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Matteo Belletti, Mario Biggeri, Federico Ciani

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Assessing multidimensional well-being and capabilities of migrants hosted in the Italian reception system

Matteo Belletti[*], Mario Biggeri[**], Federico Ciani[***]

Abstract

Although migration is usually approached at the macro level as geopolitical phenomenon and catalyser of social economic changes (e.g. impact on poverty in home and host countries, impact on economic growth, impact on human capital), the capability approach (Sen, 1987; 1995) suggests that being able to decide where to live is also a key element of human freedom. Starting from 2000, Italy had the highest relative growth of its migrant population (Caritas Italiana, 2019) in the European Union (EU). The number of asylum seekers, holders of international protection and refugees hosted and assisted by the reception system has significantly increased between 2011 and 2017 (UNHCR, 2020). Consequently, a major challenge emerged: how to structure a reception system able to support migrants by fostering their integration within hosting communities and by promoting their autonomy at the end of the asylum procedure. The aim of this paper is to describe the evolution of the multidimensional well-being and capabilities of migrants along their migration experience with a particular focus on to the role played by the reception system. The paper investigates three case studies which have been observed between 2015 and 2019 in two Italian regions, Tuscany and Piedmont. The research adopts innovative participatory methods, including structured focus group discussion and participatory mapping, with the aim to directly engage asylum seekers and holders of international protection.

Keywords: Migration, Refugees, Integration, Capability Approach, Participatory Method

Abstract

Nonostante la migrazione venga normalmente considerata a livello macroscopico come fenomeno geopolitico e come catalizzatore di cambiamenti socioeconomici (l'impatto sulla povertà nei paesi natale e ospitanti, l'impatto sulla crescita economica, l'impatto sul capitale umano), l'approccio fondato sulle "funzionalità" o "capacità" (Sen, 1987; 1995) afferma che anche essere in grado di scegliere dove vivere è un elemento fondamentale della libertà umana. Partendo dal 2000, l'Italia ha avuto la più alta crescita relativa della popolazione migrante (Caritas Italiana, 2019) nell'Unione Europea (UE). Il numero di richiedenti asilo, titolari di protezione internazionale e

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[*] Team member of ARCO (Action Research for CO-development), Prato (Italy).

[**] Scientific Director of ARCO and Associate Professor in Applied Economics at the University of Florence (Italy).

[***] Team member of ARCO (Action Research for CO-development), Prato (Italy).

rifugiati ospitati ed assistiti dal sistema di accoglienza è notevolmente aumentato tra il 2011 e il 2017 (UNHCR, 2020). Di conseguenza, si è presentata una nuova sfida: come strutturare un sistema di accoglienza capace di sostenere i migranti attraverso la promozione della loro integrazione nelle comunità di accoglienza e favorendo la loro autonomia al termine della procedura d'asilo. Il fine dell'articolo è quello di descrivere l'evoluzione del benessere (in più dimensioni) e delle capacità dei migranti nel corso della loro esperienza di migrazione, concentrandosi particolarmente sul ruolo giocato dal sistema di accoglienza. L'articolo analizza tre casi di studio che sono stati studiati tra il 2015 e il 2019 in due regioni italiane, Toscana e Piemonte. La ricerca si avvale di metodologie partecipative innovative, tra cui discussioni di gruppo strutturate su un obiettivo centrato e rilevamenti partecipativi, con il fine di coinvolgere direttamente i richiedenti asilo e i titolari di protezione internazionale.

Parole chiave: Migrazione, Rifugiati, Integrazione, Approccio sulle Capacità, Metodo Partecipativo.

Introduction

Migration has become central to the global policy agenda, as the number of migrants that leave their own countries has been sharply increasing during the 21st century (IOM, 2019). Several structural and contingent factors contributed to this trend. As a matter of facts, international migration[1] flows are strengthened by globalisation and interdependencies, wider opportunities to move and communicate, strong demographic pressures and unbalances, huge inequalities between developing and developed countries, emergencies, conflicts and growing political and social instability in many regions (Jennissen, 2007).

Focusing on hosting countries, the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis and the increasing prevalence among EU citizens of negative perceptions toward migrants (European Commission, 2018) led the EU governments to reduce the number of work visas and, more in general, to shrink regular economic migration channels. The combination of the two phenomena (i.e. more migrants and less regular migration channels) resulted into an increase of illegal migration on one side and, on the other, into a huge increase of applications for asylum and humanitarian protection. The latter had a relevant impact on the European reception systems, generating internal tensions among EU member countries that are serious threats for the EU internal stability (ECRE, 2016; HRW, 2019).

