

# fieri

## Working papers

### **Urban narrative–making on refugee crises**

**Andrea Pogliano (FIERI)**  
**Irene Ponzio (FIERI)**

March 2017, Turin

White paper produced thanks to the financial support of the Urban Communication Foundation in the framework of the programme “Changing Cities: Migration, Communication and Culture” and Compagnia di San Paolo.

## Index

<b>1. Aims and conceptual framework</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. The occupation of MOI buildings in Turin</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. The transit refugees in Milan</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>4. Methodological note</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>5. Media coverage and framing</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>5.1. The MOI occupation in Turin</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>5.2. The transit refugees in Milan</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>6. The strategies of the local governments and the issue networks' functioning</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>6.1. Local governments' perspectives</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>6.2. Local governments' communication strategies</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>6.3. The cohesion of the issue networks</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<i>6.3.1. Milan: from grassroots activism to the local administration's centralism</i> .....	<i>23</i>
<i>6.3.2. Turin: between weak cooperation and strong conflicts</i> .....	<i>25</i>
<i>6.3.3. The Regions and Prefectures</i> .....	<i>27</i>
<b>7. The functioning of local journalism</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>7.1. How the journalists' specialization impacts local narratives</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<i>7.1.1. Local journalists and the MOI occupation</i> .....	<i>28</i>
<i>7.1.2. Local journalists and the transit refugees</i> .....	<i>29</i>
<b>7.2. Journalists' perception of the relevance and meaning of the cases and of the refugee issue</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>8. Policy recommendations</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>Cited works</b> .....	<b>35</b>

## **1. Aims and conceptual framework**

City narratives are crucial in shaping public attitudes and perceptions and in defining viable policy options and cities' responses to hot issues, such as migration and asylum. In this regard, communication by policymakers and media plays a relevant and acknowledged role. Little is known, however, about the specific strategies of these two actors and on their reciprocal relations at the local level, especially in the field of migration and asylum [Bennett et al. 2011, Pogliano 2012, Ter Wal 2002].

This proposal starts from a hypothesis that emerged from the comparative research project entitled 'Concordia Discors. Understanding Conflict and Integration Outcomes of Inter-Group Relations and Integration Policies in selected Neighbourhoods of Five European Cities' ([www.concordiadiscors.eu](http://www.concordiadiscors.eu)) carried out in London, Barcelona, Turin, Nuremberg and Budapest [Pastore & Ponzio 2016]. This comparative inquiry suggests that the "narrative autonomy" of policy communities – meaning all of the actors involved in local policymaking regardless of their legal status, i.e. public, non-profit and for-profit actors [Jordan 1990, Rhodes 1990, Marsh and Rhodes 1992] – is greater where they are more cohesive, i.e. when their representations of the issues at stake are consistent and when their actions are coordinated. More cohesive local policy communities seem to be better able to develop their own neighbourhood narratives on migration and integration and self-representations of the local community, and more capable of influencing the media narratives.

While it succeeded in highlighting the association between cohesive local policy communities and positive narratives on migration by local media, Concordia Discors was unable to investigate the generating mechanisms and the specific processes upon which this association is based.

This paper aims to take a step forward by investigating the mechanisms producing the positive association between policy communities' cohesion and local migration and integration narratives. In doing so, we aim to contribute to the enhancement of scientific knowledge in this regard as well as offer more detailed and practical recommendations to policy communities on how to reinforce their narrative autonomy.

In order to investigate the above-mentioned mechanisms, we intend to focus on what can be regarded as the hottest policy issues in Europe in the field of migration, i.e. forced migration flows and asylum. In fact, this is a top priority in Europe and an actual emergency for many cities to deal with throughout the continent. In this area, Italy is certainly on the frontline and therefore represents a unique case study to investigate the dynamics that will affect a growing number of European cities.

Specifically, we intend to focus on two study cases, defined by specific events, relevant in terms of both policy and media narratives, which occurred in the metropolitan areas of Turin and Milan. In Turin, in spring 2013, a group of people who had arrived in Italy during the so-called "North Africa emergency" and held regular permits for humanitarian protection, who were unemployed and without any accommodation after the end of assistance support, started squatting in four empty buildings in the so-called "ex-MOI" (Mercati Ortofrutticoli all'Ingrosso) area.

As for the Milan case, in summer 2013, asylum-seekers who had recently landed on Italian shores started gathering at the Central Station with the aim of moving to other European countries. The growing numbers soon sparked concern from the city's civil society and policymakers and reached

the pages of the national media, triggering mobilization by voluntary organizations and public authorities.

In fact, the relevance of these two events goes beyond the cities where they took place, related as they are to two crucial stages of asylum-seekers' and refugees' paths which are matters of high policy concern in Europe: the asylum-seekers' attempt to leave the first arrival country and reach wealthier EU countries, disregarding the Dublin Regulation which requires that asylum be claimed in the first-entry country, and the post-accommodation phase, when the State's assistance stops.

It can be safely assumed that other cities are going through similar situations. Therefore, the knowledge produced by investigating the management of communication processes during these two emblematic cases will be useful to other local policy communities.

Besides its focus on asylum-seekers, this research also differs from Concordia Discors on the conceptual level. In the Concordia Discors research project, we investigated *neighbourhood policy communities*, i.e. sets of public and non-public actors based on their functional interests and characterized by shared norms and common specialist language; frequent, stable and long-standing interactions; a certain degree of resource dependence; and regulation of members [Richardson and Jordan 1979; Hogwood 1987]. In fact, that project investigated the neighbourhood actors who worked on migrant integration on a regular basis. In contrast, this research deals with specific issues and events. Therefore, we will speak of *issue networks* characterized by an ad hoc policymaking process, open participation (with participants moving in and out), and limited consensus on issue definition [Jordan 1990; Marsh and Rhodes 1992]<sup>1</sup>.

The paper is outlined as follows. Sections 2 and 3 provide a brief overview of the main events in the two cities from 2013, when both of the crises broke out, to June 2016, when local elections were held in the two cities (in Milan the centre-left coalition continued to govern the city while in Turin the centre-left majority led by the Democratic Party was replaced by a Five Star Movement-led majority). Section 4 explains the methodology used for the fieldwork and the analysis. Section 5 illustrates the local media coverage and frames for the two cases from 2013 to 2016. The organization and functioning of the local issue networks and of local journalism and newsrooms are explained in Sections 6 and 7 with the aim of illustrating the differences in media coverage between the two case studies. In the last section, we highlight a set of policy recommendations and lessons drawn from the empirical findings.

## **2. The occupation of MOI buildings in Turin**

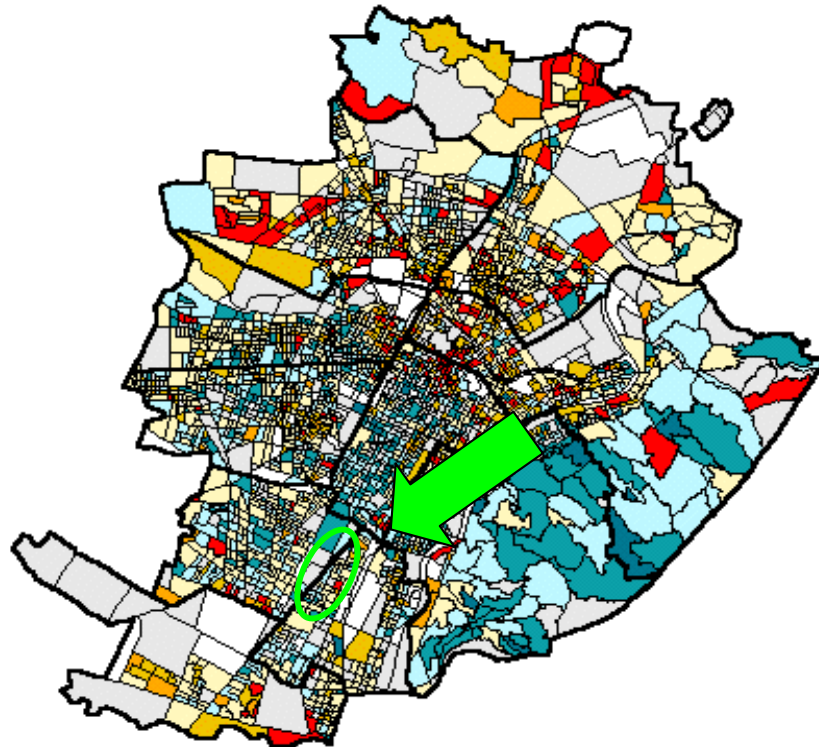
The four buildings occupied by refugees are part of the so-called Olympic Village, made up of around 30 buildings located on the East edge of the Lingotto neighbourhood, just along the railways, where the MOI, a former vegetable and fruit general market, was located. The Olympic Village was constructed to accommodate the athletes during the Winter Olympic Games held in Turin in 2006 and, in 2007, was partially (7 buildings) sold by the City of Turin to the Turin City Fund, a real estate fund whose investors are the City of Turin itself (35%), Equiter (29%) and

---

<sup>1</sup> Hecló's idea that in policy networks the primary interest is based on intellectual or emotional commitment rather than on material interests (Hecló 1978) fits the case of Milan more than that of Turin.

Prelios (36%). This last is also the Asset Management Company which manages the Fund and is responsible for the reconversion and commercialization of the buildings and thus acts as owner.

**Fig. 1 - The location of the MOI area in the city of Turin**



The initial idea was to create a functional and social mix which would have contributed to the development of the neighbourhood and countered its economic and social decline (Olagnero and Ponzo 2010). In fact, before the occupation, part of the 30 buildings were recovered to public housing estate, the premises of CONI (Italian National Olympic Committee) and Arpa (Regional Agency for the Environment Protection) and the headquarters of the post-Olympic Foundation, whereas the buildings closer to the occupation were rented by different organizations running social housing activities, i.e. a youth hostel run by the Falciola Foundation, a university student residence managed by EDISU, and a social housing project with short-term and long-term rental apartments developed by social cooperatives (Buena Vista Social Club). Finally, close to those buildings are the so-called Arcades, conceived for hosting tertiary activities but actually rented to local organizations for staging sporadic cultural events while remaining empty and vandalized most of the time.

As for the buildings occupied in 2013, Prelios tried to sell them on the private market but they remained unsold. Therefore, the buildings remained empty from the Olympic Games in 2006 to the beginning of 2013 when they were occupied by squatters. In the city imaginary they had become a symbol of the city's failure to derive value from the Olympic buildings. Indeed, they were chosen for the occupation not only for the many apartments available but also for their symbolic value.

In June 2016, when our fieldwork ended, around 1,200 foreigners were living in occupied MOI buildings. Internal activities such as an Italian language school, an information office on legal

aspects, work, health and a desk for distribution of goods are run by Italian volunteers. A canteen/restaurant, a barber, a bike workshop and food shops have been set up by refugees, as well as recreational activities such as the soul group Re-fugees and the football team Africa United which participates in the local Balon Mundial football league.

**Fig. 2-3 - The ex-MOI occupation**



The story of the Olympic Village is intertwined with that of the so-called North Africa Emergency Programme, started in 2011 and triggered by the arrivals which followed the Arab Spring and the fall of Gheddafi in Libya. It mainly concerned people from Central Africa living in Libya who were hosted, upon arriving in Italy, in accommodation centres established under the North Africa Emergency Programme managed by the Department of Civil Protection and the Ministry of the Interior. Italian local authorities strongly criticized this operation for several reasons: people were all treated as refugees with very poor screening and were all channeled into collective accommodation structures; the local authorities were completely cut out of the management of the programme and not consulted on either the redistribution of refugees throughout the national territory or on the accommodation solutions; few efforts were made to foster people's integration, so almost everybody was expelled from the accommodation structures in February 2013, when the programme ended, generating a considerable mass of homeless, unemployed migrants.

