

Migrant women and participatory processes. Obstacles and social inclusion paths in Italy from a gender perspective

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Abstract

The paper offers a critical perspective and an analysis of what is the state of art about the link and possibilities offered by national law and the real opportunity for migrants to exercise an active and effective participation in Italian public life.

Keywords

migrant, social inclusion, gender, participation

1. *Introduction*¹

The article focuses on Parti-Ge.Mi research project's results on migrant women inclusion in European host societies. In particular, it is based on the qualitative analyses of interviews with migrant people who have experienced some form of participation in three selected areas of society (politics, trade unions, education) in Italy, adopting a biographical approach. The paper tries to offer a critical perspective and an analysis of what is the state of art about the link and possibilities offered by national law and the real opportunity for migrants to exercise an active and effective participation in Italian public life.

As we will see, there are still many obstacles that immigrants are confronted with in order to have effective access to active participation, but at the same time the people met during the research activities have shown that there is a definite commitment on the part of foreigners to interact with Italian society and to contribute to its transformation into a democratic sense. Of course, difficulties in obtaining regular stay permits and to achieve a secure socio-economic situation are the first "walls" that immigrants encounter. When the daily concerns are paramount, the workload overwhelming, and the uncertainty of their legal situation does not allow access to a whole range of rights automatically and directly, for immigrants the real possibilities to have a major commitment in Italian society are drastically reduced. However,

¹ For the purposes of the paper, all the reports and deliverables of Parti GeMi project have been consulted. In particular, the four National reports on "Mapping of the legal and institutional framework for participation" (Italy, Germany, Spain, Greece); the four National qualitative analyses of Interviews and Focus groups (Italy, Germany, Spain, Greece); the final Transnational report; the Policy briefs (in particular, the Italian ones, written by the author of the current article). All the reports and deliverable are available at <http://www.parti-gemi.eu/>.

through a series of bottom-up actions, the people interviewed have won public spaces, are active in institutional debates and give life with their social and political work to participatory and consultative actions.

A fundamental fact to keep in mind in Italy today is the impact of the economic crisis that is putting serious difficulties in the whole population. Unemployment levels are of concern, especially among young people, and the situation is constantly changing, unfortunately according to a negative trend. Although the data related to immigration still do not photograph a serious deterioration in employment rates and relative incomes, experience and field observation tell us that the immigrant population is suffering greatly and that there are frequent returns to the country of origin. In the domestic work sector, in which immigrant women are primarily inserted from the point of view of working, the Italian families in difficulty had to give up their support, and the workload is back to “weigh on the shoulders” of Italian women.

2. *The qualitative research*

To locate people for interviews and focus groups, the Italian team first of all made a mapping of existing realities at local level (associations, movements, advisory bodies, public bodies, local projects and paths, trade unions etc.) that deal with immigration and interculturalism. This mapping was carried out either by using the already existing networks of researchers, online archives and databases, and through interviews conducted with migrants particularly involved in the three areas studied by the Parti-GE.MI project (political participation, trade unions, participation in school councils).

2.1 *Sampling strategy*

Since it was important to involve immigrants with a different degree of commitment and different roles in public spaces, different ethnic origin and, at the same time, maintaining a gender balance in the sampling, it was also followed the channel to contact persons reported through the network of personal relationships, following a snow ball strategy.

As a result, we have formed a significant sample of immigrants, taking into consideration the local specificity of the territory that we decide to investigate: the province of Florence and, more in general, the Tuscany Region. In general, we have not encountered any particular difficulties in contacting people and getting appointments for interviews-except of course some organizational problems in relation to time and place of meeting-and in general the people surveyed said they felt very happy to be able to participate in moments of confrontation and reflection on the issue of participation of immigrants. A critical issue raised in this type of research and action has been to point out that very often immigrants are searched to detect their opinion, point of view, experience, but in fact are not actively involved in the projects.

Certainly, the experience developed by the researchers in many previous research projects in areas such as immigration and their active participation in network working on human rights issues, migrants' support, equal opportunities in relation to gender and a specific interest in school/education area have contributed decisively to make the search process fluid and very easy to enter into contacts and conducting the interviews with immigrant women. In practice, the climate of trust was already established before the interview were begun. The focus groups were conducted by people very competent in creating collaborative and participatory climate, using as *gate opener* an immigrant, previously interviewed, who has been particularly active and skillful in this role.

With regard to the trade unions, the route followed was the main trade unions contact reference for immigrants, identify the specific sections in which they are most involved (areas of work such as construction, domestic work, agriculture) and the people who report being dealing with the rights of migrants. In most cases, it appeared that the people responsible for these areas are migrants themselves.

	Name	Nation of origin	School	Political participation	Trade Union	Male	Female
1	Gilles	IVORIAN COAST	X	X		X	
2	Mathias	ANGOLA		X		X	
3	Fatiha	ALGERIA		X	X		X
4	Adelina	ALBANIA	X				X
5	Xavier	BENIN		X		X	
6	Fatiha	TUNISIA		X			X
7	Pablo	PERU'		X	X	X	
8	Tesfai	ERITREA		X		X	
9	Amalia	PERU'			X		X
10	Uzoma	NIGERIA		X	X	X	
11	Maria	COLOMBIA		X			X
12	Klovis	CROATIA	X	X		X	
13	Adanira	ALBANIA	X	X			X
14	Tatjana	UKRAINA	X				X
15	Mariam	TUNISIA	X	X			X

With regard to the education sector, it was found that, unfortunately, are still very few, at the regional level, immigrant parents actively included in school boards or otherwise participate in the life and decision-school and now almost all the schools in the area use, at some level the professional role of the linguistic-cultural mediators for issues related to the reception of foreign students.

For this reason, alongside immigrant parents, we also interviewed some brokers who are confronted daily with the schools.

To comply with ethical issues, everyone was informed of the aims, methodology and future developments of Parti Ge.Mi project and only later was invited to sign the informed consent for the research use of their interview.

2.2 On interviewing

Interviews

The interviews were held in various places. Most public spaces such as libraries, college classrooms, quiet areas of a cafe, in some cases at the headquarters of associations and unions, and, finally, in one case in a private house. As noted above, in general it has been found a very cooperative attitude, open, and a clear desire to explain well their point of view, its experience of life. Only in one case, with Mathias, the researcher has found resistance than a biographical approach: the interviewee stated explicitly and also with a set of attitudes and postures its disappointment at having to talk about themselves and their own path. In this case, the criticism was that what he had to say was about the substance of the questions on immigration, and that it was not possible that any research in this area would go instead to investigate personal journeys and stories of individual lives, rather than tackle head political issues. Of course, the type interview conducted with people engaged in activities related to immigration since many years has mainly focused on the political analysis of the situation of immigrants in general, rather than on the biographical part, also due to the fact that these persons, as key informants of the sector, have been repeatedly interviewed about their life story. This is the case, for instance, of Mathias, who explicitly asked the interviewer to skip this part of their conversation and to concentrate on a critical discussion about migration.

Focus group

The relational climate was good and friendly throughout the course of the FG. The fact that most of the participants knew each other has certainly favored the initial “break the ice”. In the group there have been people who have intervened on each topic, others, at the contrary, after their personal presentation, did not actively participate to the debate: they only showed interest nodding. The FG moderator writes: “Let’s say that from the outset it was noticed who was the leader of the group.” The participants showed great interest and asked to be further involved in the project and especially informed and made aware of what was written on the report of the meeting. The moderator assured them that they could be sure about the content of the report because everything was recorded and would be faithfully transcript.

3.3 Processes and patterns of participation: the analysis of structural constraints and agency/strategy across individual interviews

All The people we interviewed have expressed a clear migration project: in most cases, they share the intention to continue their studies and to achieve better professional prospects. Only Tatjana, in fact, know from the start that, migrating to Italy, she will not be able to practice her profession (she was a naval engineer). At the contrary, Donia, Maria, Klovis, Xavier, Mathias arrive in Italy (in two cases, with an intermediate step in France) to pursue graduate or post-graduate studies: a migration of people who are -or have the intention to become- highly professionalized and intend to assert their qualifications, although in some cases they are not recognized by the Italian State.

These people then have precise ambitions, they want their experience and their skills to be recognized, they try to use their expertise, and want to become an integral part of the country that hosts them.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that we find them active, albeit at varying levels of personal commitment in the areas of social work and / or cultural, or used by the unions, or as intercultural mediators, researchers and activists.

Immigrants with low professional status are little or not present, do not seem to be involved in these participatory processes and strong dialectical interaction with the Italian social context.

3.1 Learning from biographies: different Nations, different life stories, same perspective?

Gilles is from the Ivory Coast, he has been living in Italy for almost 20 years, where he studied Engineering at the University of Pisa. He has 2 sons, the older one being 12 and his wife is Italian, from Firenze. They got married 4 years ago, after having the babies, and now he has Italian citizenship. In the association world he has a key role as a spoke person of “Rete Primo Marzo” in Firenze and other associations, as well as being active in the school environment, as school councilor and member of the guarantee agency of the school Manzoni Baracca in Peretola, suburb of Firenze. Gilles initially migrates to France, Paris then Bordeaux, then Tolosa, until he decides to join his cousin in Italy. Furthermore, in France it was becoming popular Le Pen’s extreme right-wing movement, and racism was spreading in particular in schools. Gilles had more freedom of movement than other immigrants because he arrived in Europe as a student with a scholarship. He highlights some differences between French and Italian environment: in France he didn’t have the same welcoming, there were no centers like «Giorgio La Pira» in Firenze, where foreign students are accommodated and can study Italian language all together, and social and lingual integration still needed to be worked on. The situation he found in France during the 80s was different from the 70s, and immigrants were abandoned on their selves. In Italy, the situation was different, they were the first immigrants and the situation was still developing, those were the first

experiences and the environment was very domestic and immigrants from different nations lived together. Before becoming part of Rete Primo Marzo, he had been working in various fields, for companies, chemical factories, cooperatives, and now works for a cooperative managing the archives of the courthouse. He says that he has always worked legally, paying the taxes, and underlines the importance of feeling that way part of something truly human. At the moment he's still in touch with the Ivory Coast, both for scholastic and political reasons, and he's a consultant for infrastructures, arranging meeting between Italian builders and Ivorian contractors.

