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HOSTING IMMIGRANTS: LOOKING FOR A REFERENCE MODEL

**REFLECTIONS FROM THE STUDY
CASE OF RIACE**

RIACE, ITALY

STUDENT
CLAUDIA TAURINI

TUTOR
MARIA CRISTINA GIAMBRUNO

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Prof. Giambruno
Claudia Taurini

INDEX

ABSTRACT	3
KEYWORDS	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. THE DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM	4
3. METHODOLOGY	6
4. THE STUDY CASE OF RIACE:	7
4.1 The development of the reception project	7
4.2 Achievements	9
4.3 Analysis of the future perspectives and individuation of criticalities	11
5. CONCLUSIONS	14
BIBLIOGRAPHY	15
SITOGRAPHY	15

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to lay the guidelines to find a working model for the reception of immigrants in Italy. From the initial considerations on immigration numbers (arrivals, landings, attendance in Italy) and types of structures designed to accommodate immigrants - with a particular focus on the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees - the focus is shifted to Riace's studio case, known to the national chronicles for years as an example of effective and functional integration. This small town of Calabrian region is the subject of study because it is from this single case that we try to deduce the guidelines and the main success factors of the reception program in order to re-focus them on a large scale. The analysis, therefore, starts from the development of the project and the determination of its actors, by passing on the results obtained today to find out the strengths, criticalities and future perspectives.

In the conclusions, the first identified issue is the lack of number of places in the "first reception system"; therefore, the attention goes again to the Locride Commune, seen as a model, to find the characteristics that can be replicated at national level in order to implement the number and quality of the spaces for the immigrants reception and, at the same time, to recover and revalorise the half-abandoned places of Italian territory.

KEYWORDS

Immigrants, integration, hosting, reception, restoration, Riace, Sprar.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the headline titles of the *Corriere della Sera* on August 31, 2016 was: "Record of rescue at sea: 13 thousand landed in 4 days. 3,000 people rescued only yesterday. There were already 105,000 arrivals since the beginning of the year. Reception system is collapsing."

The numbers of people arriving from Libya and dying into the Mediterranean sea are clear: "According to the *Oim, the International Organization for Migration*, in the first 8 months of 2016, 105,342 migrants arrived by sea in Italy (of which 961 have already been received in another EU country as refugees with asylum) ". The inadequacy of reception facilities that can cope with this situation is also reported: "The number of arrivals continues to create problems in the area, with collapsing structures. The most recent case is the Sardinia one, with the Cagliari Prefecture that last night has drawn attention to the decrease of the availability of new beds. "

The article appears on the 27th page of the chronicle section, considering that the topic is no longer treated as an emergency or novelty. Landings, routes, deaths at sea and boats in the middle of the Mediterranean are normal facts. Immigration to Europe, through the sea and Italy, is the standard. But then what does not work in the reception system? Why are structures "falling apart"? Why are we still unable to cope with what it isn't anymore an anomaly?

Mario Ricca,¹ already in 2010, in his analysis of migratory phenomena, gives a keen point of view by exhorting to approach the theme of reception rather than as a reaction to isolated episodes, but as a systematic response to events that can not be otherwise classified unless as "ordinariness".

And it is in this sense that the reception machine in Italy has to be oriented - and it is actually orienting -: towards the management of a predictable and systematic phenomenon, not of an emergency, and towards the absorption throughout the country and not only in some oversaturated centres unable to cope with continuous waves of humans.

2. THE DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

The choice to analyse the immigrants reception system and its criticalities is dictated by the ever-increasing need to provide an efficient and appropriate response to migratory phenomena, which in 2016 are no longer an emergency or anomaly but are still treated as such. The aim, therefore, is to identify a replicable model that allows to systematically absorb the flows of people who require reception and protection in European territory.

The main problem identified is the inadequacy of the reception facilities in Italy and their poor quality. The principal causes are identified in the overall inefficiency of managing migration flows and in the complexity of immigration legislation. As regards the first factor, it is recognized the inability at national level to address the continued arrival of asylum seekers and refugees in a systematic and efficient manner, while continuing to approach the problem

