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Integrating communities: how *spatial patterns* matter?

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Abstract

Social exclusion is a key issue in the European Cohesion Policy 2014-2020. Despite the magnitude of the problem and the importance recognized by the literature to the spatial component of the city in supporting effective inclusion, policy documents still lack of attention on *spatial patterns* and their influence on integration. This paper discusses how *spatial patterns* may influence the outcomes of urban policies addressed to social inclusion, with a particular focus on Roma minorities. Recommendations will be supported by the findings from two case studies located in a Southern European metropolitan area, Reggio Calabria, and include: 1) Avoiding concentration of minorities through appropriate displacement, planned on case-by-case approach and discussed with the interested community; 2) Supporting flexible displacement through appropriate rules and planning regulations; 3) Avoiding displacement of minorities in areas lacking physical and social connectivity.

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1. Inclusive urban policies and spatial patterns

Social Exclusion is a key issue of the European Cohesion Policy in the current programming period 2014-2020, which considers *inclusive growth* one of its three main *pillars*. A major target of the Europe 2020 strategy is to lift at least 20 millions of people out of poverty and social exclusion (EC 2016 a). The *European platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion* is an instrument foreseen to support the fight to social exclusion, which covers a wide range of policies aimed at reaching the targets set out by the Europe 2020 strategy (EC 2016 b). Despite the magnitude of the problem and the importance recognized by the literature to the spatial component of the city in supporting effective integration (Madanipour 2006 and 2011, Bollens 2002 and 2009), policy documents lack of attention on *spatial patterns* and their influence on social inclusion. This paper discusses how *spatial patterns* may influence the outcomes of urban policies addressed to social inclusion, with a particular focus on Roma minorities. The discussion is supported by findings from direct survey and field work, conducted in a Southern European city, Reggio Calabria.

Amongst the broad range of groups plagued by social exclusion, Roma population is gaining growing interest in the European 2014-2020 policies because of the difficult conditions that characterize the majority of this population. According to the European Union Agency for the Fundamental Rights, the living conditions of Roma across Europe are associated to poverty and marginalization (FRA 2009). In the literature, Roma integration as it is pursued by the European Commission is a controversial topic. Goodwin & Buijs (2014) highlight that although the Europe 2020 strategy seems to enact a shift from an economic and financial – centred Union towards a more inclusive and socially sensitive one, in reality, what the European Commission is seeking to achieve, is to turn Roma into *good European* citizens. Some authors (McGarry 2012, Tremlett and McGarry 2013) provides us with an overall understanding of the rationale behind the European approach to the Roma situation. Regardless the genuine reasons for which European Commission seeks to address the Roma situation, several authors highlight the new centrality of this issue in the current European policy (Chorianopoulos et al. 2014, Uzunova 2010, Sobotka and Vermeer 2012). A few authors consider the spatial feature in Roma integration (Bessone et al. 2014) and in the integration of ethnic minorities more in general (Arbaci 2008). In the following section, the Roma integration will be discussed by drawing insights, as anticipated, from two case studies located in Reggio Calabria, more specifically, Arghillà and Rione Marconi - Sbarre. The paper includes recommendations on *how space matters* in inclusive urban policies, that are applicable to the larger European context.

2. Research methodology

The research question of this paper stems from the unexpected findings of a previous project, BESECURE (7th Framework Program), aimed at investigating key- indicators for an early warning on urban safety and security. In this sense, the research methodology reflects a typical path determined by a phenomenological theory- oriented inquiry strategy, suitable to produce unexpected new research questions. In particular, during the BESECURE project, the researchers analysed an exploratory case, the neighbourhood of Arghillà in Reggio Calabria that, from a preliminary skim of secondary data, resulted to be challenged by unsafety issues. Following the analysis, the researchers realised that social issues were perceived by some local community as related to the presence of a close knitted Roma group, which the city of Reggio Calabria had displaced there in the late 1990s. By discussing this issue with key informants (interviews with city planners at the City of Reggio Calabria, 2014), the researchers discovered that in another area, Rione Marconi - Sbarre, a similar displacement process had produced very different results. In this latter, no relationship seemed to emerge between social issues and displacement of the same ethnic minority, the Roma. On the contrary, Rione Marconi - Sbarre seemed a good practice case for integration policies, as Roma groups are still very well integrated in the existing community. The researchers decided to start from a new research question in order to unveil the reasons for such a difference. Arghillà was then re-casted as critical case study for understanding what may happen in an extreme situation, where a high number of Roma families were displaced altogether. Rione Marconi - Sbarre, on the other side, seemed to be different in terms of *spatial pattern* both for the displacement rationale and for the urban structure. The researchers decided to investigate how *spatial pattern* matters in achieving different outcomes on integration. Stemming from the new research question, the researchers decided to apply a qualitative methodology, based on visual survey -field work- and on direct data collection -informal interviews and semi-structured interviews with key informants-. These latter were selected in both neighbourhoods, in order to gather opinions from the community workers with a close knowledge of the areas,