Below we will briefly summarize the main milestones from the occupation up to June 2016.

### **30 March 2013**

Two empty buildings of the so-called ex-MOI area were occupied by 170 refugees, the majority of whom had permits to stay for humanitarian reasons<sup>2</sup> and came from the North African Emergency Programme which ended in February 2013<sup>3</sup>. The occupation was planned over the course of several meetings and was supported logistically by the extreme-left organizations Gabrio and Askatasuna<sup>4</sup>, and by the Migrant and

---

<sup>2</sup> The permit of stay for humanitarian reasons has a duration of two years and can be converted into a permit of stay for work. It does not allow holders to freely circulate in Europe.

<sup>3</sup> There were around 1,700 people concerned by the North African Emergency Programme in the Piedmont Region, of whom 1,200 were in the metropolitan area of Turin.

<sup>4</sup> Askatasuna's ideology is anarchism, Gabrio's is communism.

Refugee Movement linked to the radical trade union USB. Actually, those organizations started to meet and support those refugees independently and eventually combined their efforts. Therefore, that was the first time they had ever cooperated. In the following days, a Solidarity Committee supported by Gabrio, Askatasuna and the Migrant and Refugee Movement, was set up with around 15 Italian volunteers and some refugees from the occupation. Neighbourhood residents provided basic goods. No protests were registered.

### **2 April 2013**

According to the Solidarity Committee, the number of people squatting in the buildings doubled. Any outside check on the numbers was impossible since the buildings were surrounded by blue barriers set up before the occupation in preparation for renovation works. The Prefecture, the local branch of the Ministry of the Interior, gathered the Deputy Mayors concerned with the occupation (Passoni for Budget, Tisi for Social Policies and Tedesco for Public Order) around the table to agree upon a common approach and action plan.

### **7 April 2013**

Given the increasing number of people who wanted to join the occupation, a third building was occupied and people rose to around 450. The supporting organizations and especially the extreme-left organizations which are more familiar with occupations, tried to keep control over the entries and set priority criteria. This triggered tensions. One of the buildings was assigned to families in order to shelter women and children from extreme overcrowding.

### **April 2017**

Several left-wing movements offered their support to the occupation. At mid-April No-TAV movements, that were fighting against the project Treno Alta Velocità (i.e. High Speed Train connecting Turin and Lyon) and which were linked to the extreme-left groups supporting the occupation, organized a solidarity lunch within the occupied buildings. On the 25th April, the Liberation Day, the District branch of the National Association of Italian Partisans (Anpi) celebrated with a lunch in the yard of occupied buildings.

### **10–11 April 2013**

The President of the Lower Chambers, Boldrini, visited Turin as a speaker at a public event. MOI refugees with the support of extreme-left organizations and the USB trade union staged a public demonstration and finally met Boldrini to explain their situation and their requests.

### **12 April 2013**

District 2, where MOI is located, held an open assembly focusing on the occupation. This was the first contact of the District with the Solidarity Committee which read a public statement explaining the reasons for the occupation avoiding any discussion. No protests from the neighbourhood residents occurred during the assembly, nor in the following weeks. The District failed to gain cooperation from the Municipality to cope with the occupation.

### **19 April 2013**

The Migrant and Refugee Movement and the extreme-left organizations, in collaboration with the Sans Papier international coalition, staged a public demonstration supporting the MOI occupation and addressing the local authorities with two main requests: to provide refugees living in the occupied buildings with city residence (which allows them access to city services and permit renewals), and with documents to travel around Europe. A group of refugees and the supporting organizations met the Deputy Mayors for Social Policies, Tisi, and for Civil Registers, Gallo. Some days after this event, the Municipality offered collective

residence (granted to groups of 15–20 people under the guarantee of a person with city residence) as a possible solution, the pro-occupation organizations rejected the proposal.

### **6 July 2013**

The Turin Archbishop visited the occupied buildings and promised to speak with the local institutions and to mobilize parishes and families on the issue of refugee integration and accommodation.

### **29 August 2013**

The fourth building, the only empty one left, was occupied by Somali refugees, the majority of whom came from a structure in via Asti where they were transferred by the Municipality after another occupation which occurred in 2008. Overall, the number of occupants rose to around 600. The occupation by Somali refugees, by making the increase in numbers evident, aroused public concerns.

The organizations which manage the buildings close to the occupation (Buena Vista Social Club, EDISU and Falciola Foundations) claimed that they were losing clients and faced high expenses because of electric energy and water consumption by people from the occupation. In fact, these organizations continued complaining over the following months and years without gaining support from almost anyone but the District.

Several District Councillors asked the President to hold public assemblies to discuss the occupation. The City was invited to the first one. However, the Deputy Mayor sent by the city was the one for Culture, Braccialarghe, whose purview was not relevant for the occupation management and who spoke about cultural projects in the area close to the occupied buildings instead of the occupation itself.

### **September 2013**

The District President, Giorgio Rizzuto, started a dialogue with the Solidarity Committee and, separately, with the organizations managing the social housing projects close to the occupation (Buena Vista Social Club, EDISU and the Falciola Foundation).

### **October–November 2013**

The refugees, together with the organizations which supported the occupation, staged a public demonstration within the Civil Register Offices hampering the front office functioning and asking for city residence. Negotiations with the local authorities continued during the following weeks. The Municipality maintained that the issue would be discussed at the national level with the Ministry of the Interior and ANCI (the National Association of Italian Municipalities), of which the Mayor of Turin, Fassino, was the President: the Municipality's point was that similar, though smaller occupations concerned other cities as well, therefore the solution should be the same for the whole country.

### **December 2013**

No responses came from the national government. Therefore, a local solution to the problem was found: artificial residence<sup>5</sup> "Via Casa Comunale 3" was provided by the Municipality of Turin to homeless asylum-seekers and refugees, including those squatting in the MOI buildings. The Municipality required the Solidarity Committee's active support to the registration procedures leading some members to talk of "forced volunteering". Actually, in those months only a part of people living in MOI buildings enrolled on civic registers.

---

<sup>5</sup> The artificial residence is an imaginary address which allows homeless people to enrol in the civil registries, obtain city residency and access services. Two other artificial addresses already existed at that time, i.e. via Casa Comunale 1 and via Casa Comunale 2.



## **January 2014**

Three smaller occupations were organized by the extreme-left organizations, Askatasuna and Gabrio, together with refugees from MOI and evicted Italian families in the second week of January, during the national mobilization by “Living in the Crisis” (Abitare nella Crisi) which fought evictions and supports occupations of empty buildings. Two of the three occupations were cleared out. The third, which occurred in an empty hospice belonging to a religious order, Le Salette, triggered a negotiation between the religious order itself, the local Curia and around 80 occupying refugees who came from MOI, in order to develop a shared action plan and convert the occupation into a social and housing pilot project. The attempt was successful and the experimental project started.

## **March 2014**

On 7 March 2014, the City of Turin, together with Bari and Milan, submitted a plan to the Ministry of the Interior through ANCI, the National Association of Italian Municipalities, in order to obtain the Ministry’s support on the occupations by refugees coming from the North Africa Emergency Programme. The plan foresaw three main steps: 1) screening of the refugees occupying the target buildings, 2) temporary relocation of entitled refugees to proper collective structures to assess their needs and provide them with information, 3) distribution of refugees throughout the country with tailor-made projects managed by local Municipalities with the support of civil society organizations and aimed at supporting work and housing inclusion or assisted voluntary return to the home country. It is worth emphasizing that the then-Mayor of Turin, Fassino, was also the President of ANCI and presumably a major sponsor of the plan.

On the same date, Fassino, as Mayor of Turin, sent the Minister of the Interior a letter requesting economic support to cope with the MOI occupation.

## **July 2014**

The request submitted in March 2014 to the Ministry of the Interior was submitted again because of the lack of response from the government.

## **November–December 2014**

The number of people living in the occupied building continued to rise to around 800 people of which nearly 40 were children.

The right-wing political opposition in the Municipal Council repeatedly called for the occupied buildings to be cleared out. The leader of the right-wing party in the Municipal Council Fratelli d’Italia, Marrone, together with some councillors from Forza Italia, Berlusconi’s party, and the Northern League, including Ricca, repeatedly tried to enter the occupied buildings to check on the situation inside but they were stopped by members of the extreme-left organizations Askatasuna and Gabrio.

Ricca, a Municipal councillor from the Northern League, claimed to be looking for cocaine and marijuana near the occupied buildings and filmed the scene in order to denounce the drug-selling that he alleged was occurring in the area. In response, the Solidarity Committee organized a 24/7 task force together with the refugees to oversee the area and push out drug-sellers. Some neighbourhood residents joined the task force.

On 2nd December, a meeting between the people living in MOI buildings and the District residents was organized at the cultural centre Hiroshima Mon Amour, with the support of the Solidarity Committee and the District President.

On 20 December, Salvini, the Northern League national leader, staged a public demonstration in front of the MOI occupation.

The blue barriers that surrounded and hid the occupied buildings and the large amount of garbage that accumulated around them were removed by the municipal refuse agency. This occurred after repeated requests by the District President, Rizzuto, to the private company responsible for the (never done)

renovation work of the occupied buildings and a long negotiation with the Solidarity Committee, and thanks to the support of the Deputy Mayor for the Environment, Lavolta. This was regarded as a crucial step to breaking their isolation from the rest of the neighbourhood.

### **January 2015**

Prelios, on behalf of the owner Fondazione Torino, notified the judiciary about the occupation in December 2014 but injunction to leave the buildings only became public in January 2015 thanks to a statement by the Fratelli d'Italia councillor Marrone. The injunction, however, specified that clearing out be subordinated to the needs of public order and refugees' protection. In any case, the intervention would have required many police officers and a huge economic investment to find alternative accommodations, therefore its implementation appeared to be extremely challenging.

After the meeting at Hiroshima Mon Amour, the District President established a working group involving the Solidarity Committee and the neighboring organizations (Buena Vista Social Club, EDISU and the Falciola Foundation) for the management of share spaces (eg. the yard).

### **March 2015**

A petition with 1,128 signatures asking for the implementation of clearing out was delivered to the Municipality. In response, a pro-occupation demonstration was staged in the city centre. Other demonstrations followed in subsequent weeks.

A meeting with MOI neighbourhood residents who signed the petition and the Deputy Mayors was organized at the Municipality but the only institutional figure who showed up was the head of police. This was regarded as a sign of Municipality's lack of attention towards the occupation.

### **May 2015**

On 18 May 2015, the Ministry of the Interior issued a communication which specified that resident permit renewal was not dependent on enrollment on the civil register.

### **June 2015**

The occupation and the closer social housing realities, especially Buena Vista Social Club, launched an open-air movie festival in the shared open space. This was a clear sign of cooperation between the occupation and the neighbouring organizations.

Three migrants were arrested on suspicion of having abducted and raped a mentally disabled young woman held for two days within the occupied buildings. The men were caught with the help of the people living in the occupied buildings. Public demonstrations followed, organised by the right-wing parties, and a police garrison began to oversee the area 24/7. The final judgment concluded that the girl spent time with the men, one of whom was her boyfriend, on a voluntary basis but the men nevertheless were sentenced for having taking advantage of a mentally disabled person.

The Mayor announced a census of the people living in the occupied buildings but it would never happen. Meanwhile, the Solidarity Committee carried out an anonymous census following the District President's suggestion and counted around 1,500 individuals.