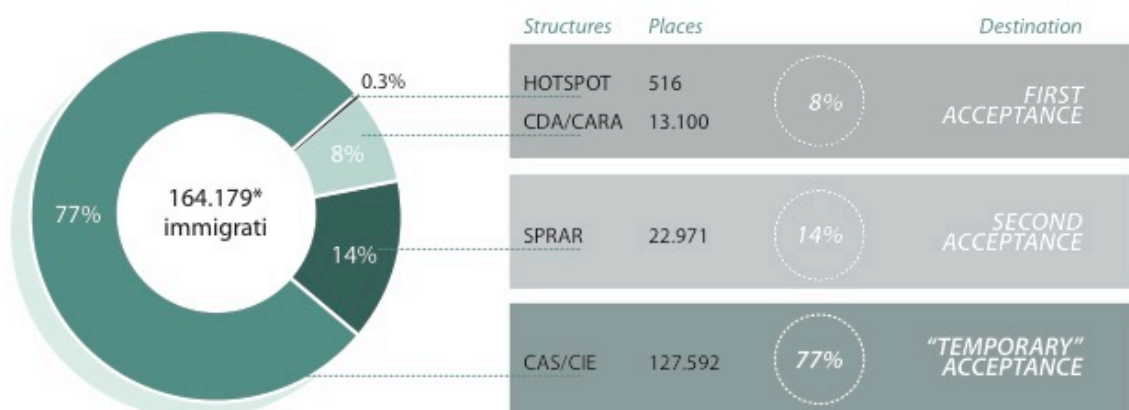
¹ He is the president of the *IDEDI, Intercultural, Democracy, Law*, association, and he's a law professor at the University of Parma.

as an emergency; we also try to consider the Italian difficulty in the transparent management of the reception. The second factor, though, is linked to management from the top: the complexity and overabundance of the regulatory corpus make it virtually impossible to carry out a clear and efficient management of migrants by field operators, as a result of the substantial inapplicability of laws and of a consequent "casual" management and displacement of immigrants.

Inadequacy is distinguished by an "effective" lack of reception places and a "relative" insufficiency due to the fact that inadequate management of existing structures entails a blockade in the applicant's protection: 70% of refugees do not have access to "second reception" facilities and remain within the "extraordinary reception" centres, hindering in fact any chance of real integration. Staying in the emergency structures, in fact, implies the impossibility of social inclusion both in the short and the long term and strengthens instead of distrust and fear from the residents.

THE PROBLEM

IMMIGRANTS HOSTED IN ITALY



*Data: by Ministero dell'Interno, at 21.12. 2016

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the problem of reception in Italy, a collection of data on immigration and reception (mainly through the sites of the organizations involved: the Ministry of the Interior, Sprar, Associations, UNHCR) and a bibliographic research were made to understand the current overall situation and to hypothesize a resolution (or at least the improvement) of the problem.

For this reason, the case study of Riace - which has been identified as an example for the creation of reception facilities and the integration of immigrants on national territory - has been examined. In order to better understand the welcome system created by the Municipality, in order to identify the replicable features and to have more data on the operation of the reception-recovery system of the territory, we went to the second phase of the research by doing an inspection in Calabria.

Direct observation has therefore allowed to check the state of the restored houses and the public space. In addition, qualitative research was conducted through interviews. Participants were selected based on their ability to give a different point of view on the same theme: Mayor of Riace, Domenico Lucano and an employee of the commune in the technical office, Domenico Pazzano. Despite the survey and the interviews, it was not possible to obtain certain figures (like the number of immigrants actually hosted and the number of restored properties). Lastly, once all the material (bibliographic, photographs, data and interviews) has been collected, we have analysed the existing situation and looked for the potential to be developed.



4. THE STUDY CASE OF RIACE:

4.1 The development of the reception project

The municipality of Riace, recently subject to media attention but already famous since the '70s for finding bronzes, has undertaken its own reception path in 1998.

Before the *PNA*, *National Asylum Plan*, before the *SPRAR*, *Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees*, the small town of Locride area had already opened the door to the refugees.

The village of Riace, at the end of the 90's, could be defined as a ghost country. It had just 1,500 inhabitants, most of whom had abandoned the old town to move to the "Marina", part of the Commune on the coast, recently built and best connected to the rest of the area.

About ten kilometres from the sea, clinging to the Calabrian hills, the old town centre was dying.

The rebirth occasion came by sea: a boat with 220 Kurds on board landed on the Riace Marina beach on July 1, 1998 and from an idea of Domenico Lucano, now mayor of Riace, the village started to be lived again.

The idea was simple: if the Calabrian emigrants had decided to abandon their homes in search of a better future, there was no reason why those same homes could not be used again by those seeking a home.

Mimmo Lucano founded the association "Città Futura", which began to take care of the reception and recovery of the territory.

The association was born "as an institute of ethnographic research of local history and culture" according to its manifesto.