Gilles talks about his family, of how he decided to go alone to France, of his older brothers who had a key role in the communication with his parents, and of how he didn't see his father before leaving. During this migration journey, he had contrasting feelings: the fear of leaving his own country but also the curiosity of opening to a new world. During this journey, Gilles finds out more about identification issues: he meets a girl who considers herself Ivorian, even though she is French, and understands that she actually was born in the Ivory Coast and had Ivorian passport, and that it was somehow her home. Gilles tells us about an Africa bloodstained by internecine wars, death and injustice, in particular he recounts the 90s *golpe* and how he, who had just come back before the war, decided to come back again to Italy. He exhorts to think about the complexity of the situation when you see women, men, children coming from Africa. He denounces the futility and absence of ONU and the Monetary Fund in Africa, whose missions end up being just diplomatic meetings with the authorities, and don't change the life conditions of the people.

Gilles talks about his family story, with really personal details, talking about himself through this lens: the difficulties his mother went through to raise them alone, his distant father, police chief, functionary, who however granted them a comfortable life. His mother was more than once suggested to divorce, but she never wanted to, to raise her children and give them an economical tranquility. Gilles learned from his mother to always look on the bright side, the glass half full, not getting upset over futile things, to use his anger for the good.

This experience changes the way Gilles looks at the world and brings him to affirm that children can't be blamed for immigrating, they're just children who didn't choose where to be born. There might be some reticence to accept immigrants, but children can't be treated like adults, since they have no fault. He talks about a devious racism, that you live in first person in schools, by the side of Italian parents who don't want classes with too many immigrants, because they slow down their children. They don't realize that an active effort of integration can speed up this process, that can and has to be enriching for all children, Italian and not.

All we know from the interview about Mathias is that he came to Italy in August 2000 with a visa of the Vatican. For this reason he defines himself as a "lucky foreigner", as he never had many problems with his residency permit. He initially lives in Rome, where from the beginning he helps foreigners with

problems with the residency permit, and begins his activity with associations. For a long time he works in Treviso with Amnesty International. After this experience in Treviso he moves to Tuscany, in Florence, where he still lives and works.

Born in Algeria, Fatiha moves to live in Italy with her sister in 1976 at the age of 24, before the «immigration boom». At the time there was only the residency permit for study purposes. Fatiha initially used this one. Thus, she comes to Italy to study in Vinci, but she can't do it at the beginning because she has to work to sustain her younger sister, who is attending the University, and her brother studying in Sorbonne in Paris. She is a sales agent.

After a few years in Italy Fatiha went to live together with a man with whom she has a baby. She works with him in his accessories shop. When they break up, that's when problems start for Fatiha, because she is on her own with a child, without a home or a job, and with her residency permit periodically expiring. She then moves to Livorno and does a variety of jobs in Florence to sustain herself: waitress, domestic worker... After a few years she starts to study to get a degree and looks for information about a job she's interested in. In 1990 Fatiha enters CGIL, during the immigration boom years.

The emigration of Adelina is of an economic nature. Adelina was born in Albania, after the fall of the Berlin wall, the end of the communist regime, the beginning of the democratic process. She and her husband lose their jobs, and when raising their child becomes impossible, they decide to move to Italy. Adelina was raised in a poor family where her mother was a farmer and her dad a driver; she graduates in Agricultural Sciences since at the time, in Albania, it was impossible to choose your university path, «it was the regime who decided for you», and at the time she was already considered fortunate to attend university. She worked two years in a high school and specializes in subjects such as biology and botany since she loved to teach. The emigration process starts with her husband leaving for Italy and after 18 months when he manages to obtain the necessary documentation, Adelina reaches him. At the beginning, Adelina's husband is the only one working and in order to provide for the family, he has several jobs. Adelina for the first year does not find a job and her son has to wait until September in order to enroll in school.

Xavier begins his story by telling that there are different types of immigrants and that many people see them as only one type. People leave their homes for different reasons: to improve their life condition, to reach their family and for work related reasons. Xavier comes to Italy thanks to an international project related to democracy within the OMD (Goals for the Millennium of Developments) context, a project that will last until 2015 and that rallies all the member states of the UN that agreed in participating on an international scale to different issues regarding development. Xavier works for an international organization whose goal is to supervise the commitment of the different states to this project. Xavier is assigned to the Italian supervision group and this is his main reason for immigrating to Italy. After a while, Xavier falls in love with an Italian girl and decides to live in Italy regardless of his commitment to the project.

The migration history of Donia began in 1999, when she left Tunisia to study in France, in Paris. She talks about her migration project as a “brain drain” process, and always underlines how her economic conditions have improved thanks to her training rather than her migration. Donia considers herself an “anomalous” immigrant, whose conditions have always been lucky enough, and emphasizes the difference between the migration of highly skilled people (brain drain) and that of those who do so for economic reasons. She studied Psychology in Paris, and after working in France for the first period, thanks to the support given to her by the teacher who had helped her with her thesis, she decided at the age of 27 to go to Italy. She explains that for immigrants the freedom of movement is very limited, and when you manage to get the necessary papers almost no one wants to start over in another country. For her, on the other hand, the need for a change was stronger, she wanted to get out of Paris: so her second migration stems from a social disadvantage. It was a time when she wanted to improve her quality of life and that’s why she chose a city like Florence, smaller and more people-friendly, where she had a circle of close friends. She says that the French racism is a subtle one, always hidden, but always present, it is difficult to create a clear cultural identity when you are a foreigner, since you’re not French, but there are no language or cultural barriers, so this difficult position creates a difficult relationship with others. In Italy, she says, the racism is more evident and it is easier to define one’s own identity as a foreigner. Later, after marrying an Italian, the problem of the documents and her residence in Italy was solved.

Pablo came to Italy 23 years ago, with the purpose of studying, because he won a scholarship for Political Sciences at the university of Siena. He already had a degree in Peru, where he worked as lawyer and teacher, but thanks to this scholarship he decided along with his wife (who has Italian citizenship) to move to Italy. During the first years in Italy, Pablo spends most of his time studying, but when he got his degree, along with the search for a job, starts his activity in a left-wing political party and the collaboration with the trade union, where he presently works. At the beginning Pablo volunteered at CGIL, and lived off socially useful part-time jobs, that he got thanks to the employment agency. A year later, in 1996, CGIL offers Pablo a collaboration contract, because he gave them juridical advices. He later got an open-ended contract.

Tesfai arrives from Eritrea in the 70’s as a university student; he enrolls in the University of Florence at the Architecture faculty and passes several exams. Tesfai’s request for a scholarship was rejected since the scholarship had already been assigned to a minister’s nephew through reference. Feeling outraged, Tesfai decides to work for four and a half years in order to pay for his studies in Italy. In 1974, Tesfai finds himself involved in the fight for the liberation of Eritrea and enlists in the Liberation Front of Eritrea, meaning that he was not able to finish his studies. Eventually he manages to obtain various specializations having the diploma title. During his studies, he works

in the catering environment, as a concierge in a hotel, cooperates with Ascat, an association of hoteliers in Tuscany and eventually becomes director of a university cafeteria in via dei Servi, in Florence.

Amalia is a 33 year old woman from Peru, she came to Italy when she was 27, in 2007, joining her mother who settled there in 1998 to allow both children to study. She explains that she comes from a wealthy family so she didn't need to migrate for a better life, but her mother decided to come to work to Italy to grant her and her brother their studies, working in an estate agency renting houses in Firenze to French people.

When the estate agency was looking for someone who knew many languages, Amalia's mother proposed her. Amalia came to Italy in 2007 with a job contract, with the intent to earn some money to get better studies in Italy, since she already graduated in Peru in Communication Sciences with a master in Business Communication. In 2008, after having her degrees recognized, she starts a master at the University of Firenze on Communication and Advertisement, and during that period she starts her experience in CISL.

Uzoma is Nigerian, he moves to Italy in 1979 to attend the University of Pisa to study agricultural sciences. Uzoma receives from the Nigerian government a scholarship which allows him to live modestly in Italy and therefore he does not go back to Nigeria for quite some time, not having enough money for the trip. Once graduated, he decides to specialize himself in "tropical and sub-tropical agriculture" by enrolling in a master's program at the University of Florence. When he completed his studies, he takes the exam to enable him to exercise his profession but also so that his studies will be recognized in Nigeria since he plans to move back to his country. Initially, he is not allowed to register to the professional order because he is not an Italian citizen; he will be able to register only after 1990 when the Martelli law passed.

Uzoma's dream was to undertake the university career and he tries to enter the Superior School of University studies at the Sant'Anna Institute in Pisa, however, even with the help of the dean of his faculty, he is not allowed to join because he does not have an Italian citizenship (no one without an Italian citizenship was allowed to until 2013). He is an autonomous worker and for a period dedicates to his agronomist profession. Once he completed his master's, he decides to send his résumé to the various organizations that cooperate for development. Out of the 32 résumés sent, only one organization, Cospe, offers him a job as an expert on the themes of racism and emigration for an investigation they are conducting. He starts to work on these issues in 1988 and officially becomes a trainer in 1990.

Maria was born in Colombia, in Bogotá, and lived with her parents and 3 brothers until she graduates in Economy and decides to come to Italy for three months with the help of a friend, who finds her a job in an agritourism.

