



Intercultural cities

Building the future on diversity

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NOVELLARA

Intercultural Profile

Background

Novellara is a town located 19 km north from the province of Reggio Emilia in Emilia-Romagna, Italy, with a population of 13,761 inhabitants. 16% of the total population have been identified as non-nationals, and 13% as foreign-born. None of the minority groups represent more than 5% of the population. The biggest foreign-population is Chinese (3.97%), followed by Indian (3.55%) and Pakistani (3.18%) and Morocco (1.33%).

Remarkably the number of migrants has been growing from 6.6% in 2002 to 16.2% in 2013, to decrease again later on.

The objective of this report is to understand how the city is reacting to the significant increase in sociocultural diversity in recent years and to examine its policies of diversity management.

Novellara is part of the Città del Dialogo (Italian Network of Intercultural Cities) which is linked to the European network of "Intercultural cities" promoted by the Council of Europe in cooperation with the European Commission. The report is based on an analysis of the documentation provided by the city and the content obtained during a one day visit for four days in January 2016 by the Council of Europe agent Francesca Lionetti, together with the expert Phil Wood. During this visit, we had the opportunity to meet the Mayor of Novellara, Elena Carletti, as well as the deputy charged with the intercultural policies file, Marco Battini, other political representatives, as well as a range of municipal policy officers and representatives of various organisations and associations.

This report complements the results of a previous one made by the Council of Europe based on the results of the Intercultural City Index.

The context of this report is set against the background of the severe economic crisis in Italy over the past years which is having a major impact on all levels.

The consequences of the economic crisis, which has raised the unemployment rate to 12% of the working population in the whole country (and 44% among those under 25 years), have not necessary slowed immigration flows, but have surely busted the number of people, especially young people both of Italian and foreign-origin, that are currently deciding to move abroad to look for the opportunity of a better life.

Local socio-cultural diversity

16% of Novellara population is made up by immigrant population, 2205 people out of the total 13 761. Considering the surrounding industrial (especially textile) and agricultural vocation, is easy to ascribe this high number to a mainly working migration. For this reason the decreasing trend in the migrant population, 16.2% in 2013, is not completely unexpected news. This decreasing trend is shared by all the cities in the territory surrounding Novellara and is mainly explained through the economic crisis which has hit hard on SMEs in Italy. Connected to the crisis, as well as to assimilation to local behaviours, the number of births within this population has been decreasing for the last five years. This is largely affecting the age structure of the migrant population: the percentage of young people underage has decreased steadily in the last 10 years and accounted in 2014 for 24.9%. On the other hand, the 35-64 group is increasing every year and has reached 41.5%. Moreover the share of people older than >65 is nowadays 2.5%, while it was only 0.9% ten years ago.

This progressing ageing is going to face the administration with new issues like the need to provide specific health and welfare services for mixed population.

Another important topic to face is the increasing number of people leaving either to go back to the country of origin or to Northern countries, but also Canada and the US, which might open more job possibilities. This is especially true for second generations that are holding a European citizenship and often high education. This is in contrast with other indicators that show how migrants are actually investing a lot on their presence in Novellara and see it in a long term perspective. The numbers of mixed marriages, for example, represents 50% of the ones celebrated in 2014; around 56% of the immigrants are also living in their own house; 40 businesses were started by foreigners in 2014. Finally the number of new citizenships assigned in 2014 was 120, marking a steady increase in the last 10 years (the numbers doubled between 2011 and 2012, and tripled in 2013) which is the result of a long-term settlement in the country.

Regarding the composition of the migrant population, the biggest group is represented by Chinese (24,8%), Indians (22.1%), Pakistani (19.8%), Morocco (8.3%), Rumanian (4.2%), Turkish (3.9%).

Diversity Management in Italy

As of 1 January 2015, there were 5,014,437 foreign nationals resident in Italy. This amounted to 8.2% of the country's population and represented an increase of 92,352 over the previous year. These figures include children born in Italy to foreign nationals (who were 75,067 in 2014; 14.9% of total births in Italy), but exclude foreign nationals who have subsequently acquired Italian nationality; this applied to 129,887 people in 2014. They also exclude illegal immigrants whose numbers are difficult to determine.

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Considering the normative and cultural framework for policy on immigration and integration that has emerged and been enacted since the seventies, the last couple of years have polarised the discourse and brought the country to a cross-road.