The purpose of the organization was to promote social and cultural initiatives and the main activity was the development of a popular hospitality project called "Riace Village". The idea was to encourage a new kind of sustainable tourism to reactivate places and knowledge of the half-abandoned village.

Through a financing of just 50,000 euros from Ethical Bank, "Città Futura" has managed to restructure various buildings within the historical fabric, with the intent of making them habitable for both tourists and Kurdish immigrants.

No precise restructuring plan has been followed: the houses selection was conducted on the base of their abandonment and on the base of the owners' willingness to make available their property.

The disposal of the apartments took place in various forms: some (only the very first) were donated to the association, others were given in a loan for use and others were purchased. If it was not possible to trace the owners directly, they were asking permission from relatives and heirs.

Even with regard to the work done, it is not possible to decode a precise *modus operandi* unless "the maximum result with the lowest expense", using the volunteer work of the few locals and the newly arrived Kurds. The apartments, which are part of the historic centre, have simply been restored and equipped with furnishings and appliances.

With the first funding, twenty-seven homes abandoned in the last century by emigrants were recovered for a total of about one hundred new beds for widespread hospitality (twenty houses) and twenty beds for refugee reception (seven houses).

With the same funds have been restored: the ancient noble palace Pinnarò that is the headquarters of "Future City" and which acts as a multicultural centre of reception; a typical gourmet restaurant; an old mill converted into a workshop of craftsmanship; a crusher with stone mills for pressing olives and an associated laboratory for the production of citrus jams; some craft workshops (glass, ceramics, dolls and typical local costumes).

These renovations therefore included not only the recovery of the structures themselves but also the local traditions and knowledge that were getting lost.

In the "Città Futura" poster the objectives of the project are explained:

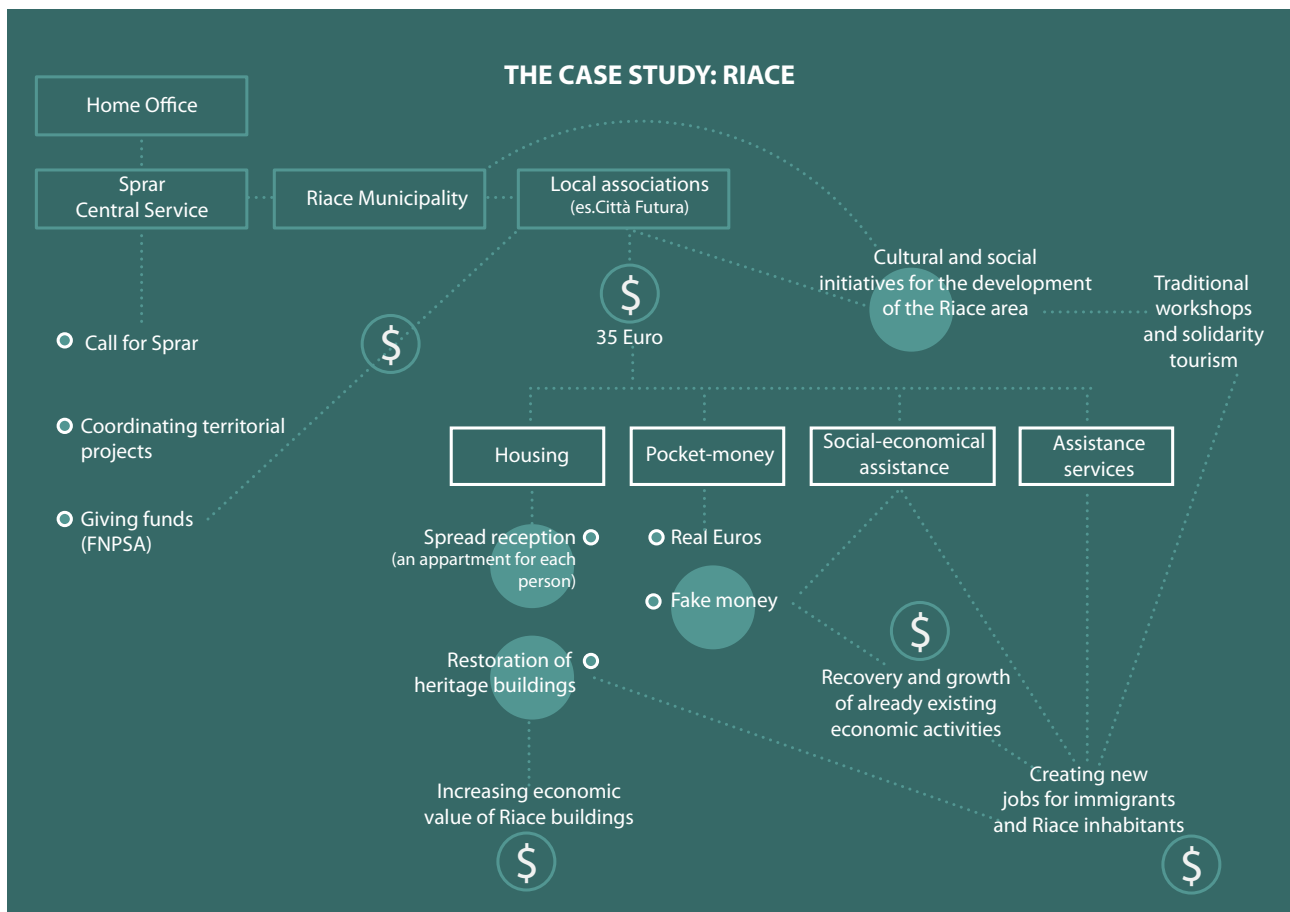
- "Create opportunities for jobless young people in the place.
- Facilitate the socio-economic integration of some refugees in Riace.
- Improve the local economy: bars, small grocery stores, artisans, peasants, shepherds, olive oil producers, wine ..
- Make sure that the old history of the hamlets of Riace is not lost, but continue to live through folklore, traditions, craftsmanship. "