In Italy she fell in love with the person she lives with now, so she decides to enroll in a degree course on Statistics at the University of Firenze. During the first years Maria focused on her studies, also because she wasn't too comfortable with the language and the university system, which she defines more

closed and individualist than Colombian one. Furthermore, the residency permit was bound to the results of the exams, so Maria really has to focus on her studies.

Klovis comes to Italy in June of 1994, from Croatia, after the end of the Yugoslavian conflict. He moves to Italy with his ex-girlfriend, who spoke Italian and had family in Italy. Klovis moves to Italy not due economic reason and neither due to the conflict but because he did not want to serve in the Croatian army and wanted to continue his studies. Eventually, Klovis graduates in Ethnology with a final paper on the rom population, an argument that always fascinated him since he was a child.

When Klovis came to Italy, he did not speak Italian but he learns it by himself. At the beginning he stays in Rimini, where he obtains the work permit relatively fast at the police station. Then he moves to Trieste, to Bologna, where he works at a post office for two months as a member of the cleaning staff, and in 1995, he moves to Florence, already speaking Italian. He approaches the University environment and in 1996, he starts to work with a research team. In those years, by attending various courses, he acquires his formation in intercultural terms and in 2000, he enrolls to obtain his Italian PhD.

In terms of bureaucratic and institutional problems, he did not have many; his studies were recognized and he easily obtained his work permit. Since 2007, he has a permanent visa and now since 2013, when Croatia became a part of the European Union, he is a European citizen. He explains the difficulty to obtain a residence/work permit that became even worse since 2007, when the price and the amount of paperwork increased so that several immigrants had to submit their paperwork when it was already expired.

Adanira is an Albanian woman who, after graduating and working for a few years in Albany, decides to migrate to Italy hoping for better life conditions. Initially she tries to get to Italy legally, through an Italian language exam introduced by the Martelli law. Despite passing the exam, she can't obtain the documents, so she decides to buy a false residency permit.

Her first years in Italy are really hard: she expected some harshness, but she didn't expect that feeling of loneliness and frustration. Adanira finds a job thanks to a friend as caretaker for a woman with Alzheimer she has to take care of alone, doing it for the first time and not earning much money, around 600.000 lire a month. She doesn't complain about the hard work, but she feels empty, unable to express herself. But she finds some help with the woman's previous caretaker, who explains her the job very well, and whom Adanira describes as being "a wonderful person". When she obtains her documents in 1996, Adanira gets a raise to 900.000 lire a month, but after some time she still leaves the job on her own will, not managing to handle the work load by herself anymore, because the woman's health had gotten worse.

At this point Adanira is unemployed and homeless, but luckily she starts working at an Import-Export company in Montemurlo, where she finds shelter by the Dominican nuns. After a trial month the company refuses to hire

her with a regular contract, even if she keeps working for them. Also, she worked 9 hours a day being paid only for 8. During this period Adanira gets to know the association *Nosotras*, an female intercultural association in Firenze, which will bring her a lot of support and change.

Thanks to the enthusiasm given her by these projects and the support of a friend and the then President of the association, Adanira gathers the courage to change her life. Tired of being taken advantage of, she quits her job at the Import-Export and collaborates full-time with the association's projects. The first projects she deals with is destined to prostitutes.

Even though she didn't have any kind of financial security (because the projects always had a determined duration), and the workload was heavy, Adanira is satisfied, feels that this job is making her grow from a personal and professional point of view, and begins to create a circle of friends. In 1999 she's involved to the foundation of a project aimed to support immigrant women, born from a research done in Toscana showing the isolation and loneliness they feel. The initiative has been supported by the Ministry of Work and the Municipality of Firenze that supply the association with a seat. This service is given the name of *Ponte* ("Bridge"), because aside from helping immigrant women it controls the situation of immigrants in Italy and makes proposals to make their situation better. In the meantime, it begins a project on lingual support for children in schools, to which Adanira contributes.

Tatjana was born in the Soviet Union; she graduated in naval engineering and worked for eight years in Ukraine in a factory that produced ship turbines. On her return from her maternity leave, after the fall of the Soviet Union, while Ukraine was trying to achieve independency from Russia, the factory was closed and only one part of the factory remained open producing cold cuts. She was forced to find another job in order to support herself, in the catering environment, an environment she was not familiar with. Thanks to her new job, she managed to save some money and take a trip to Italy, where she meets her future husband. In 1998, she decided to move to Italy with her five-year-old daughter. In Ukraine, Tatjana used to help children in need by motivating them to study and aiding them in their scholastic career.

At the beginning, Tatjana does not validate her studies in Italy and starts working as a babysitter and a caregiver like most of Ukrainian women at the time. Today Tatjana is aware of the mistake she committed and now she devotes her spare time to intercultural projects to raise awareness and avoid that other people surrender to the immigrant destiny, which seems predetermined, as well as to fight to accomplish themselves personally and professionally.

Tatjana defines herself as lucky due to her economic status and her juridical status: by being married to an Italian, she does not have to deal with the all the bureaucracy that other foreigners have to and by being married to an Italian, she was always welcomed and treated kindly.

Mariam studies Fine Arts in Tunisia, she graduates with the highest honors and moves to Italy in 1989 thanks to a scholarship obtained through collaboration that Italy and Tunisia had at the time. The reason she moves to Italy

is purely for educational purpose and she decides to complete her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts of Florence. Since it was very difficult to find a work related to her studies, she decides to work within the migration environment, a phenomenon that was new in Italy at the time. Mariam attends the first class on linguistic and cultural mediation, a class sponsored by the Region of Tuscany and by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Mariam obtains the certificate of mediator and, together with other participants of the class, they decide to establish a mediation association in which Mariam is a founder and initially works on different projects. Mariam starts working as a mediator offering to work with immigrant women and at the job placement office with a booth dedicated to foreigners. Later she works with other associations such as Nosotras or ARCI with a project aimed to provide support to immigrant minors that committed felonies, abused women and minor in conflict with their family.

3.2 *Barriers for participation*

During the field research, we find out that some respondents argue that there is no difficulty in supporting (or even sponsor) many initiatives of immigrants but, in general, only if they are initiatives related to “cultures”, in the sense of art, literature, music, cooking, events for children ... and little more. They, at the contrary, only seldom have found support or promotion for action aiming to political integration. Some respondents argue and / or share that immigrants are involved only when they are “couscous and Tambu “ but that integration actually does not come from this folkloric approach, and if some immigrant “rebels” against this logic, he/she just finds the door is “no more opened”.

Many immigrants have argued that participation and interaction is missing even for Italians themselves. According to them, there is not a very big difference between Italians and foreigners from this point of view: political participation is not promoted and facilitated for anyone in Italy. Participatory routes are seen as something strange, not usual, dangerous even...

Within the interviews and the FG discussion someone have raised and discussed the issue of “immigrant community/ies”: only immigrants have “community” and not for example, American, Japanese, Swiss, etc. people living in Italy. Many foreigners, for instance the richest ones, or the artists, very often do not integrate in any way in Italian society and yet are not absolutely discriminated “but if an immigrant do the same thing...!” The participants to the FG have tried to give an explanations to this phenomenon, including reflections on how the fact that rich people (or people who comes from determined Nations) are perceived as a resource -”often many people are judged on what they have in your pocket” (FG), they are not considered immigrants and against them you do not notice discriminatory or racist attitudes.

3.2.1 *Political participation*

The participation of foreigners in political life is only as “observer” since immigrants do not have right to vote. Recently, some members of the main political parties have declared that Italian legislation should be changed in this regard, but during the electoral campaign nobody referred any ore to these declarations...

An immigrant is “unable to perceive even the desire” to interact with political institutions: the perception is that the institutions do not even think to immigrants. According to some interviewees, and to FG participants, very often there is not even the possibility of a real dialogue with Italian institutions: sometimes, it happens that local governments undertake courses of participatory citizenship, without even thinking of involving an immigrant (for instance, Xavier experience in Lastra a Signa). Immigrants, in any case, could e involved regarding immigrant issues, and never about the general governance, or issues related to the population as a whole...

Of course, there are some important exceptions: The forum Citizens Together was born under strong pressure of the town councilor and immigration and has always been involved in social activities among citizens (regardless of Italians and foreigners). At a time when the members of the forum have realized that in some cases their activities could be exploited for the sole purpose of the public image of the Municipality, so they decided to “somehow protect themselves” and decided to form an independent association. Consequently, the association became part of a much more complex bureaucratic system, where there is no support with respect to “external attack “ (FG): “You are the rules like everyone else”. Despite all that, fortunately, the City of San Casciano continues to support the efforts of the forum and also it proves to be very helpful to provide them with the tools to continue the journey started (small financial contributions, the availability of rooms/places/spaces etc.).

Some interviewees, despite the optimism from which they feel animated, can not explain why important initiatives aimed to facilitate the participation of immigrants, protests, demonstrations are unlikely to achieve their full objectives: always comes up a time when it all “falls on deaf ears” (FG). So feel the need to understand the reason for this, in order to arrive at the “ result objectively verifiable “ which is what to which they aspire. They find out that Italian citizens experienced the same situation...it is not matter of to be foreigners or natives.

Some respondents argue that the Ministry for Integration, as it was structured, “made no sense” because they have had full perception that the same group that promoted it, has not enough power in Government and it is not supported even by the other members of the same political party.

Moreover, very common among the participants is the perception of a manipulation on the part political parties of the few foreigners (immigrants) that they have co-opted and enrolled. They use the image of immigrants in order not to promote their rights, but only to show how the party is “open”, not

racist, multicultural... without any real engagement on human rights topic or in constructing a very inclusive Italian society. On the other hand, others argue that the same immigrants, once entered into a party, fall to political negotiations for their own advantage and that they only finish to think about their own promotion.

