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Sussex Centre for Migration Research

Local Identities, Identification and Incorporation of Albanian Immigrants in Florence

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Zana Vathi

Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex

E-mail: Z.Vathi@sussex.ac.uk

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University of Sussex
Sussex Centre for Migration Research

Abstract

In this paper, the concepts of city as context, locality and incorporation are applied to the case of Albanian immigrants in Florence. To date, most research on the incorporation of immigrants and its relationship to space is based on the city or the inter-relations between the nation-state and city as contexts where incorporation takes place. The findings of my study show that the relationship between locality and the incorporation of immigrants is multi-dimensional. Firstly, although findings support the role of the urban ethos in immigrants' incorporation, the city is not a homogeneous entity and should not be equated with locality where immigrants' incorporation is concerned. The importance of locality within the city is highlighted by the role played by the qualities of space and aesthetics in immigrants' incorporation and identification. Also, more attention should be paid to intergenerational perceptions of space, as my data show that different generations have different 'cognitive geographies' and varying perceptions of space and appreciations of cosmopolitanism, seen here in relation to locality. These aspects should be seen in relation to the historical, structural and cultural particularities of the city as a key context of incorporation, without ignoring the national-level politics of immigration and integration.

Introduction

In the study of the incorporation of immigrants into host societies, the focus is moving from the nation-state to the city, partly in order to counter methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). The danger, however, is that cities are seen as homogeneous entities, either as spaces for incorporation or in terms of their structural components (such as the labour market, Goodwin-White 2009). Other scholars (for example Koopmans 2004) link *locality* with the national context of integration and maintain that the local incorporation of immigrants is highly dependent on national agendas and policies regarding citizenship and integration. This is primarily a literature focusing on structural integration and little attention is paid to other aspects, such as culture, that might affect the incorporation of immigrants.

In this paper, the incorporation patterns of Albanian immigrants in Florence are discussed in relation to the city as a key context of immigrants' incorporation, including the specific characteristics of locality and urban space. The paper responds to previous research that has highlighted the lack of research in this area, pointing to the fact that most studies on immigrant incorporation are focused on global cities. The paper also adds to the

literature on Albanian migration. Like many other recent migrations and perhaps because of its illegal nature (King 2003), Albanian migration has not been studied in depth in terms of identity and social and cultural integration. The focus has mostly been on the migration process, issues of regularisation and integration in the labour market. This is also the case with studies of Albanians in Italy in general (see for example King and Mai 2008; and Kotic and Tryandafillidou 2003 for a study of Albanians in Florence).

The paper is structured in five sections. In the following section, the concepts of city as a context, locality and incorporation are discussed theoretically. This section is followed by an introduction to Florence and its historical, structural and cultural characteristics. The case study of the incorporation of Albanian immigrants in Florence starts with a note on methods and fieldwork and contains two empirical sub-sections. The impact of the city's structural characteristics on immigrants' incorporation comes first, followed by a sub-section on cultural characteristics and immigrants' identification and incorporation, although a clear-cut division between the structural and the cultural dimensions of incorporation is, of course, impossible. The findings are discussed in light of theoretical assumptions on city, locality and space and show that the

relationship between locality and the incorporation of immigrants is multi-dimensional. There are significant differences between localities within the city and between generations of immigrants in the way they perceive their identities and incorporation. The findings also call for an analysis of cosmopolitanism in relation to locality, apart from the focus on the nation-state and its transformation under the effect of cosmopolitan dynamics. These aspects should be seen in relation to the historical, structural and cultural particularities of the city as a context of incorporation, without ignoring the national-level politics of immigration and integration.

City, Locality and Incorporation: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

Cities are becoming more and more prominent in the literature on the incorporation of immigrants. In fact, as White (1999) maintains, cities are largely a product of migration, but it has been only recently they are analysed as distinct contexts of incorporation. This is related to an assumption that has for a long time ruled migration studies, that nation-states are homogeneous entities (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009: 183). As a result, data taken from research in cities have been considered as representing the situation in the whole nation-state, although paradoxically most of this research has been conducted in 'gateway' cities – a category created to refer to particular cities which usually attract a large number of immigrants, and which may be different in this and other respects from other major cities in the same country.

Cities, however, are increasingly appearing as a main unit of analysis due to several characteristics that influence the incorporation of migrants, operating at different levels. Such factors include the history of immigration and characteristics of immigrants, the structure of cities, the city's labour markets and the set of values that characterises city's life, including the ideology towards immigrants (Brettell 2000; White 1999). When urban ethnography

started to develop, Brettell (2000) notes, anthropologists found that social relationships in cities were characterised by different patterns from those of small self-reliant communities, so concepts such as social networks, quasi-groups, ethnicity and fluidity of interactions started to develop. Furthermore, the existence of historical minorities can have implications for the settlement of newly-arrived immigrants. Other important influences include the degree of residential segregation in interaction with the size of the city, the existence of certain areas of urban economy, such as under-served markets, low economies of scale and the market in ethnic goods and services, and the city's ethos developed out of its particular history. White (1999: 155) on the other hand maintains that minority settlement in European cities is extremely diverse, which is one of the main differences of Europe compared to other continents of immigration, especially the US.

Related to this shift in the unit of analysis from the nation-state to the city is also the development of concepts of locality and scale. Glick Schiller *et al.* (2006) note that this development came about as a result of a developing scholarship on the city as a context. This started with describing the settlement of immigrants in particular cities, noting the role of the size and political configuration of cities, the differences between rural contexts with suburban and non-gateway cities, the political economy of the sending cities and how it extends through transnational space. They, however, note that the impact of the position of the city within hierarchies of power on the settlement of immigrants has been overlooked. Pointing to the different context of neoliberal global capitalism in which cities nowadays operate, they propose the concept of scale, which they define as '... the summary assessment of cities determined by the flow and control of capital and structures of power as they are constituted within regions, states, and the globe' (Glick Schiller *et al.* 2006: 615).