These were the first activities scheduled but the list of work undertaken to re-qualify Riace is much longer: not only the houses inside the centre but also the surrounding areas have been re-qualified.

The surrounding farmland, which had been abandoned for lack of work, was recovered. The ancient terraces have been restored and now they host new crops and a new didactic farm.

The historic washrooms have been restored and connected with a new educational path.





4.2 Achievements

Today, the Municipality of Riace is part of the SPRAR network and you can say that it was precisely this municipality, which so prematurely gave hospitality to the refugees, to represent the reception model that first inspired the National Plan Asylum and then the Protection System For Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

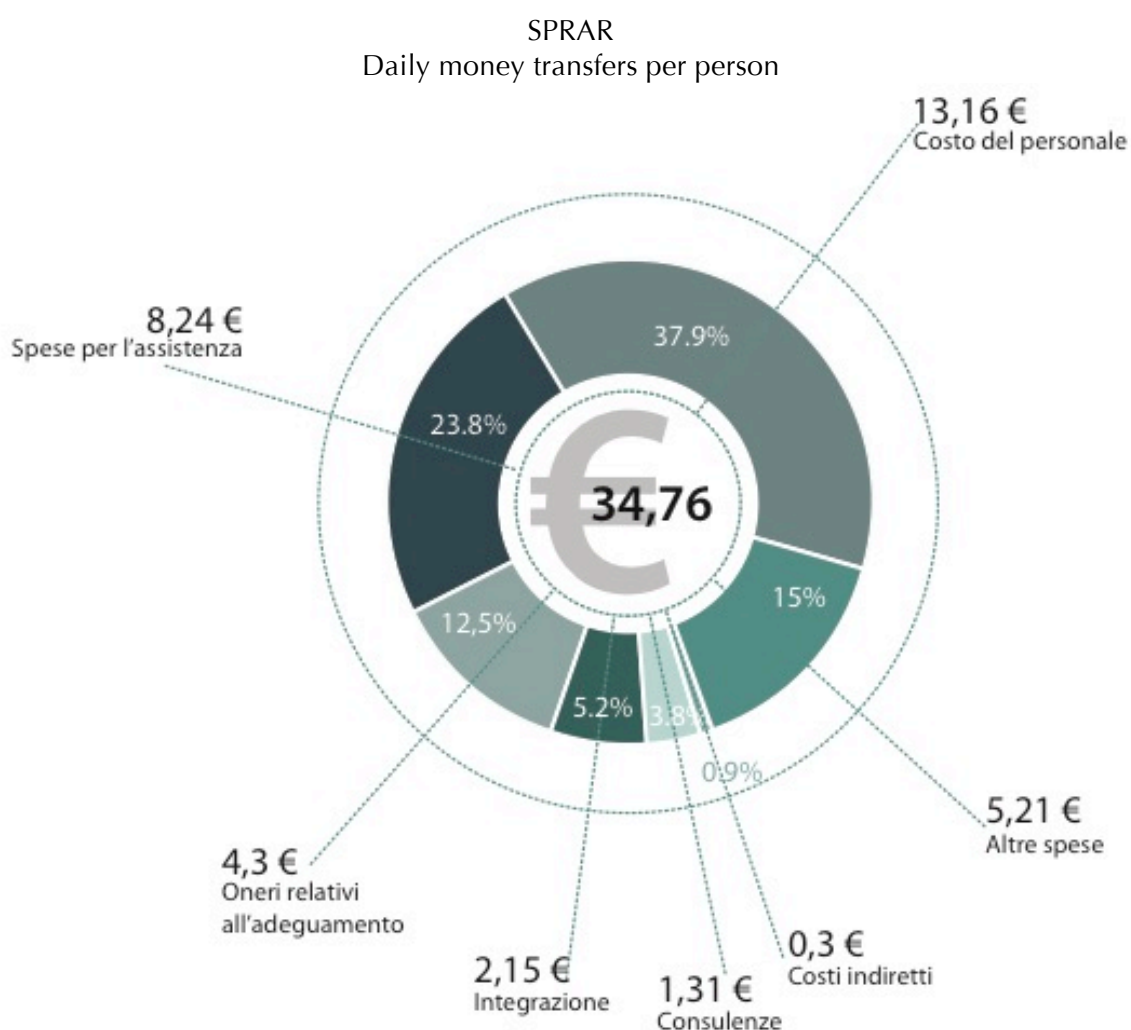
Between the old town, where the work is still being recovered today, and the Marina, Riace now hosts about 500 immigrants and counts seven associations that work to improve widespread hospitality, refugee welfare, and urban, architectural, social and economic regeneration of the Calabrian village.