Although migration has always played a relevant role in the history of mankind, it is not possible to consider it as a fundamental human right progressively recognised at the global level. As suggested by Golash-Boza and Menjìvar (2012, p.1215), "the

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[1] An international migrant is any person who changes his or her country of usual residence (Bilsborrow et al. 1997).

right to enter another country, however, does not form part of existing human rights conventions and treaties. In the prevailing human rights tradition, the freedom to leave is a more fundamental right than the freedom to enter". In other words, the right to improve (or safeguard) one's well-being by choosing where to live has often been limited by the existence of other fundamental human institutions such as national States which establish who has or has not the right to cross borders (Sørensen, 2012). This situation shaped a lively debate on how to conciliate migrants' rights, host communities' prosperity and compliance with international law. All in all, national governments maintain a substantial degree of discretion in deciding upon the exact status to be granted to asylum applicants. Furthermore, they can also greatly impact the treatment given to asylum seekers and refugees by regulating and limiting their access to key entitlements such as the healthcare system, their freedom to choose where to live etc. EU countries, for example, tend to restrict asylum seekers' labour market access, trying to reduce incentives for economic migrants to submit (unfounded) asylum applications (Dustmann et al, 2017).

Although economic status and inequality are important drivers of migration related phenomena, the number of migrants continues to rise even if an increase in the level of socio-economic and human development occurs in the country of origin. From a within country perspective, adopting both mono and multidimensional approaches to define poverty (ICMC EUROPE and FORIM, 2016), migrants are not the poorest among the general population. From a between countries lens, middle income countries are among the most relevant origin countries (UNDESA, 2016). As described by De Haas (2010), there is an inverted-U-shape relationship between the level of human development and migration patterns, which demonstrates why development processes are generally associated with higher levels of both migration aspirations and migration capabilities. Interestingly, moving from macro-trends to micro dynamics, we can see that a wide range of partially unexpected factors contributes to shape migratory projects: education and access to information through media, internet and migrant networks increase people's awareness of social, economic and political opportunities elsewhere, increasing their own life aspirations (Hart, 2016). This suggests to reject stylised approaches for describing migrants' well-being while acknowledging the complexity of migration as a fundamental part of human lives.

The aim of this paper is to describe the evolution of capabilities during the migration experience and to assess the role of the Italian reception system on migrants' multidimensional well-being and capabilities through a person-centred analysis. From a methodological point of view, the paper provides a practical example of how a tailored participatory toolbox rooted in the Capability Approach can be used to achieve the mentioned goals. The presented evidence is based on the analysis of three case studies observed between 2015 and 2019 in Italy.

According to the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, human capabilities are conceived as the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have (Sen, 1999). This provides a potential metrics to evaluate human well-being and to assess the influence of policies, programs, projects in terms of capability expansion. Interestingly, Martha Nussbaum (2000; 2006) proposed a list of central capabilities, and among them she included *mobility*. Furthermore, children and the youth tend to identify mobility as a relevant capability for their well-being and well-becoming if asked to in conceptualise their capabilities (Biggeri et al., 2006). The 2009 Human Development Report (UNDP) defined mobility as "the ability of individuals, families or groups of people to choose their place of residence" (p.15), highlighting its importance for human beings. In other words, elaborate and successfully implement a migratory project might have a decisive influence on individual well-being. Mobility as a capability has an intrinsic value but also an instrumental role to increase other capabilities or to implement fundamental coping mechanisms.

The capability approach is here operationalised through the application of a tailored and flexible toolbox which leverages on the complementarity between different tools and is able to collect quali-quantitative data. The application of methods based on stakeholder participation is coherent with a perspective of individual and social empowerment (Biggeri and Santi 2012; Clark et al., 2019). More precisely, the main tool adopted is the *Structured Focus Group Discussion* with score matrix (SFGD), developed by Biggeri and Ferrannini (2014). This is a participatory method that enables a broad and direct evaluation of individual and collective capabilities by collecting data and information on the level of real opportunities (or achievable functionings) of stakeholders. Other qualitative methodologies, such as individual questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and participatory mapping have been applied.