A theory of locality is seen as especially important, since a categorisation of cities according to scale would allow for cities of different scales to be considered as units of analysis and thus complement research based to date mainly on global cities. This would also enable the development of comparative research which would furthermore enrich our understanding of structural issues of immigrants' incorporation (Favell 2001; White 1999). Moreover, more emphasis should be put on the role of migrants in the restructuring and rescaling of the cities, so a theory of locality should be based on a comparative perspective of migrant incorporation, by simultaneously paying attention to the role of place, global restructuring processes and migration. In turn, this shift would also make possible a more detailed study of locally-specific dimensions of opportunity structures, seen now in relation to urban restructuring, which would contribute to the development of a better urban policy (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009: 178-179).

However, the modern scalar perspective has been criticised for the exclusive and hierarchical way of representing the relationship between various units of space, such as cities and states. This is even more problematic when cosmopolitanism is included in the discussion of scale, which acts in itself as an apparatus of capture and shows cosmopolitanism as an upper stage of scalar relations. Moreover, the scalar approach ends up reducing the multiple loyalties, belonging and patriotism into singular and controlled ones, and fails to 'capture' the affective belongings, identification and attachments of different groups of citizens (Isin 2007: 224). On the other hand, different authors are talking about space at a more micro-level, yet associated with a strong sense of liminality. Liminality here differs from the original definition developed by Victor Turner, which refers to a kind of rite of passage that migrants experience either as a pre-stage to assimilation into the mainstream host-society, or, from the point of view of the sojourner, as the pre-stage before return to

the home country with a better status and economic position, or even a marginal state of feeling trapped 'betwixt and between' (cited in Jones-Correra 1998: 191). For Fanetti (2005: 418) liminality describes the multicultural experiences and the construction of hybrid identities of immigrants in North America – a state of being familiar with many cultures, but of none, and being unbounded to any (cultural) signifiers.

Both the above-mentioned studies define liminality by referring to the immigration experience as a whole. Other research, however, refers to micro-cultures of space that reflect a different state of affairs of understanding and negotiating difference. Amin (2002: 14) describes these as 'micro-publics of banal transgression' and advocates for them to be taken in consideration when urban policies of cohesion are designed. He describes the role of secondary schools in British cities, usually located in residential areas, as '...a critical liminal or threshold space between the habituation of home, school and neighbourhood on the one hand, and that of work, family, class and cultural group, on the other hand' and represents them as sites of social inclusion with a great potential for change in terms of racism and ethnic diversity. Similarly, Anderson (2004: 28) describes what he calls 'cosmopolitan canopies': certain places and settings that allow '... people, whose reference point often remains their own social class or ethnic group, a chance to encounter others and so work toward a more cosmopolitan appreciation of difference'. Referring to public spaces in Philadelphia, he cites the Reading Terminal, Rittenhouse Square, Thirtieth Street Station, the Whole Foods Market, and various sporting events. These spaces, according to Anderson (2004: 28-29), have the potential to encourage everyday common civility, as increasingly these places get embedded in the local culture and the 'folk ethnography' that takes place between people of various backgrounds encourages new social patterns and norms of tolerance in the population of the city. This in turn allows

denizens to construct their public behaviour, which is now more comprehensive due to the social sophistication that results from these encounters.

Nevertheless the incorporation of immigrants and its relationship to space is much discussed based on the city, or the inter-relationships between nation-state and city as contexts where incorporation takes place (Dikeç 2002; Koopmans 2004). On the other hand, the literature that focuses on the processes of immigrants' insertion in the host society is vast and has produced a variety of terms to describe the process, with 'incorporation' being one of the least politically inflected (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009). Structural approaches dominate the studies of immigrants' incorporation and research revolves around ethnicity, policy agendas and immigrant groups' characteristics. Cadge *et al.* (2009: 3) attempted to bring culture into the study of the city as a context, noting that the economic characteristics of localities have been given far more importance than their cultural resources. They found that the way incorporation is conceptualised and advocated by officials and stakeholders in the city is related to the variations in how cities create and deploy their 'culture armature'. They, however, did not study this role of the city from the perspective of the immigrants.

Turning now to the specific Italian context, research on immigration and incorporation in Italian cities is growing. Many studies have pointed to a difficult shift in which Italy has become a receiving country of immigrants after many decades of emigration, and a difficult start for multicultural agendas and the actual incorporation of immigrants (Foot 1999; Foot 2001; King and Mai 2008; 2009). Urban issues and the importance of locality have also been highlighted. For example, Cristaldi (2002) researched immigration in Rome and showed that there is a close relationship between localisation and access to services, job opportunities, linguistic integration and education. On a broader scale, King and Mai (2008)

developed a comparative analysis of the incorporation of Albanian migrants in three cities, Rome, Modena and Lecce. At a more micro-scale, an excellent portrayal of urban public space and immigration is that of Dines (2002). Focusing on Piazza Garibaldi in Naples, he notes that this public space in the historic part of the city has shown an opening to diversity that has increasingly characterised the urban experience in Naples since the beginning of the 1990s. More importantly, Piazza Garibaldi has also 'hosted' immigrants' action with regard to their legal problems, and has in this way experienced immigrants' claim to having a right to the city. Amongst the distinct features of immigration into Italy, however, are both the significant regional and provincial diversity of the immigrant experience and the diversity of migratory types and nationalities which have entered Italy (King and Andall 1999). In the following sections, I describe Florence and its history and particularity as a city, and analyse the identification and incorporation of Albanian immigrants there.

Florence: Background as a City and Context of Incorporation

Florence is one of the most prominent Italian cities and a major centre of international culture. Its history and identity are related to its medieval and Renaissance treasures, which make Florence one of Italy's prime artistic and commercial centres, and also a very popular tourist attraction. Perhaps as a result, conceptualising Florence and its ideology as a city and as a living context over thousands of years is not easy. On the other hand, although its history has not followed a clear-cut chronological development, Florence is associated with, and has played an important role in, the political, cultural and economic life of Italy (King 1987; White 2000).