as well as, key informants were selected among City public officers and NGOs experts involved in setting and implementing social inclusion policies for the Roma, in order to get an overall understanding of the phenomenon in the city of Reggio Calabria. The field work consisted in two sessions for each area, run in different time of the day both by walking and driving to the areas, including informal talking with local residents.

3. Roma integration: *spatial patterns* matter

Roma presence in Reggio Calabria dates back to the XV century (Cammarota & Tarsia 2009). However, issues in integrating Roma within the urban community of Reggio Calabria started during the 1950s, under the pressure of a growing urbanization process that displaced large groups to the city without adequate infrastructures and housing. At that time, Roma became increasingly detached from the existing urban community and gathered in slums located close to the city streams. Disastrous floods in 1971 and 1976 severely affected Roma population and elicited intervention from local government, thus paving the way for the relocation policies of Roma population to council housing.

Table 1. Relocation of Roma families in the neighborhoods of Reggio Calabria. Authors' elaboration based on data available in Cammarota et al. 2009: 90.

Year	No. of Families	Neighborhood
1980-1997	47	Ex Caserma Cantaffio 208
	6	Piazza Milano – Viale Calabria
	20	Modena Ciccarello ex Polveriera
	48	Modena Palazzine
	9	Archi
	8*	**Arghillà**
1998	**25***	**Arghillà**
2003	13	Different City neighborhoods
2003-2006	**65**	**Arghillà**

* plus 20 already living there

Today the 65% of the 160 Roma Families settled in the city of Reggio Calabria live in blighted ghettos, only 35% of them live in social housing units in which they suffer social exclusion conditions. As shown in *Table 1*, starting from 1998 the majority of Roma families have been mainly directed to the neighbourhood of Arghillà, leading to their concentration in a specific area of the city. The two ways in which Roma families were assigned housings followed two basic spatial rationales. As shown in *Table 2*, 82 families have been displaced across the city following the *dispersal* rationale of spreading them in small groups (with an average ration of 2 families for each apartment block hosting 10 families), interrupting the social linkages within the ethnic community. Out of these 82 families, 16 were located to Rione Marconi and Sbarre. Rione Marconi - Sbarre area is therefore an interesting example of a neighbourhood in which displacement of an ethnic minority reflects the *dispersal* rationale. While this happened in Rione Marconi- Sbarre, about 70 further families were displaced following the rationale of moving them in large group to the same place (*concentration* rationale). The preferred target destination was the neighbourhood of Arghillà. A local NGO -Opera Nomadi- supported Roma population in getting council housing. Although the strategy was led by the idea of preserving the existing social network within the Roma community by keeping them together as much as possible, after having discussed this issue with the Roma themselves, social workers realized that the willingness of the Roma community was to be equally distributed across the whole existing communities (interview with Opera Nomadi, 2016). After having framed the two case studies within the wider urban context, the following two sub-sections will examine them in details.

Table 2. *Dispersal vs concentration* rationale in Reggio Calabria. Authors' elaboration based on data available in Cammarota et al. 2009: 90.

