

# Chapter 4

## Rural Destination Areas: Impacts and Practices



In this chapter we provide a framework to assess and analyse ongoing rural migration dynamics from the perspective of areas of destination, with a view to answer to the following questions: What are the impacts on the local economy and society? Which are the practices, programs and policies that underpin the presence and integration of migration? What is recent experience revealing on these matters?

In particular, we focus on the more marginal, isolated, remote areas of the EUMed where the contributions of immigrants are critical for the sustainability and reproduction of local societies. In these areas, immigrant communities represent a strategic asset with a vision to contrast processes of population decline and overall socio-economic desertification. The chapter progresses through several cases and experiences related to processes and practices of inclusion and integration of immigrants in diverse rural settings in Italy.

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 discusses the important role of immigrant workers in Mediterranean agriculture. In this chapter we will analyse the consequences of immigration in different areas of destination, while in the following chapter those of emigration on the communities of origin will be assessed.

Existing literature mostly focuses on the migrant workforce employed in EUMed intensive agricultural systems, oftentimes addressing its exploitative nature and relationships (King et al. 2000; Ortiz-Miranda et al. 2013; Gertel and Sippel 2014; Corrado et al. 2016, 2018; Corrado 2017; Papadopoulos and Fratsea 2017). This literature plays an important role in raising concern over the (often degraded and vulnerable) living and working conditions of rural migrants, and the related economic, social and political implications of such arrangements.

As the focus is mostly on agricultural high-potential areas and intensive systems, the relevance of the migratory phenomenon in agro-ecological marginal settings has

been often overlooked by academic literature. This is due to several reasons, including the marginality of these territories and their limited relevance in policy debates. Nevertheless, it is particularly in these marginal rural settings that the presence and contributions of migrant communities are critical in maintaining these territories and ecosystems alive and productive. Here we mostly focus on these latter areas, as a way to redress existing literature, and also because immigrant communities represent there a strategic asset to contrast rural population decline and shrinking agricultural practices.

This chapter provides a framework to assess and analyse ongoing rural migration dynamics in either settings, with a view to answer to the following questions: What are the impacts on the local economy and society? Which are the practices, programs and policies that underpin the presence and integration of migration? What is recent experience revealing on these matters?

These questions will be addressed for the different agricultural and rural development patterns pertaining to systems in EU Mediterranean countries, with a specific focus on Italy, as emblematic case for these dynamics. Related experiences and initiatives aimed at creating local models of integration in either intensive and extensive settings will be then assessed, towards more sustainable agricultural productions systems and rural development patterns.

## 4.2 Implications in Rural Areas of Destination

As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, the decline and ageing of population that have characterised rural settings in recent decades have resulted in problems of workforce availability and generational renewal. These problems have been threatening the sustainability of agriculture, food systems and rural communities alike in parts of Europe (Nori 2017a; Farinella et al. 2017; FAO 2018).

As we have analysed, immigrant populations have often come to replace and complement the declining local one, with evidence attesting that in most cases, the immigrant labour force does not compete with native workers, but it rather fills the gaps in agricultural labour markets (Kasimis 2010; Nori 2015; FAO 2018; Robinson et al. 2017).

As discussed in Chap. 3 the geographical features of Mediterranean countries together with the socio-economic and territorial polarisation that has characterised rural development in recent decades have contributed reconfiguring the agrarian world in two basic domains:

1. Labour-intensive farming, livestock breeding and horticultural value chains that characterise agricultural systems in high potential areas such as valley bottoms, plains and coastal areas.
2. Low-input systems and agro-pastoral practices in marginal rural settings that offer limited capacities for agricultural intensification—mountainous areas, remote villages, islands.



**Fig. 4.1** Main areas of intensive agriculture (white) and extensive agro-pastoralism (black) in EUMed countries. (Source: our elaboration)

Figure 4.1 indicates main areas of intensive and extensive farming systems in the EU Mediterranean region.

The presence and contribution of immigrant communities is widespread in both settings and in related farming systems; the patterns, dynamics and challenges are though quite diverse. These have given rise, through time, to a territorial reconfiguration along forms of ethnic specialisation, with distinct communities occupying specific ecological and productive rural niches (Schrover et al. 2007; Bell and Osti 2010; Ambrosini 2013).

