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DIIS Brief

Migrant-development nexus and local authorities in Italy: towards a *European Transnational Integration Approach*

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**Migrant-development nexus and local authorities in Italy: towards a *European*
*Transnational Integration Approach***

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Throughout Europe, in different countries, a current debate is concerned with the issue of guaranteeing a better integration of foreign citizens arriving in Western countries, while maintaining and fostering their relationships and linkages with countries of origin. The unsuccessful assimilation policies as well awareness that reducing migration flows is not a solution - other than for creating irregular flows - brought this issue in the public sphere and on the media.

What we will argue in our presentation is that promoting the relationship between integration and transnationalism could become the key issue for managing migration flows with the objective of achieving common development goals.

The concept we wish to introduce here is of ‘transnational integration’, which is indeed still underdeveloped or absent in many actions and assessments undertaken by researchers and policy makers. In our opinion it is a relevant concept as it could serve as the logical framework for a multilevel dialogue between sub-national, national and European institutions which may take place with the aim of managing positively migration flows.

However for this strategy to be achieved, it is necessary both at the national of both origin and destination countries and at the European level to overcome the political conceptions centred on security and the reduction of migration flows.

Further, as we shall demonstrate in the course of the presentation it is important that at the European level the role of local authorities is recognised systematically and coherently since these actors – as we shall see for the Italian case – are the best candidates in managing simultaneously integration needs, demands and the feeling of ‘double belonging’ of migrant communities residing in their territories.

In the first part of our presentation we will focus on the process that - at least in Italy - gave local authorities an active role in managing migration flows. We will then indicate the innovative aspects and the limits of such local policies through the description of two case studies that saw the involvement of the Moroccan community.

In the second part of this article we shall spell out the need for a systematic approach unifying and merging integration and transnational development, going beyond interventions and projects that too often end with their pilot phase.

Finally we shall mention how the European Neighbourhood Policy may constitute a positive answer wherein migrants and local authorities could become active actors proposing innovative contents.

Glocal migration and the new role of local authorities

The literature on international migration shows today migration flows as networks of different nature linking directly specific geographical areas both of origin and destination countries. In a growing *globalisation* of markets and societies this phenomenon shows the emergence of the local dimension and it does not seem incorrect to speak of a new phase of ‘glocalisation’ of migration flows, where global and local interact continuously, where the interdependence of economies and societies is combined with a process of localisation of migration dynamics, linked to productive demands of specific territorial areas and economic sectors.

In the Post-Fordist Era economic development no longer takes place in the big industry, but appears instead organised in a myriad of little nets of small and medium enterprises

and industrial districts with strong productive specialisations, while employment in the service sector becomes relevant especially in the so called 'global cities'. In countries like Spain and Italy which do not operate any selection on migration flows based on professional skills, migrants find jobs in the local systems often in occupations at the lowest levels: i.e. as generic or domestic workers.

The demand for foreign labour is different in time and space following the economic needs and developmental perspectives that characterize the different local contexts. Flexibility in the labour market broadens the differentiation of professional profiles opening a large spectrum of atypical jobs, often unstable, and without social protection.

All this can make it very difficult for governments to manage flows 'from above' since these appear difficult to foresee, monitor and manage at the central level, thus an increasingly important role in the area of migration policies is played by sub-national institutions.

In this context, where sub national institutions gain centrality, local authorities broadened their functions: initially providing welfare and social integration policies, which on migration issues would translate in reception and access to service policies (healthcare schooling etc.), today instead they promote economic development in order to regulate the local labour market according to development demands of their territories, therefore including recruitment and training policies for migrants. In dealing with these new functions local authorities establish relationships with sub national government and sometimes central institutions in countries of origin in order to manage – in a cooperative way - migration flows with the aim of fostering mobility as a resource for common development. An interesting example is represented by the case of the Region of Andalusia in Spain: the Region signed directly with the Moroccan government an agreement in order to manage emigration flows arriving from this country. This partnership includes *inter alia* labour policies, policies directed at minors, creation of 'reception' centres in the countries of origin..