Since the beginning of the economic crisis, in fact, immigrants were presented by the right-wing government as being responsible for general social problems, backed up with debatable statistics and

1 "Cittadini Stranieri. Popolazione residente e bilancio demografico al 31 dicembre 2014". ISTAT. 15 June 2015.

without evaluations of policies' impact on integration. Immigration policy was linked specifically to issues of security and crime.

On the other hand, the introduction of the figure of the Ministry for Integration and the nomination of Cecile Kyenge, the first ministry of African origin in a country that counts less than 10 politicians with this background, in 2013 have marked a shift in the political discourse, as for the first time integration was discussed as a voluntary two-way process and not considered as something spontaneously deriving from the integration of migrants in the labour market. The *Patto per l'integrazione* (Integration Agreement) and the *Piano per l'integrazione nella sicurezza* (A plan for integration in secure environment, further referred to as Integration Plan) have been introduced. *The Patto per l'integrazione* is structured as an agreement signed by the State and the immigrant, who agrees to gain credits (ie. attending a civic course, passing a language exam, attending professional courses, complaining to fiscal duties) to obtain a resident permit.

The *Piano per l'integrazione nella sicurezza*, instead, identifies five areas where integration occurs and in which it is necessary to intervene. First, the educational system has the task of helping with Italian, values and civic culture; language courses are also planned for adults, with particular attention to women, and training courses for Italian civic culture, laws and values are promoted.

The second area of attention is the labour market: the need to avoid the development of a black economy is stressed, the necessity of training courses in the countries of origin is noted, and entrepreneurship of immigrants is promoted. Third, housing policies have to be encouraged to support migrants in search of a house and to avoid the formation of ethnic enclaves. Fourth, access to social and health services has to be promoted, through publicity, cultural mediators, training for health and social workers, cooperation between the State, regions and municipalities. The fifth area, finally, regards children and second generation migrants, where the right to be educated has to be guaranteed.

Second generation is becoming more and more the central topic of discussion and a new citizenship bill is being discussed in the Parliament. The original *ius sanguinius* is most probably going to be replaced by *a ius soli temperato* as the basis of Italian nationality. The draft law, approved by the lower chamber in October 2015, is going to shorten and facilitate the acquisition of the Italian citizenship for children born in Italy to parents in possession of an EU long term residence permit, and for children who arrived in Italy before the age of twelve, have resided in Italy for at least five years, and completed school in the country.

On the other hand, the issues of refugees and terrorist attacks are making it hard to cool down the inflammatory speech by the Northern League and other right-wings movement. In the last two years (2014-2015), UNHCR has recorded that 223.943 refugees and migrants have arrived in Italy by sea, which has prompted the narrative of the "terrorist at our doorsteps hiding in the group of desperate people arriving on our shores".

Diversity Management in Novellara

Given the sense that national government (whether left or right) seems unwilling or unable to take an effective lead on integration policy, historically it has fallen to a combination of local authorities and non-governmental actors to fill the gap.

In Novellara the activities have been mainly focused on inter-religious dialogue, education and social service, mediation and the building of communication bridges. Since the early nineties, local authorities have also experimented with different ways of giving representation for immigrants, in particular through the form of two Extra Foreign Advisors (*Consigliere straniero aggiunto*). It is worth noting here that this body ended up being more of a symbolic figure and was not set up again.

Nowadays, high importance is given more to challenge of including migrants in all the democratic spaces, meaning trade associations, civil society associations, advocacy associations etc.

As a matter of fact, in 2014 the administration has changed, starting a new period for diversity management in the city. The new officials have worked for one year to collect data about the situation on the ground, meeting people and re-orient the work to the real priorities of the citizens.

The other challenges that have been identified are:

- Ageing population: as already noted the structure of migrant population is rapidly changing with a shrinking of the 0-18 groups and an increment of the >35 that passed from accounting for 30.2% in 2002, to more than 44% in ten years. This progressing ageing is going to face the administration with new issues like the need to provide specific health and welfare services for mixed population.
- Women: the female migrant population has known a big change in the last two decades. In 1997, in fact, males accounted for 60% of the total population, while now the majority is made up by women (52.8%). This change was driven in a first moment by family reunifications, but it's more and more connected to labour migration. Immigrant women are now accounting for 15.8% of the total female population in the city. Unfortunately, as in many other contexts, women are sometimes difficult to intercept by the city administration, especially when the social services are concerning. Often, in fact, is the man who asks informations for the wife or the mother. Similar issue is marked at school, where mothers are not always able to communicate with the teachers and tend to stop showing up because of this.
- Chinese community: even if it represents the biggest foreign community in Novellara, contact with it are not easy, mainly because, differently from all the other communities there is not a religious community that can work as a bridge. In the last year a structured process partnering school, the health sector, family doctors and police, is being set in place to connect with the Chinese families and find out more about their migration history, their goals, their needs and their biggest challenges. an other goal of these activities in managing to involve more the Chinese in the cultural and social life of Novellara.
- Openness and readiness to meet between migrants and autochthons is not very high, from both sides. Migrant population is not at all present in historical associations in the territory, as well as in the trade one. only 5-10% of the kids participating in sport teams are of foreign backgrounds.

Specific Policies and Initiatives for Diversity Management

Reception, welcoming, services and equity:

For new citizens, the first contact with the City normally happens through the Administrative Service and Public Relations Office. Here people are signing up for the City register and receiving information on services they are entitled to, as well as assuring them the right to be listened to.

The head of the Office acknowledged how in the last years new people arriving in the city have been mostly well prepared, with very little needs to be assisted by the mediators.

On their first visit, all new citizens also receive two important documents: a *Welcoming Letter* and the *Charter of Values of Novellara*. This second document, translated in several languages and undersigned by the Mayor as well as the citizen, is enlisting the values shared by the population of Novellara: respect and equality in accessing right to life, free medical assistance, protection of mothers and children; importance of compulsory education up to 16 years old; equality between men and women; family as the social cell at the base of society; secularism and freedom of religion.

The charter is also stressing that, because of *“the geographic position of Italy [..], in the midst of the Mediterranean Sea, Italy has always been the crossroads of different peoples and cultures, and the Italian population still bears the signs of this diversity. All that makes up the Italian heritage, its artistic and natural beauties, together with its economic and cultural resources and its democratic institutions, are there for men and women, young people and future generations to enjoy. Our Constitutional charter protects and promotes inalienable human rights in order to support the weak, guarantee everyone’s capacity building and develop work skills and moral and spiritual aptitudes.*

The document works as an agreement on the behavior that all new citizens, not only the ones of foreign background, are expected to have in the city, as well as a way to insure that everyone is on the same page and ready to well start the new experience.

Another symbolically very powerful action, making the welcoming attitude visible, is the choice of the Mayor and part of the city government to greet newcomers in a ceremony held every three months. This kind of events is really important for new citizens that on the one hand see their presence valued and appreciated and on the other hand are able to find out more about the activities of the cities.

Over the last years, caused mainly by the economic crisis, it has become clear that reception services are relevant not only for newcomers but also to migrants who have been living for many years in the city. The economic crisis, in fact, has made many people which previously did not use these programs to turn to them in order to improve their ability to find work, improve their qualifications, learn the local language or get a better understanding of the municipal welfare services.

A new scheme to provide job positions, like garbage collectors, gardeners, road construction, etc, was recently launched to ease the pressure on people who have lost their job and cannot count on the safety net of their families.

Schools:

26,9 % of pupils in the only school in Novellara (a comprehensive institute) are of foreign origins, but interculturality in education has developed as a really strong point for the city, even if we discovered that most of the projects are being carried out against more and more constraints put on schools by ministerial directives.

The intercultural work is, for example, already part of the didactic in disciplines like Italian language and literature (where the children are analysing the intercultural process from where the language originated and how interactions with other cultures have shaped it), geography, history and civic education, as well as non-verbal communication.

Welcoming activities include 1 or 2 weeks with a teacher and a mediator that are helping the kid to explore the environment, meet the class, as well as investigating the past school experiences through maths and logic-spatial tests. From the third week the pupil is attending standard classes, as well as an Italian course. Parallel projects like “**Progetto Cinque**” for the inclusion in primary school of kids that have never been in school before, are increasing the number of hours provided by the mediator to help the kid to acclimatise. Particularly interesting is also the project “**Insieme si può**”, where kids receive help by their peers to learn Italian.