Florence was at the centre of the nation-building process by becoming the capital of Italy in 1865, four years after its unification (King 1987). White (2000: 38) refers to the Poggi Project that took place in Florence in 1865 and its focus on the 'amplification,

reduction and widening' of streets and spaces as a bespoke enterprise of a nation-state building ideology. Florence has also been at the centre of economic developments in Italy. Both Lombardy and Tuscany were important centres of silk and wool while textiles had been for centuries one of the most important industrial sectors of the Italian economy. More importantly, textiles were one of the most important sectors on the basis of cultural wealth of Florence, Lucca and Venice and the sector where the first industrial revolution in Italy took place (King 1987: 97). The city is also known as an old urban centre, and its urban tradition, redolent of the age of Dante, has marked the historiography of the Italian city in a wider sense (White 2000: 40). This position is even more important considering that Italy has an urban heritage that goes back over two and a half millennia, with numerous cities and towns that consist of various urban situations, ranging from ancient to modern, from expansive and burgeoning metropolis to small or even decaying country towns (King 1987: 108). Florence stands out among other urban centres as it rose again over the ruins of a very different civilisation dating back to Roman times; but, different from Rome and other ancient cities, it represents a new urban culture with its infrastructure composed of major centres connected by road, and mostly based on commercial rather than military interests (White 2000: 2).

Such strong identities of Italian cities, however, are thought to underpin the fragmentation and regionalism within Italy, which persists in its contemporary history.

While other countries in Europe were emerging as strong nation-states, Italy's nation-building process was weakened by the prominence and the *de facto* sovereignty of several cities in northern and central Italy (King 1987). Indeed, it was not before the middle of the nineteenth century that Italy united and stopped being mostly an imagined homeland – a rather abstract concept developed by Dante and other influential intellectuals over the centuries (Paulicelli 2001: 243). Regional variation

exists in different dimensions, such as industrial and agricultural patterns, urban development, style of political activity, while the north and south division remains very sharp (King 1987). Despite the influence of Fascism, no government has managed to eradicate the strong regional identities within Italy, which make the Italians the most 'regional' among the other advanced nations in Europe. Although since 1948 the development of a more cohesive national identity is noticeable, the regional 'roots' are still very visible, 'vocalised' by regional dialects which are thought to counter the development of strong national identity since they keep alive the local or regional cultures as distinct from a national culture (Moss 2000). At the same time, divisions over religious versus secular identity persist, while there is unevenness among the strength of local identities among various regions, with some of them facing an identity crisis and others holding strongly onto their strong historical identities (Levy 1996).

It should be mentioned, however, that, although regionalism is very important for the history of modern Italy, regional government was not established in Italy before the end of the Second World War, and in some regions not before the 1970s (Levy 1996). This is because the internal divisions in Italy are thought to be the outcome of more fundamental attachments that people have towards local urban centres and the surrounding countryside, which rest at the centre of local identities (Lyttelton 1996). This attachment is considered to be an important feature of Italian culture and identity and has proved resistant to government-sponsored propaganda, civic education and the mass-media (Haddock and Bedani 2000: 278).

And this is not just an identity issue. These strong identities are seen to impact the whole welfare of the regions, as the regions that were dependant on the resources from the central government have a modest development when compared to the urban centres with a strong local identity, which have experience in thinking and working on a European scale and employ various

funding initiatives (Haddock and Bedani 2000: 284). Indeed, economically, Italy functioned since the twelfth century represented by cities such as Florence and Genoa which at the time were managing the trade of Sardinia and Sicily (Dickie 2001). These divisions, which have a strong historical basis, have aggravated in the modern history of Italy, since automatic market mechanisms have been unable to counter the historical and structural factors that are on the basis of these differences (King 1987).

Even in the context of regionalism, Florence and the region of Tuscany have a particular position. Being a strong region with an unrivalled cultural tradition, Tuscany was subject to particular economic and political reforms that transformed it into the model state of enlightened absolutism in the eighteenth century, while the Restoration¹ had been less disruptive than in the other regions. Its governing elite took care of the preservation of Tuscany's liberal attitude towards free trade and private enterprise, while the first government in 1861 further established Tuscany's special status, which outlasted the transition period by preserving its own laws and structures (Lyttelton 1996: 42). Together with Venice and Bologna in the North of Italy, it represents a successful case of a combination of balanced development with the preservation of its outstanding resources of urban and rural landscape, apart from the centrality of these centres as agents of cultural dissemination (King 1987: 110). On the other hand, its commercial profile, matched by Venice alone within Italy, has enabled Florence to survive important political changes in Europe (Haddock 2000).

Florence is also associated with national unification and the establishment of the Italian identity. Due to the major fragmentation within Italy, even by unification in 1861 there was no language

known as Italian, apart from a fourteenth-century Florentine language that was used by the great Florentine writers and known by a small elite. It was the prestige of Florence and writers such as Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio that influenced the choice of Florentine dialect as the official language of Italy. Although dialects still rule the spoken domain, the Florentine dialect, that had long before been adopted by the institutions of Rome, was established and remains today the national language, and served as a strong basis on which a sense of belonging to the nation was built (Moss 2000).

The strong local identity, however, has also represented signs of closure and exclusivity towards newcomers. White (2000) goes back to the writings of Dante and Eco to point to a dualism in the vision that Florentines held for their city. The myth of an earlier Florence was contrasted to the commercial dynamic of the urban culture, while at the heart of the dualism were the *nuova gente* – people migrating from the surrounding areas and further afield attracted by the possibilities offered by its dynamic economy. A parallel is drawn here between the historical past and the incidents between the newly-settling immigrants and the traditional city dwellers since the early 1990s. Nowadays Florence is a big tourist centre and its cultural 'market' brings high revenues to the city's economy. On the other hand the city's diversity is growing, with 10.3 percent of its population of over 364,000 people at the end of 2007 being foreigners. Florence was one of the cities that started earliest with providing services to immigrants and the region of Tuscany is known for the progressive initiatives on interculturality (Commune of Florence 2008). The discourse on immigration, however, continues from the beginning of the 1990s to refer to the possibility of a 'divided city' over the settlement of new ethnic communities within the localities of the city, suspected to be unable to 'fit in', although conflict and unrest over immigration have been recorded in other Italian cities (Foot 1999; 2001).