Similar examples can be found in Italy where some regions collaborate with central governmental institutions of emigration countries for recruiting – within the quota agreements established by the Italian government – foreign workers to be inserted in relevant sectors for the regional economies. For instance, the Italian Ministry of Welfare

with the Veneto Region together with trade unions, and training centres, are recruiting 80 workers for the construction industry from different countries including Romania.

Shifts in migration and development policies undertaken by Italian local authorities: two case studies

In Italy, over recent years, sub-national governments (particularly Regions and Municipalities) rather than the central government, have played an increasingly important role in trying to shape (at times unintentionally) a co-development approach in migration and cooperation policies

On the one hand, local authorities have concrete competencies for the integration of migrants in their specific territories, and on the other they have an increased awareness of the trans-local dimension of migration which is creating direct ties between territories of origin and destination. Consequently they have reacted to this new global interdependency, connecting migration and development ‘here, there and inbetween’.

Over the last years a range of pilot schemes in the area of co-development have been put in place¹.

What is new in these projects is what we can call a methodological approach to managing migration-development policies: a ‘partnership’ approach where actors promoting such practices include Municipalities, Provinces, Regions as well as migrant associations, NGOs and the private sector, in one word, the whole set of actors of the so-called *decentralised cooperation*.

In order to give a more precise picture of what we are saying, we will present two pilot projects which have been recently undertaken by the Italian decentralised cooperation.

The first project (which is still on-going) has been funded by the region Emilia-Romagna and implemented, among others by an organization, Nextia: a private company linked to the consortium of the Emilia Romagna’s productive cooperatives. Each season cooperatives from the region Emilia-Romagna use seasonal workers from Morocco for the cultivation of agricultural products also grown in the area of Khouribga. In the first phase of the project, a network of Italian and Moroccan joint

¹ CeSPI has a data base of more than 60 projects, (a very high number in comparison with the few projects promoted at the central level).

ventures or Moroccan cooperatives for the cultivation and processing of organic products will be set up in Khouribga. The network will be promoted, supporting the internationalisation of Italian productive cooperatives and the reinforcement/creation of Moroccan cooperatives or SMEs (small and medium enterprises) . At the same time trade agreements between Morocco and Italy will be endorsed for marketing Moroccan products in Italy through the commercial network of cooperatives in Emilia Romagna. In the second phase Moroccan seasonal workers – many of which have worked for the Italian cooperatives during several seasons – will be trained as agricultural technicians and, once back, hired as skilled workers in the cooperatives of the network or assisted in setting up their own cooperatives taking part in the network.

The project is particularly interesting as it aims at the creation of trans-local economic circuits within which migrants can play the role of labourers, facilitators or direct investors. We can see here a form of transnationalism linking different dimensions: the economic sphere, through the creation of integrated economic circuits; the institutional sphere, - since the project can be inserted in a wide institutional partnership subscribed by Regione Emilia Romagna and the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture, with the aim of creating an integrated productive and commercial space between the region of Khouribga and the fruit and vegetable district of Emilia Romagna; and finally a social sphere through the creation of a space of circular movements, in which flows of seasonal workers are inserted as development agents.

The second project concerns channelling and enhancing remittances. This issue has been considered critical by Italian central institutions, as shown during the 2004 G8 Summit at Sea Island, where the Italian government led the debate on the opportunities to foster and channel migrants' remittances as finance for development². However, notwithstanding the increasing interest showed by central Italian institutions so far, the few projects undertaken in this domain have been financed by the local authorities. All the projects on remittances undertaken by the Italian decentralised cooperation are still undergoing; the

² Annex to the G8 Action Plan: *Applying the Power of Entrepreneurship to the Eradication of Poverty*, available on http://www.g8usa.gov/d_060904a.htm

project we shall present here is the only one which has been concluded so far. It is not necessarily a positive example, but we believe it is an interesting case allowing us to show limits that pilot projects conducted on an experimental and small scale can encounter, but it can also show the opportunities that local authorities have in mobilizing different actors on the territory to respond to needs and demands of foreign citizens – which central institutions would rarely reach rapidly and in a flexible way.

The project has been financed by the Region of Tuscany and the province of Livorno and implemented through the participation of a network made of different actors such as banks, micro-finance agencies, NGOs and migrants' associations. The project aimed at transferring remittances from Livorno to Khenifra in Morocco: migrants' savings were transferred from an Italian commercial bank to a Moroccan commercial bank in Khenifra and from there to 5 micro-credit organizations.