	City of Reggio Calabria	**Rione Marconi**	**Arghillà**
Dispersal rationale	82	16	0
Concentration rationale	171	0	100

3.1 Rione Marconi – Sbarre

Rione Marconi and Sbarre are located East of the Reggio Calabria city centre on the other side of the Calopinace fiumara, along the arterial road Argini Calopinace, that connect the city centre to the airport. In the late 1980s the area was interested by the construction of intensive public housing estates, sufficiently equipped with public services (a school, a police station). Up to the 1990s, in the heart of the neighbourhood a military estate was in use. Outside it, over the time a nomadic camp inhabited by Roma grew and was taken under control with regular checks from the local military forces. At the end of the 1990s, a dramatic increase in sanitary issues related to the poor hygienic condition determined the death of some kids, thus eliciting the public authorities to tackle the situation. Thus, the local government of the City of Reggio Calabria decided to assign public housing to Roma families in different areas of the city. Some families were *concentrated* to Arghillà, others were *distributed* through Rione Marconi and Sbarre (Cammarota et al, 2009: 90, Marino 2008). The physical environment in Sbarre – Rione Marconi is featured by a dense urban structured, with medium- rise buildings. A public estate built according to the 167 Law –i.e., the national Law that gave impulse to the construction of massive public estate neighbourhoods throughout the whole Italian territory- occupies a significant part of the area. At the end of the 1990s, the social structure was mainly composed by low- income families living in the public estate stock of the 167 and by families of military forces employed in the police station nearby. The spatial pattern of the neighbourhood is compact; the social structure reflects an adequate sense of community. In this context, the assignment of public houses to Roma families followed the logic of spatially distribute them in different parts of the neighbourhood.

The researchers decided to investigate the current level of integration of the Roma families by undertaking both secondary data analysis and field work in the area. The first step was a preliminary investigation through local newspapers and websites, in order to detect possible problems and social conflicts. Neither particular threats nor risks were reported on the area that on the contrary was considered a quite positive example of successful integration. The researchers then conducted an in-depth field work. A photographic survey documented the major physical issues affecting the area. Scarce maintenance of public spaces was considered the most relevant problem by all the residents informally interviewed. In several places, the streets were poorly maintained and showed sewing water coming out from obsolete pipes, producing bad smell. Some lack of maintenance also emerged in playgrounds and green open spaces. Some evidence from the photographic survey are showed in Figure 1. However, no relevant issues seemed to emerge in terms of social conflict. Informal talks with residents, both from the Roma and the Italian community, conducted during the field work sessions, confirmed that lack of maintenance, and not lack of integration, was the major issue in the area. Semi-structured interviews with key informants allowed researchers to assess the services delivered in the area. Particularly in the early childhood service, the local institutions seemed to be fully involved in the fight against social exclusion with excellent results (interviews with experts working in the early education services in the Rione Marconi, 2016; interview with public officers working at the Social Policies Department of the City of Reggio Calabria, 2016).

Fig. 1. Rione Marconi. (a) Open Space in the heart of the Area; (b) Damages to the sewing system; (c) Lack of maintenance; (d) School
(Authors' photographs)

3.2 Arghillà

Arghillà is located in a suburban area in the Northern part of the city of Reggio Calabria, detached from the city centre and currently characterized by urban and social decline. However, the location on the top of a steep hill allows a wonderful view on the Strait, giving outstanding landscape value to the area. It is not by chance that an old fortress is located in the Southern part of Arghillà, currently occupied by the Ecolandia park. In the 1970s General Plan of the City of Reggio Calabria, Arghillà was planned as middle upper-class residential area. After that some private real estate initiatives had started, the City promoted the implementation of 167 Law plans for council housing. This decision led to the perception of an ongoing process of ghettoization of the area, that prevented private estate initiatives from being put forward (interview with the technical staff of the municipality of Reggio Calabria, 2014). The area ended up in being not mixed enough to support a socially thriving environment, as the population were composed by mainly low income families. In this context, at the end of the 1990s the displacement of several Roma families happened, following the rationale that has been described in the previous sections (see *Table 2*), thus definitively undermining the social structure of the neighbourhood and exacerbating social exclusion. Informal talks with the local community conducted during the two sessions of field work showed how the presence of Roma population is associated with social issues in the area, while it tends to be underestimated the fact that Roma families were relocated in an already socially unstable context. The lack of public services and community- oriented spaces furtherly increased tensions in the area. As shown in Fig.2, the area is characterised by a socio-economic and urban-physical decay, the quality of the built environment is very low and the spatial pattern, complemented by extremely poor mixed-use, is not supportive of safety and security.