¹ Restoration refers to a period in the nineteenth century after the Congress of Vienna (1814–15), when the European nations were trying to restore the pre-revolutionary European political *status quo* previous to the French Revolution in 1789 (Ola 2010).

The Case Study: Incorporation and Identification of Albanians in Florence

Methods

The remainder of this paper draws on qualitative material collected during fieldwork I carried out in Tuscany in October-December 2008. Fifty-five interviews were conducted: twenty-three with teenagers, twenty with parents, eight with teachers and four with key informants. From these fifty-five interviews, sixteen were conducted with eleven teenagers, two parents, one teacher and two key informants in Prato, a small urban area in the vicinity of Florence. This serves as a 'control group' in the investigation of the city as context, locality and the impact on incorporation. In addition, a focus group with five teenagers – three girls and two boys – was organised in a secondary school in Florence.

Interviews with the first generation (parents) were in Albanian, although Italian expressions were used in most of the interviews. Interviews with teenagers were conducted in both Italian and Albanian, depending on the teenagers' preference. Interviews with first-generation immigrants took place in their workplaces, in cafés and a smaller number in my residence, whereas those with the teenagers took place mostly in schools. Other material was collected through participant observation in migrants' homes, at community events and in secondary schools. The names used are pseudonyms; when they were revealed by participants a name of the same category (i.e. 'Albanian' or 'Italian') was used.² All interviews were recorded.

Incorporation of Albanian immigrants and the impact of the city

Despite their relative recency of arrival compared to many other immigrant groups, Albanian immigrants in Florence show a high degree of incorporation, especially

² This is because of the very important role that names are found to have in the way immigrants' identities in general are perceived in receiving societies, which in turn affects their identification patterns (see for example Silberman et al. 2007).

structurally and occupationally, appearing as a 'mature' immigrant group that experiences settlement and starts to conceive itself as a minority. As King and Mai (2008) found with Albanians in Lecce and Modena, Albanians in Florence tend towards structural integration and are ambitious to enter into institutions. There is some employment mobility as well, with Albanian migrants working in trade unions as representatives for the whole immigrant population of the area,³ in NGOs working with migrants, and as cultural mediators in intercultural centres. There is also an increasing number of small businesses owned by immigrants, mainly construction firms, hotels, restaurants and shops. As most first-generation immigrants from my sample have the status of long-term residents in Italy,⁴ there is also a claim for participation and acknowledgement of their residence in Italy. This is sometimes explicitly highlighted by the parents who differentiate themselves from newly-arrived immigrants and in their intended or actual applications for Italian citizenship.

At a more general level, this sense of settlement and high level of participation in the host society is reflected in the attitude of community leaders who see 'typical' community cultural events now as unnecessary and limit their activities to *ad hoc* events, such as concerts with Albanian artists and exhibitions of Albanian culture. Albanians in Florence are also active in asserting a claim for voting rights to be granted by the Albanian government. They are also virtually transnational, showing a great interest in Albanian affairs and following them through the internet and Albanian digital broadcasting.

The incorporation of Albanian immigrants, however, appears to be affected by the particularities of Florence as a context and the perception of immigrants about its

³ Both in Florence and Prato, the representatives in the Trade Unions and in the *Questura* (where immigrants' residence permits are dealt with), are Albanian and Kosovan migrants.

⁴ Long-term residence permits issued in Florence at the end of 2007 numbered 14,684. Of these, 3,853 were issued to Albanian residents (Commune of Florence 2008).

status. Firstly, Florence is appreciated by both parents and children as a special site for their integration, due to its left-wing orientation and its reputation for being accepting towards immigrants. This contrasts with Koopmans' (2004: 467) view that 'in more inclusive political contexts, migrants play a more important role in the public debate on issues concerning them, they are much less oriented toward the politics of their homelands, and focus more strongly on issues pertaining to their integration and rights in the receiving society'. Instead, Albanian immigrants in Florence show interest both in their settlement in Italy and in maintaining ties with Albania.

ZV: What would you say about the attitude of Italian society towards foreigners?

Mondi: Referring to my experience, I haven't felt any racist discrimination. [...] Besides I can tell you this: as long as we refer to Florence, I would say the word racism doesn't exist. Florentine people expect you to be correct and coherent, but these don't have to do with racism. [...] I would say Florence is classic! There is nowhere in Italy like Florence in terms of tolerance, welcoming and all that, I would think (man, 48).

ZV: Would you choose another place as the place where you belong?

Elvis: No, no... Maybe if I went to another city, depending on how the people in another city are [towards me]... I might feel worse and as a result... might want more to return to Albania. But in this city I feel good with all the people in the city, seeing how everyone behaves (boy, 17).

The city is also seen as a special location due to its particular status in Italy arising from its economic prosperity. This is noticeable in the immigrants' narratives as they refer to it as a special location, increasing the perception of a successful migration plan. Florence is also seen as a place of great traditions and of life and professional wisdom.

My migration experience has been a real school of life. Besides, from the professional point of view, especially Florence... It's not a coincidence that I have stopped exactly in Florence. If you would see this from a practical point of view, this is an almost dead city, from the perspective of the pace of modern and especially post-modern developments. But it has an experience cultivated over a long time, so for a person who is searching and willing to learn and to know new things, there is a lot to find here. I repeat: it is not very practical; it doesn't help you very much. This is the place to learn and then go with your 'luggage' full of what these people have created, and go somewhere else (Pali, man, 48).

