure 1.

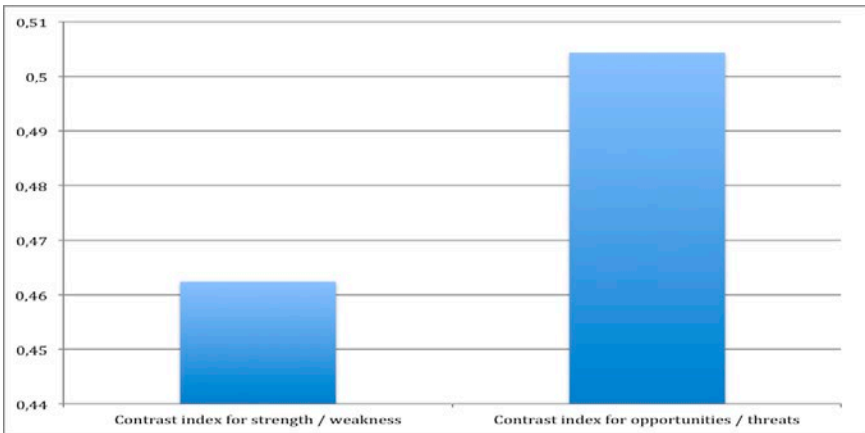
The discussion was animated and diverged on aspects related to the evaluation of external factors affecting the results of the *Sicilia Integra* project and related to a context related to well-known “immigrant” issues and possible causes (political or economic) and/ or solutions (Scuderi *et al.*, 2018).

As for strength/weakness performance indicators, the realization of the study/ job inclusion training project benefited from specific financial support (+1 index), the support of administrative entities responsible for its operation (+1 index), a high degree of involvement of foreign and local subjects (+2.66 index), high operating performance levels (+1.67 index), as shown in Figure 2.

Some weaknesses should be attributed to the “quality” of the regulation, to the degree of openness to the initiative gathered on the territory, to the system of relations between immigrants and locals, often restricted by linguistic and religious barriers, to the professionalism and the adequacy of the subjects involved, distinct cultural and professional backgrounds.

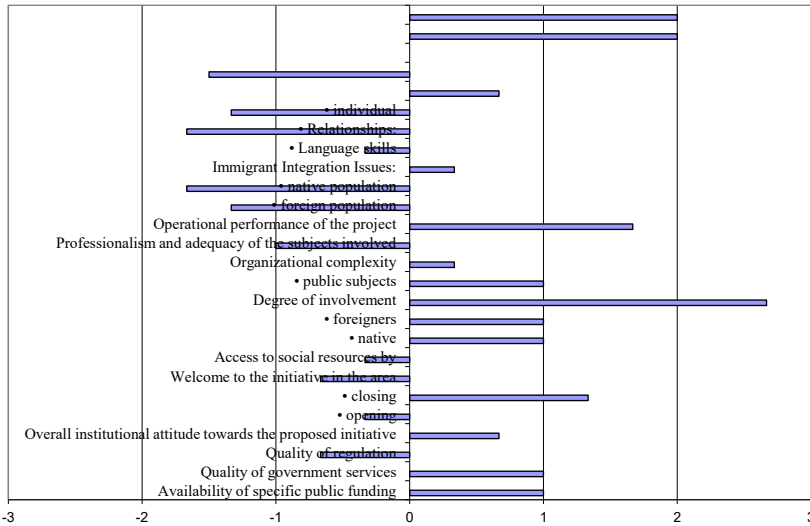
The qualifying aspect of the project was, as stated, the creation of social capital, aimed at stimulating entrepreneurial skills and involving the work of immigrant and local people. The creation of the garden laid the basis for an

Fig. 1. Contrast index in the sample detected (2017).