In general, our sample recognize a ethic problem in Italian society. For example, Pablo says that his political participation is “a pastime”, subordinated to his job and family, mainly because he saw a deterioration of ethics in Italian politics, losing much hope in being able to make a difference even from the inside. Pablo doesn't make it a matter of left or right, but a matter of ethics, solidarity, things that are missing in Italy, substituted with egoism and prejudice. What Pablo thinks is lacking in Italian culture and politics is solidarity, that is making yours the problems of the community, exchange information, create a social net where everyone can count on each other. He also thinks that immigrants themselves lack that kind of solidarity.

Pablo says he doesn't have big integration problems, but at the same time he thinks that, based on his personal experience, Italy is not very open to immigrants. He notices that racism often goes along with ignorance, misinformation, low critique capacity, twisted beliefs, based on the fact that money get you anything, making rich people superior. Pablo tells how he was very active in politics in Peru because he trusted politics more.

3.2.2 *Participation in trade unions*

Many immigrants are enrolled in trade unions and even recover roles of some importance into them, the problem is that they often are not representative, not because of them, but because of a political leadership that often does not promote immigrants to fill management positions in various sectors. Especially in construction, agriculture, caregiver and domestic sector of trade unions there is a majority of immigrants registered than Italians. It is believed that immigrants can also find expression through an agency.

The majority of immigrants are in Italy to work -and have to work to renew the residence permit - people comment on the fact that the legislation in this regard is “scandalous”, especially in a moment of economical crisis.

When questioned about, the interviewees and FG participants talk about the work in domestic sector as caregiver in terms of “slavery”, “imprisonment”, “appalling situation” and in view of this justifies the fact that who works in this sector does not have time (or even energies) to participate in trade unions or other social activities. The fact that these workers have few tools and little time to think about how to create a future in Italy, determines their uncertainty, insecurity, which may even lead to full-blown depression.

In many cases, many immigrants (but not always) go to unions when they are faced with a specific problem, but otherwise do not support the unions. But there also many cases, especially among immigrants from Latin America

and Africa, that immigrants join the union “beyond any personal need, it is real “militancy”, real “activism”.

Some of the participants found the cause of low participation in trade unions also in the cost of operations unions often request, whether you're registered or not you have to pay high sums of money for an immigrant worker to carry out practices –which, of course, could discourage contact the union itself. Another FG participant explained instead that the costs of the transactions was a choice due to the union because the legislation has organized several procedures to carry them out in such a way that it takes special authorization which only some external firms may have. Therefore, the union was forced to outsource certain services. This does not mean, according to all the other participants of the FG, that the costs are high but for many interviewees the sum has been declared “unsustainable”, even if it is 30/40 € for operation.

But there are also different approach and experiences: for example, Pablo takes care of all the procedures necessary for immigrants to work, to have the residency permit and everything they need. The key word of his help desk is welcoming, regardless subscription to the trade or not. The help desk also spread information useful for immigrants, so that they know their rights and duties, and they learn to take care of themselves.

When immigrants go to a trade union organization, very often they expect to completely delegate their rights protection: “I do not know the laws and paperwork, I trust you...”

Some interviewees and FG participants noted that within the union some things have changed during the last years and this has led to a deterioration in the level of being able to encourage the participation itself: first the unions were from the people, from workers, located in the same places of work, now this happens with less frequency and that necessarily implies a distance between unions and workers: “obviously one can not generalize because each union carries out his work in a different way” (FG).

Another attitude noted within the unions is that they tend to consider only companies with many employees, while smaller firms (or, in domestic sector, the families) are always a bit “on the edge”.

3.2.3 *Participation into school/educational sector*

In general, the experience of the participants shows that foreign children are welcome in the classroom and are often proposed and implemented intercultural programs. They met very good teachers, with some negative exception, -and, if there are obstacles, they think it is often because of school dean.

According to all the interviewees and FG participant, “you need to educate citizens in the early stages of schooling: to educate future generations” because there are no prejudices among children and among them there is full cooperation and interaction. After this age, could be too late.

The school may be a useful tool for participation, if projects support were implemented. These “intercultural projects” are perceived by students as a

fundamental support: they receive a great help and they are, in turn, encouraged help others (for instance, newly arrived children). In fact, the solidarity mechanism often implies that them, who have been helped, in turn, will have the desire to help those who come after. Even for that reason, the school must welcome diversity as an opportunity for all, in order to construct the future citizens and a better society for all.

In many school, initiatives to promote interaction are implemented (including some self-managed by students), especially with the aim to include the children marginalized in the school -for various reasons, not only because immigrants. Unfortunately, these initiatives often do not find great success among deans and teachers, or in terms of students involved: they rest marginal, residual. The deans, in many cases, does not see itself as an important element of the fact that students “get together” and talk about certain topics (so for example, do not provide space for meetings), this kind of activities is considered a waste of time (even if the meetings are generally fixed outside school hours). Amina also refers to a sense of helplessness and frustration at the fact that “the group disintegrated “ and everything is back as if nothing had ever been.

The lack of major initiatives on interculturality in schools is also attributed to lack of budget.

Participants to the FG and some interviewees know some immigrants (or are themselves) who make the class representatives: ironically, some of them say they have found it not particularly difficult “because today no one wants to be class president!” (FG).

Some immigrants also talk about the differences they have found in Italian school in relation to the system they have experienced in the country of origin. For instance, Tatjana make a comparison between the Italian and the Russian school system: they are two different approaches, in her country, it is considered a shame not to know determined subjects and students are motivated to study, to learn and especially to read. After school, there are free laboratories accessible to all that complement the studies done in school. The duration of lesson is also different, in Russian schools, periods last 45 minutes and then students have a fifteen-minute break so that they can go to the next class fully concentrated. Tatjana defines the Russian system as more disciplined; in Italy, the students are not encouraged to think and they are expected to follow a dogma and in addition, the level of knowledge is quite low. She underlines how it is important to train teachers in Italy especially in the intercultural context.

Education is important for integration: Tatjana think that the Italians are not the only one who should take a step forward immigration but the immigrants themselves would contribute and integrate in the society; they should learn the Italian language, learn the laws off the country and engage in the Italian culture. She expresses the importance of foreigners to maintain the two cultures, to preserve the native language and the traditions, to not be ashamed in expressing their nationality but instead be aware that having two cultures

is a great privilege, an objective that it is not emphasized in schools. She says that the Italian government is taking steps forward towards integration but that much more can be done. For example, in 2012, a law was passed that forces immigrants to take Italian courses and to take an exam that certifies their knowledge of the Italian language, an element that Tatjana considers very important in the process of integration. However, she criticizes the very long (5-10 hours) video in which it is explained to foreigners how the Italian government, schools, healthcare and bureaucracy works: she believes that this approach should be improved by creating new tools with in mind the real objective, integration.

Moreover, Tatjana as intercultural mediator and interpreter works in welcoming children and parents that come from former Soviet countries, who “do not speak a word of Italian”, and help them in understanding how the Italian school system works. She also works with the teachers, providing them with information that could help them better understand the behavior of children. Her work as a mediator being thanks to the municipality of Pontassieve and to the European funds for integration. In 2001, she became part of the new intercultural center in Pontassieve after a training. She then develops several projects in schools, with children and parents. Currently she works as a linguistic mediator at Carige and at the prefecture to help with family reunions, to inform them about the Italian laws and to ease the integration process.

Tatjana is one of the founders of the “Tessere Culture” association, which is an association that deals with intercultural activities within schools in southwest of Florence and target not only foreigners but also Italians. This association was created in 2011, the head office is in Pontassieve and was created within the intercultural center. Tatjana was one of the founders, starting with a group of fifteen people and now counting more than thirty. The goal of the association is to help foreigners integrate in the society and make Italians value the importance of integration: Tatjana believes that foreigners are a great treasure for the country since they bring new culture, new customs and new ideas and that people should take advantage of this.

Even if Pablo, as we have seen before, has not a very good image of Italian society, he sees room for improvement in the education of the youth on active participation and information. Young people must acquire a protest method that is rational and not extreme, and various generations must know how to debate and collaborate for the change, in a synergy where the enthusiasm of the youth joins the experience of adults.

Klovis believes that school is the starting point from where integration and education to intercultural issues should be taught, however, people should continue to research on these subjects in order to find better ways to integrate immigrants. Often the mediators come in a conflict with the professors on the subject of the teaching methodology. Mediators often use an approach to teaching languages that is more informal and makes the learning much more fun and effective. According to Klovis, the University environment is the closest environment that a foreigner has to face; foreigners are usually inserted only

so the university appears more culturally diverse. The Italian university has a small percentage of foreigners working as professors or researchers and the hurdles foreigners have to face in order to become researchers are huge. There is a sort of sly racism that Klovis experienced himself.

As Mathias points out, if it's important for immigrants to integrate themselves learning Italian and attending courses of active citizenship, at the same time it's important for Italians, in particular those working in direct contact with foreigners, to be prepared to this kind of interaction. They must be aware of the daily difficulties immigrants have to live with, and know all the newest laws and rules on immigration.

3.3 Needs - resources - experiences and strategies of migrants in their effort to participate

Mathias says that when he moves to Tuscany, the political activism on immigration was very strong, and he joined a foreign association to which the municipality granted a physical seat. After 2005, with the change of councilorship for immigration politics in Firenze, things got worse and that seat was taken back, giving much trouble to the association. Mathias insists in highlighting how often immigrants are used by politics and Italian associations to earn funds, visibility or various advantages. Mathias points out there are a lot of projects on the topic, but often managed by Italian associations in which immigrants have no part.