The three case studies presented in the paper focus on reception facilities and projects managed by third-sector organisations. The first case study is based on a participatory research made in two Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS). These are managed by a local association member of the *Confederazione Nazionale delle Misericordie* in northern Tuscany. The second case study is part of a research project promoted by *Caritas* in Piedmont, which involved asylum seekers and holders of international protection hosted in five CAS and one SPRAR facility in Biella, Asti and Cuneo, managed by *Caritas* itself. The third case study focuses on the activities of *ARCI* in Tuscany, which involve holders of international protection hosted in the System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) / the Protection System for Beneficiaries of International Protection and for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (SIPROIMI)[2]. The case studies do not intend to represent the overall situation of all asylum seekers and refugees hosted in Italy. However, considering the small group of

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2 ARCI and CARITAS are two Italian NGO deeply rooted at the local level thanks to their regional and provincial committees.

the investigation, we aim to identify positive and negative aspects of reception experiences and to discuss some related policy issues.

The objective of this paper is to contribute to disentangle the complexity of migration by stimulating the participation and the direct involvement of migrants. More specifically, we intend to answer the following research questions:

- Does migration expand migrants' capability space?

- Which are the dimensions of migrants' well-being more impacted by the migratory experience? Do they change according to the migrants' nationality and the type of reception facility?

- Do alternative reception settings (namely SPRAR/second line and CAS/first line facilities) and their inclusion within the corresponding territorial networks of actors have different impact on migrants' well-being and capabilities?

The paper is structured as follows. After the introduction, the second section presents the conceptual framework through a synthetic literature review on migration, human development and capability approach. The third section briefly explains the design and methodology of the research and the case studies. The fourth section describes the main results. Conclusions are included in the last section.

1. Analysing migration from a capability approach perspective

The capability approach is based on the concept of *human capabilities* developed by Amartya Sen, which relates to the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have (Sen, 1999). This approach clearly moves away from conceptualisations of well-being and development focused on income per capita or the GDP growth. Referring to income as a mean and not an end of development, Sen creates the ground for a multi-faceted definition of human development and well-being: development is defined as the freedom of choice and the capacity of people to exercise autonomy in their lives (IOM, 2013).

Applying Sen's capabilities approach to migration, Martha Nussbaum argues that mobility is part of a set of basic human functional capabilities that can be used to assess the effective freedom that individuals have to carry out their life plans (Nussbaum, 2006). *Human mobility* is defined by UNDP (2009: p.15) as "the ability of individuals, families or groups of people to choose their place of residence", whereas human movement, its related *functioning*, is the act to realise it. If the decision to move and the act of migrating are linked to a free and informed choice, these are expressions of human development (De Haas, 2009).

The capabilities and human development frameworks have been used by several authors and organizations as a useful theoretical approach to meaningfully bring

together migration, development and human rights: the Joint Migration and Development Initiative (JMDI) puts the capability approach at the centre of its handbook *Migration for Development: a Bottom-Up Approach* (2011); a series of *Human Development Reports* authored by the UNDP analyses migration through the capability approach (Klugman, 2009; Risse, 2009); Preibisch et al (2014) investigate how the capability approach is pursued within the global governance of migration; Bonfanti (2014) develops a capability-based framework for migration.

The decision to migrate is not always an expression of individual freedom: often this decision is taken in highly constrained environments and, thus, it refers to 'un-freedoms'. Moreover, migration does not always result into an expansion of the individual capability space. If migrants are exploited, lack fundamental rights or live under unfavourable development conditions (in sending and receiving societies), mobility may have a limited or even a negative impact on people well-being and human development (De Haas, 2010).

According to a widely shared definition, *forced migration* is "the movements of international and internal refugees displaced because of conflicts as well natural, environmental, chemical or nuclear disasters, famines, or development projects" (IASFM) – and is a direct expression of a lack of freedom. In case of forced migration, risks perception – related to the availability of information and to correctly process existing evidence – is a key determinant of decisions linked to the migratory project (Dadush and Niebuhr, 2016). The assessment of migration-related risks depends also on 'what' the migrant leave in the origin country including the social and economic status (i.e. the opportunity cost) and, more in general, the extent to which the potential migrant enjoys the opportunity to live a life he/she has reason to value. At the aggregate level, forced migration tends to differ from voluntary migration since it regards usually big numbers in short period of time, causing disruptive effects in the location of first arrival and having dramatic consequences on migrants' life. Therefore, the closer a migration experience is to the ideal-type of forced migration, the more the conclusions and policy suggestions that result from exploring voluntary migration are challenged (Ruiz and Vargaz-Silva, 2013).