Because of these assets, Florence is also seen as an important city in the North of Italy; as a result, it has been a target for migration within Italy of Albanians initially settled in the South. This is the case both of the early immigrants at the beginning of the 1990s who migrated to the North soon after their arrival, and of the families who, when their children came of age, migrated to access education and better job prospects. As a famous Italian city, Florence was known in Albania during the communist era, as was the case of Italian culture in general, due to the interest in Albania in the Italian media at that time (Mai 2001).⁵

I am one of the first Albanian migrants in Italy and to be honest, I feel a bit lucky because when we arrived in Brindisi [...] the first days they found us accommodation in schools and then in tents. After a few days we heard that 120 people were going to Florence. A friend of mine luckily knew Florence, because I didn't know Italian, but he knew a little bit, he had learnt during Enver's time.⁶ 'Let's go to Florence, he

⁵ Galileo Galilei and Leonardo Da Vinci were two figures who had survived the communist censure and were famous in the Albanian education system during the communist period.

⁶ A common way to refer to the communist regime period in Albania.

told me. It's in the North, it's better, because here we are in the South, we are still in Albania!' (*laughs*) We were very much welcomed here. They had written slogans 'Welcome brother Albanians' and also in Italian 'Benvenuti nostri fratelli', in capital letters (Michelino, father, 46).

My daughter was doing very well at school so, thinking about her future, when she finished secondary school, I decided to move. Because where we were it was a small town, without any big opportunities, so since my daughter was very keen to continue her studies... she wanted to become a designer. I asked around and they told me that there are three cities where my daughter could continue this kind of studies: Milan, Rome and Florence. From the three we thought Milan was too far and also a very big city, understand? Rome the same. So we thought of coming to Florence (*smiles*) (Selim, father, 66).

The spatial characteristics of Florence thus suit the 'cognitive geography' of the first-generation Albanian immigrants, while their incorporation seems also to be affected by the specific features of the city's labour market. Florence offers a dynamic and flexible labour market and, therefore, many opportunities to the low-skilled, due to its tourist activities and the surrounding industrial enterprises. It is also cited as offering more work opportunities for women. Work in restaurants in the city centre seems to be a typical job for Albanian immigrants. Its tourist orientation, however, limits job opportunities in other sectors and the city offers few opportunities for mobility to professionals. On the whole, however, the opportunity structure is appreciated locally, both for the economic prosperity of the first generation and the potential mobility of the second generation.

ZV: What kind of jobs have you done here?

Edi: I have done all kinds of jobs, but I have mostly worked in restaurants, because Florence is mostly a tourist

city, and doesn't have a big industrial sector... factories or... I have done various jobs, two-three jobs [at the same time]... (man, 36).

Moreover, due to its cultural heritage and international reputation, Florence is also an inspiring destination for artists, especially painters. The concentration of many artists, previous students of arts and literature, also creates a transnational artistic field. Many of these artists, anonymous in the piazzas of Florence, redeem themselves in Albania and in other cities in Europe, through professional visits, exhibitions and other artistic activities. The highly-skilled parents also see Florence as a good location to raise their children, with the potential to enrich their background, due to its enormous cultural capital. In general, Florence's beauty and convenience of living make it even more difficult for the immigrant families to consider returning to Albania.

I am not doing much here, but anyway, my child here could have a better starting point. From here when he will become 20 years old he could go to Paris, London; it would be easier than if he would grow up in Durrës or any other Albanian province. This is another reason that keeps me here. This could be a good starting point for his future, although he will have to go through more difficulties in the school environment with the other Florentines (Anton, man, 38).

ZV: Where do you see your future?

Tony: The future... Until ten years ago when my daughter was not born yet, I saw my future in Albania. [...] But in the end, you stay where you have economic, health and educational security. Besides in Florence you can live beautifully... It's also this, it's also this...! (man, 41).

Since Florence is one of the most expensive places in Italy, indeed in Europe, this creates issues with housing. Housing problems in Florence were documented long before Italy and Florence became immigrant-receiving areas (King 1987:

127). Indeed, many Italian cities have experienced housing crises, which became especially evident by the end of the 1960s when the economic situation worsened. Florence was one of them, with 30,000 people demonstrating for housing reform in 1968. The situation is even more problematic for Albanian immigrants, since they experience discrimination in the housing market as immigrants and as Albanians. Long-term immigrants are increasingly buying houses in order to escape the extremely high rent, but also to avoid instances of discrimination.

ZV: Are you still renting?

Tina: Yes, still renting and we have had many difficulties in finding a house. Not only because of the price which is very high, because Florence is one of the most expensive places in the world, but also because of the problems with the owners. Once they get to know that you are foreign, Albanian in our case, they don't let it to you. We have really had problems with housing. After they give it to you, they remain very satisfied, but it's a problem until they decide. We are now thinking of buying the house that we are renting. Let's see (mother, 38).

On the positive side, there is not yet any spatial segregation of immigrants in Florence.

Many immigrants live in the centre of the city, close to the tourist employment, but some have moved to the suburbs. Interestingly, the suburbs are represented in the narratives as a 'normal' Italian neighbourhood, where an immigrant can integrate discreetly.

ZV: What's the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood where you live?

Pali: I don't have a great knowledge about the neighbourhood to be honest, but it's an Italian neighbourhood in general, and I remember when my daughter was in secondary school she had in her class a Brazilian and a French-African mate. It was only these two and her who were not Italian. So it's not very heterogeneous as a

neighbourhood. It's mostly Italian and... basically mostly Florentine (father, 48).

The lack of segregation, however, could positively affect the incorporation of the second generation. Zhou (1997) holds that assimilation into the middle class in segregated and underprivileged neighbourhoods can be hampered by the concentration there of the poor section of the population and of children with little hope for the future. The presence of these children and their low expectations, according to Zhou, puts pressure on immigrant-origin children. Therefore, the lack of segregated areas offers better prospects for incorporation and potentially counters the downward mobility of the second generation.