Migrants in high-potential areas satisfy the high demand for temporary, cheap and precarious labour which is demanded by such seasonal and intensive systems, which require workers to move from one region to another according to production needs. These contributions and impacts have been thoroughly assessed in the previous chapter.

In marginal rural areas the human presence goes beyond the mere economic dimension, as it bears relevant implications in the social and environmental dimensions as well. As it will be assessed, land abandonment and the reduction of ecosystem management associated to local farming, grazing and forestry implies substantial natural hazards for society. Furthermore, the active presence of people in marginal settings has a wider, ‘multifunctional’ role in maintaining local territories and reproducing local societies. These are the reasons why the social desertification most marginal rural communities have undergone in recent decades represent a serious concern for policy makers and citizens alike. The growing presence of

foreign, immigrant communities represents in these settings an interesting phenomenon, which might help to redress these dynamics.

Research suggests that immigrant communities residing and operating in marginal settings not only represents a main supplier of agricultural-related wage labour, but oftentimes play a plurality of roles, alternating between agriculture, tourism, construction and other service provisions which often carry relevant implications on the local social and cultural fibre (Mas Palacios and Morén-Alegret 2012; Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2013; Nori and Luisi 2019).

Their contributions are often vital to rural enterprises, villages and societies, which in the last decades have suffered from problems associated to lacking workforce, ageing population and generational renewal. The contribution of immigrants is also critical in providing the ecological and social services that support local societies, as much as it is in mere demographic terms.<sup>1</sup> Through higher fertility rates immigrant communities play a relevant role in supporting local demography by buffering population decline. This has helped to maintain the provision of basic services, such as primary schools and health posts, for remote and poorly populated areas which have been the primary targets of shrinking public budgets due to their lowering population density and limited political influence (Kasimis et al. 2010; Osti and Ventura 2012; Gallo and Rioja 2016).

The demographic structure, average age and fertility rates of immigrant communities compared to local ones suggests that their relevance for the social and economic development of these areas will be increasing through time. As for Italy, immigrants represent about 10% of the adult population in most inner areas of central Italy (refer to Table 4.1), where the proportion of children in local schools is normally much higher, thus to indicate a shift in the local population composition (Barca et al. 2014; SNAI 2015; Nori and Luisi 2019). Similar dynamics are reported for island and mountainous areas of Greece and Spain (Kasimis 2010; Collantes et al. 2014).

Immigrant women in these settings often play less visible but equally critical roles by providing domestic work and care-giving services. Oftentimes the availability of foreign assistants enables local elders to remain inhabiting rural villages, while allowing their relatives to engage in the labour market. In these terms immigrants complement local labour, in the fields and at home, facilitating the adoption of new employment strategies of autochthonous families, with overall positive effects on the local economy (De Lima et al. 2005; Kasimis et al. 2010; Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2013; Osti and Ventura 2012; Mas Palacios and Morén-Alegret 2012; Nori and López-i-Gelats 2017; Ragkos et al. 2018).

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<sup>1</sup>Refer to data from Kasimis 2010; Collantes et al. 2014; Barca et al. 2014; SNAI 2015 respectively for island and mountainous areas of Greece, Spain and Italy.

**Table 4.1** Population growth rate in Italy: annual average in inner areas municipalities (years 2003–2013 × 1000 inhabitants)

Regions of Italy		Total population <i>annual average growth rate</i>	Italian population <i>annual average growth rate</i>	Foreigners population <i>annual average growth rate</i>
Islands	Sicily	−0.15	−2.35	+2.18
	Sardinia	0.76	−1.09	+1.82
Alpine inner areas	Piedmont	0.63	−4.16	+4.63
	Aosta Valley	2.77	−1.76	+4.39
	Lombardy	3.44	−1.48	+4.59
	Trentino Alto Adige	6.48	2.79	+3.49
	Veneto	4.34	−0.94	+4.95
	Friuli Venezia Giulia	−2.03	−5.61	+3.49
	Apennines inner areas	Liguria	−0.48	−4.76
Emilia Romagna		3.77	−1.84	+5.29
Tuscany		1.55	−3.92	+5.32
Umbria		3.95	−1.72	+5.56
Marche		−0.80	−5.62	+4.59
Lazio		13.31	6.25	+6.97
Abruzzo		−0.51	−4.16	+3.61
Molise		−3.55	−6.01	+2.44
Campania		−1.41	−4.06	+2.63
Apulia		−0.53	−2.33	+1.77
Basilicata		−4.72	−6.82	+2.09
Calabria		−3.03	−5.93	+2.87