### **July 2015**

As a consequence of the reaction to the rape, an open Assembly was held by District 2: there were 300 participants, including anti-occupation groups, neo-facist movements like Casa Pound, the Solidarity Committee, and Regional and Municipal councillors. The Assembly lasted 4–5 hours but nothing relevant occurred. However, since then, up until the beginning of 2016 when the campaign for the local elections

began, a closer collaboration between the Municipality and District 2 developed in order to establish a shared action plan, although no actions followed.

### **December 2015**

EDISU cancelled the contract with the Falciola Foundation for the rent of the three buildings which hosted the university student residence that was moved to the city centre. Besides the economic loss, the Foundation and the other local actors feared that those buildings, left empty, would be occupied as well. In fact, the Foundation was able to replace students with families within a few hours to prevent occupation.

On December 21 Salvini, the Northern League national leader, again staged a public demonstration in front of the MOI occupation.

### **May 2016**

On 25 May, the City Mayor, Fassino, sent a letter to the Prefecture as the local branch of the Ministry of the Interior in order to recall all of the above-mentioned efforts to obtain support from the Ministry and establish cooperation on the MOI occupation. The letter eventually once again proposed the three-step plan, though rescaled to a local dimension: 1) screening of the refugees occupying the MOI buildings, 2) temporary relocation of entitled refugees to proper collective structures, and 3) distribution of refugees throughout the Turin province with the support of third-sector organizations and thanks to structures made available by the central State or found on the market.

### **June 2016**

Local elections. The previous Democratic Party majority was replaced by the Five Star Movement and Chiara Appendino became the Mayor of Turin. Also District 2 was reelected and President Rizzuto left. The working group set by Rizzuto never met again but cooperation among its members had become close enough for them to work together without the mediation of the District. Indeed, a collaborative network which includes the Solidarity Committee, Buena Vista Social Club, the recreational centre Hiroshima Mon Amour, the CON-MOI association stemming from the occupation and working on recycling, and the nearby municipal housing estates was established. This network demonstrated how cooperation at the micro level had developed positively.

The number of people living in the MOI occupied buildings reached 1,200, though the numbers dropped during the summer, when many people moved to the countryside to seek jobs in agriculture.

## **3. The transit refugees in Milan**

According to the Dublin Regulation, refugees have to claim asylum in the first-entry country. However, when refugee flows started increasing, after the Arab Spring, both Italy and Greece were not used to identifying every refugee and many of them crossed the border to reach other European countries. Against this backdrop, Milan was a major passageway to the North since it is close to the border. The number of Syrian families became significant in 2013 when many of them started spending a few days in the Central Station before resuming travel. Since 2015, sub-Saharan Africans, especially Eritreans, started arriving as well and after a while they exceeded Syrians who soon moved away from this route. According to the Municipality's statistics, Syrians went from 95.9% of refugees transiting through Milan in 2013 and 78,1% in 2014, to a much lower 20.3% in 2015, to eventually drop to 1.1% in the first six months of 2016. The Eritrean community rose from 15.6% in 2014 to 58.5% in 2015, and dropped again to 22.4% in 2016. In fact, in 2016 flows became more diverse with increasing numbers of Somali, Sudanese, Ethiopian and Afghan

refugees. Minors among transit refugees decreased from 33% in 2013 to 12% in 2016. This is due to the replacement of Syrians and Palestinians, who are predominantly families, with sub-Saharan Africans who are mostly single men. However, whereas the number of minors in families has drastically dropped, non-accompanied minors have increased from 13 in 2013 to 1,478 in 2015 and 402 in the first six months of 2016.

Overall, from October 2013 to April 2016 the number of registered transit refugees was 88,067, of whom 75,466 were hosted in accommodation centres under the convention signed between the Municipality and the Prefecture. The refugee arrivals were distributed over the investigated time span as follows:

- 2013: 1,316
- 2014: 52,631
- 2015: 31,855
- January–June 2016: 4,677

With the arrival of Syrian refugees, various NGOs as well as the Milan Municipality started offering support. Private citizens activated to provide help, too, by triggering one of the greatest solidarity mobilizations of the city. The Ministry of the Interior soon provided economic support to the Municipality through the local Prefecture in order to establish accommodation structures to host transit refugees. The legal basis for the intervention has been the so-called Apulia Law (Law Decree 451/1995 converted into the National Law 563/1995) passed two decades earlier in order to manage flows from the Balkan area to Southern Italy. The law allows the establishment of emergency centres to accommodate irregular migrants waiting to be identified. Furthermore, the Immigration Consolidated Law foresees that foreigners have to submit requests for residence permits to the public authorities within eight days of their arrival in the country. This condition was interpreted the other way round in the case of transit refugees in Milan: they could stay in the accommodation centres for eight days without declaring their identity.

**Fig. 4-5 - Transit refugees at the Central Station mezzanine**



Support for transit refugees has become increasingly structured over time. The activities of screening and relocation to accommodation centres moved from the mezzanine of the Central Station to the temporary shops in the Station's open-air gallery and finally to a renovated closed space near the Station, in via Mortirolo, to eventually settled in the new centre in via Sammartini,

located along the railways but farther from the Station. In the meantime, accommodation centres were opened thanks to the economic resources provided by the Ministry of the Interior through the local Prefecture. The numbers of centres and beds changed over the year given that arrivals were much higher in summer, when it is easier to cross the Mediterranean Sea, than in winter. Some parishes and Catholic NGOs, and initially even some mosques, provided beds on a voluntary basis. With the closing of borders in 2016, transit became almost impossible. Therefore, time spent in the accommodation centres has increased. The average number of days of stay went from 7.5 in 2013, 4.5 in 2014 and 5.8 in 2015 to 19.8 in the first six months of 2016. People in the centres at the end of June 2016 had an average stay of 100 days. Now, the large majority of would-be transit refugees ended up asking for asylum in Milan. This change was mirrored in data about the final destination: initially Italy was not considered as such whereas it became the declared final destination for 49.3% of refugees who passed through the hub in the first six months of 2016. In contrast, Germany as a declared destination declined, going from 41.4% in 2015 to 21.9% in 2016, similar to Sweden which dropped from 45.0% in 2014 to 2.5% in 2016.

Finally, it is worth remembering that Milan hosted the Universal Exposition in 2015 (<http://www.expo2015.org/archive/en/learn-more.html>). This had two main relevant consequences. First, this event attracted lots of tourists, private companies, public officers and heads of state and journalists: the Central Station became a sort of “entryway” into the city, especially from May to October 2015, when the Exposition was open to the public. Second, the Expo emphasized the cosmopolitan identity of Milan impacting its approach towards migrant communities since the mid-2000s when preparations for the Exposition first started<sup>6</sup>: immigrant associations and cultural groups were regarded as resources for the city’s international outlook [Caponio 2014]. This orientation and, more generally, the cosmopolitan atmosphere emphasized by the Expo contributed to limiting xenophobic attitudes by politicians as well as citizens.

Below we will summarize the main events from the arrival of the first Syrian transit refugees in the Central Station to June 2016.

### **May 2013**

Syrian refugees started arriving in Milan and resting in the mezzanine of the Central Station. At that time only the NGO Save the Children was there with its outreach activities towards non-accompanied minors.

### **Summer 2013**

The Municipality set up a desk in the Central Station offering information and orientation to transit refugees. Some associations, like the Eritrean association Cambio Passo, and the Young Muslim Association, began offering support.

### **Autumn 2013**

On 18 October accommodation of the refugees in specific centres began thanks to an agreement between the Prefecture and the Municipality of Milan which foresaw special economic resources of the Ministry of the Interior to establish accommodation centres for transit refugees (36 euros per day per person). From now

---

<sup>6</sup> The 2015 Exposition was assigned to Milan in 2008.

until the end of 2016 the number of beds fluctuated between 240 to 1,100, depending on changes in the arrivals.

At the same time, screening and distribution of refugees among accommodation centres became more structured and the Central Station mezzanine, where these activities took place, became known as the “hub”: the social cooperative Universiis took over management of the hub after the Municipality’s procurement, the NGO Save the Children managed the area for children on an informal basis, and volunteers distributed food and basic goods. Municipal employees were present for a few hours a day on a formal basis but many of them, from different Departments, contribute as volunteers alongside the private citizens. Doctors and pediatricians also offered help by providing basic medical treatment and medicine.

### **May 2014**

From October 2013 to May 2014, around 5,000 Syrians were accommodated.

The Deputy Mayor for Social Policies, Majorino, asked the Prefecture for a closed place in the Central Station for the refugees’ screening, distribution among accommodation centres and first aid services, including some beds, since the mezzanine was not a proper place for carrying out those activities. The Prefecture forwarded the request to Grandi Stazioni which managed the Italian railway stations.

Majorino and the Mayor, Pisapia, asked the central government to redistribute those refugees among several cities, to provide prompt information about arrivals to Milan and to negotiate with EU institutions to grant Syrians refugee status and provide them with documents for freely circulating in Europe.

The accommodation of Eritreans began alongside that of Syrians.

Austria closed its borders and France and Switzerland intensified controls.

### **June 2014**

The so-called SOS Syria Emergency voluntary group was started by Susy Iovieno who passed through the Central Station and posted some pictures of refugees on Facebook. One Saturday, she started offering help with a few people from the local branch of the Democratic Party who suggested that she create a Facebook group. After that the number of volunteers rapidly increased.

### **July 2014**

From October 2013, 12,000 Syrians and 3,000 Eritreans were accommodated in 10 public centres run by nonprofit organizations (Arca Foundation, Farsi Prossimo, City Angels). Considering both public and nonprofit centres, there were almost 1,000 available beds but they were unable match the demand despite refugees’ staying only a few days. The Deputy Mayor Majorino and the Archbishop Scola pleaded for parishes to make their spaces available for refugee accommodations.

Since Eritrean refugees tended to spend their days and nights in the Porta Venezia area, where the established Eritrean community is concentrated, shopkeepers held public demonstrations and asked for the Municipality’s intervention and a police garrison.

### **August 2014**

Hundreds of people arrived every day (e.g. on 8 August 700 people arrived in just one day).

The Ministry of the Interior communicated that the Corelli centre previously used for the detention of irregular migrants waiting for identification and expulsion, could be employed to host transit refugees. While waiting for its renovation and opening, a tent structure was established in Palasharp to accommodate Syrians.

### **September 2014**

By now, 36,000 refugees were registered, of whom 24,000 were Syrian, 11,000 Eritrean, 900 Palestinian and 300 Sudanese, Somali and Iraqis.

The Regional Council, led by the Northern League, formally rejected the proposal, repeatedly pushed by the centre-left minority and the Municipality, to set up a fixed medical unit at the Central Station. Nevertheless, voluntary and public doctors both offered their help, though not on permanent basis.

A District centre-right councillor circulated a picture of a child sleeping in the Central Station triggering polemics. The central headquarters of Save the Children in Rome asked for pediatric assistance since 30–40% of transit refugees in Milan were children.

### **October 2014**

Right-wing parties such as Fratelli d'Italia and Lega Nord and the neo-fascist movement Casa Pound staged anti-refugee demonstrations in both the city centre and the Central Station. Centre-left parties and far-left movements organized counter-demonstrations to support refugees.

The Corelli centre opened with 150 beds with the aim of reaching 200 beds later on.

### **January 2015**

GEPSA took over management of the hub at the mezzanine in the Central Station.

### **May–April 2015**

The Prefecture and the Municipality announced that tents and containers would be added at the Corelli centre since there were not enough beds to host all of the transit refugees, but it took more time than expected. Groups of refugees started again to sleep in the Central Station.

Some refugees declared that they came from the refugee hub Mineo in Sicily: the Deputy Mayor Majorino accused the central government of sending refugees to Milan on purpose with neither agreement nor notice.

The presence of Eritreans in Porta Venezia became significant again.

Some cases of scabies were found among transit refugees.