Therefore, often the money destined to projects on immigration are misused because there are no immigrants involved in the decision. An example is an interview in which many immigrants were asked how often would they go to their family doctor, overlooking the fact that most immigrants don't even have one.

Furthermore, immigrants are often victims of indifference to their problems and abuses right at the help desks of the offices destined to foreigners. Even more so, immigrants living and working in Italy should be able to work in those help desks and offices, like an "immigrant quota" for public administration. Only then we could witness true integration.

In order to promote a different, critical point of view and a real participation of immigrant to Italian politics, Mathias decided to found an Angolan association. He refers how important it is to create an association to have voice in the matter, being the involvement of immigrants in politics still influenced by prejudice. The few immigrants that are involved in politics don't do that for their experience or knowledge, but just because they are immigrants, and solely deal with immigrant politics.

Mathias highlights an apparent contradiction with his association: creating an Angolan association is important to preserve cultural identity, but at the same time it lessens the importance of the participation of these associations to the problems of the citizens, because their opinion doesn't have the

same value of other Italian citizens. That's why Mathias also founded an university help desk for foreign students, where he works as volunteer, and is part of another association that deals with citizenship and participation problems, called "Apriamo le porte" (Open the doors).

So Mathias thinks the core of the problem of immigration in Italy is that the Italian culture is not ready to welcome immigrants as citizens, involved in all aspects of culture and participation. Not only there still exist people and political parties that discriminate immigrants, but there is a more subtle discrimination lying in institutions, people of learning, public authorities, associations, and mass media. Despite the existence of theoretical projects and laws that would support immigrants, they are not really taken into account or involved, it's taken for granted that they can't give an actual contribution to change things and help new immigrants, they are passive spectators.

Mathias puts some of the blame on immigrants as well, who often don't participate in the few activities they are involved in, or on the opposite they get involved in every activity without questioning their finality.

Fatiha works in schools in the afternoon, while in the morning she volunteers in the immigration camp. She becomes union organizer and takes part in the creation of an organization of immigrants from all countries, which in time becomes politically strong. CGIL supports this project providing materials, information and spaces.

Thanks to this organization they support Senegalese people in their fight, and they win. Together with the Province of Florence they give birth to a project called FAT, helping immigrant prostitutes, providing them with information about precautions, STDs and other life possibilities.

In 1994 she becomes a member of the Council of the Region of Tuscany working on various projects regarding women. She works on the mediation with Muslim women and housemaids, obtaining a professional recognition (contract, holidays, maternity leave). Her political commitment begins with volunteers and associations. All of her activities revolve around the trade union. Fatiha slowly gets closer to political institutions, starting some projects in collaboration with the Province, like FAT. Afterwards she becomes active in the Council of the Province of Tuscany (not abandoning her previous activities), broadening her participation. The main themes of her projects and political battles are: immigrants' rights, workers rights (in particular women and immigrants); education and mediation with immigrant women.

Afterwards she begins working with the immigration office where she fills up residency permits, deals with procedures for family reunion, and in general gives all her support to immigrants in Italy. Meanwhile she remains active in the Algerian association, of which she still is President, and deals with immigration politics.

Fatiha highlights two main issues about immigration in Italy. The first is an evident growth since the 70s of prejudice, mainly due to the worsening of life and work conditions of Italians themselves, and the inability of the political class to tackle the situation. She defines it as a "war of the poor".

The second refers to the racism present in institutions in direct contact with immigrants, such as the Prefecture, where lies indifference and misinformation on the laws about immigration approved by the Parliament, and the Police Headquarters, where abuse of power is not uncommon.

Fatiha underlines the importance of a social network and registration to trade unions to oppose these abuses and defend your own rights. She recounts numerous times in which she managed to solve those problems thanks to CGIL's support, where it's possible to learn more about your rights and ask for legal support, as well as expanding your circle of acquaintances. At the same time, she says she is aware that not all immigrants find this help as they come to Italy, being often victims of mistreatments and abuses.

Xavier begins to work (Xavier is a psychotherapist specialized in socio-political mediation) on a project that will try to include the disabled in work positions; during his free time, he try to make people aware of matters such as democracy and political participation. Xavier says that trying to become part of the working force in Italy is very hard, especially due to racial prejudice that has worsen lately. Even though Xavier is an individual capable of phenomenal critical thinking skills he is still quite hopeful; he defines himself as a person that "never surrenders" and that there is always something that can be done in order to improve matters. These beliefs are the common point in all of his projects, as he will later explain. Xavier founded an association whose objective is to function as a speaker for the political class but does not try to become a political party or tied to the public administration. In this movement are involved all of the association of the territory (those that are not connected to the public administration) with the common goal to promote citizenship, education and knowledge while dealing with different issues. Xavier is not against the political class, however he states that a state can work much better if the political class is supervised by the active participation of the population and that a constructive dialogue should exists between the two. He himself says that such objective is hard to achieve, especially in a country such as Italy where the citizens are not used to political participation. He therefore suggests that in order to achieve the object, the approach should be slower and smaller steps should be taken before. Xavier reports the issues that arose in the project "One city two municipalities" in 2007 that involved the municipalities of Signa and Lastra Signa. The main problem with this project was that the objective were too hard to achieve since the preparation to participation that the citizens of these two municipalities was extremely low. The movement created by Xavier is called "Ottica Sociale", and the main objectives are the promotion of a responsible citizenship, the use an interactive space in order to promote communication between the citizens and politics, the fight of corruption, the respect of the public heritage and mostly the control of public actions.

The recently established network of associations plans to fund their new participation project using regional fund accessible through a contest. Xavier know that winning the contest will be hard; however, he is ready to start organizing self-funding initiatives. The idea of the network was created due to the

necessity, according to Xavier, to create a movement that does not divide even more the citizens but that combines the strength of all associations, which usually compete between each other.

Regarding the theme of immigration in Italy, Xavier reserves different criticism. He states that the Italian culture should make a step toward diversity and acceptance of diversity, due to the fact that in most cases people's relation is based on the wrong principle that the other person in front of me must be the exact same as me. He stresses how immigration, even though is a quite an ancient phenomena, is still not accepted by the Italian population and that a lot of ignorance still exists on immigration as well as improper legislation. An example of improper legislation is the fact that a son of foreigners born in Italy, is not allowed to ask for the Italian citizenship until his 18th birthday, which creates an issue of cultural identification throughout his adolescent life and that brings problems of a practical nature. Xavier focuses on how in Italy, today, immigrants are not allowed to take part in the political life of society and therefore in raises a question of integration. The only events at which the immigrants are invited are those regarding the musical and culinary tradition of their country of origin. All these criticisms, combined with the fact that immigrants often perform jobs that are very stressful at a physical level as well as number of hours of work per day (i.e. caregivers), lead to a conclusion that immigrants have a hard time taking part in Italian culture and actively participating in the social life.

The life experience and the political reflections of Donia concern very important key points. She never had particular problems in finding a job t she is aware that her situation can not be generalized to all immigrants, especially to those who come from lower social and cultural classes. She says that it is the responsibility of immigrants who manage to achieve a certain social and economic status to fight for the conditions of immigrants and immigration laws to change: you can not ask the people who live in a constant struggle for daily survival, and their own family, to think and invest their time in the fight for the rights.

Moreover, with regard to the issue of migration policies, Donia thinks that we must work on two fronts, the policies of the European Union and those of the countries of origin, in her case Tunisia. It's essential not only for Europe to abandon a discriminatory policy of access and not respectful of human rights, but also Tunisia to stop fueling the migration process, abandoning its citizens. She states that already when she was 16, the dreams of boys and girls are oriented towards foreign countries, to leave one's country, for a better future, which often they don't find or do not meet their expectations.

Donia also talks about the difficult relationship between the first and second generation immigrants in Italy, as well as in France. She initially participates alongside the second generation, combining their struggles to hers, but soon realizes that their goals and issues are different: the second generation clearly represents a group of French and Italian, which are not fully recognized as such, despite being so. Their struggle is for the full recognition of their citi-

zenship and that of their children, but we must recognize that their education and their experiences are different from those of first-generation immigrants: they were born and raised in France (or in Italy), and didn't go through a voluntary migration process, they are trained in the schools of these countries and have lived there their socialization in adolescence, a crucial period for the recognition of identity. Often, says Donia, we encounter language differences: for example, a second generation Tunisian, often does not speak the same Arabic a first-generation immigrant speaks, therefore to avoid misunderstandings they communicate directly in French, mixing in a few words of Arabic. For example, the language spoken in the *banlieu* (suburbs) of Paris has no equivalent in any of the Arabic dialects, as it is a new language born from the interactions between immigrants from different backgrounds and French people. Moreover, integrating the gender perspective, it is important to emphasize that the young Tunisians often find some difficulties in dealing with a different model of woman, which is often found in the second generation.

Donia has always been active in social movements and associations. In France, she fits right in the social movements that were born around the political resistance to the Tunisian dictatorship made up of those who could not do politics in their country, dedicated to the issues of migration in foreign countries. She was also socially active in Tunisia, where she participated in a dissident theater group, but the atmosphere had become too overwhelming, especially in the last period of Ben Ali, one of the reasons that led her to embark on the path of migration.

In Italy she initially collaborated with second generation associations, particularly to "Yalla Italia", a weekly supplement dedicated to the writings of the second generation that appeared on the Milan newspaper Vita, and with Tele G2, the second generation television. Since 2008, she collaborates with Nosotras, an association that brings together women of 27 nationalities. Donia is very fond of this activity, as it stands out of the community dimension, to address different problems in a new way and jointly, respecting everyone's uniqueness but also creating a common ground. Everyone brings to the association what he or she can do best, and the encounter of these different forces can achieve important goals.