With SPRAR's European funds, the associations take care of the immigrants by providing them several services that are grouped into nine categories:

- linguistic and intercultural mediation
- material reception
- orientation and access to local services
- vocational training and retraining
- orientation and accompaniment to work placement
- orientation and accompaniment to housing
- orientation and accompaniment to social inclusion
- legal orientation and accompaniment

- psycho-social-health protection.²

The operation of the system is based on mutual guarantees: on one side these services are provided by the hosting community, on the other the hosted people carry out certain activities. Immigrants are committed to learning a profession, following language courses and trying to promote as much as possible their social and work integration path. For example, many of them have worked and now work for local construction companies and they are in the first place the protagonists of the physical recovery of the commune.



The reception system coupled with the Calabria Region's 2008 allocation of € 2 million for the upgrading and recovery of the historic centre - which has allowed to fix the connective tissue and the public spaces between the homes of returnees and immigrants - after 15 years has more visible effects on the territory.

The old town houses, the surrounding farmland, the ancient routes, the shops, the squares are alive. They are lived.

² Source: *SPRAR* socio-economic inclusion manual.

Just taking a quick walk through the streets of Riace is enough to feel the scents and languages of at least 10 different countries, to see those who have always lived here chatting at the bar with those who have just arrived, there are tourists, journalists, students and other people. Space is saturated with people, re-qualified and used.

Mimmo Lucano's slogan is "filling the empty spaces" and, both inside and outside the houses, it seems he has achieved his goals.



4.3 Analysis of the future perspectives and individuation of criticalities

Therefore, it seems obvious that the Municipality of Riace has succeeded not only in self-regenerating after the twentieth-century migrations, but also in becoming a model for the rest of the region and the state in terms of reception.

Its principles of integration and solidarity have rebuilt private and public spaces and have become the basis for SPRAR's structuring at the national level.

Its organization has become a role model so far that the Calabria Region was induced to pass the Law No. 18 of 2009 "Reception to asylum seekers, refugees and social, economic and cultural development of local communities" to support all similar initiatives, in which the opening of the gates of a Calabrian Commune brings benefits to the spaces and inhabitants of the Commune itself.³

³ Being the model unfortunately did not provide more help from the institutions. In the SPRAR fundraising rankings, Riace is in the final position and for the drafting of Law no. 18/2009 the Mayor,

In order to produce an effective analysis, without prejudice to the aims and objectives achieved, it is crucial to find the criticalities of the "Riace model", which deploy their effects over the short and long term.

Riace's first and biggest problematic is also its strength and beginning: Domenico Lucano. There is no doubt about the merits and the quality of the work done by Lucano but, without much difficulty, we realize how much the whole structure of urban reception and regeneration turns around its figure. The first steps have been taken precisely because of its ability to organize and involve locals and immigrants but if, even today, the first citizen is the pivot of the entire system, it means that probably the system is not autonomous.