The Universal Exposition began on May 1.

### **June 2015**

Since the beginning of the year, 9,200 transit refugees were accommodated (3,500 of them Syrians and 3,800 Eritreans). Since 2013, 64,000 refugees passed through Milan, and only 250 of them eventually claimed asylum in Italy. France and Austria started closing their borders and reaching other EU countries became harder so turnover in accommodation centres slowed down and some refugees came back after having tried to cross the border.

Deputy Mayor Majorino appealed to non-profit organizations and charities to deliver free accommodations while the Municipality was waiting for the renewal of the convention with the Prefecture. Casa di Carità and Fratelli di San Francesco answered the call. Sant'Egidio also started managing free accommodations in the Shoa Memorial close to Platform 21 at the Central Station.

Cases of scabies surfaced. The Lombardy Region finally established a fixed medical unit at the Central Station to cope with the challenging health situation.

Arca Foundation took over management of hub in the Central Station.

Grandi Stazioni identified a closed space near the Central Station, in via Sammartini. Since it would take time to renovate, while waiting the Municipality and the Prefecture decided to move the hub to via Tonale/via Mortirolo (which belonged to Grandi Stazioni as well) since renovation should be smaller than in via Sammartini. In the meantime, the hub was moved temporarily to two plexiglass temporary shops in the Central Station's Galleria delle Carrozze.

The Region sent a letter to the Prefecture and the Municipality maintaining that the refugees crisis was their responsibility and that they had to respect refugees' dignity. The Mayor of Milan reacted by criticizing the Region for not having contributed to resolving the crisis in any way.

Anti-refugee demonstrations were staged by right-wing parties and far-right movements. Citizens mobilized to offer goods and help to refugees.

## July 2015

The hub was moved from the temporary shops to the closed space in via Tonale/via Mortirolo.

## September 2015

Numbers rose again with around 400–500 arrivals per day. Refugees slept in the hub of via Tonale, though it was not meant for this purpose, and on the street because of the lack of beds in accommodation centres as a result of slower turnover. The latter was because of both the growing difficulties in crossing borders and the longer stays of sub-Saharan Africans compared to Syrians because of fewer available resources and the consequent longer time needed to gather enough money to continue the journey.

NGOs and companies offered goods and furniture to the hub worth more than 500,000 euros.

## April 2016

The hub was transferred from via Tonale to via Sammartini 120, which was bigger but farther from the Central Station. It included a canteen, showers, a children's area, a medical unit and 70 beds for emergencies.

## 4. Methodological note

This research is based on a mixed qualitative methodology. To study the local issue networks, we analysed the available (few) official documents and carried out 18 semi-structured interviews with local actors involved in managing the transit refugees in Milan and the MOI occupation in Turin. For the media analysis, we collected news items related to transit refugees in Milan and to the MOI occupation in Turin, by using keywords to search the online archives of newspapers. We collected all of the news items for the period from the beginning of the media coverage of the two cases – April 2013 for Turin and October 2013 for Milan – to the end of June 2016. The news titles analysed are from the two main national broadsheets with a local newsroom in the cities – *La Stampa* and *Repubblica* in Turin, *Corriere della Sera* and *Repubblica* in Milan. Specifically, we analysed frequencies and frames of news items through a qualitative news framing analysis.

For the framing analysis we referred to Benson's [2013] distinction between victim frames and threat frames – the hero frames were so rare in our data that we decided to omit them. Victim frames are:

- the global economy frame,
- the humanitarian frame, and
- the racism/xenophobia frame.

In our case studies, the first frame (global economy) had only a few occurrences, while the second (humanitarian) was very much diffused in news items from both Milan and Turin. Finally, the third (racism/xenophobia) was sometimes present, especially in Milan, in the form of a journalistic counter-narrative of the “anti-refugee” demonstrations or declarations.

Threat frames are:

- the jobs frame,
- the public order frame,
- the fiscal frame, and
- the national cohesion frame.



The first (jobs) was absent in our dataset, the second (public order) was the most frequent threat frame, while the fiscal and the national cohesion frames recurred sometimes in both Turin and Milan through the media's quotations of right-wing politicians or protest groups.

Not all news items express a clear frame and more than one frame can be found in the same item.

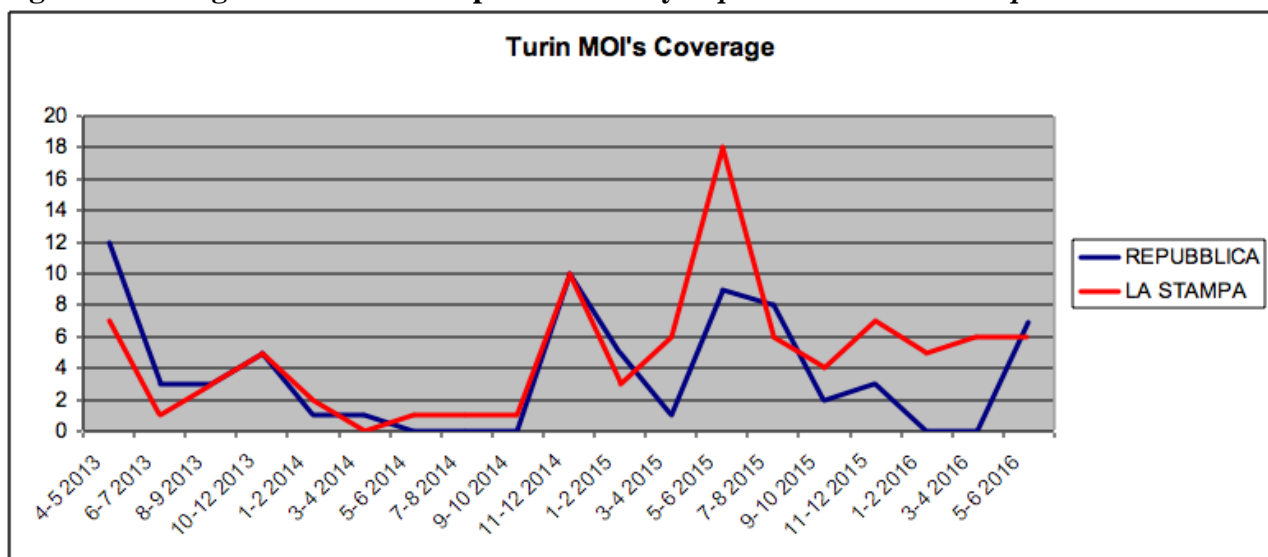
Finally, local journalism in the two cities was investigated through eight semi-structured interviews with journalists (four in Milan and four in Turin).

## 5. Media coverage and framing

### 5.1. The MOI occupation in Turin

Coverage of an event such as the MOI occupation would be expected to produce a high number of articles from local journalism, for various reasons, including the important news-value of “quantity” (number of people involved in the occupation). However, *Repubblica* produced only 70 articles in the 38 months between April 2013 and June 2016, which means an average of 1.84 articles every month, while *La Stampa* produced a bit more news with 92 articles in total (2.4 per month).

**Fig. 6 - Coverage of the MOI occupation news by *Repubblica* and *La Stampa***



News peaks are quite similar for the two newspapers: the first occurs – as is obvious – in the beginning of the occupation; the second is registered more than a year later, in November–December 2014, and a third peak occurs in the summer of 2015. These are small peaks, around 10 articles in two months, which can be regarded as coverage intensification rather than as media hype. The highest peak is that of *La Stampa*'s coverage of May–June 2015 (the third peak, summer of 2015) with 18 articles in 61 days.

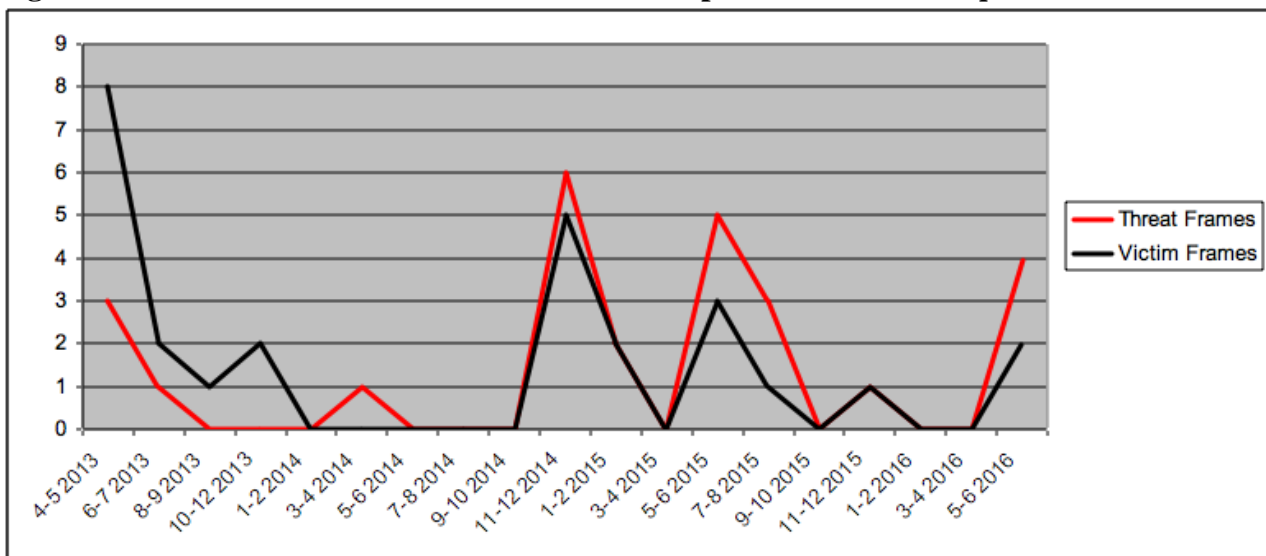
This last peak was activated by a fact (the arrest of three migrants living in the occupied buildings on suspicion of having abducted and raped a mentally disabled young woman) and influenced by the subsequent public demonstrations organized by the right-wing parties against the occupation, along with the Mayor's announcement of a census of the people living in the occupied buildings. The reasons for the second peak (November–December 2014) were similar: coverage increased

following demonstrations by right-wing parties and minor events about drug dealing, framed as public order issues.

From April 2015 to June 2016 *La Stampa* paid relatively higher attention to the MOI case than *Repubblica* did. It was largely the consequence of a security-oriented attitude developed by local journalists at *La Stampa* after the rape of the young woman, as seen from both the interviews and the content analysis. This attitude was also a consequence of the silence from the local authority, better explained in Section 6, which allowed the protest voices to be the only voices heard by journalists covering the MOI occupation.

The graph below on frames' coverage shows how the second and third peaks were a result of the intensification of the threat frames rather than of the victim frames.

**Fig. 7 - The distribution of frames in the MOI occupation news from *Repubblica*.**



The two peaks (Nov–Dec 2014 and May–June 2015) are the effect of an intensification of the public order frame within the threat frames and of a combination of the humanitarian frame and the racism/xenophobia frame within the victim frames. The first frame (public order) was produced mainly by right-wing politicians quoted by journalists, while the second frame (humanitarian) and the third frame (racism/xenophobia) were often the product of the journalists' quoting of members of the civic society – more than left-wing politicians – in the process of collecting reactions to the public order frame. It means that – apart from the first few months – the public order frame led the coverage, i.e., the news was more frequently activated by a fact framed as “public order”.