An Italian micro finance private company (Microfinanza Srl) was responsible for controlling transfers, transmitting data to the local micro-credit organisations as well as verifying that recipients received their money. Differently from what occurs by using formal banking channels, by using micro-finance instruments the recipients of remittances were not required to open a bank account to draw their money so that also 'unbanked' people could be involved in the project. The transfer service was particularly cheap for migrants and its length, that usually was variable, took on average 5 days.

The evaluation of the project showed that all migrants originally from Khenifra residing in Livorno (30 persons more or less) used the service. However after one year the service was closed even if it was working because of the scarce number of receipts, and it had been impossible to extend the project in other provinces for a lack of funding.

Despite the project has been closed, it does present some strengths:

- It shows that it is possible to channel remittances through banks, here and there, reducing the use of informal channels. And this is a pre-condition for directing a share of remittance flows towards more productive uses, offering money transfer services at reduced costs, and favouring a form of economic citizenship for migrants in Italy.
- At the same time it has been the first project in Italy which showed that it is possible to connect banks in the countries of arrival and micro finance institutions in the countries of

origin and this ensures a rich distribution of remittances and their possible translation into productive investments.

The closure of the project instead shows the necessity to proceed through economies of scale in order to reach a significant number of beneficiaries and a margin for profit that banks can find 'interesting' in order to become self-sustainable. The relevance of economies of scale is evident in a country like Italy where only after a consistent increase in migrants' demands to become 'bankised,' these institutions started creating and introducing migrant banking tools.

And another limit can be seen in the wrong choice of outsourcing remittance transfers to a private company, and involving the President of the Moroccan community in Livorno as the key responsible for money collection: these actions must instead lie in solid inter-banking agreements that can reduce the existing gap between migrants and financial institutions.

Limits and Opportunities

Focusing now on limits and opportunities of migration and development policies undertaken by local authorities we can say that although we are witnessing a significant amount of experimentation and creativity with regard to Italian regional and local co-development projects, these suffer in the first place from a series of institutional and financial structural shortcomings. These most frequently can be associated with: the isolation of these actions and excessive sectorialisation; inadequate coordination with programmes and activities with similar objectives undertaken by other regions or central institutions (also in the countries of origin); lack of specialised staff within the institutions; scarce promotion of migrants' associations and limited coordination with them for implementing the projects; weakness of migrants' associations; little engagement of local communities in the countries of origin in the implementation of these projects. Furthermore, the Italian national and regional budget allocated for the management of migratory flows is very low and this entails that the number of projects and beneficiaries are numerically limited.

What dramatically lies behind the above mentioned issues is a cultural incapacity of local governments in gathering under the same unitary and coherent policy, policies that

normally address integration and transnational development separately. This division is often reflected in administrative arrangements which see development cooperation departments never interact with departments working on with social policy and migrants' integration mandates and vice versa.

In the second place 'cultural' shortcomings exist. As a matter of fact the relationship between transnationalism and migrants' integration is quite rarely considered, not only by policy makers but also by researchers. This fundamental gap in the political and theoretical dialogue is certainly due to the fact that usually transnationalism and integration are seen as contradictory, excluding one another. Traditionally the literature features 'integration' as the final achievement of a migratory process which is restricted into a univocal pattern: it starts in one place and ends in another one. In this perspective, integration is the expression of a permanent and successful settlement in the receiving country: the last step of a long process coinciding with the weakening of the desire to return, the loss of relationships with relatives and friends in the home country, a reduced willingness to remit and a declining feeling of commitment towards the country of origin.

In contrast with this vision some local authorities and, if we look at the last Communication on Migration and Development issued in September also the EU, started to underline the relevant links between integration and transnationalism. In this document the Commission explicitly declares that 'integration policy by allowing migrants to feel that their cultural identity is recognised and valued, should encourage them to remain committed to their country of origin and those they have left behind. In addition, it is also increasingly being recognised that migrants' personal involvement in the development of their country of origin in turn facilitates their integration in the country of residence'.