Source: Own elaboration based on Istat data (Nori and Luisi 2019)

### Box: Romanian Women in Rural Sardinia

Romanians are the main foreign residents in Sardinia; of a totality of 14.216 in 2018, Romanian women (9.626) are double than men (4.590). Most Romanian women work in rural and inner mountainous areas such as in Barbagia, where they assist the elderly as caregivers. There are frequent cases of inter-marriages between locals and Romanian women who eventually contribute to the farm management and economy. However, there are no real policies to support the inclusion of these women in local societies. The general attitude seems rather that of an opportunistic exploitation of cheap labor to compensate for the shortcomings of a welfare state and the absence of care policies.

(continued)

A similar phenomenon was reported in the early 2000s when northern Greek mountainous communities received important inflows of Albanian immigrants, following the change of policy regimes (Kasimis 2008, 2010).

In comprehensive, broader terms, immigrants' contributions in demographic, economic and social terms play an important role in covering the gaps created by an ageing society and the associated decline in welfare services (*for more references see AA.VV. 2018*). All in all their presence is therefore critical in maintaining and reproducing local communities and the socio-cultural identity of territories (Kasimis et al. 2010; Osti and Ventura 2012; Barca et al. 2014; SNAI 2015; Desjardins et al. 2016; Gallo and Rioja 2016; Nori 2017b).

In Chap. 6 immigrants' role in ensuring basic ecological services will also be assessed; the specific agro-pastoral domain will be discussed in deeper detail, as a case study to disentangle and assess these contributions to the sustainable development of marginal territories.

The following two sections assess several experiences related to processes and practices of inclusion and integration of immigrants in diverse rural settings in Italy. We consider the Italian case as an example of the initiatives and debates underway in Mediterranean Europe on these issues. The choice to focus on this country is linked to a better knowledge of the reference literature and experiences, and enables the author to provide a comprehensive overview of the range of initiatives undertaken at national level.

### 4.3 Experiences in Integrating Migrants in Intensive Agricultural Areas

Several experiences and practices have been set up and evolved in recent years in most EUMed settings with a view to contrast the exploitative local conditions of immigrant workers. Civil society has been active in proposing and implementing bottom-up practices of integration and cooperative agriculture where local farmers, activists, precarious workers (both local and migrants) and refugees jointly engage to contrast the agricultural squeeze of producers and the exploitation of workers. We will assess a number of these pertinent to the Italian context.

Through the promotion of alternative agriculture practices, based on fair relations and short supply chains, these bottom-up experiences aim to promote better living and working conditions for agricultural workers, and to support their inclusion in the local society, addressing "simultaneously the crisis of social reproduction of both small-scale farmers and of migrant farm workers" (Iocco et al. 2017). These experiences are limited, but significant because they try to propose an alternative model, based on peasant agriculture and on the alternative food networks and short supply chains. The idea is to promote an agriculture reconnected to the local environment,

which is able to give value to the reciprocity of relationships, more oriented towards a “moral economy”.

The focus of these experiences is to overcome a model in which agriculture is only conceived as a system to produce commodities, to be sold at low cost on the global market. Instead agriculture is here conceived and practiced as a multifunctional activity aiming to ensure a fair standard of living for local people, to improve social and fair relations between all actors in the agri-food chain based on local knowledge, respect of the local ecosystems and mutual relationships, while guaranteeing the quality of healthy food for consumers. The political framework most civil society initiatives breed and evolve from is the one articulated at the global scale through the *Via Campesina* network (<https://viacampesina.org/en/>).