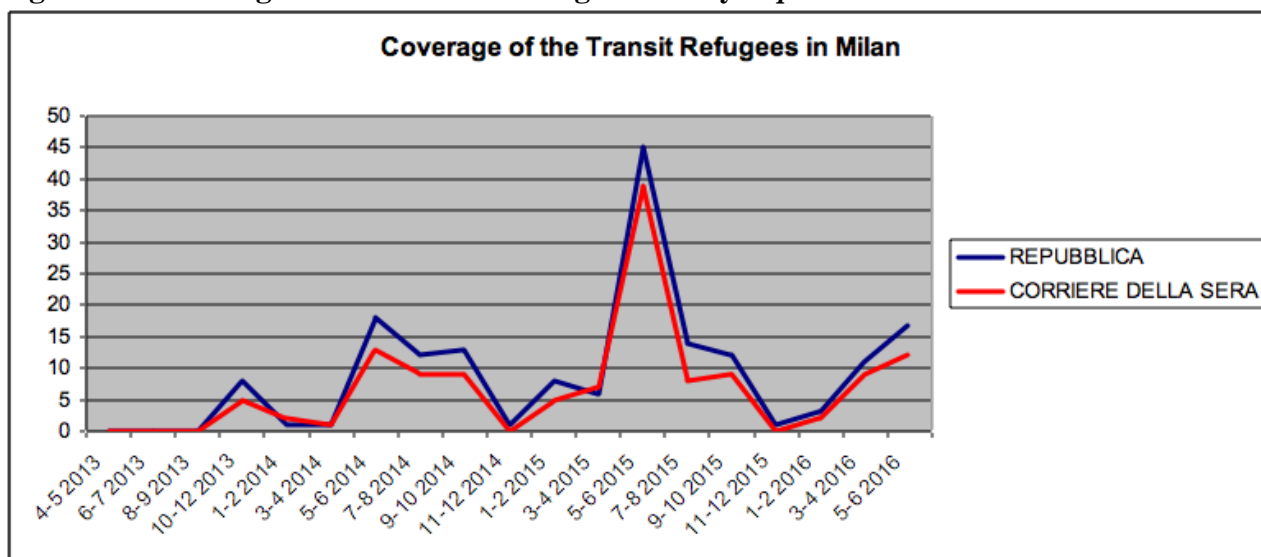
Furthermore, the Prefecture and the Questura<sup>7</sup> both played a great role in supporting the humanitarian frame. As official journalistic sources, they managed to counter-balance the public order frame through official public declarations inspired by the humanitarian frame and the systematic downplaying of the few violent acts that occurred during the MOI occupation, playing the role of the “firefighters”, according to the journalists interviewed.

<sup>7</sup> Both are local branches of the Ministry of the Interior.

## 5.2. The transit refugees in Milan

On transit refugees in Milan, *Repubblica* produced 171 articles in the 32.5 months from mid-October 2013 to June 2016, which means an average of 5.26 articles per month, while *Corriere della Sera* produced a total of 130 articles (an average of 4 each month). The difference with the MOI case is clear: here the coverage is a reflection of the newsworthiness of the case (considering, at least, the news value of “quantity”). Considering only the hot seasons (from May to October), where the numbers of refugees arriving in Milan were higher, we see an average of more than 1 article every three days (12 per month in *Repubblica*, 11 per month in *Corriere della Sera*). These numbers of news items allow us to characterize this as intense coverage.

**Fig. 8 - The coverage of Milan transit refugee news by *Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera***



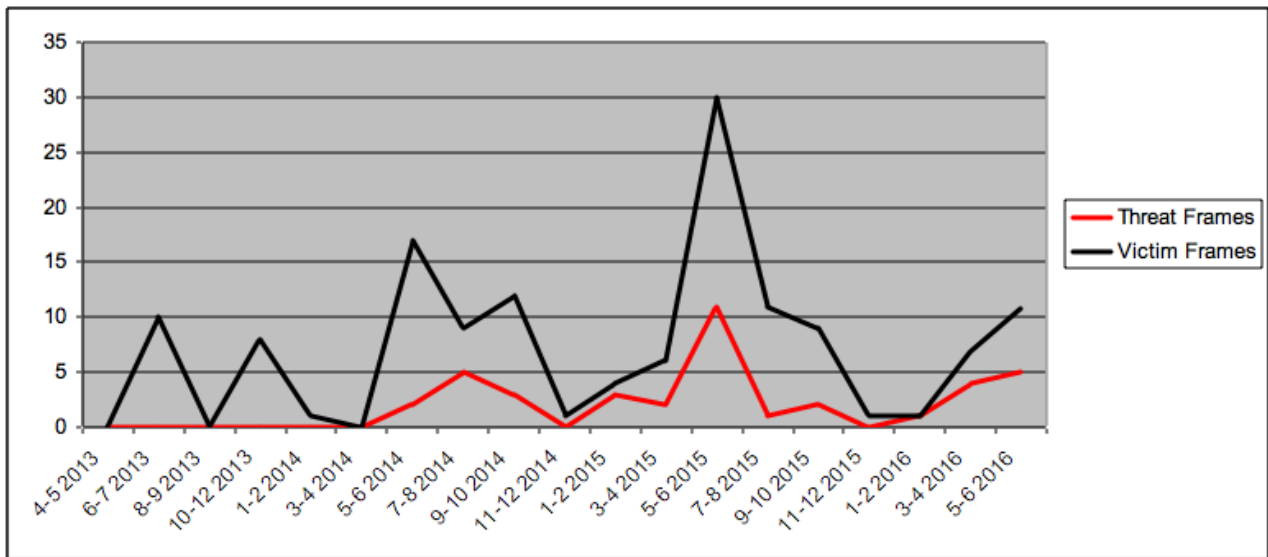
The peaks in news are identical for the two newspapers. This is a clear demonstration of effective *news management* around the transit refugees’ developed by the local government and the strategic communicative work done under the direction of Pierfrancesco Majorino, the Deputy Major for Social Policies, as we will better explain in Sections 6 and 7.

In general terms, the peaks are easy to explain with the intensification of refugees crossing the sea and then travelling to Milan during the hot seasons. The highest peak, that of May–June 2015, which is a media hype (more than a quarter of the entire coverage of 32.5 months is concentrated in this two-month period), is a consequence of the sum of various factors: a) the beginning of the hot season with an intensification in the number of refugees, b) the opening of the Expo (Universal Exposition) in Milan with the consequent increase of attention around the city and its security system, c) the medical alarm about scabies, d) right-wing politicians’ public statements and demonstrative acts aimed at creating a public health moral panic, and, the last factor, e) the local government’s communication-action efforts in order to quash the panic.

In contrast to Turin, in Milan the humanitarian frame led the coverage, and even when the public order or the fiscal frames promoted by right-wing politicians or civic society protest groups (like that of Porta Venezia) were the real first material for producing news, both the *Corriere della sera* and *Repubblica* often embedded the threat frame within news items which started with quotations from the victim frames’ supporters. This means that the threat frames were systematically downplayed and often presented as strategic and demagogic political communication. This way of

representing the threat frames was favoured by the strong news management of Mr. Majorino, aimed at presenting the local administration as a pragmatic and anti-ideological actor engaged in a sort of resistance against an adverse fate (“the State and the Region have left us alone”) and at demonstrating how the local administration was driven by both humanitarian and public order concerns. This kind of constant and coherent communicative action led to a rejection of the racist/xenophobia frame (the accusation of racism in coping with the threat frames) in favour of a distinction between “people who do things” and “people who only talk”, where the latter were easily labeled as contradictory and demagogic.

**Fig. 9 - The distribution of frames in Milan transit refugee news from *Repubblica***



In the following sections (6 and 7) we will analyse the issue networks’ and local journalism’s functioning with the aim of explaining the differences in the media coverage highlighted in this section, i.e. the intensive and overall positive coverage of transit refugees in Milan and the scarce coverage of the MOI occupation with a general balance of public order and humanitarian frames in Turin.

## 6. The strategies of the local governments and the issue networks’ functioning

In this section, we will analyse the local governments’ strategies and relations with other local actors paying special attention to the degree of cohesion. Indeed, our hypothesis is that a greater cohesion among the issue network strengthens its influence on local media narratives.

### 6.1. Local governments’ perspectives

The local governments of Turin and Milan converge in identifying the causes of the crises they were concerned with, i.e., respectively, the MOI occupation and the transit refugees, but diverge in the solutions adopted.

In both cities local administrations identified the *causes of the problem* and the actors to blame outside the local context. In Milan, the local government identified the main actor responsible for the urban crisis as the Ministry of the Interior: its faults were, first, bad management of the migrant

inflows which allowed hundreds of refugees to reach Milan without any control; second, the inability to negotiate with EU institutions in order to obtain a fair redistribution of refugees across Europe and a revision of the Dublin Regulation. The Turin local government also blamed the central government, in this case for the bad management of the North Africa Emergency Programme: because of the lack of integration measures, at the end of the accommodation period refugees left the centres without any jobs or places to stay and some of them occupied empty buildings including the MOI estate.

Moreover, in both Milan and Turin the local government blamed the central government for the lack of support in managing the local crises, leaving the burden on local actors who were not responsible for them.

However, in the case of Turin criticism towards the central government was much more limited than in Milan: the local government somewhat excused the central government for its lack of support claiming that the Ministry of the Interior did not manage to allocate resources because it was engaged in the national “refugee crisis”. Local stakeholders have given different explanations for this mild attitude. For some of them it was a matter of politics: the local and the central government had the same political color (i.e. a Democratic Party majority) and this contributed to limiting the clashes, at least in public arenas. For others, the fact that the City Mayor, Piero Fassino, was also the President of the National Association of the Italian Municipality (ANCI) which is largely engaged in the management of the refugee accommodation system together with the central government, prevented the local administration from raising the level of conflict with the Ministry of the Interior. Despite it being difficult to identify the real causes, politics seems in fact to matter.

Regarding the *solutions*, the two cases are rather different. In Milan, the intervention was based on the criteria of what is called “*bassa soglia*”, i.e. the support services given to homeless people. As a local administration officer said, what they needed was “a bed and a soup” given that transit refugees spent just a few days in Milan. Therefore, in developing collaborations with local actors to cope with the crisis, the local administration gave much more weight to the rapidity and flexibility of action than to expertise in migration and integration. This approach allowed the Municipality to set up, in a short time span, a sizable welcoming and accommodation system able to handle hundreds of refugees per day. The sense of emergency and the high commitment of the local government underlying this system was emphasized by the recurrent public declarations and frequent presence at the Central Station, at least during the months with the highest inflows, of the Deputy Mayor for Social Policies, Majorino.

The outstanding figure of Majorino contrasts with the absence of Turin’s institutional representatives on the public scene: Deputy Mayors never visited the MOI occupation and the Municipality was mainly engaged in drafting plans that never turned into concrete action. Here, the intervention was conceived of as a two-step project: first, a short-term relocation to smaller collective centres and, second, distribution over the national territory, with the support of local authorities and third-sector organisations, to start tailor-made interventions aimed at supporting housing and labour integration or voluntary return to the home country. Two prerequisites were identified by the local government in order to carry out that plan. The first was a sort of “census” of the people squatting the buildings in order to understand the characteristics of the targets and the number of people actually entitled to public support. The other prerequisite was the availability of

adequate resources<sup>8</sup>. Given the high and rising number of people living in MOI building and the Municipality's empty coffers, the local government believed that it was impossible to intervene without substantial support from the central government. Since the census was never completed and the money from the central government never arrived, the action was stalled.

Beyond these technical obstacles, the more general policy context also seems to have played a role. In those years the Turin Municipality was engaged in two other major relocations, i.e. the end of the relocation of refugees who initially occupied the San Paolo Clinic in 2008 and were then moved to other structures, and the housing project addressing over 1,000 Roma people living in the irregular camp in Lungo Stura. According to the then-Social Policies Deputy Mayor this engagement hampered intervention on the MOI occupation since managing all those operations together would have been difficult in economic, operational and communicative terms.