Finally, Donia stresses the importance of the end of Ben Ali's dictatorship and of the Tunisian revolution, despite it being likely deriving from an American or foreign matrix. In any case, the process of democratic and constitutional definition, as well as free elections, is leading to a revolution in Tunisians, living in Tunisia and in Europe. Right now it is vital to have as a new partner the Tunisian government to find solutions to the problem of immigration and understand another great theme affecting the Tunisian population: drug dealing, which ends up being the only occupation of many youths, and that in the dictatorship was managed directly by Ben Ali and his family.

Donia's speech is full of hope and willpower, coming from a personal and collective experience in associations and community – social- movements, from a deep consciousness of their migration experience and its complexity,

and a migration path lived with identity awareness found also and especially in social and political participation, as well as in her higher education.

Tesfai currently works at the ministry of Cultural Heritage in Florence as a state employee. He has also work with Eritrea in regards of different construction projects, as a topographer, soil measurements and in other installations. His plans are to returns to Eritrea in 2015 when he retires and work in the city planning department since it is his field off expertise.

While in the Liberation Front of Eritrea, as a partisan, he contributed by providng medical supplies given by the Careggi Hospital, which helped build clinics and first aid stations as well as providing the tools that the medics required in the area of Libya and Eritrea. Eventually, the help of the recently formed solidarity committee for Eritrea and other aid received from various Italian institutions played a big role in the independence of Eritrea.

Tesfai's commitment to the cause continued until 1991 when Eritrea obtained their independence. Tesfai focus then shifted from a political asset to a more cultural and social asset. Today, Tesfai is the president of the AIAS association in Italy. AIAS deals with creating an intercultural network of friendship and solidarity and was founded in 1996 at the international center Giorgio la Pira. Tesfai is also the coordinator of the elder committee of the African Federation in Tuscany (FAT), which with other four members constitute the founders; the role of the founders is to guarantee the functioning of the association. The African federation was founded in 1980 at the international center Giorgio la Pira as a meeting point for African students; as the founders of the association eventually became employed and the African community increases in numbers, the goal of the Federation becomes to coordinated and promote the creation of numerous association that represent all the different African communities. Another objective of the African Federation is to develop activism, political participation and relations with the institutions to the members of the various communities.

Tesfai explains how the project to create a Council of foreigners at a communal and provincial level failed. He explains that little by little, without funds, the political parties eventually separated the representatives of the different associations and used them as publicity to show that their party had foreign candidates.

Tesfai is also the president of the Italian Eritrean community committee, and his task is to create a bridge between the Eritrean community and Italy as well as the embassy in order to establish a communication network between these institutions. Every semester in several Italian cities, meetings formed by eleven representatives of the communities occur; the goal of the meetings is create a link and promote communication between the institutions and the academic world.

Tesfai explains the strong relationship between Italy and Eritrea: the colonial past and the cultural heritage is still noticeable on an infrastructural level, educational level and the presence of an Italian population as well as Italian businesses confirms it. Tesfai had no difficulty to fit in when he arrived in

Italy, thanks to the education received in Italian schools, which allowed him to arrive in Italy with prior knowledge of the Italian language and the Italian culture. Tesfai states that the Italian foreign policy to abandon relationships with ex-colonies is wrong and instead flourished in order to avoid losing the cultural roots that Italy had in these nations. Tesfai due to his deep link between Italy and Eritrea nowadays has both citizenships.

As we can see from his biography, Tesfai is committed in activism in Eritrea as well as in Italy. Thanks to his active participation in both communities, he is able to give a clear analysis of the current situation: the issue of the political and social participation of immigrants relates to the absence of the encouragement and economic support and not due to the lack mobilization and participation. The role of the immigrants' associations is crucial in the individuation of the relationships between the Italian and the foreign population as well as to understand the needs of the immigrants; the knowledge then acquired, should be used to as tool to create new migration policies that address today's needs.

Tesfai reports how the immigrant's associations do not have the same possibilities to obtain public funds in comparison to local associations. There are some Italian associations such as ARCI, linked to specific political parties, which receive the majority of these funds; these funds are then used to develop projects and events that are suggested by the African federation or other communities since they are the ones that understand their communities' needs. He also reports that often these funds are given by the international cooperation to Italian associations, which employ Italian personnel and therefore unable to determine the real necessity of the foreign communities.

Tesfai also explains the difficulties he himself encountered, as an immigrant, while trying to participate in the Italian political scene. In the 90's, he candidates himself for the town council as a member of the socialist party and realizes how difficult it is for an immigrant to talk to immigrants and for immigrants without using them as trading currency. He says numerous politicians manage to obtain the vote of the immigrants by promising something that is impossible to achieve while failing to give immigrants the rights that are actually needed. Tesfai narrates an episode regarding an assessor, Graziano Cioni, and says that when the case of peddlers in via Calzaioli made the news, Cioni deceives the Africans and promises them an African square and now Cioni is a senator. On the other hand, Tesfai, who tried to explain to the African community that such promises were in fact lies, did not even become counselor.

Tesfai also criticizes the current Italian political situation and says that the language that the Italian representatives use is utterly inappropriate and barbaric. As an example he recalls the language used by the xenophobic party "Lega nord" when they insulted the African minister Cecile Kyenge. He then blames the current government of Renzi for not keeping the integration ministry. Regarding international politics, Didier, a friend of the minister Kyenge, explains how the African states were deprived of the sovereignty by the we-

stern civilizations and especially the United States, which in order to obtain control of the natural resources, directed military attacks without a proper justification. Acts of power abuse were made in Libya, Somalia and Eritrea and were disguised by the media as an attempt from western forces to defend democracy and human rights. Didier compares the events in Africa to the more recent event in Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimea province to the Russian federation; he debates that while having the same context, the media and the international community had a much more hostile approach to Russia.

Tesfai states that the immigration problem should not be separated from the social difficulties that the Italians face. The social difficulties are the same, the only difference that the foreign ones are not followed by a plan of integration. Due to this problem, many immigrants that come to Italy find themselves in an ambiguous position where they find difficulties in leading a legal life. Making the welcoming process easier, would discourage the formation of underworld circles in Italy as well as in the country of origin in which organized crime operates by selling people. For Tesfai, integration consists in teaching the language, civic education and work integration in professions that are highly requested in Italy such as pastry Chef or cook in order for the individual to become a productive member of society. The immigrant should have the same rights and obligations of the Italian, and while the immigrant should not take things from granted, the development of his life should not be hampered.

Tesfai then adds that the value of dialogue is the key to build a true intercultural and multiethnic society that sees Italians and immigrants contribute in order to improve Italy itself. Opportunities of an Italian should be seen as different form that of an immigrant, but based on the same rights and obligations, otherwise real integration will never be achieved.

Uzoma, currently, is responsible of the research, counseling, formation regarding immigration, fair treatment, integration politics, data collection and data analysis regarding issues such as racism, xenophobia and intolerance in Italy in Cospe, a cooperation association that deals with the development in emerging countries and works to obtain rights for the immigrants in Italy. In 2007, the investigation broadens since it is now funded by the European Union agency for fundamental rights.

Uzoma starts his journey to political participation when he was a student: he is the founder of the Nigerian students association, the African students in Pisa association and together with other students participates in the writing of the university's newspaper "Baobab". In 1987 the Arci association "African Insieme (Africa together)" was founded and is focused on immigrant rights. This association becomes the pinpoint in which immigrants that come to Tuscany turn to. "African Insieme" was founded after an episode of police brutality on a Senegalese peddler that a group of elementary school children saw. They have a direct relationship with the police stations, with the municipal administration and they offer free legal representation to immigrants. They

also have several honorary members from the academic environment such as Professor Campioni Giuliano, Palidda Salvatore and they organize debates and conferences on the subjects of immigration and integration. In the Africa Insieme association they have worked together to abolish discriminatory laws present at the university (the impossibility to vote at the University's Senate, or the removal of the visa in case the student was two years beyond the deadline to graduate) but mostly by supporting the fight for immigrant's rights. Due to the association and Uzoma, the province of Pisa was where people had most respect for immigrants after ten to fifteen years of dedication to the cause. Uzoma explains how during the years the association lost a bit of its influence; he says that people started to divide immigrants in two categories: the wealthy immigrants, students like him and the real immigrants, people that were forced to move from their original country to find a better living in the 80's. Especially in the academic environment, people divided immigrants accordingly and were not eager to take into consideration the requests of the so-called "wealthy" immigrants.

Uzoma was forced to leave the association due to work reasons and his commuter status between Florence and Pisa. Today the association lost its influence without Uzoma and the situation worsened since there is not a strong association fighting for rights anymore.

Uzoma's journey is a joinery of activism and active participation, a fight for the recognition of rights to immigrants and their integration: his own life and mostly his work life was limited to his juridical existence, especially regarding the issue of his citizenship.

Uzoma is convinced that direct participation of immigrants to public life is crucial, since most of the time, the politicians, even my acting in the best of interest, cannot fully understand the need of the immigrant population: he recalls a period in which there was a party that wanted to grant the voting right immigrants. In that particular case, the immigrants were accused of poor participation, but the immigrants in that period had far greater issues. For this reason, the Cospe, developed activities that grant support, formation and tutoring to open new associations.

In addition, Uzoma supports integration starting from the local community, where the division between Italians and foreigners does not exist and the places such as bars, schools etc. create networks of collaboration and solidarity. The school is also one of these places, in which people work on integration every day, while the working and family environments remain more hostile.

As cultural mediator, Mariam collected many immigrants' life stories... These experiences with immigrants made her realize what immigration really is and all the problems related to this phenomenon. Adding to the projects in the social environment, Mariam is also active culturally wise. She presents the news at Contraradio and Babele, with talks about immigration and news in different languages (French, Somali, and Arab).