**SOS Rosarno** operates in an area of Calabria that is characterized by an intensive exploitation of immigrant workers engaged in the citrus fruit harvest that determined, in 2010, a first immigrant strike to obtain rights to a fair salary. Despite the symbolic significance of this uprising, the situation of migrants in Rosarno is critical, with migrants forced to live in slums and exploited in the local countryside, with strong episodes of racism by the local residents. In this difficult context, in the 2011, an organic farmers’ cooperative, *I frutti del sole*, started to employ four African workers in the harvest of citrus with regular contracts and fair retribution, organising the commercialisation of the citrus fruits in some critical consumers’ networks (whom are able to support the ethical aims of the project), in particular through solidarity purchase groups based in Rome, Bologna and other main Italian towns. This first project was extended in 2012 with the foundation of SOS Rosarno, an association for social development created by local farmers, activists and African workers to promote the original idea of a transparent and fair citrus fruits chain (also refer to [www.sosrosarno.org](http://www.sosrosarno.org) and Oliveri 2015; Mostaccio 2013; Iocco and Siegmann 2017; Semprebon et al. 2017; Iocco et al. 2018, 2019).

SOS Rosarno was launched as a solidarity economy project, with the aim to promote the collaboration between local farmers and African workers around an alternative citrus fruit chain, based on the right to the fair remuneration for all participants in the supply chain (farmers, workers, final consumers). Although it was a successful project, this experience had a weak point: the precariousness of the work. Though fair salary and fair working conditions have been guaranteed, labour availability remained seasonal, linked only to the harvest of citrus fruits (and to the unemployment benefits in the rest of the years). As Iocco and Siegmann (2017) noted, this did not allow the immigrants to send remittances home and fulfil a central aspect of their migratory project.

For this reason, recently the project involved with the social cooperative *Mani e Terra* (Hands and land), in which the migrant workers themselves are members. The idea is increasing the empowerment of the local and immigrant workers, involving them in the farm’s management, processing also other vegetables and other agricultural products (to give a guarantee of a continuity of salary to the working member all of the year) and experimenting some practices of collective farming, through the rent and the cultivation of some hectares of abandoned land.

The project called *Funky Tomato* (FT) started in 2015 and focused on the ethical harvesting of tomatoes in the area of Venosa (Basilicata Region) and their artisanal processing of canned tomatoes, that are distributed in alternative and critical food networks as solidarity purchase. It is inspired by the informal group *Fuori dal ghetto* (Out of the ghetto) which aims to support the immigrant workers in the tomato harvest to obtain a fair retribution and dignified living conditions (out of the “ghetto” of Venosa) (Iocco et al. 2018, 2019). Small farms and social cooperatives participating in the project accept Funky Tomato ethics and principles, and engage with FT agricultural company in order to produce process and commercialise tomatoes along the FT lines. The project has continuously grown since its inception, increasing the tomato cans production and the amount of workers employed. From its origin in Basilicata, it eventually extended as well to the regions of Sicily and Campania (Iocco et al. 2017).

Similar to Funky Tomato is the project *SfruttaZero* in Apulia (Italy). This is a cooperative and mutualistic project that aims for the cooperation of migrants, farmers, young people precarious in agricultural activities to produce local products (in particular tomato preserves), to be sold in solidarity economies. This experience was born after the strikes of the agricultural workers of Nardo and aims to enhance diversity strengthen social relations and fight against exploitation (Perrotta and Sacchetto 2015).

Other similar experiences are made by the social Cooperative GOEL in the Locride area (Calabria), a region with a high rate of organized crime. The cooperative promotes a series of activities based on the ethical principles of solidarity, fair pay, the fight against crime and the enhancement of local knowledge and cultures. In this context, it has launched a project for the collection and marketing of oranges in circuits of ethical economy, which guarantees a fair remuneration to the workers employed in the collective (migrants and locals) and to farms.

Another interesting micro experience of inclusive and ethical production has been elaborated by the *Barikamà cooperative* which was created following the struggles of Rosarno thanks to a group of African workers. After several experiences of exploitation in the Calabrian countryside for the harvest of oranges and in those of Puglia for the harvesting of tomatoes, in 2012, young Africans founded the association that produces yoghurt. This project started in the premises of a former social center in Rome, which also started a microcredit project to finance activities that involve African workers, originating from Mali, Senegal, Benin, Gambia, Guinea, of which four are involved in the Rosarno uprising (Ascione 2018).