The different course of action in the two cities seems to be mirrored in their communication strategies: the policy activism of the Milan Municipality was matched with an amazing communication activism, especially by the Social Policies Deputy Mayor, while the Turin Municipality's lack of action corresponded to an equal lack of public communication, as explained in the following Section.

## 6.2. Local governments' communication strategies

The two local governments adopted opposite communication strategies. In Milan, the Municipality and especially the Social Policies Deputy Mayor, Pierfrancesco Majorino, developed dense relations with local media, almost on daily basis, and completely centralized the communication flows within the issue network—members of the issue networks generally did not give interviews without passing through his press office—so that Majorino was the central “speaker” for the local issue network. Furthermore, some newspapers, such as *Repubblica*, were close to the local administration and explicitly supported it both generally and in that specific circumstance by amplifying Majorino's messages or calls for citizens' help to provide first-aid supplies. These elements seemed to contribute to the development of a sort of “*co-production*” of narratives by policy and media<sup>9</sup>.

This co-production sustained the development of a sort of “*politics of collective identity*” [Radaelli and Schmidt 2004; Radaelli 2002] which defines not only who we are but also what we can achieve. This triggered a massive mobilization of Milan citizens to provide help to refugees and contributed to preventing significant anti-refugee demonstrations. Interviewees declared that they felt proud of being “Milanesi” and described that mobilization as an expression of the “real Milan”—though this essential nature was actually attributed to different elements according to the various interviewees, from the Catholic culture, to the tradition of civic engagement, to cosmopolitanism.

In contrast, the communication strategy of the Municipality of Turin was explicitly aimed at limiting outward communication and relations with local media according to a strategy that we can

---

<sup>8</sup> The local municipality asked the central government for 2.5 million euros. However, the needed resources should have been much more than that: a similar intervention implemented on a squatted building with around 350 people some years earlier cost more than 12 million euros, according to the estimations of the key informants.

<sup>9</sup> Jasanoff [2004] used the term co-production to describe the joint generation of knowledge by science and politics.

define as “*non-communication*”. Furthermore, the Municipality had no control over the communication delivered by other local actors. It is worth underscoring that non-communication can be viewed as a communication strategy, just as non-policies are regarded as policies able to produce significant consequences. In fact, local governments do not move in a communication vacuum: as we will see in the section on local journalism and newsrooms (Section 7), the local media generally opt for official sources including public authorities’ declarations and press releases; when those are missing, they use other sources, such as protest groups and bystanders, etc. Therefore, the lack of communication by the local government left the door open to other narratives which were often distant from and contradictory to those of local authorities.

### **6.3. The cohesion of the issue networks**

In this section, we describe the composition and internal dynamics of the two issue networks, leaving aside the media component to which the Section 7 is devoted.

#### ***6.3.1. Milan: from grassroots activism to the local administration’s centralism***

In Milan, the issue network took shape through two different processes, one bottom-up and the other top-down, though the distinction is not always neat. On a general basis, we can say that the organizations involved in the management of the hub, especially when it was located at the Central Station, got involved mainly through a bottom-up process<sup>10</sup> whereas the organizations in charge of first-shelter accommodation got in through a top-down process. These two components operated somewhat separately with the exception of the Progetto Arca Foundation which, besides being the organization which managed the largest number of accommodation centres for transit refugees, has been the hub manager since June 2015.

As for the bottom-up processes, some civil society actors, such as the international NGO Save the Children, or the voluntary group SOS Syria, started operating spontaneously in the Central Station and, because of that, they ended up getting involved in the issue network<sup>11</sup>. Other associations joined later, on a voluntary basis, providing medicine, food, child care, etc. and even accommodation such as Sant’Egidio which provided beds at the Shoa Memorial located close to Platform 21 of the Central Station. In contrast, the top-down process was stimulated by the local government which asked some local organizations (Progetto Arca, Farsi Prossimo, City Angels and GEPSA<sup>12</sup>) to manage the accommodation centres for transit refugees established through funding provided by the Ministry of the Interior via the local Prefecture.

---

<sup>10</sup> The organizations which have contributed to the hub’s activities are the following: Save the Children, Terre des hommes, SOS Syria, Cambio Passo, Insieme si può fare, l’Albero della vita, Caritas Ambrosiana, AVSI, OSF, Casa della carità, Medici volontari, Red Cross, Banco Alimentare, Humana, Remar, Exodus, Fratelli di San Francesco d’Assisi, Informatici senza frontiere, ACP, Arcobaleno, Naga, Comunità Sant’Egidio, CMF.

<sup>11</sup> In the case of SOS Syria, the genesis is somewhat ambiguous since the founder, Susy Iovenio, and the initial volunteers were supporters or members of the Democratic Party, the same party of Deputy Mayor Majorino, who extensively backed the group and maintained direct contacts with the volunteers.

<sup>12</sup> Actually, GEPSA managed the Corelli detention centre for irregular migrants who were to be deported. When the centre was transformed into an accommodation structure for transit refugees—and then also for asylum-seekers—GEPSA continued to manage the centre since it had won the initial public bidding.

Because of the above-mentioned “bed and soup” approach, the civil society organizations involved in the issue network include few organizations with specific expertise on migration and asylum. The main ones were Save the Children which had been active at the hub since the very beginning providing child care and legal counseling, especially for families and minors, and the social cooperative Farsi Prossimo which had been in charge, again from the very beginning, of running some accommodation centres.

As a result of the scarce expertise on migration within the issue network, the majority of its members interviewed during the research had no specific views on the phenomenon of transit refugees, nor proposals on the best way to deal with it. They might disagree upon precise and practical aspects but not on the visions and ideas that might potentially challenge those of the local administration. The only exceptions identified during the fieldwork were indeed Save the Children and Farsi Prossimo which, without criticizing the Municipality, somehow challenged the “soup and bed” approach: Save the Children highlighted the need, especially in the first period, to better tailor the intervention towards families, pregnant women, children and non-accompanied minors; Farsi Prossimo underlined the opportunity to ameliorate the screening and orienting activities at the hub, and to improve the quality of accommodation-enhancing services such as legal counseling and psychological support.

This lack of expertise on migration within the issue network seems to have limited the development of competing narratives. We can therefore affirm that *the development of competing narratives depends* not only on the set of interests and views of the issue network’s members but *also on their knowledge and expertise on the specific issue*.

That said, the cognitive cohesion of the issue network in Milan was supported by practical coordination provided through organizational devices. From October 2013, when the Municipality signed the convention with the Prefecture and money for the accommodation of transit refugees was made available, the organizations responsible for the accommodation met together with the local administration on a regular basis at the municipal Service for Immigration Policies to share action plans. The organizations which had been active at the hub were initially informally coordinated by the same Service<sup>13</sup>. The coordination made a significant step forward with the relocation of the hub to the closed space in via Mortirolo in mid-June 2015, where hub organizations started gathering more frequently, the roles of each organization were defined on a clearer basis, and access to the hub was restricted to authorized people (a restriction that was impossible to implement when the hub was located in an open public place like a railway station). This *operational coordination by the local administration clearly mattered in fostering the convergence of narratives by issue network members*.

The hub’s relocation to a closed space also impacted relations with the local media, as is better explained in Section 7: at the Central Station journalists could easily get in touch with any volunteer or social worker engaged in support to transit refugees; in the closed hub where one needed

---

<sup>13</sup> In this regard, it is worth noting that the volunteers of SOS Syria were almost immediately asked to enrol in the municipal register for volunteers, they were provided with specific bibs in order to be recognizable and were organized in shifts by the local administration.



authorization to get in, this was no longer possible. Therefore, the *physical location matters in terms of relations with journalists*.

### **6.3.2. Turin: between weak cooperation and strong conflicts**

In Turin the situation is rather different since the local issue network was far from being cohesive. We can distinguish three main blocs—themselves divided by internal conflicts:

- i) the local administration articulated into the different Municipal Departments and District 9, where MOI buildings are located;
- ii) migrants occupying the buildings and the organizations which provided logistic and political support to the occupation (the Refugee and Migrant Movement connected to the radical trade union USB and the extreme-left organizations Gabrio and Askatasuna were the main ones, while others such as ASGI, the Franz Fanon Association, Psicologi nel mondo, Mamre Association, Doctors Without Borders, and GRIS provided support on specific issues);
- iii) the local Curia and related organizations.

The first difference from Milan concerns the *expertise on migration and the relevance of migration for the organizations' missions*. The Migrant and Refugee Movement has an advocacy mission in favour of migrants and refugees; Askatasuna and Gabrio, which are inspired respectively to the anarchist and communist ideologies, frame migration within their contestation of the social and racial inequalities the institutional order produces; the local Curia frames solidarity towards poor and vulnerable people, with whom migrants and refugees are identified, as a priority, consistent with the narrative started by Pope Francis and to some extent anticipated by the local Bishop Nosiglia; the local administration is mainly concerned with gaining (or not losing) consensus which is particularly at stake when dealing with hot issues such as migration and asylum; the other civil society organizations have more pragmatic attitudes and specific aims, usually limited to certain areas of intervention (eg. health, legal counseling, etc.). Overall, *since migration is a significant issue for the mission of several issue network members, they hold a certain degree of expertise in this regard and rather specific perspectives and narratives on the issues at stake not easy to reconcile*.

Second, different from Milan, cooperation was poor since it was hampered not only by the above-mentioned different perspectives but also by *internal fragmentation—not to say conflicts—of the single components of the issue network*, particularly the Municipality and the organizations supporting the occupation.

As for the occupation-supporting organizations, the initial cooperation between the extreme-left organizations and the Refugee and Migrant Movement soon broke down with reciprocal accusations of not sticking to the agreements on the internal management of the occupation and on negotiations with the other actors, especially with the local administrator.

As for the Municipality, relations between the Deputy Mayors engaged in the issue of the MOI occupation were rather conflictual and, as some interviews underscore, “each of them tried to discharge the hot issue onto someone else’s shoulders”. This internal conflict and the lack of a shared position probably contributed to preventing the establishment of formal platforms or working groups involving other local actors to deal with the occupation. Interviewed civil society

organizations, including the Solidarity Committee, have declared that they had contact and talks with the city administration on issues related to the MOI occupation but on a very sporadic and informal basis.

The peak of interaction within the issue network was reached in Summer–Autumn 2013 on the question of municipal residency, but agreement was reached after conflicts within and between members of the issue network. The occupation supporters pushed the Municipality to provide city residency since it was needed in order to access welfare services and to renew the residence permit and sign work contracts. The local administration saw in occupying migrants' enrollment in the civil registers an opportunity to carry out a sort of census and get a better idea about the people squatting in the MOI buildings. However, the positions of local actors took time to converge. The Municipality first offered a “collective residence” given to groups of 15–20 individuals under the responsibility of a person already resident in the city but this proposal was rejected by occupation supporters. Given the difficulty of reaching an agreement, the Social Policies Deputy Mayor was keen to grant occupying migrants an “artificial residence”<sup>14</sup>, which already existed for homeless people, on the condition that access to social services would be precluded. However, the Deputy Mayor responsible for civil registers was against this compromise. The organizations supporting the occupation, especially ASGI and the extreme-left organizations, asked for a full enrollment in the civil registers without the escamotage of the “artificial residence”.

Beyond the discussion on technical solutions, during the negotiations the extreme-left organizations and Refugee and Migrant Movement reciprocally accused each other of not playing fairly so the Solidarity Committee broke up and the Refugee and Migrant Movement, although it kept working on the occupation, left the Committee. After two temporary occupations of the Civil Registry Office, a public demonstration in front of the Municipality and several meetings, in December 2013, everybody converged towards the “artificial residence” solution which was then granted to homeless asylum-seekers and people with international protection and humanitarian permits (the decision had to be general but the main targets were people living in MOI buildings). However, few people from MOI actually enrolled in the civil registers, only around 200, i.e., the ones whose resident permits were expiring and needed municipal residency to renew it. Therefore, the Municipality's hope of getting a clearer idea about the people living in MOI building was disappointed.