Currently her main activity is with Italians, to try to develop a positive attitude towards immigration and intercultural integration by stimulating

curiosity towards immigrants: for example, workshops of Arabic calligraphy in schools. She also works on the subjects of multiculturalism through artistic expression, for example through the participation of a festival dedicated to the Arab world, financed with European funds, she decided to give lectures on Arabic calligraphy and writing. The main goal of this festival is to look at immigration as a resource, especially through an artistic point of view, so that immigrant artists may succeed.

Mariam states that in Italy, the phenomenon of immigration was completely new and at the beginning, they did not know how to receive and integrate this people. She also says that she found easier the process of integration in southern Italy, maybe due historical and cultural reasons, but also due to the fact that it was present compared to Northern Italy.

Mariam criticizes the intercultural projects that are done by the state, because they do not guarantee work continuity and make impossible to observe the results of the intervention. She also criticizes the Italian work environment: she states that Italy does not offer much to neither the Italians and neither to the immigrants. She adds that there exists a myth of Italian quality of life that pushes many people to flee their countries in poor conditions and often encountering death. The biggest difficulty that Mariam found on her path to integration is job insecurity, which did not allow her to live a full life in the meaning that she worked by giving support to all kinds of people but she never received that kind of support. She received the honorary citizenship for her work as a mediator however, as an Italian or immigrant, she considers herself a victim of life insecurity.

Amalia's path starts with volunteering at Anolf, "Associazione nazionale oltre le frontiere" (National association beyond frontiers), an onlus association of which she's now president, an autonomous association but part of CISL. In 2013 she's nominated for the coordination of women in CISL Firenze – Prato.

Amalia says she's never been victim to racism or discrimination, her only struggle was with bureaucracy, because for the lack of some documents she lost a few job opportunities. Luckily she already had a job. She's always had a residency permit for work purposes, but notices how the bureaucracy situation has worsened since 2007, with costs and waiting times rising.

Yolanda says that in her country the trade unions are really different from Italy's and Europe's. In Peru the unions are seen as corrupted corporations which can't be trusted, not appreciated by workers and not seen positive by the society. With CISL she had the opportunity to witness a new reality she got passionate about, for her the trade union is not only something dealing with redtape procedures, but something that helps citizens, immigrants and locals, in their everyday struggles and the recognition of their rights. She's not registered to any political party because she prefers to do politics as a citizen from inside the trade union.

Anolf, the association of which she's president, founded in 1991, helps immigrants with bureaucracy and procedures and daily issues, it doesn't provide humanitarian aid, but a help desk where they can find support. Anolf is a pe-

cular association: it works for immigrants, but puts all nationalities together and has immigrants working in it.

Since Amalia manages the association, Anolf has grown a lot, capable to provide a better service. In general Amalia follows two work guidelines: she tries not to focus the association mainly on bureaucracy, but also developing political actions. It's fundamental that immigrants join every milieu, sensitizing the public opinion on these themes: that's why the association must concern politics, contact institutions and collaborate with other corporations, to acquire more visibility and social mobility.

For what concerns her role as coordinator of women CISL Firenze – Prato, it's a true trade union duty, where she deals with the coordination of the women in CISL from different categories. It's a space open to discussion, for men too, where the main theme are gender politics: the objective is to create a cultural exchange inside and outside the union.

Amalia herself says that the access to the labor market and inside CISL wasn't easy just for the fact that she's a young, immigrant woman. Her experience shows how gender stereotypes often go along with racial discrimination. Despite her path not being easy, thanks to her personality and to people who believed in her, an essential element for integration, she managed to succeed. Initially she didn't think she would remain in Italy, her project was to finish her studies and go back to her country with an European title which would open up more opportunities, because in Peru she has friends, family and home, but circumstances brought her to jump in something new she loved, and that's why she keeps working and fighting for what she believes in Italy.

4.3 *New participatory routes*

Through the stories and reflections of the people we met, we have collected a number of strategies adopted by immigrants to enter fully into the Italian society as active and proactive member. Hereafter we present some of these routes in order to emphasize the great resources put in place by immigrants and their ongoing commitment to contribute at the growth of the Italian society in order to render it more inclusive and democratic.

Gilles believes in the value of education as a mean of social change. He comes from a family of teachers, he had an uncle working at the Ministry of Education, so even before having kids he commits to education, taking part in the activities of the center Giorgio La Pira, a reference point for the integration of foreign students where they could learn Italian, and where he organized some activities on intercultural topics in the schools. For that reason, Gilles has an active role in schools as spokesperson of parents in the board of governors, because he thinks that it's fundamental to support education and that schools have a key role in the evolution of the society: it's both a personal and political effort as for Gilles it's a passion but also a fundamental contribution to the growth of the society.

Gilles denounces the African condition, in particular regarding education,

as he says African managers are formed in Europa, but they don't spread the notions and technological innovations they found in Europe. The introduction of modern school, as opposed to the traditional one, from the French, has opened many possibilities and pushed young people out of their own country. Many are able to do that thanks to scholarships, offered directly by the Ministry of Education to go to France. It is important, as well as implement integration in European Countries, not to forget what happen or could happen in the countries of origin.

According to Gilles the Martelli law introduced some importante measures for immigrants' integration, as it introduced the possibility to work for immigrants who before that could only live thanks to scholarships. He thinks Martelli really listened to the immigrants, and tried to develop a multicultural Italy. He also tells about the difficulties that immigrants find in Italy, mainly about stereotypes and how hard it is to get the documents to be in order. He talks about the necessity to introduce jus soli, promoted in the last government by Cecile Kyenge (Minister of integration for few months in 2013-2014), friend of him, and he says that he got the citizenship just to make life easier for his children, not because he really cares being an Italian or Ivorian citizen. He shows great knowledge of the Italian situation, politics in particular, where he says immigration is a taboo: only PD introduced in his electoral program a point on immigration.

That's why Gilles is involved in politics since 2009 in Rete Primo Marzo, to which also Cecile Kyenge belonged before becoming minister. With this movement they want to get closer to the scholastic environment, where they could do direct education to work on immigration on two fronts, both Italians and immigrants. He exposes that integration comes from the will of both parts, and often the immigrant families are the first obstacles, not knowing how to deal properly with the issue. He also talks about the difficulty of entering schools, the access to which depends in large part from the principal and his political ideas, but without making political proselytism, just wanting to transmit a message of integration and non-violence.

The first difficulties Adelina encounters are of a linguistic nature since she did not know how to speak Italian. Her husband on the other hand, thanks to the integration process and his formation, learns Italian quickly and manages to become a part of society; this goes to show the major differences in the process of integration between a worker and a non-worker. Adelina and her husband eventually learn Italian by themselves without following classes. They have a house and they move to a small town, which with an initial distrust, eventually welcome and aid them. Adelina states that at the beginning, it was hard to settle in and that she felt homesick but she did not experience racist behaviors. Her neighbor become a key individual for Adelina; her neighbor helps her son do his homework and helps Adelina track his process at school by talking to professors.

Adelina experience racism for the first time when they have to move to another town for work related reasons: the town they move to is a much smal-

ler and closed town, her son experiences discrimination at his elementary school and feels isolated. Adelina works as a maid, assistant cook, baby sitter and waitress, but she does not feel satisfied: her feelings of inadequacy are reinforced by the racist behaviors of her work colleagues and their accusation of stealing work in Italy while being incompetent. Due to her strong will and initiative, she manages to locate herself socially and by meeting other mothers and her English professor she realizes that her studies can be recognized in Italy. Adelina then starts her approach to a teaching career and starts her training as an Italian teacher. The Italian teaching environment was very different from the Albanian one but ultimately she manages to obtain a position in an Italian school as a part-time support teacher. In the meantime, she gives birth to a daughter and the process starts from the beginning but this time with more knowledge and awareness. Today, her son goes to University and her daughter to high school and they both feel a strong relationship with Italy, especially the daughter, who has a strong attachment to the dialect of the area. Adelina actively participates in the scholastic life of her children and was for five years the representative for her sons' class in high school.

On her path to integration in the Italian society, she does not usufruct the help of associations and centers; she remains attached to her family and to a small circle of friends. When she successfully integrated, she sought the previously mentioned association in order to narrate her experience to other immigrants. Another reason why she did not seek these associations at the beginning was the lack of the internet and therefore the ease to create network between people which we take granted in today' society.

Adelina's initial plans were to work as much as they could in Italy and then move back to Albania. However, after seeing the recent changes that occurred politically in Albania and the fact that her children started to become part of the Italian society, they decided to stay in Italy. To move back to Albania would have meant to start from the beginning again in another country, which they did not know that well anymore. Every year they go to Albania to visit they parents and they though Albanian to their children even though her daughter was born in Italy.

Adelina emphasizes the feeling of futility that immigrants feel: they do not think they are contributing to society and the difficult process of political and social integration gives them a feeling of isolation and alienation. She adds that in most cases immigrants move because they are forced to escape from extreme political, economic and social situations, which do not allow them to conduct a normal life. Children have the most difficulties because they lose their reference points and are not given the choice whether to stay or leave. Nonetheless, she had a very difficult time in going through this process as a mother and as a woman: it is a process that involves the creation of a new identity and the rebuilding of self-confidence, which makes you stronger and able to endure difficulties on the path to integration. This path is a more difficult to sustain for a woman: for example, a woman by staying at home and not

working, has a difficult time learning the language and creating a network of contacts on which to rely.

In order for integration to be achieved, it is essential the existence of a social network of people that help you reach you potential. The story of Adelina is a story of integration, and how emigration is not only a story of loss but also a story of re-inventing yourself and if achieved, open a path to new personal and work related experiences.