*Contadinazioni* is a movement localized in the area of Mazara (Sicily), where African workers are exploited in the olive harvest in Autumn season and live in rural shanty towns without any basic services (water, electricity, toilets, etc.) (Iocco et al. 2018, 2019). In the 2013, a young migrant worker died in his shack due to an explosion. A collective of local activists, militants and researchers based between Palermo and the small village of Campobello di Mazara, mobilized to help the migrants living in the slums by improving access of water and by promoting mutualistic relationships to self-produce goods and services useful to improve the quality of life of immigrants in this territory. The idea of this movement is to promote



self-production, mutualism, cooperation, and peasant practices as social cohesive experiences targeting young people, and local and immigrant communities.

Members of the *Contadinazioni* started to work in seasonal olive harvesting to improve their know-how in the agricultural sector (many of them have not experience in agriculture and grew-up in an urban context) and to create linkages with African workers and olive producers. After this phase, *Contadinazioni* started an autonomous experience of production of organic table olives, in collaboration with SOS Rosarno, with the idea to push-back against the exploitation of immigrant people. Many Senegalese workers are part of this movement.

The project also succeeded to establish an agricultural cooperative *Terra Matta*, by uniting a few migrant workers, young local precarious workers and activists, with the aim to promote sustainable agriculture and collective production of sun-dried tomatoes. This collective is very fluid and heterogeneous, characterized by a strong political component. The participatory and deliberative mechanisms of decision making are particular to this project (Iocco et al. 2018). Though, in some cases they slowed down the decision-making process and created conflict.

The *Maramao* project (Donatiello and Moiso 2019), financed in part by funds from the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR), managed by the Ministry of the Interior, is interesting because is located in the North of Italy (Piedmont Region), in an area with intensive agricultural development, in Canelli town. Canelli is specialized in the cultivation of the vineyards from which the Moscato Bianco DOCG vine is produced. This area is also recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site for its extensive vineyards that characterize the rural landscape. The paradox is that the Moscato wine, a typical and local product of the territory, is produced through the exploitation of migrants, hired through the mechanism of landless cooperatives. Landless cooperatives often provide for the intermediation of other migrants, thus increasing local migrant populations. For example, the Macedonian community now settled in the area, accounts for 8% of Canelli's population (Donatiello and Moiso 2017, 2018).

The *Maramao* project aims to facilitate immigrant entrepreneurship by supporting agricultural production, in the name of enhancing the quality and the link with the territory. The involvement of migrants takes place through the SPRAR that involves refugees and asylum seekers (Zetter 2017). At its base there is an agricultural cooperative that cultivates abandoned farmland and is free or cheap to some residents. The cooperative also carries out training and job placement activities for young migrants from neighboring SPRAR. Currently, its staff is made up of five people, including three refugees carrying out agricultural activities and one Italian person presenting a percentage of disability. There are also five other trainees, including four asylum seekers and holders of international protection (Donatiello and Moiso 2019).

The *Sicily Integra* project was established at the end of 2015 by an NGO, with the aim of promoting equitable and sustainable development and the active inclusion of local young people and migrants. It has foreseen the activation of local training projects on the sustainability of biological and regenerative agri-food systems and on sustainable agriculture (fair-farms, ecovillages, agro ecological movements, farming

techniques, etc.), reaching 93 people, of which 23 young unemployed Sicilians and 70 migrants, asylum seekers and refugees entering the Italian SPRAR system (Dara Guccione et al. 2018).

In other EUMed countries we find other similar projects. In Spain civil society actions include the experience of the *Sindicato de Obreros del Campo* (SOC) which is active in Andalusia in integrating local claims on land and on labour rights with support to the integration of foreign workers (Caruso 2016). The *Nuevos Senderos* program is engaged in supporting the integration of immigrant households in rural communities suffering from intense depopulation ([www.cepaim.org](http://www.cepaim.org); <http://nuevossenderos.es/>). In Greece and Turkey as well civil society organizations are actively engaging in supporting the integration of Syrian refugee agricultural workers by enhancing their access to farm land and improving the recognition of their rights (such as the Development Workshop initiative: <http://www.ka.org.tr/>).