Since the municipal residence question was resolved, the situation was stalled: the Municipality continued to wait for resources from the central government and to ask for a census of people occupying the MOI buildings as a pre-condition for any kind of intervention; the occupying people kept asking for a co-planned project which would provide support for job-seeking in order to give people the means to rent proper apartments on the market while, after the struggle for the city residence, the political fight connected to the occupation weakened and left the floor to the practical management of everyday life by the (now smaller but steadier) Solidarity Committee with the support of other city civil society organizations. Neither of the two happened before the election in June 2016.

---

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 4.

### **6.3.3. The Regions and Prefectures**

Two further institutional levels require particular attention: the Region and the local Prefectures. When the two crises broke out both the Regional governments, i.e. Piedmont Region and Lombardy Region, were led by the Northern League, which has traditionally held rather anti-migrant stances, whereas the city administrations were led by centre-left coalitions. However, whereas in Milan the political clash between the Municipality and the Region—in particular between Deputy Mayor Majorino and the Region President Maroni—was harsh, with reciprocal accusations of a lack of commitment, in Piedmont the Region was silent and so was the Municipality. This divergence is consistent with the different Municipalities' attitudes towards the central government mentioned above: whereas the Municipality of Milan repeatedly accused the Ministry of the Interior of an inability to manage the inflows and its relations with EU institutions, the Municipality of Turin never blamed the central government in public arenas and negotiated with it in sheltered venues. To sum up, we can say that the Municipality of Milan maintained a high level of conflict with higher institutional levels, whereas the Municipality of Turin did the opposite and remained silent in this regard. As we will see in Section 7, *the different level of political conflict affected the media coverage of the two crises*.

Local Prefectures are local branches of the Ministry of the Interior. They played an important role in the local issue networks. They usually hold the so-called Security Roundtables which gather together the key local institutions to manage significant local issues. These Roundtables were held on the issues of transit refugees in Milan and MOI occupation in Turin. In Turin, where cooperation was scarce within the issue network, those Roundtables appeared to be more crucial than in Milan. This was particularly evident in two moments. First, right after the occupation, the Prefecture set the media frame by defining the situation in a press conference as a humanitarian issue (Section 7). Second, when the MOI buildings' owner, Prelios SGR, notified the judiciary about the occupation and asked for a clearing out in order to have its property back, the agreement to postpone the clearing out for humanitarian and security reasons was in fact signed at the Prefecture Office which mediated between the parties. As we will see in the next section, this central role of the Prefecture in Turin is evident when analysing the dynamics of media narrative production.

## **7. The functioning of local journalism**

### **7.1. How the journalists' specialization impacts local narratives**

In Italian newsrooms there are few journalists with expertise in migration, and those few who do are often freelancers. Those expert journalists in migration interpret their work as mostly concerned with the production of a form of news [Bernhurst and Nerone 2001] that Benson [2013] has described as “dramatic personalized narratives” which is closely linked with the humanitarian frame, having its origins in the advocacy-oriented and social journalism [Schudson 1978].

The freelance condition makes it strategic for these journalists' careers to focus on international stories in order to widen the basin of potential clients. As for migration, looking for assignments

from a set of European or even US news companies, expert Italian journalists are primarily engaged in covering stories of people escaping from war and famine, and of migrants and asylum-seekers temporarily trapped in certain countries due to border closure. It means that Italian events about migration are rarely covered by such expert journalists, with a partial exception for events which are undoubtedly relevant at the international level such as the arrivals of migrants and asylum-seekers through the Mediterranean Sea, the rescue operations, and deaths occurring during the sea crossing. As a result of this structural condition, ***Italian stories related to migration are often covered by journalists who lack – in part or completely – expertise in the field of migration.*** Despite this general weakness of Italian journalism in the coverage of domestic migration-related issues, ***a few exceptions do exist.*** They concern a restricted number of journalistic companies paying special attention to the migration issue and being characterized by an ***advocacy mandate.*** Among these companies there is a Catholic news title (*Avvenire*) and a journalistic agency explicitly concerned with social stories (*Redattore Sociale*). Their presence guarantees a focus on civic society and migrant communities that is often omitted or marginalised in the mainstream media. However, all of these companies are based in Rome and Milan and, due to their relatively small size, do not usually cover the rest of the Italian territory except for special events.

The situation at the local level is made worse by the fact that in Italy ***local journalism*** on migration largely relies on ***desk-production of news based on official sources*** rather than on first-hand materials, and civic society is often underrepresented. This way of collecting information is accompanied by a presentation which is uninterested in the structural forces and in the power relations implied in the events reported.

The two cases of the MOI occupation in Turin and the transit refugees in Milan, under examination here, will be now discussed by questioning whether the journalists involved in covering these stories were or were not experts on the migration issue.

### ***7.1.1. Local journalists and the MOI occupation***

The case of Turin presents a general absence of expert journalists in migration, but in covering the very beginning of the MOI occupation a particular configuration occurred. Cosimo Caridi, a journalist specialising in the coverage of migration stories whose work usually focuses on human rights, social movements and refugees' personal stories, was working in Turin for an Italian national newspaper, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, in the days when the first occupation of the MOI buildings occurred. In the years before the occupation he covered stories about people accommodated within the North Africa Emergency Programme, including some of the refugees now squatting the MOI buildings. When the ***extreme-left organizations and the refugees*** planned to occupy the buildings, they decided to inform a trustworthy journalist: at the suggestion of some refugees, they ***called Mr. Caridi, demanding that he witness the occupation.*** From the perspective of the occupants, the presence of a journalist and his camera, was a shield against possible acts of force from the police to repel the occupation. From the perspective of agenda-setting, ***this micro fact had a significant impact on the frame through which the MOI story entered the public debate.*** Due to the journalist's expertise and personal knowledge of the refugees' "careers" through the accommodation system, and due to his proximity to extreme-left and pro-refugee movements, the

story was told from the very beginning with an advocacy angle, and with a critique towards the central government for its management of the North Africa Emergency Programme. Furthermore, because of his expertise, Caridi conditioned the local media representations that other less expert journalists sent by other news companies furnished about the occupation in the first days.

These relations on the ground and the specific orientations of the people involved, account – at least in part – for *the primary definition* [Hall et al. 1978] of the MOI occupation in Turin, which was built under a humanitarian frame, in line with the local Prefecture's first definition of the event, which clearly reinforced the journalistic narrative.

Notwithstanding this primary definition of the MOI occupation, the incidence of the public order frame grew after a few days and increasingly so in the following months. This was the result of numerous factors. Among them, the *lack of expertise of local journalists involved is without any doubt a major factor accounting for the progressive weakness of the humanitarian frame* which was indeed built upon the knowledge of the historical, institutional and political events that led to the illegal occupation.

With the passing of time this context stopped being mentioned by journalists. The humanitarian frame that followed in the local news was related to poverty and it lost its connection with that side of the humanitarian frame focused on unjust government policies<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the local journalists started to describe the MOI occupation as if it were an ordinary albeit large occupation of empty buildings. It brought journalists to focus more – if not exclusively – on the possible tensions it could generate within the neighbourhood, thus opening a gate for the dominance of the threat frames.

### **7.1.2. Local journalists and the transit refugees**

Compared to Turin, Milan shows distinctive characteristics in the local journalistic field. In Milan, the above-mentioned *advocacy-oriented media companies* – namely, the Catholic news title *Avvenire*, the social news agency *Redattore Sociale* and other companies such as *Radio Popolare* – *were involved from the very beginning* with their journalists covering the case of the transit refugees in the Central Station. This indicates that special attention to the civic society was guaranteed from the very beginning, and that many of the journalists dealing with the transit refugees in Milan were experts in migration. Though none of these titles has a large audience, they still have an influence on media narratives at the local level. For instance, a journalist from the social news agency *Redattore Sociale* – Lorenzo Bagnoli – who covered the first summer of transit refugees' flows in the Central Station and who can be defined as an expert journalist on migration, collaborated with the national news title *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, where his articles were published.

Furthermore, the national news title *Repubblica* has its largest local newsrooms in Rome and Milan, with a few journalists with expertise in migration, including Zita Dazi who has covered the case throughout. She also had her journalistic training in an advocacy-oriented media company: *Radio Popolare*.

The fact that a group of 5–6 local journalists with expertise in migration, who already knew each other, had their formation as journalists in the same or in similarly oriented newsrooms and who

---

<sup>15</sup> Rodney Benson [2013: 8] defines the humanitarian frame as follows: “Immigrants are victims of unjust government policies (violations of human rights, fair legal process) or business practices; they suffer from poverty, lack of access to health care, dangers related to border crossing, etc.; or they have difficulties in adapting to their host society.”

reciprocally appreciate each other's work, explains the special journalistic situation which developed around the case of the transit refugees in Milan. *These journalists worked as a team* (first news from sources was regularly exchanged) rather than as competitors, *and this contributed to the narrative cohesion around the transit refugees in Milan*. Furthermore, the particular condition of the case covered and the setting (see below), produced an even stronger sense of reciprocal trust and complicity.

## **7.2. Journalists' perception of the relevance and meaning of the cases and of the refugee issue**

When, in the interviews, the local journalists were asked about their perception of the relevance of the cases they reported, they stressed three elements which largely influenced it:

- *The particular location within the city*. Clearly, the location seems to be of a great importance for journalists and their work. In other words, the central or peripheral collocation of the site to be covered seems to play a crucial role, together with the publicity/accessibility of the place vs. possible obstacles for public access;
- *The relevance given or not given to the facts/events by the local journalists' official sources*;
- *The relevance given or not given to the facts/events within the newsrooms* and by the direction's team in particular.

The MOI buildings are in a *peripheral neighbourhood* of the city of Turin and – all the local journalists interviewed stressed this point – this location accounts for the perception of the occupation as something less newsworthy than the buildings were in the city centre. As for *accessibility*, access to the occupied MOI buildings generally requires a sort of "authorization" from the Solidarity Committee which follows strict rules according to which decisions, including responses to media requests, are made by consensus in periodic meetings. More generally, as in every illegal occupation, the atmosphere is not always welcoming, especially for journalists, so it takes time to gain the trust of the refugees living there. These *difficulties in accessing the occupied buildings and people living there strengthened the journalists' perception of the unnewsworthiness of the MOI occupation*, limited their attempts to tell the story from an advocacy perspective and increased their suspicions towards the occupation and even their willingness to rely on anti-occupation local groups as reliable source.

Something quite different happened in Milan. The *Central Station* of a tourist city is a key place and a symbol of the city, and in times of international events such as the Expo, it represents the golden gateway for the worldwide image of the city. All these elements were well known by the local journalists interviewed in Milan who argued that *a news event which happens in such a symbolic place deserves special attention* and intensive work for journalism. Furthermore, the fact that the place is public and accessible, with neither a need for intermediaries nor complications of any sorts, allowed a group of journalists to work in the way social journalism is intended by its practitioners, i.e. through an immersion into the place where the facts happen and with an advocacy-oriented way of presenting the news. Here, journalists also sometimes helped the volunteers in their everyday work for refugees; some of them had friends or relatives working with

the volunteers. This situation strengthened the complicity and trust relations between journalists covering the issue on a daily basis.