Adelina explains the difference between aware and unaware racism; where aware racism is used by politicians to achieve their goals while unaware racism is related to people that are follow stereotypes and do not know what racism actually is. Adelina says that the key to eradicate racism is to emphasize culture and education. Problems arise at the administrative level, where for several years, immigrants had to stand in line at the police station for hours to obtain the documents needed in order to live legally; the problem where not only the lines but also the way they were treated from the police force.

Nowadays, Adelina teaches Italian in primary school, middle school children and to adults. In addition to teaching the language, Adelina also guides them through the process of integration, encourages them, and tries to introduce them to the Italian culture: she is convinced that most misunderstanding arise due to ignorance on behalf of other people' culture and that only though education can real integration happen.

Klovis, at the moment, is not part of any association; he mostly works on education and formation. Today he works with the University of Florence and with the Alphabetization centers, a service that the municipality of Florence offers since 2000 to numerous elementary school in order to facilitate the learning of the Italian language to foreigners. He sometimes cooperates as an external member with the Amalipe Romano association, which is an association founded in 2000 by the communities coming from Kosovo and Macedonia; the goal of the association is to spread the rom language and culture and offer a mediation service to help roma integrate in the society. He frequently helps this association since he knows also Romane (the rom language) in addition to Serbo-Croatian. He never became a part of any association because he feel that the environment is too closed.

Klovis talks about the presence of roma in Florence: a community that moved to Florence in the early 80s from Macedonia and Kosovo, and lives in camps, houses and apartments as well. From 2000, different groups of roma came from Romania, with a less sedentary approach and with great issues derived from the absence of formation. Klovis explains how there exists a stereotype of roma that does not correspond to scientific truth since they are ancient communities that have to written history.

Klovis is a mediator and a researcher. Mediate for him does not only mean translate but it is a much more complex task that involves explaining context and circumstances to both sides. Frequently he speaks in schools about intercultural issues especially if students of Yugoslavian origin are present. Klovis is also a researcher; he cooperated with the University of Florence and now

is a part of the institution, he received his PhD by writing about the status of rom and sinti minorities in Italy with more accuracy and in-depth analysis compared to the final paper that he submitted in Croatia.

Klovis states how there exists a problem of communication and comprehension between research on one side and activism on the other; he says that most of the time these two bodies work on the same issues but do not communicate between each other. This communication problem creates a void since research is not used as it should; research, Klovis argues, should be used in order to better understand issue and to develop much more efficient solutions in order to solve this issues.

Adanira starts attending education courses organized by an association but she gets immediately involved in their planning and in other projects. Presently, Adanira works full-time with the association, more than happy to use most of her time that way for the importance it had and has in her life. With the association she finally felt useful, a real person, less lonely. She says that working with the association she found out that most immigrant women feel the same, therefore she's motivated to helping and supporting them. The association mainly deals with psychological and legal support for women (but also men and families) and takes care of different projects. It also has a solidarity account meant for everyone who's in need of immediate sums of money for things such as the renewal of the residency permit o just for survival. The financial resources of the association come from subscriptions and self-financing.

Adanira never experienced "direct" racism, like insults or violence, but denounces a more subtle racism, in laws and institutions dealing with immigration. For example, in order to be regularly employed, immigrants must present the certificate of housing suitability, which, in addition to requiring very long bureaucratic procedures, expires every six months. Since Italians aren't required this certificate, they are often favored for jobs when they have the same skills, because they have immediate availability and the employer doesn't have to wait for bureaucracy procedures to be over (80 days minimum) to integrate the employee in his business.

The biggest difficulty Maria faced is the difference between Colombian and Italian culture, the first being more open and the second more distrustful, making more difficult to create connections. At the beginning she found difficult even finding some help at the university. After spending some time only studying she decided to start working along with it to help her boyfriend with the expenses, and almost immediately she founds a job at the exchange office. It wasn't difficult finding a job because at the time there was no crisis in Italy, so certain jobs like hers weren't too sought after for their evening and Sunday shifts. Sure enough when she started working she didn't have many Italian coworkers, while now their number is rising.

After the degree she gets a master degree with a thesis on a proposal for an education project in Colombia. The project is called "the week of education" and mainly covers formation and education.

She and her sister founded in Colombia, in the Alots de Cazucà housing project in Bogotá, an association dealing with sexual and gender education. The aim is to fight and prevent through education and information gender violence, sexism, unwanted pregnancy and STDs. The association has a help desk and carries out various educational projects in schools. This association is much needed, because in Colombia, country where violence (not only gender related) is too common to see everyday. Furthermore, despite the existence of a law allowing abortion in certain cases, it's not always followed, and the association appraises women on their rights and support them through the whole process. Now the association, due her sister's relocation, is moving from Bogotá to Medellín, hoping it will be as successful as it was in Bogotá. Maria's sister and other partners take care of the office in Colombia, while Maria takes care of the fund-raising in Italy. She founded an ONLUS association called "Protegete" ("Protect"), but the managing costs were higher than the profits.

Another issue Maria reports is the fact that as soon as people or other associations find out that the money gathered from the ONLUS is going to Colombia, they are less eager to help, or at least more suspicious. Maria volunteers in a small association in San Miniato called Frida, where a multiprofessional team supports victims of domestic violence. Speaking about racism, she says she never faced any problem personally, but she understands from friends and what she sees that it's growing.

4. *Concluding remarks*

According to some participants the opportunities for interaction and participation are not lacking, but you must know how to exploit. As well as the rights exist, but it is necessary that the immigrants (and not only) "take possession of it". Many immigrants do not directly affect the political life for various reasons, such as: fatigue due to workload, no motivation to get information, the lack of perception of the need (this concept emerged repeatedly referring to all 3 areas both in interviews and FG: searching for a thing/service/right etc. when needed otherwise immigrants often ignore even the existence), habits related to cultural background and linked to social class, lack of time and "mind" caused by lack of employment and the need to deal 100% of their own and family survival. The information is often lacking, but it is also true that "the immigrant struggle to go to find it themselves" ("lack of motivation" (FG)).

Some have observed an attitude typical of many immigrants enter the places (e.g. offices, trade unions, etc.) in "tip-toe ... not to mess up the balance and then to try to be accepted". But during our field research, we also have encountered experiences of integration / interaction extremely positive, such as a political refugees became deputy mayor in Italy and absolutely welcome, involved in public and political life and respected.

The personal routes of interviewees and FG participant testify to the possibility of positive paths in Italy, but as we pointed out, all these people were equipped from the outset by a strong motivation, an important cultural background, self-awareness, willingness to participate, ambitions and a very strong commitment in social-cultural issues...

All these features make their story very peculiar, in a sense, heroic, they can therefore be considered as gate openers, facilitators, mediators. To involve people of most common profiles, it is necessary to put in place strategies inclusive to everyone, easily accessible. This could be the aim of all those policies that will improve immigrants' situation and support Italian society in becoming more participative and cohesive in an intercultural perspective.

5. *Policy recommendations for promoting participation*

Hereafter, some suggestions for promoting participation of immigrant in Italian society:

- Raise awareness for you to intervene on citizenship legislation regarding both the participation that " immigration in general (several examples: Bossi –Fini, crime of illegal immigration, duration of the stay permit linked to employment contract, etc.).
- Fighting for the costs of bureaucracy (e.g. to renewal of the residence permit) decrease.
- Promote information, dissemination and proper interpretation and application of the Law on Regional Participation.
- Continue the current work in progress of the initiatives of the Tuscan Regional Coordination of Immigrants. The initiative came from the bottom and has been up to now supported by the Region of Tuscany that admits the need to a dialogue. It is a work in progress: a regional assembly was held and it is working on the drafting of statutes, regulations, etc.
- Establish and strengthen the Ministry for Integration and Participation in such a way that it could have the tools to work (financial funds, autonomy, etc.): up till now, before Renzi become the Italian Prime Minister, the participants to the FG and the interviewed believe that it has not been and / or usable a useful tool.
- Interaction has to start from the bottom and therefore "we need to educate people": the priority is education.
- It is necessary to join (Italian and foreigners) and fight together to enforce the rights of participation for all, starting from the bottom so that it is necessary to involve all citizens in the early years of life, making them children aware ("you will find that the investment will take place automatically, without having to chase" FG).
- The school should be perceived and experienced as an opportunity: the education of people should start from school and its activities: it is necessary to consider diversity as a resource.

- To use participatory budgeting on-line (software program that translates the financial statements of the municipality in terms understandable and makes them available to everyone) would allow the control of citizens on Italian public decisions. There are even proposals to create events where people who have used this tool and have actively contributed through it, could be rewarded in order to encourage a greater participation .
- In general, Italian state should be able to translate the entire bureaucracy in terms understandable by all, so that, after the understanding, people can feel free to “have their say”.
- To implement the occasions of real interaction, creating situations in which simply “being together”, supporting the socialization and encouraging people to share their own different cultures. Sport , as well as school, can be a great tool for enhancing participation as well as the commitment in volunteer initiatives, ong, ect.
- To offer public or private spaces for immigrants initiatives, associations, etc.
- The trade unions could regain its peculiarity “to go look” for the (both Italian and immigrant) workers, even the irregular ones, to inform them and involve them in the fight for the rights of workers.
- Begin to speak of interaction rather than integration as a process promoting diversity and enhancing social cohesion and cultural, democratic development of the society as a whole
- Not to speak mainly about immigration, but rather of citizenship as currently foreigners and Italians are “all to sail on the same boat that needs to find stability to lead us across the river” (FG), so it is not important the origin of the passengers, but the direction and the safety of their trip.
- Any field you analyze (political, trade unions, etc.), what emerges is that in Italy in the first place you need to work on the legislation. Legislation must be updated to the current new situation, taking into account the globalization processes and the effects of the economical crisis.

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