Many of these experiences are micro and bottom-up practices of social innovation and inclusion based on the cooperation between immigrant workers and local people to promote new forms of peasant agriculture, with a mutualistic approach, linked to economies of solidarity and reciprocity, and models of critical consumption as the short food supply chains and the alternative food networks.

Characteristic features common to most schemes include:

- the organization in a cooperative or associative form;
- the importance of the reuse of land previously abandoned and often worked collectively;
- the valorization of local knowledge and the training of newcomers on local techniques and practices;
- the building of networks of sharing, exchange and co-production between migrants and locals in a relational economy;
- the attention to fair prices in the supply chain for workers and farmers;
- the reliance on critical/ethical consumption demands that recognize and remunerate the material, ecological and cultural value of productions;
- the central role of militants and local activists in supporting initiatives;
- the choice to encourage a peasant agriculture that invests in the cultural and social values of food and agriculture, with a view to enhance organic production and workers' rights.

Most initiatives hold the merit of trying to build horizontal and bottom-up cooperation practices, with a view to enhance the subjectivities of the population present in the territories involved, both migrant and native. One of the most interesting aspects is the strengthening of the autonomy through community practices and collective action, starting by overcoming the role of subordinated worker and recovering the ethical and moral dimension of agriculture. Another relevant aspect is the ambition to build economies of reciprocity and mutual-aid, not simply focused on economic value but embedded in social relationships. However, these processes (based on deliberative democracy mechanisms) often proceed through tiring and conflicting paths and the related principles that underlie these experiences

are time-demanding, controversial and stressful; it is often difficult to balance the interests and motivations of the different participants.

#### 4.4 Experiences in Integrating Migrants in Marginal Rural Settings

Several programs and experiences have been implemented with the view to integrate immigrant communities in marginal rural settings of Spain, Italy and Greece. Most initiatives have though originated from the need to allocate the intense flows of refugees and asylum seekers generated by the political and economic crises that ravaged the Mediterranean, rather than by a genuine concern for inclusive and sustainable agricultural systems and rural communities. We will present here cases from the Italian context, through governments programs as well as civil society actions in southern and northern parts of the country.

An important experience along these lines is the *National Strategy for Inner Areas* (SNAI), a long-term strategy financed by EU and through national funds with the objective to counter the socio-economic marginalization of inner areas of the country, which represent about three fifths of the Italian territory. These areas are characterized by a lack of basic services and depopulation dynamics, demographic malaise. The challenge in these areas is to trigger local dynamics of social and entrepreneurial vitality, to improve the quality of life and the related attractiveness of these areas, with the aim of reversing ongoing trends of rural desertion (Nori and Luisi 2019).

The strategy is based on the idea that economic development and social cohesion are objectives to be achieved jointly, working on intertwined aspects. For example through the improvement of citizenship services (school, health, mobility), enhancement of environmental diversity and landscape, inclusion of projects aimed at countering the hydro-geological and landscape instability, the strengthening of the territorial capital, and construction of new connections and circularity between urban and rural areas (refer to <http://community-pon.dps.gov.it/areeinterne/>).

This strategy proposes support for new forms of rurality and the so-called new rural populations. Amongst the agents of change critical to this challenge—which includes young and new farmers, retired people, temporary residents—immigrant communities who work and live in rural areas, as well as those who are hosted in refugees and asylum seekers reception facilities, represent an important potential asset. These actors carry skills and capacities that would be critical to enhance local, endogenous development.

**Box: Migrants' Work Contributing to Managing Natural Parks (Nori and Luisi 2019)**

In the twentieth century Italian silviculture took shape in the forested areas of Casentino, in Tuscany. These practices eventually influenced forest management in the whole Mediterranean and beyond. These areas are today protected and enhanced through the establishment of a National Park. In the Municipalities of the Casentino Park, the presence of immigrants is the highest among Italian national parks (12.3%). A significant part of these neo-citizens come from the Bakau region of Romania, rural areas that have many similarities with the local ones. This is a main reason the experience and the technical skills of Romanian foresters are recognized and appreciated, and represent a resource for the local territory. The immigrant population plays therefore a fundamental role in the conservation and evolution of the forest sector—which is at the same time a landscape heritage, a touristic attraction and an element of the local traditional identity, and a key resource for the park as well as for the future of this territory.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the Italian government set up a national system to receive refugees based on a private-public partnership, specifically between local authorities and civil society actors. This system is named *Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati* (SPRAR—Protection systems for asylum seekers and refugees), and receives funding from the Ministry of the Interior. A main pillar of this system is SPRAR's hosting centers spread out throughout the territory, particularly in rural and inner areas. The vision is to avoid the territorial concentration and the “ghettoization” of migrants, while exploiting the availability of housing in these areas.