The question then is: when will Mimmo Lucano end his last term, will Riace continue this path? The answer is not taken for granted.

The Riace community has managed to get where it is now thanks to Lucano's will: first as an activist and then as a mayor. Thanks to him the bureaucratic obstacles have been removed,⁴ thanks to him the work of the Commune has been joined to that of the associations (which he founded in part), thanks to him there always has been the guarantee of absence of mafia infiltrations, thanks to him the attention of the media - and the undeniable enthusiasm that comes from the local community - has always remained high, even today that it is no longer a unique example. The Mayor was the propulsion element, the proponent and operative director of Riace's rebirth. But since 2019, when there will be another mayor - and perhaps other lists - in his office in the City Hall, will Riace be able to continue to be such a virtuous model?

The other great criticism, which, like the previous one, is also one of the strengths of the project, is the quality of life that Riace can offer.

The indigenous depopulation of the twentieth century was what caused and allowed the development of the reception project, but it is also what undermines the bases of its full success.

Currently immigrants are divided into two categories: those who go away after the expiration of the SPRAR project and those who decide to remain. If the ultimate goal of the urban regeneration project and social integration is to assume that the second category prevails - saturating the habitable space, fully recovered - it is the first to prevail with no doubt. The

Domenico Lucano, has not even been consulted, although he is the proponent of this sort of small territorial revolution (bearing in mind all the difficulties of having undertaken such a project more than fifteen years ago in a remote city of the Locride).

⁴ And regulations. It is emblematic the renovation of the headquarters of the "Città Futura" - Pinnarò Palace - which seems difficult to classify as "standard".

Although there is no certainty about it, the only observation has allowed me to see personally the state of precariousness in which the structure is now. Practical demands were obviously subject to compliance with many laws (primarily buildings) which would slow down, or in most cases blocked, the availability of Palazzo Pinnarò, in particular, and the completion of the project, in general.

And although this "regulatory shortage" has surely been just one of the components for the project's success, overall, it is impossible to think of creating an exportable model of urban development and regeneration on the basis of these assumptions. The eviction of some of the rules - probably due to the impossibility of raising more funds - is to be taken into account when trying to analyze the process that has brought Riace to the current situation since, it's obvious, non-compliance with the legislation can't be chosen as a rule.

challenge then is to "persuade" refugees to stay, to really build a life in Riace, and not to use the village as a land of passage for a better future in a big northern city. But this is not the place to look for solutions to the global problem of countryside depopulation.

Riace offers hospitality, personal services, a consonant home and serenity, but this is not necessarily what immigrants are looking for. Like every small mountain community in Calabria and beyond, it offers limited perspectives, often connected works or land cultivation or tourism. But few of those who come up here for a new life aspire to this, especially the younger ones who have no family and have higher profit ambitions than those that can be provided by the agricultural or tourist sector in these areas.

The challenge therefore seems to be twofold but always linked to the long term: to find the key to the operation and continuity of the project beyond the figure of Mimmo Lucano on the one hand, and to understand how to repopulate definitively - or almost - the ancient village on the other.



5. CONCLUSIONS

Looking for answers to the questions posed, understanding how to tackle more efficiently migratory flows, is a topic debated every day by all the industry players. The extension of the Protection System for Asylum and Refugees and the systematization of some peculiarities of the "Riace model" can be a solution.

The problem of the overcrowded structures used for the "first" reception is also related to the state of the structures itself and to the "secondary" reception system. The quality of the hosting space, its use and, above all, its availability are key factors in the management of international protection applicants and their social integration.

The first reception centres must only be a transitory port. If the reception machine is not perfectly oiled, it is impossible to think that these structures can hold the sudden waves of refugees without collapsing and retaining their vocation of temporariness.

Looking beyond the first reception system, attention must be paid to the Asylum and Refugee Requesting Protection System. This system must also be implemented.

And it is Riace, with all its specifics, which could once again represent a model.

Not all SPRAR centres have the same level of success and efficiency.

The Municipality of Riace has three features that make it a workable example: transparency in management, timely delivery of services and real integration (albeit embryonic) between immigrants and locals. And the keys to the system are once again: the figure of Mimmo Lucano, the innovative fundraising system and the real application of the widespread reception system, through accommodation in private flats in the urban fabric.

These are homes, not hotels or centers.

Immigrants are given homes, not housing.

If you can not export "Mimmo Lucano" as an uplifting factor, you can look at the choices made on the management and recovery of the built heritage, by which many people have a future again and a half-abandoned village has returned to life

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