The journalists emphasize that when the Central Station was cleared out and refugees were moved to the closed hub in via Mortirolo they lost narrative control. In many cases, they were banned from entering the hub, so that phone calls with information sources such as volunteers, and press releases from managers, the Prefecture and politicians became the only information allowing them to tell the story. This shift in the access conditions produced a shift in journalistic practices and in the way journalists articulated narratives over transit refugees in Milan, with political discussions now taking the foreground. This change did not affect the framing process, but the practical journalistic difficulty which followed – a difficulty in telling the story from several angles and using diverse forms – generated *a sense of fatigue in the newsrooms* which, after the Universal Exposition, started to see the transit refugees' case as something the public was bored to read about.

The *relevance given or not given to the facts/events by the local journalists' official sources* also marks a great distinction between the two cases. From a journalistic perspective, the *news management* of local politicians in Milan and the silence of the local administration in Turin contributed greatly to the perception of worthiness and unworthiness of the two cases. That of *Milan* is an exemplary case of *collaboration between local officials and journalists*. All journalists interviewed reported intense and transparent relations with official sources, especially with the Deputy Mayor for Social Policies, Majorino, who did a great communicative job, becoming the node of the network. The availability of the official source of information – in the hot season journalists called him on his private number every day – and the high number of press releases influenced the perception the local journalists developed about the relevance of the case. Notwithstanding the critical distance most of them tried to establish, it was true information management, in the sense that *the frames adopted to narrate the story were always primarily produced by the local government*, and the consensus over them was quite large.

What happened in *Turin* is just the opposite. The local journalists in Turin complained in the interviews about the absence of communication from the local government. They interpreted the silence as an absence of political strategy. This *silence led them to downplay the newsworthiness of the MOI occupation*.

As for the *relevance given or not given to the facts/events within the newsrooms* this is in large part a consequence of the previous points. The case of Milan is a typical case in which the journalists involved in the coverage have had great freedom and been encouraged to produce a high number of articles. The changes of the narrative perspective – which a typical newsroom needs for stories with long coverage over time – were guaranteed by the embeddedness the journalists who could therefore benefit from the centrality and accessibility of the field and the co-presence in the same place of all the actors involved, from the refugees themselves, to the volunteers, from members of the organized civil society to members of the local government. Furthermore, the fact that the story had its breaks in the cold seasons and its peaks in the hot seasons produced "natural waves" in news and made *the case of transit refugees in Milan a perfect story from the newsroom's perspective*, where news editors are worried about possible repetition and the risk of boring the readers. Only after the Central Station was cleared out and refugees were moved to the closed hub in via Mortirolo, as mentioned above, and with the end of the Universal Exposition in

Milan, did the newsrooms start to communicate a feeling of fatigue to the journalists involved in the coverage.

*In Turin*, the interviews conducted with local journalists show that no one in the management office of the newsrooms ever decided to engage with this story, making it relevant and assigning some journalists to cover it extensively. Nor were the few expert journalists working in Turin for these national titles involved in the coverage. The local newsrooms in Turin generically involved an entire section of the newsroom in the coverage of the MOI story with a consequent high turnover of the journalists, so *none of the journalists acquired a complete view of the situation* and of the context which generated the occupation. This is also a result of the weakness in communication exchanges among the actors forming the issue network and a lack of news management by the local government.

## **8. Policy recommendations**

The evolution of the two cases and especially the media narratives about them were extremely different. Below we sum up the main elements which have impacted media narratives in the two cities with the aim of providing some policy recommendations.

*Level of politicization.* The media appear to be generally attracted to political clashes. Transit refugees at the Central Station became an opportunity for political clashes of the Municipality with the Region and the Ministry of the Interior. The local administration of Turin decided to keep a low profile and avoid any kind of political and institutional conflicts, at least in public venues. *The level of political conflict is thus a crucial variable in determining media attention.*

*Issue network's cohesion.* Cooperation between the actors of the issue network tends to reinforce its ability to affect the local media's narratives. In Milan, the two main Deputy Mayors involved, i.e. those responsible for Social Policy and Public Security, got along well without tensions and, outside the local administration, a relevant part of the issue network was tightly coordinated by the Social Policy Department. In Turin, conflicts among Deputy Mayors were frequent and coordination of the local actors was weak, not to say absent. Therefore, we can affirm that *cohesion of the issue network among local actors has a positive impact on media narratives.*

*The local authorities' communication strategies.* The Municipality of Milan and, specifically, the Social Policy Deputy Mayor Majorino, developed daily relations with local media which led to a sort of "co-production" of narratives by policymakers and the media. Furthermore, he fully centralized the relationship with the media: the civil society organizations which worked with the local administration did not talk with journalists without passing through the municipal press office. This enhanced the influence of the local administration on the local media. In contrast, the local administration of Turin refrained from any contact with the media and adopted a no-communication strategy. With the lack of official communication, the local media in Turin ended up relying on anti-occupation groups, though they were small and marginal, or police reports, and the local administration's view remained marginal. We can thus conclude that *non-communication could be a very risky strategy since it leaves the floor to different and opposite narratives.*



*Accessibility of information sources* can be articulated as follows:

- *Event setting.* The Central Station is a key hub of Milan, highly visible and accessible: it attracted the media's attention and, at the same time, allowed journalists to easily access the scene and information sources. In contrast, the MOI buildings are on the edge of the Lingotto neighbourhood, alongside the railways, and were initially sheltered by barriers which hampered sight. Furthermore, things happen mainly "inside" the buildings where access is not easy and requires the "authorization" of the inhabitants through the Solidarity Committee. We can therefore say that the *permeability of the setting impacts the amount of news generated.*
- *Internal organization of information sources.* Beyond the different strategies of local administrators mentioned above, local civil society organization settings and attitudes towards the media impact news flows. For instance, SOS Syria in Milan was extremely accessible since it was a spontaneous organization with no hierarchy, specific communication rules or press office. By contrast, the Solidarity Committee at MOI follows strict rules with periodic meetings where decisions, including responses to media requests, are made by consensus. Hence, *permeability of the issue network organizations affects the level of media coverage.*

*Expertise on a specific issue.* This expertise may concern:

- *Journalists.* In Milan, all the local journalists involved in the coverage of transit refugees from the very beginning had journalistic training in social journalism and they all shared good knowledge of the migration issue. This fact, along with the common knowledge and trust they had of one another contributed to shaping the coverage as a collaborative and advocacy-oriented work. In Turin, apart from the first days which were characterized by the presence of an expert journalist invited by the occupants themselves, both expertise in migration and an advocacy orientation were missing from the local journalists involved. This leads to the assertion that *the involvement of journalists who are experts in migration conditions the coverage of issues concerning refugees by producing a more advocacy-oriented storytelling.*
- *Issue network organizations.* In Milan, few organizations in the issue network had enough expertise on migration to elaborate alternative views on the management of the transit refugees. In contrast, in Turin, several subjects held expertise in this field and migration was a relevant – and thus not very negotiable – issue for their mission, so alternative and poorly reconcilable visions developed. Hence, *in the lack of shared frames and missions, expertise does not improve and, on the contrary, undermines the cohesion of the networks.*

A last element which impacted the media narratives in the two cities is the variability of available sources. In Milan, this variability was guaranteed by the number of local actors involved in the event's management and by accessibility to the refugees themselves. Moreover, the fact that the number of refugees decreased significantly in the cold season produced a halt in the coverage of transit refugees in the city, avoiding the journalistic perception of fatigue and making its return in the hot season a newsworthy event. By contrast, in Turin, the very few actors available as information sources and the difficulties local journalists experienced in directly accessing the

refugees and their voices led to a sense of unnewsworthiness, in very practical terms. This, translated into journalistic terms, means that *the opportunity to cover an event from different angles and to produce an acceptable number of different “forms of news” (personalized dramatic stories, political stories, economical stories, hero stories etc.) greatly affect the level of media coverage.*

To sum up, our initial hypothesis, i.e. that the cohesion of the issue network impacts its ability to affect the local media narratives, is confirmed. This general statement has however been refined through the empirical investigation of the case studies of the MOI occupation in Turin and transit refugees in Milan, and other important variables have turned out to be as important. Some of them, such as the event’s setting or the internal organization and the expertise of local actors and local newsrooms, are beyond the local administration’s control. Others, such as active news management, can be intentionally pursued by local administrations and appear to be effective in making the political and media narratives converge, whereas “institutional silence” cedes the floor to multiple, potentially contrasting narratives. Clearly, the closer and easier the relations are between local actors and the journalists, the more the respective narratives tend to converge.

## Cited works

- Barnhurst, K.G, Nerone, J. [2001]. *The form of news: A history*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Bennett, S., ter Wal, J., Lipinski, A., Fabiszak, M., & Krzyzanowski, M. [2011]. *Mediva thematic report 2011/02: Media Content*. [www.eui.eu/Projects/MEDIVA/Reports.aspx](http://www.eui.eu/Projects/MEDIVA/Reports.aspx)
- Benson, R. [2013]. *Shaping immigration news. A French-American comparison*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Caponio, T. [2014]. *Integration Policies for Immigrants of the City of Milan, Italy*, KING In-depth Study n.10/October 2014, [http://king.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/Caponio\\_InDepthStudy10.pdf](http://king.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/Caponio_InDepthStudy10.pdf)
- Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., & Clarke, N. [1978]. *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state and law and order*. London: Macmillan.
- Hecló. H. [1978]. 'Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment'. In A. King (Ed.), *The New American Political System*. Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 115-124.
- Hogwood, B. [1987]. *The Tangled Web: Networks and the Territorial Dimensions of Industrial Policy*, paper for PSA Conference, Aberdeen.
- Jasanoff, S. [2004]. *States of Knowledge; the co-production of science and social order*, New York: Routledge.
- Jordan, A.G., [1990], 'Sub-governments, Policy Communities and Networks. Refilling the Old Bottles?', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 2 (3), 319-338.
- Marsh, D. & Rhodes, R. A.W. [Eds.] [1992]. 'Policy Communities and Issue Networks. Beyond Typology'. In D. Marsh & R. A. W. Rhodes (Eds.), *Policy networks in British government*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pastore, F., & I. Ponzó (eds.). [2016]. *Changing Neighbourhoods: Inter-group Relations and Migrant Integration in European Cities*. IMISCOE Research. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Pogliano, A. [2012]. 'Media locali e migrazioni: Raccontare i quartieri'. In F. Pastore & I. Ponzó (Eds.), *Concordia discors. Convivenza e conflitto nei quartieri di immigrazione*. Carocci: Rome, 257-289.
- Olagnero, M. & I. Ponzó [2010]- *Mix abitativo e mix sociale. Una "soluzione" difficile*, paper presented at EXPANET Conference, Naples, 29<sup>th</sup> September-1<sup>st</sup> October 2010, available on [http://www.espanet-italia.net/conferenza2010/programma/edocs/2B/2B\\_Olagnero-Ponzo.pdf](http://www.espanet-italia.net/conferenza2010/programma/edocs/2B/2B_Olagnero-Ponzo.pdf).
- Radaelli, Claudio M. [2002]. 'The Italian State and the Euro'. In K. Dyson (Ed.), *The European State and the Euro*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 212-37.
- Rhodes, R. A. W. [1990]. 'Policy networks: A British perspective'. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 2, 293-317.
- Richardson, J.J. & A.G., Jordan. [1979]. *Governing under pressure*, Oxford: Martin Robertson.

Schmidt, V.A. & C.M. Radaelli. [2004]. 'Policy Change and Discourse in Europe: Conceptual and Methodological Issues', *West European Politics*, 27 (2), 183–210.

Schudson, M. [1978]. *Discovering the news*. New York: Basic Books.

Ter Wal, J. (Ed.). [2002]. *Racism and cultural diversity in the mass media. An overview of research and examples of good practice in the EU Member States, 1995–2000* . Vienna: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. Available at: <http://www.eumc.eu.int/>