Through improved reception of migrants and refugees, the SPRAR project hopes to generate social capital, relational goods and external economies useful for the growth of the territory as a whole. To this end SPRAR aims to:

- develop widespread hospitality paths for migrants, in which migrants can become main actors in the revitalization of depopulated villages (through projects for the recovery and management of abandoned houses where migrants would be hosted for example);
- favour training in liaison with the local population to enhance exchanges, sharing and ultimately integrate and collaborate on the provision of local public goods and/or services to enhance rural welfare.

The general approach is based on the construction of a process of community empowerment and community care, in which the local population and refugees experimented with forms of active citizenship, participation, continuous learning, with the aim of producing developing that relational and cultural fabric in able to support endogenous local development based on social cohesion and territorial innovation.

The establishment of *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* (CAS—Extraordinary Reception Centers) has been informed by emergency, a humanitarian logic, rather than by aspects of active inclusion of refugees and their potential contribution to the revitalization of local societies.

Systems of refugees and asylum seekers reception have had variable and diverse outcomes and impacts. In some cases, these have generated virtuous processes of social innovation and territorial revitalization, while in others they have resulted in precarious livelihoods, patterns of exploitation and social tensions (Corrado et al. 2018 also refer to Chap. 3). In general civil society has been critical for enhancing the capacity of EUMed territories to integrate and include newcomers in recent decades. In Italy this is specifically the case for mountainous communities, where estimates indicate the number of foreigners to be around 350,000; this includes important portions of asylum seekers and refugees. About 30% of total refugee flows have been relocated ‘*either by choice, by force or by necessity*’, in mountainous communities (Membretti et al. 2017). Successful strategies to enhance integration have targeted both immigrant and local populations, often working and investing at the interface amongst them, and creating opportunities for synergies and cooperation.

A well-known program of reception and insertion of immigrant communities is that of **Riace**, a small village in Calabria, southern Italy. When in the late 1990s the village witnessed the arrival of hundreds of Kurdish refugees that approached Calabria coasts through boats, the mayor Domenico Lucano decided that was a relevant opportunity to welcome and host them, while also envisaging a different future for a community that had been undergoing decades of population decline and economic depression (Sarlo and Martinelli 2016; Carrosio 2019).

The whole administration and management of Riace was devoted to integrating these new citizens, in a proactive way, through recovering the ruinous local building heritage, opening schools, financing micro-activities, opening bars, artisan workshops, bakeries, and shops, reclaiming lands and agricultural production and setting up new services to this aim. Apart from providing a livelihood to incoming populations, these opportunities generated local employment and supported the local economy, which eventually benefitted to the whole population. Cultural mediators were employed and involved in the process, and eventually innovative touristic tours attracted European visitors to witness the experience of the ‘capital of hospitality’.

The town tripled its inhabitants, eventually turning from a ghost town, to a vibrant social, economic and cultural centre, providing hospitality to over 6000 asylum seekers from more than 20 countries. Riace became a model, showing that fair integration is beneficial to everybody, and indeed indicating a potential scheme for inspiration and replication. In 2010 the film maker Wim Wenders decided to film this experience through the movie ‘*Il volo*’. Along these principles, similar SPRAR projects eventually developed locally in Badolato, Caminiti, Caulonia and Stignano (Carrosio 2019).

Other interesting example is that of Pettinengo, Piemonte, which is reported, amongst others, in Perlik and Membretti (2018: 258). Set in an area which had

undergone a deep socioeconomic and identity crisis, with persistent negative natural demographic balance, *Pacefuturo* launched in 2008 the project “Sent-ieri, oggi e domani” (Pathways—yesterday, today and tomorrow). With the view to support the local integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The NGO in collaboration with the municipal administration and with the active involvement of the local community, the project brought back to life more than 10 km of old paths that connected the farms and the larger neighbourhoods of the village. These paths were used by peasant workers to reach the sites of now-abandoned factories.