However, lack of Italian citizenship is an important factor that impacts perceptions of incorporation, making immigrants feel excluded from having the 'right to the city' as a political space (Dikeç 2002: 96). This points to the role of national-level agendas regarding the incorporation of immigrants. The right to the city is also diminished by the experience of discrimination. Discrimination is seen by the immigrants as a relative and personal experience and its perception differs depending on the level of interaction and the type of relationship attempted with the locals. Discrimination here also reflects a perception of different ideas of class and status among the receiving society, more based on inheritance and wealth. As a result, certain spaces in the city centre are not open to immigrants, and others are characterised by brutality and harshness towards immigrants. Places like the *Questura*⁷ and the bureaucratic rituals of the regularisation process (see also Triandafyllidou 2003) have little to do with the universal cultural values.

The Florence context and identification

According to King and Mai (2008: 207) 'the key aspect of Albanian diasporic identities

⁷ *Questura* is the Italian for 'police headquarters' – the office that handles the immigrants' applications for residence permits and in general the regularisation process.

in Italy is the co-existence of specific conditions of vulnerability with a strong drive towards assimilation'. Their and my findings show that the process of acculturation and assimilation is already evident among the first generation. Although not ethnically articulated, Albanian immigrants are very receptive towards Italian ways and tend to embrace practices from the context where they live. This is a very rational way of identifying and belonging, based on everyday life and interests. It should be mentioned that parents in my sample generally come from urban areas in Albania. In one case, one respondent referred to herself and her husband as born in Albania *per caso* (by chance) in order to express their open-mindedness and orientation towards the West, seen through Italy, even during communism. The Albanian parents said that they felt an affinity to the Italian culture and language even before migrating to Italy.⁸

ZV: Why did you decide to migrate to Italy?

Mondi: I had thought of Germany and Italy. But you know, when you speak to a German, do you know how he says to you 'come here'? 'Komm her!!!' [speaking loudly] ... It scares you!!! (*laughs*) And you know the Italian way? It's said 'Vieni qua...' like they are caressing you! Understand? It's Latin, it's light, it's easier for us to understand it and live in it, they are more tolerant... (father, 48).

ZV: Has this time living abroad changed you? If yes, how?

Tony: I know how to evaluate and appreciate things better. I can't say I learnt so much from the Italians, because as far as I can see we are similar as people, it's not the difference between the Middle East and Italy for example, I think it's the same way of

living, of thinking, that's how I see it. I haven't had difficulties getting into the Italian way of living. And I have followed the way of imitating them, not because they know more or are better, but because I live here (father, 41).

The first generation, however, still feels economically disadvantaged and after 'starting a life from zero' in Italy, they strive for the children to have a more secure start. In the quote below from Anila, immigrant identity appears as a strong identity trait, regardless of locality:

Italians are very outgoing; they have overcome that stage of being stressed about work and all that. I have managed to understand them because before I used to wonder why it is enough for these people to work two hours and for us it is not enough even eight hours? Well, because they have a house inherited from their grandparents or parents, whereas if we don't work we can't pay the rent at the end of each month! [...] Can I tell you something? In 14 years that I have been living here, I have only started this year to go to the cinema because I send my daughter. Because my husband works all day; on Sunday we are home, what to do first? We have to stay with the children, we have to do the family shopping and this and that... [...] We have beach holidays in Albania, we are limited in our expenditure on clothing, not to mention brands... we don't have any kind of entertainment (mother, 35).

The tendency towards assimilation is also affected by the particularities of the special status of Florence within Italy and the Florentine culture. This is evident in the interviewees' reference to its people in terms of their local identity and their eagerness to interact with them, singling them out as *Fiorentino proprio* (real Florentine). This is in turn reflected in the attitude of Albanian immigrants – both of the first and the second generation – to embracing distinctive local and regional identities. Some parents and children said that they relate to, and also identify with,

⁸ The celebration for the Albanian National Flag day in Florence on the 28th of November 2008 was held mostly in Italian although there were hardly any Italians among dozens of Albanian participants. The invitation was in Italian and the food served was a typical Tuscan menu.

Florence and Florentine identity and culture, seeing it as a reputable culture and a famous and distinctive location and accent in Italy. This is more broadly related to the nature of Albanian identity. As Morgan (2008: 411) maintains, there is a dual nature of belonging that characterises Albanian identity and Albanian national consciousness: the pledge of belonging versus the drive towards otherness. Broad tolerance accompanied by religious openness (Kadare 2005) are in effect based on the general ambivalence and fragility that characterise Albanian identity, caught between the demands of self and other, the nation and the world (Morgan 2008: 422). In this case the 'other' has a privileged status within the host country and a great and universally acknowledged value, which provide a positive signifier to the identity ambivalence and fragility.

I am a fan of Florentine culture... I support it a lot! They have a culture much more developed than anywhere in the world. Florentine people do not make you a friend very easily, but if they appreciate you they open their house to you. But it's normal, if they don't know you, why should they make friends with you?! They firstly get to know you well and then they become your friend and open their house to you. I am a fan of Italian culture, of the Florentine culture (Farije, mother, 43).

ZV: But are there things that you do like the Italians?

Angelo: Yes, everything. Speaking Florentine.... Speaking Florentine, and besides in the end many things are the same, there is little difference, I don't know... (boy, 17).

ZV: Where do you feel you belong the most?

Rudina: To Florence

ZV: Why don't you say Italy?

Rudina: Because in Florence... Basically it's not Italy... because Florentine people are a little bit... how do you say it? Parochial... they care for their region... they are patriots... they are so

much after their own place. If you hear a Florentine [talk] about Florence... I have this perception, maybe if you go to Livorno... And then it's true, Tuscany, Florence are very well-known in Italy (girl, 18).