We wish therefore to put forward the concept of **transnational integration**, that is - positive practices of transnational individuals, communities and political subjects who - thanks to a good level of integration at the local level allowing them to enhance financial, social and human capital can work directly in and between the territories, for the promotion of human, social and economic development. The outcome of their activities might widen opportunities of integration at two levels: 1) for a better social

and economic integration of individuals (actors of transnational activities) in the local contexts where they are living and working, and 2) for the integration of the countries or the regions between which migrants and local authorities are developing transnational practices.

As we have repeated at the beginning of this presentation this will result unfeasible if migration policies both at the national and international levels remain framed on control and flows reduction objectives.

Which role can Local authorities play in the European Neighbourhood Policy?

Having come to this point we may argue that a convergence of local authorities' innovations and concrete interests with national and European policies and resources is necessary. Local authorities could elaborate a new concept in order to politically sustain their position. The concept of transnational integration may be useful since it links preventive security, integration and development issues putting migrants and local authorities at the centre of the scenario. This concept could be adopted in the European Neighbourhood policy as well as in the EU Aeneas programme and in national initiatives. EU policies, as well as national policies, focus on stricter control, labour selection and improvement of integration of necessary but undesired migrants. These are insufficient actions and basically in conflict with policies of economic liberalization and the pretension to export democracy. In the external dimension of migration and cooperation with third countries the transnational integration concept and the pro-active role of migrants and local authorities (which we can refer to as a downward phase of the subsidiarity principle) should be introduced.

As we have seen, migrants and local authorities can play a critical role in the promotion of co-development. A wide range of opportunities are linked to the role of migrants in supporting social welfare in their countries of origin, the financial relevance of remittances, the possibilities to enhance skill and brain circulation, the innovative initiatives of migrants and local authorities on migration management and development. However most of the projects undertaken in this domain are scattered and not embraced into a strategic framework.

The launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy, can offer motivations and a new opportunity framework where migrants and local authorities can lobby for a new transnational integration programme.

The European Neighbourhood policy aims at creating a common space of security, stability and prosperity with East European and Southern Mediterranean countries, and it offers - quoting from *Wider Europe*: ‘the prospect of a stake in the EU’s internal market and further integration and liberalization promoting the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, the four fundamental freedoms’. EU and its neighbours should put in place - it continues: ‘mechanisms that allow workers to move from one territory to another where skills are needed most – although the free movement of people and labour remains the long-term objective’, providing opportunities for cultural and technical interchange with a long-stay visa policy, ensure integration, combat illegal migration, examine wider applications of visa free regimes, facilitate cross border movements in the frontier areas³.

An important innovation in this new external assistance policy is the adoption of territorial cooperation: the extension of the Interreg programme of the internal regional policy to Neighbour countries (the Neighbourhood programme in the period 2004-2006 and from 2007 the cross border cooperation in the ENPI). This innovation can acknowledge the role of local authorities in framing common trans-local development through cross border cooperation.

Such approach shows good perspectives for the promotion of links between migration and development, integration and transnationalism, enhancing the role of migrants and local authorities in decentralised and cross border cooperation.

However this approach is not systematically pursued within EU policies: as a matter of fact, documents such as the EU *European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper*⁴ as well as the ‘EU Meda Neighbourhood Programme’⁵ fail to indicate concrete perspectives on issues of migration and development and on the relative role of local

³ Commission of the European Communities, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A new framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, COM(2003) 104 final, Brussels 11.3.2003.

⁴ Commission of the European Communities, *European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper*, Communication from the Commission, COM (2004) 373 final, Brussels 12.5.2004.

⁵ Commission of the European Communities, *Meda Neighbourhood Programme, Strategy Paper and Indicative Programme for countries under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership*, Brussels 2004.

authorities; a territorial approach is completely absent also in the new Communication of the European Commission on Migration and Development published in September 2005.

In this framework it is up to local authorities, migrant organizations and civil society to lobby and promote political and practical measures of co-development. Local authorities can build through their practices and experimentations a framework for intervention. The lessons learned and the elaboration of political proposals can steer the European Commission and national governments in setting up a new transnational integration programme in the ENPI and in reducing legal, procedural and resource constraints. If they were to actively do so, migrants and local authorities could become the promoters of a new approach where migration, integration, external affairs, security and development policies, both at the European and national level, could be based on coherence and harmonization.