The aim of the project was to appreciate the natural and cultural landscapes crossed by these paths, countering the abandonment of the area. The strategy combined the local need for restoring the cultural heritage with the need expressed by asylum seekers for concrete opportunities of inclusion in the community and in its territory. The migrants were enrolled as members of the association, and contributed as volunteers for the maintenance of the landscape. While working in the field, the migrants also received technical training, often provided by local people.

By combining cultural growth, the development of tourism, and social solidarity, the project has promoted the transformation of an area afflicted by negative social and economic trends. From its beginnings, the municipal administration of Pettinengo has actively supported Pacefuturo, while requiring that every service offered to newcomers must also be offered to the entire population. Thus, the original residents also benefitted from the services offered to refugees. The project has eventually become a breeding ground for further projects aimed at including refugee populations.

Other interesting experiences are reported from mountainous Alpine settings that are common to several southern European countries, which have also recently witnessed an important shift in local human and cultural landscapes. Examples can be drawn from the work of Perlik and Membretti on *Alpine Refugees* (2018), and by the projects PADIMA ([www.padima.org](http://www.padima.org)), or PlurAlps (<https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/pluralps/en/home>).

In 2015 a wide debate sparked in European countries about refugees' accommodation in rural areas. In the new rural development plan of the EU this strategy is considered an opportunity in face of the high population density of urban areas and the rural exodus which increases the availability of housing in these areas. In this section we have explored some Italian practices as examples of the issues at stake, but a wide literature involving other EU countries is available (see ENRD 2016; Papageorgiou et al. 2016; Scholten et al. 2017; Galera et al. 2018; Weidinger 2018). The refugees' accommodation in rural areas can be an opportunity to revitalize the economic and social fabric, contrasting the decrease of services in rural areas (stimulated by the “newcomers”). However, research on these experiences provides controversial results. Some micro-experiences of widespread hospitality have worked, while others have been found to be conflictual and problematic, with a rejection by the local population and effects of alienation on the migrants' side (who have felt more isolated and victims of a double peripheralization).

## 4.5 Conclusions

The socio-economic and territorial polarisation that has characterised rural development in recent decades have contributed reconfiguring the agrarian world into a) areas of intensive agriculture, characterised by a high demand for cheap, temporary and precarious workforce, and b) extensive agricultural practices in more marginal rural settings, characterised by local population decline.

Though with different dynamics foreign communities who immigrated in rural areas have come to fill the gaps left by the local population in these rural settings. Evidence shows that their contributions have enabled many farms, rural villages, and agriculture enterprises to remain alive and productive throughout the recent financial crisis, thus representing a critical asset in enhancing the resilience of the European rural world.

Nevertheless immigrants' presence, conditions and integration in rural areas represent a matter of concern at different levels. As described practices and experiences exist which aim to recognize and improve the rights, working and living conditions of rural immigrants and that support their integration in the local society, with positive effects for the local and the immigrant populations alike. These are all parts of the same challenge towards more sustainable models of agriculture and rural development.

Most positive experiences of migrant inclusion are linked to the idea of a different model of agriculture and alternative food networks. The rural immigrant question must become part of the European debate between a multifunctional agriculture in opposition to a modern one, in terms of efficiency, performance as well as sustainability, with relevant implications for the principles underpinning policy frameworks, including the CAP (Van der Ploeg 2008; Marsden and Franklin 2013; Corrado et al. 2018).

We need though to get out of a hetero-direct policy that forces immigrants to live and stay in often disadvantaged rural areas, producing a ghettoization effect. This is one of the risks these projects aiming to accommodate asylum seekers and refugees in rural settings without directly involving all local stakeholders. On the one hand, immigrants are forced to go to areas where they are hosted in structures separated from local communities, creating a double spatial segregation. On the other hand, the rural space is once again imagined as "empty", "to be filled", ignoring the presence of local communities and ongoing dynamics.

In conclusion, this debate should consider and include the improvement of rural migrants' living and working conditions as the necessary step to shift from the dimension of "workers" or "refugees" to that of "citizens".

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