This is different for the teenagers who do not live in Florence, such as the subsample I interviewed in Prato. The reference is now made to the (Italian) nation.

ZV: Where do you feel you belong the most?

Gjergji: I feel ... Let's say 51 percent I feel of my own nationality and 49 percent [I feel I belong] here. Because it's a beautiful nation here where I have integrated, but my origins are always Albanian, so I never forget this, let's say... (boy, 17).

Differently from the Albanian-origin teenagers in Thessaloniki who do not articulate their claims of belongingness and connections with Greece and the Greek culture (Vathi 2008), because of this perception of openness and acceptance and the pride they take in Florence's reputation, a hyphenated identity is also possible and indeed is naturally experienced and constructed.

ZV: You chose Florence as the place where you belong. Would you say you feel more Florentine or Italian?

Xhilda: When I go to other cities and I say to them I live in Florence ... 'Ah, Fiorentina...' I speak with a Florentine accent and they like it. 'But I have Albanian origins...' 'Ah, they say, you are Alba-Toscana... si...'. They don't call me Alba-Italian, but Alba-Toscana (girl, 18).

Florence is also appreciated for its cosmopolitan atmosphere, which creates opportunities for acquiring new skills, such as learning foreign languages, and offers an experience of the world to the immigrants. Its great reputation creates also an emotional belonging and easy sense of home. Its qualities of space and beauty intensify such feelings. Furthermore, although the cosmopolitan orientation of

the second generation means that they still find Florence too small, the city nevertheless encourages an interest in history and art and an eagerness to become more 'cultured'.

I have always worked in bars, since 2002 I have been a barman. In 1997-2002 I was a dishwasher, but I have learnt many things. I learnt English too, as there no-one spoke ... In Florence before 2001 you would speak only English; only on Saturday you could speak Italian because the Florentines go out on Saturdays (*smiles*). In Florence you hear all the languages. You can find everything here. Just go around the corner and you will find ten Albanian newspapers. And then Arabic, French and from all the countries of the world. That's why I said it, Florence is heterogeneous. There is nothing missing here! (Mondi, father, 48)

Moreover, the city seems to be a favourite destination for the independent internal migration of the second generation when they reach maturity, as it offers better prospects for their social integration. The quotes below illustrate this by also showing the differing impact of urban and rural contexts on the social integration of the second generation.

In the village where my family used to live, I didn't have friends. When we moved to a city when I was going to high school I made many friends. Also because the place was bigger, a town, and the people were more open. Then I arrived in Florence and it was even better, because there is another vision of foreigners. [...] Besides I feel Florentine, because I have lived here for three years, I like Florence because... actually, it's the city that I like best in the whole of Italy and that's why I have chosen it (Sidorela, girl, 22).

How to say this...? I like it...! We lived also in [name of a small city in South Italy]. It was OK, but as a city, I like Florence better... When I was saying, for example, when I was in France and

was saying I am going home... Florence, understand? (Aulona, girl, 22)

Other parents, however, point to the liminality of Florence as a tourist destination, which makes micro-level interaction and socialisation with the locals more difficult. The character of Florence as a tourist destination is not new. In fact, Adamson (1993) describes the same patterns in his study of Florence at the beginning of the twentieth century. It seems that this characteristic was part of the city's identity, although not the part most loved by Florentines themselves. Adamson (1993: 253) holds that the attitude of the city's elite has significantly contributed to the strengthening of localism, although this reflects a more general failure of the new Italian state to 'make Italians'. A feeling of localism was also reflected in the strong emphasis on tourism and the transformation of Florence into a 'Mecca' for foreigners, to the resentment of the ordinary inhabitants of the city. The same insight is also found in the Albanian immigrants' narratives, which relate this to their incorporation strategies.

ZV: You told me that people of Florence are distant. Why would you say that is?

Anila: Because Florence is a tourist city so people come and go, so a person that lives here for 14 years like us and in the same area sees people coming and going, staying here 15 days, but you can't really get to know people in 15 days! In our building there are five families that live there, whereas the others are people that come and stay 15 days, and we obviously don't socialise with those. [...] People here basically have developed their antibodies so that they are not affected by this [the people that come and go] (woman, 35).

Florence is also seen as 'Western', 'cold' and 'commercial', and contrasted with the values that Albanian migrants appreciated back home, in particular the communalism of life and lack of social stratification. There is, however, a contrast highlighted between

the subtle exclusion experienced in Florence and the 'southern' culture in terms of both experiences of friendship and discrimination. Cultural difference between the immigrants and the receiving society appears here as an important marker of the socialisation process and of the 'outcomes' of the incorporation process.

I have been here 15 years and I don't have the same friendships that I had in Greece, although I am the same person and behave the same way. Here people are superficial and don't go too deeply into things, neither the first day nor the last... This is the Florence I know, because it's not the same everywhere in Italy. I have friends in the South that say that they have made many friends and have created close relationships far more than us here. So basically it is relative and it depends on whom you meet (Gino, father, 37).

ZV: Who are the people who help you most in terms of employment here in Florence?

Anton: To tell you the truth, in the beginning, from 1992 till 2001, I had the opportunity to meet many Florentine families that have accepted me also into their families and they invited me to dinners and events, and in this way they have helped me in terms of my social integration. But the problem is, and it's not only the problem of the Florentine people, but that of Western people in general that is reflected here, that friendship is a little bit commercial... commercialised (father, 38).

Yet, there is a difference drawn between the historical centre or *centro storico*, and the rest of Florence. It is the historical centre where pleasant anonymity and uncontested inclusion are experienced. In the liminal space of the historical centre there is no pressure to integrate, there is a feeling of having the right to feel a citizen of the world, there is a place in the city where the burden of having immigrant status is not felt. The process of identification is also characterised by the search, on the side of

Albanian immigrants, for their own niche. This orientates them towards identification with a famous city and an indisputable cultural tradition, as they relate to its great cultural heritage and are not constantly reminded they do not belong. On the other hand, Florentine culture, as an important element in Italian culture, is seen as the reason for exclusion in other instances, spaces and levels. This is reflected also in the system of education and the attitude of the teachers who are taking some time to fully recognise diversity in the schools, in Florence and beyond.