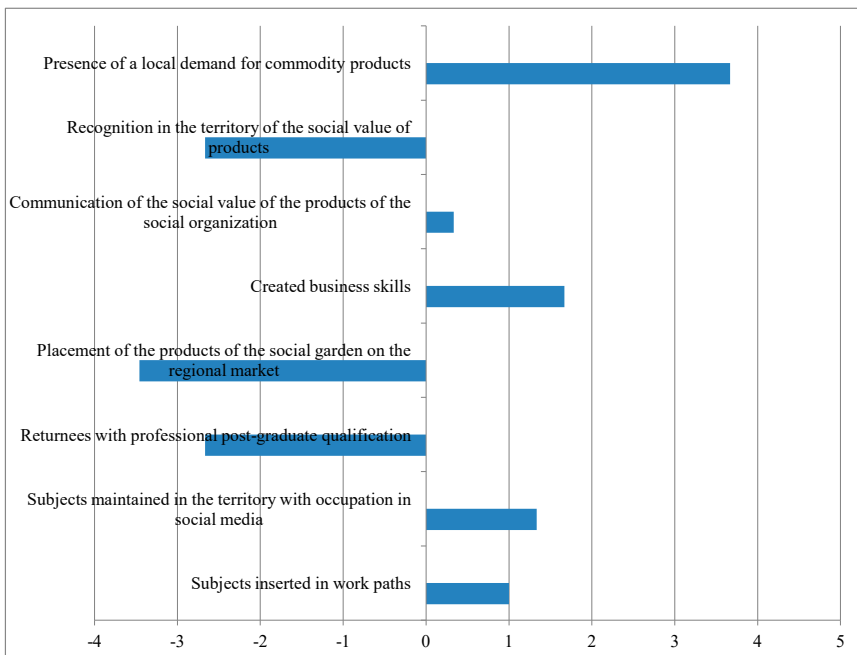
Source: own calculations based on data from survey.

Fig. 2. Performance index strenght and weakness.



Source: own calculations based on data from survey.

Fig. 3. Performance index opportunities and threats.



Source: own calculations based on data from survey.

assessment of the influence of a series of variables outside the project and referring to the territorial context of reference (Fig. 3).

In this case, the project has contributed positively to the creation of entrepreneurial skills, has contributed to the communication of positive values, linked to social aspects that let you see a possible integration of the subjects involved, including by job insertion. Negative evaluations are related to the concrete possibilities of returning qualified people to the home country, the positioning of the organic vegetable products on the regional market (limited to a natural physical proximity) and the recognition around the social value of the products produced.

7. Conclusions

Sicily continues to be the target of an ever-growing flow of political and economic immigration, representing the Italian and European shores of the main Mediterranean destination. It results in political, economic and social issues that, with modest means and resources, the EU tries to deal with an immigration policy not yet fully defined in its content and purpose.

In this context, *Sicilia Integra*'s initiative tries to build, together with other similarities, an integration model where the implementation of a training process aimed at the creation of entrepreneurial skills, which are considered useful and prerequisites for an effective immigration policy. This initiative, coming to the second implementation cycle, is well within the framework of the "social" role recognized in advanced agriculture countries for building a more inclusive, innovative and reflective Europe.

The training and information aimed at supporting forms of autonomous entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector made with the project *Sicilia Integra* have specifically offered opportunities for social and cultural development of migrants, formed on the themes of business management, on the rights and duties of citizens and on the creation of opportunities for personal and professional growth. The path has allowed the enhancement of skills acquired both in a formal way (courses) both informally (work of production and collection). They have been provided to the recipients of the know-how and know what necessary to the creation of the company.

The project also served to establish relationships on the territory and meetings between subjects with different needs (social operators, institutions, companies, researchers, etc.), thus expressing interest in the active participation in the civil life and issues related to migration processes. The debate activated thanks to *Sicilia Integra* also served to know aspects related to the impact of the migration flow on the current economic cycle of our country and the ter-

ritorial differences, on the labour market and related segmentation on a local basis, on the policy migration, on the characteristics of migrants and on the influences and choices of companies, able to determine competitiveness or complementarity between indigenous workers and immigrant.

The results show that farmers are positive regarding the contribution of immigrants to agriculture but have attitudes “defensive” against a local company multicultural that tends to assert itself in some agricultural areas. In these however it is true that the immigrant labour contributes in a structural way and decisive for the agricultural economy. The points of view of immigrants denote, conversely, a positive perception of their integration into the host society.

Ultimately, the project acted as spokesperson for changes of an environmental nature linked to a horizon of change in the style of life and consumption, beyond that of a social nature because agriculture is found at the base of the generation of reports in the Community.

In the perspective, the relationship between social farming models and cross-border cooperation measures needs to be assessed to borrow positive experiences and effectively counteracts the widespread illegality that revolves around this system.

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