Other projects like “**Costruiamo Assieme**” are producing mixed stories, using the inheritance of different traditions. The “**Intercultura**” project is composed of a set of activities and projects that enhance inclusion and social cohesion, also reflecting and bringing up discussions around topics like fairy tales, game, myth, food, religion (according to the age group of the pupils). Within “**La scuola che vorrei**” kids are invited to design a project to ameliorate their school, which is eventually put in place. Finally the “**900**” project allows discussing contemporary local history: the pupils work on a different topic each year and publish a book at the end of the “journey”. In 2015-16, they are reading letters written by a prisoner under the fascism period, trying to understand his experience and openly discussing it.

The school is also putting an effort in order to increase parents’ participation in the education system. For example, primary and secondary schools host a specialised cultural mediator that accompanies parents in their understanding of the Italian education system. The cultural mediator will also be present in the “**Punto d’ascolto**” (listening point) where foreign parents’ can meet and talk to a psychologist. To help the getting in contact point with parents, mediators are also actively making calls to families to inform them about the projects run by the schools and are present during the preliminary encounter to explain the enrolment procedures.

Finally, The opening up of school premises, after hours for the use of children and their families has markedly increased the places and times where intercultural mixing has become possible. The presence of volunteers during these time shifts has also improved the opportunities available for meeting and learning.

A challenge for the school is that professors’ ethnic background rarely mirrors pupils’, but it is also true that to become teacher in a public school in Italy, the process is normally lasting not less than 10 years. Moreover the issue of the requirement of Italian citizenship to apply to a position is smookey, as it was recently challenged and strip from the most recent legislation on the subject.

Notwithstanding, Novellara should work on this challenge considering for example the experience of Stavanger, where, even if the permanent teaching staff in public schools does not reflect the ethnic composition of the population, the City has hired a broad team of mobile teachers with multilingual competence that provide mother-tongue tuition and dual-language subject training. Furthermore, a sponsorship scheme administered by the National Centre for Intercultural Learning allows Stavanger to stimulate minority teachers to gain further education so as to qualify for a permanent position in Norwegian schools. The goal is to employ more multilingual teachers in the regular schools and thus

have a teaching community who is ethnically more in step with the pupils. Since 2010, eight teachers have been sponsored by the scheme and three are currently on a further education pathway.

A different discourse has to be done concerning kindergarten. On the 78 toddlers who are attending, in fact, only 2 are of migrants background. This lack of participation (kindergarten is not compulsory) is creating problems for non-attending kids, especially of immigrant origins, as this school is providing non-verbal communication skills, sense of community, relationship skills.

Religious groups:

Sikh Community

Novellara is home to the largest Sikh Gurdwara in Italy. The municipality, in fact, was the first in Italy to grant permission to build a Sikh temple by allowing an industrial plot to be used for religious purposes. The temple was built with money gathered by the community and inaugurated in 2000 (making it one of the oldest in Italy) at the presence of the President of the Council, Romano Prodi.

Every Sunday around 4000 people are gathering in the Gurdwara, but the number of devotees can reach around 10.000 people during the Vaisakhi, the main Sikh celebration marking the harvest festival of the Punjab region, the Punjabi New Year and the birth of the Khalsa.

The Sikh community was very clear in stressing that they don't consider their relations with the city administration and the other communities in terms of integration, but rather in terms of cooperation and collaboration, as the latter is characterised by voluntary efforts.

Examples of this cooperation have been for example the collection of clothes, food and other first aid items for people affected by the Earthquake in 2012, the donation of an emergency response car to the Red Cross, a project in the school to teach not only about Sikh religion but especially about the Punjabi culture.

Proof of the historic partnership between the Italian and Sikh community are the lives of around 83.000 Sikh soldiers which were lost on Italian soil among the two World Wars. This partnership is marked and visible every 25 April, Liberation Day in Italy, when all the new and old Novellaresi gather together to celebrate the lives of people who allowed Italy to be a free country.

More recently the Sikh community has made the news for their fundamental cooperation in maintaining and preserving traditional Parmesan cheese production. As a matter of fact, Indians (there is a much smaller Hindu community) currently make up about 60% of the Parmesan-producing workforce.

On the other hand, second generations, who grew up, got educated in Italy and prefer football to cricket, are trying more and more to assimilate to their peers. Economic crisis is making it difficult as the situation in the country is worsening and pushing these young Italians to other countries like UK or Canada, not only to work but for education purposes as well. Teaching in these countries is, as a matter of fact, focusing more on more market-oriented disciplines like mechanics. Also, learning English is more and more important to survive everywhere in the globalised world. The link with the country of origin is maintained as, a big share of these people are opening Italian restaurants abroad, etc.