Fig. 2. Arghillà. a) View from the area; b) Lack of maintenance; c) Lack of services; d) Underutilized public spaces (Authors' photographs)

Physical decay and social weaknesses are intertwined: different communities like Roma, Italians, low and medium income families live here, mainly in council housing units poorly managed, where the lack of quality in public spaces and services jointly with a scarcity of private businesses is evident. Lack of urban and inclusionary policies, economic development measures and a weak local governance contributed to the increase of socio-spatial marginalisation and exclusion of the local community (interview with local social workers, 2016). However, in the last years some initiatives grew up especially thanks to local association. Interviews with community and social workers conducted in 2016 demonstrated willingness to overcome the social *stigma* associated with the area. Social cooperatives, associations, church and volunteers play an active role in engaging local community: urban-agriculture, handmade product and social activities (especially aimed at integrating children) are among some of the currently supported initiatives. In particular, the Ecolandia Park, mentioned above, built during the 1990s as part of the URBAN Community Initiative (EC 1999), is a recreational and technological park where people and children from the neighbourhood and the city are involved in different kind of activities (Ecolandia 2016). However, interviews with social workers operating in this area showed how the social stigma associated with Arghillà negatively influences the outcomes of such initiatives, that remain neglected by the people outside the neighbourhood, because a lack of perceived *connectivity* with the rest of the city.

4. How can inclusive urban policies be improved

This paper aims at suggesting how *spatial patterns* may support integration and inclusive urban policies. These latter currently tend to focus on quantity and quality of services delivered rather than on their spatial component. Because of this limit, through recognizing that public services are key in achieving integration, the paper highlights that some backlashes and pitfalls can happen. Through the discussion of the two case studies, it is showed for example that by ignoring *concentration* vs *dispersal* patterns and by underestimating the importance of a supportive urban structure (dense and mixed use) as well as the relevance of a high degree of *connectivity*, the integration process can be undermined, as it happened in Arghillà, where the displacement of Roma population exacerbated the sense of disconnection and exclusion of the area. On the other side, the balanced displacement of Roma in a neighborhood with a different spatial pattern (dense and mixed use) coupled by an adequate quantity and quality of public services can produce a completely different outcome, as it happened in Rione Marconi- Sbarre. As a result of the case studies discussion, the main findings are:

1) Services are essential in order to support inclusion among different groups. All the social workers in both areas (Arghillà and Rione Marconi- Sbarre) agreed on the importance of delivering high standard of services. However, they also recognized the financial value of available public spaces, as precondition to make the community-led initiative viable;

2) Displacement of minorities across the existing communities -in a ratio lower than 2 families every 10 families per apartment block- was considered as desirable by the minorities' families themselves. Because sometime rules and planning regulations prevent policy makers from enacting a mixed and balanced displacement, it is paramount that flexible rules are aligned with flexible displacement. In the Reggio Calabria case, once it had been ascertained that Roma families were keen on being equally displaced, the rigidity of the rules concerning allocation of public housing would have prevented local authorities from managing this process differently;

3) Connectivity and accessibility, rather than mere physical existence of public and shared spaces, are keys. Sometime, they are challenged by social stigma, thus preventing the integrated use of existing facilities because of prejudices and bias. In the Arghillà case, the Ecolandia Park is not used by outsiders, although the very high quality of the services offered, because it is associated with a deprived area.

In conclusion, moving forward from the studies of Wilson (1987) on the ghettoized underclass created by a specific concentrated development in America, this paper suggests that the way in which minorities are distributed in an existing area, also in relationship with the specific spatial pattern, may contribute to their successful inclusion, as well as, the existing spatial organization may play a role in honing successful integration policies. Although some authors suggest that successful inclusion of minorities almost entirely relies on integrated accessible services particularly in early education and health (Bodewig & Sethi 2005), this paper suggests that positive outcomes can be

reinforced through the implementation of an *inclusive spatial pattern* based on the following recommendations, applicable to similar cases in which minorities require to be integrated:

1) Avoiding concentration of minorities through appropriate displacement, planned on case-by-case approach and discussed with the interested community;

2) Supporting flexible displacement through appropriate rules and planning regulations;

3) Avoiding displacement of minorities in areas lacking in physical and social connectivity.

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