But realistically an extra-communitarian [non-EU] child they cannot accept as inherent... not as an inherent of their culture, or a child that comes from Africa. They cannot accept him as a descendant of Micheangelo, not only because of colour, but not even a white person, they cannot accept him as a descendant of Leonardo Da Vinci, so that he ensures Italian continuity... (Pali, father, 48).

ZV: Are there discussions in class about diversity?

Teacher: Yes, there are. For example, I am personally a Euro-centric, so I think that Western culture is superior [...] So basically I don't think that all cultures are the same... as American anthropology claims. I emphasise classical culture, the terms of civilisation, city, political freedom, equality between individuals, but not in the racist sense that the others are inferior, and should work for free for us, as Hitler used to say (*smiles*). No. [...] I think that the Renaissance is the basis of global civilisation. The students are in Florence, so I try to teach them the Renaissance (*smiles*). I am sorry, but this is how I see it (male, 57).

In a moment of acknowledging their presence in the city and the prevalence of local identity, the concept of space appears here related to a claim for recognition against a strong and inflexible identity in order to make room and allow participation of the 'other' already inhabiting this space.

In the quote below, Florence is contrasted with global cities and this time its culture and its small scale are seen as a reason for closure and exclusion.

Racism: what is racism? The fear towards a stranger, it's the lack of desire to know him and what he represents. This is racism, because racists don't have horns! So basically it's the closure, because we are talking about the Florentine context, and Florence has created a great culture, but people are closed, are small... It's not that there is any big space. It's not a metropolis (Anton, father, 38)!

There is thus a duality in the perception of the city, its cosmopolitanism and its local identity: on one hand, the pride in its reputation and enjoyment of anonymity followed by a choice of identity and lack of contestation. On the other, Albanian immigrants experience a helplessness and resistance against the overwhelming status of this particular identity that exerts pressure, or even causes complacency to accept lack of social mobility and to assimilate without making claims of participation and equality.

Discussion

This paper has focused on the impact of the city's historical, structural and cultural characteristics on the incorporation of immigrants, related to concepts of locality and space. The patterns of incorporation and identification of Albanians in Florence show that the relationship between locality and incorporation of immigrants is multi-dimensional. Firstly, although the findings support the role of an urban ethos in immigrants' incorporation, the city is not a homogeneous entity and should not be equated to locality where immigrants' incorporation is concerned. Glick Schiller and Caglar (2009: 179) address the issue of incorporation by referring to locality as a 'place-based concept that includes processes and dynamics within the states, yet interact with states controlling very different degrees of wealth and power'. Nevertheless, although locality is used to

refer to a neighbourhood, a city, a conglomerate or a region, in their analysis they mostly equate locality with the city. The experience of Albanians in Florence, however, shows that *within* cities significant differences can exist between different localities and their impact on immigrants' perception of incorporation and identification.

The findings add to research on cities and the incorporation of immigrants by focusing on a non-global city. However, they call into question the concept of scale because of the diverse dimensions of Florence as a city. Although in terms of size and political power Florence is not a global city, its cultural heritage and the cultural 'market' make it an important international centre, when seen from a cultural point of view. This is especially important in light of findings of this study which show that the qualities of space and aesthetics affect immigrants' perception of incorporation and identification. These, in turn, emphasise the role of locality within the city in terms of incorporation and identification of immigrants. These findings support research that highlights the role of urban ethos in immigrants' incorporation and call for more emphasis to be placed on culture (for example, Cadge *et al.* 2009).

Attention should also be paid to the differences between different generations of immigrants in terms of their perception of the city as a context and the impact on incorporation. This study shows that different generations have differing 'cognitive geographies', perceptions of space, and appreciation of cosmopolitanism. A time factor and the stage of incorporation may also play a role in this respect. The findings show that aesthetics and cultural capital are important to long-term immigrants. It is interesting to note that Kotic and Triandafyllidou (2003) – in one of the very few studies of Albanians in this particular area – researched coping strategies and identities of Albanian immigrants in Florence and found no reference to the city's particularities in their respondents' narratives.

Furthermore, the role of the city and locality can be different when different levels of incorporation are considered. My results show that while the participation of immigrants in the city's affairs and in immigrant-related issues is recognised at a city level, the strong and prestigious local identity 'disables' immigrants from making claims to equality and 'the right to the city'. Florence's 'cosmopolitan canopy' and the patterns of interaction in the city's historical centre remind us of the distinction drawn by Hannerz (1990: 250) between the cosmopolitans and the locals. An appreciation of diversity distinguishes the two, with the cosmopolitans interested in the survival of cultural diversity, and the locals engaged in carving out their special niches, and as such there can be no cosmopolitans without locals. This 'canopy', therefore, further asserts pride in local identity, disguising the city's 'civic insularity' (Whyte 2000: 70) and the sharp distinctions between the natives and the *gente nuova*, as cultural heritage and historical status create an uncrossable threshold for the newcomers.

A final note also on the cosmopolitan agenda that refers to the state and its centrality in explaining cosmopolitanism as a phenomenon that creates a society under anyone's control (Beck and Sznaider 2006: 20). In Florence cosmopolitanism is related to the city, in that it is perceived locally and also as mainly bound to the historical centre, while the hierarchies of power and the cultural distinctiveness of the locals show enduring forms. Therefore, the findings call for an analysis of cosmopolitanism in relation to locality, apart from the focus on the nation-state and its transformation under the effect of cosmopolitan dynamics. It is nevertheless important that apart from relating the city to the national-level context, the historical and cultural particularities of the locality should be taken into account, as they appear to play an important role in the contemporary state of affairs.

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