Islamic Community

Numerous examples of collaboration between the Islamic community originally from Maghreb and the city are recorded. Since a couple of years, for example, in occasion of the Eid al-Adha, the Sacrifice Feast, the community is organising a shared meal in the main square of Novellara. This tradition started when the community realised that the third part of the sacrifice, given to relatives, friends and neighbours, should have donated to the habitants of their city.

Another interesting festive moment was shared in December 2015. Every 400 years, in fact, the birth of Jesus and Mohammed are corresponding. To mark this particular date, last year, Muslim and Christian celebrated Christmas together in the cathedral, with a lesson given by a young pakistani-origin scholar about the role of Jesus and the Virgin Mary in the Coran. Shared praying and a festive banquet concluded the ceremony.

Exponents from the communities have also served as Extra Foreign Advisors when this figure was still in place.

Economy, business and Diversity:

As already underlined, the big share of migrant population in Novellara and the territory surrounding, is to be linked with the strong industrial, especially textile, and agricultural vocational of the territory.

Difference among the different communities regarding the type of activities carried out, are present. In particular the Chinese community is mainly focusing on the textile sector, while Indians and Pakistani are focusing on agriculture. While Chinese are in general entrepreneurs, in the agricultural sector, Italians are still retaining the ownership of all the cooperatives and farms.

Considering the retail sector, the main activities are concentrated in shops (24 are owned by foreign-background providers) and stands at the weekly market (13). Interesting to note, there are no restaurants in Novellara that were installed by foreigners. Moreover, business relations are established within their same community, rarely with externals.

Particularly challenging is the lack of presence of migrant business owners in the trade association. One of the main challenges for the city administration, in fact, is how to manage to include the new citizens in all the democratic spaces. A number of meetings with different entrepreneurs have taken place in the last months, but, on the other hand, the risk of having this trust-building process jeopardised by the grey structure of some of the industrial and commercial reality of the area, is also present.

Civil society and local associations:

The last meeting of the visit has been an enormous plenary session, attended by representatives from political parties, universities, civil society, as well as the community in general.

This plenary session has been really useful to get to know the opinion and the challenges envisioned by all Novellara citizens. Some of the issues had already emerged during the day, as, for example, the lack of interest in young people both autochthons and of foreign-origin, to meet and work together on social issues. It was suggested that most of the time “tolerance”, rather than “integration” is the paradigm affecting relationships among communities.

Others were new topic and challenges, such as the problems experienced by the local football team, that to issue memberships is forced to request a heavy documentations from parents, sometimes even work contracts. For this reason a big share of kids who are not yet Italian citizens are forced to drop off from the activity.

Conclusions

Novellara seems to be quickly understanding the challenge posed to the city by the arrival of new people, as well as the medium-long term consequences of their presence. It quickly adapted policies and services to facilitate integration and ensure social harmony and cohesion. The City Administration is choosing to be proactive in increasing its relationship with all the communities.

Moreover, even if the lack of readiness to meet by autochthons and immigrants has often come up among the biggest challenges, the turnout at the last plenary is showing that there is clearly a lot of energy among the citizens and their organisations which is ready to be channelled into joint neighbourhood improvement projects that make it possible for everyone to live together in harmony. However, all this energy is maybe lacking a more formal structure to support, visualise and encourage them. This structure should not be intended as an institutionalised one, but merely a more stable and lasting network, maybe in the form of other regular plenaries. It has been noted as the plenary itself and the arising of certain discussion topics (like, for example, the topic of immigrant kids playing alone in the streets and parks) represented an eye-opening moment about cultural differences.

Considering women inclusion, other cities, as for example Sabadell, has found workshops like "Touch and Participate" and "Arteratia technique" involving women who had no knowledge of the language as well as some indigenous women, very beneficial. These workshops use theatre performances, as well as the creation of textile art pieces as tools to favour communication and socialisation. The work of these women is subsequently exposed to all neighbours to raise awareness and draw attention to those positive intercultural relations

Finally, Novellara might wish to contact Lisbon to discuss their efforts to involve the Chinese community in their recreational and social activities. For example, the municipality of Lisbon, while organising the Todos Festival, and reacting to the low turnout of the Chinese communities has decided to proactively organise traditional Chinese games on the main square, which have attracted people from the community to participate to these games in the first place, and other activities of the Festival later on.