Voluntary migration is much less distinctively defined. Ottonelli and Torresi (2013) provide an interesting review of several approaches aimed at handling the issue of voluntariness in migration decisions. Their analysis leads to a "soft" definition of voluntary migration as the result of a migration plans "belonging to the range of those choices that are voluntary but concern important goals and ends in people's lives". So doing the authors preserve the normative and analytical relevance of the concepts of forced and voluntary migration but, at the same time, push to relax this dichotomy: forced and voluntary migration should be considered as a continuum of experiences (see also Erdal and Oeppen, 2020).

The polarisation of the public debate about forced vs voluntary migrations is often deeply influenced by ideological approaches. According to anti-immigration positions, only those who can be strictly defined as forced migrants have the right to move from one country to another, being recognised as refugees. The reaction to these positions often leads to underline that, given the level of inequality and deprivation prevailing in the Global South, all migrants are someway forced to leave their own countries (Ottonelli and Torresi, 2013; Pastore, 2015). The paradoxical effect of this approach is to try to promote migrants' rights by denying the voluntariness of their migration project and indirectly reducing the attention paid to migratory agency.

Migratory agency is defined as the "limited but real capacity of individuals to overcome constraints and potentially reshape the structure" (De Haas, 2010: p.241). Migration thus entails the conversion of existing resources into a migratory project and not a mere reaction to a situation of need and deprivation: the decision to move or to stay implies the creative use of economic, social and human capital. This kind of action is likely to have a transformative impact on external structures: rules, laws, spaces could be reshaped and/or re-signified (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993) both in receiving, transit and origin communities. As an example, when a great number of people overcomes immigration restrictions choosing to migrate through illegal channels and creating migrants' networks, *de facto* it contributes to generate a gap between the legal framework (i.e. how the world is expected to work) and the underlying reality (i.e. how the world is actually working). The migratory agency also includes the way in which migrants build strategies to relate to the host communities and their actors, and to interpret resources, enabling factors and obstacles (Agustín, 2003; Erdal and Oeppen, 2013). This influences the final step of the migratory process, that is the inclusion and integration of the migrant into the social, cultural, economic and productive context of the country of destination.

The capability a person enjoys depends also on individual, societal and environmental conversion factors (Sen, 1999). These three types of conversion factors entitle a person to access and to transform goods and services into capabilities (achievable functionings, i.e. the capability set) and after the process of choice into functionings (actual beings and doings). According to Ballet et al. (2011), these conversion factors can change over time and from place to place. People migrate in order to have the opportunity to live a life they value. This can be considered as the core of the migration process: looking for a wider and more valuable capability set than those present in the country of origin means not only to look for a "richer" place (i.e. a place where one is likely to have access to a greater amount of goods and services) but also to look for a place where individual, societal and environmental conversion factors permit to convert resources into functionings more easily. It is thus clear that potential drivers of migration can be found at different levels (individual, local etc.) and both in terms of resources (goods and services) and conversion factors.

The legal framework a migrant is compelled to move within represents a crucial conversion factor. *Ceteris paribus*, migration impact in terms of capability expansion is deeply influenced by the actual access to rights and, particularly, by migrants' legal status (Preibisch et al., 2014). The "right to stay" is linked to access to decent job, to healthcare, to decent housing etc. When facing increasingly restrictive immigration regimes, which threaten both remittances sending and return migration, migrants are more likely to become permanent 'illegal' residents of the North (Datta, 2008). Moreover, restrictive immigration policies and border controls imply higher risks and costs for migrants, who are forced to use dangerous routes and spend more time to overcome these obstacles.

Access to social, political and civil rights is also a powerful driver of migration decisions. Potential migrants do not consider only income gains and lifetime earnings as motivation to move, but also differentials in security from violence, political stability and freedoms, as well as social security, education, health care and public services (De Haas, 2010; Czaika & De Haas, 2012). As found by Lovo (2014), potential migrants do not always prefer countries with higher GDP per capita, but they tend to select destinations where the average multidimensional well-being of the population is higher.

The role of reception systems is thus crucial, as it is expected to speed up the process of integration by mobilising individual and territorial resources in order to expand the migrants' capability space. As an example, organisations involved in the reception system could facilitate access to decent housing by acting as guarantor/mediator between migrants and landlords. Tailored vocational training programmes and internship activities are often implemented to facilitate a fair participation of migrants to the job market (coherently with the needs of firms in hosting communities). These are all example of how the reception system is expected to work: not only basic needs (e.g. food and shelter) but also specific bottlenecks in the capability building process (e.g. the weaknesses of social networks, the lack of trust, access to information about the job market, knowledge and awareness about duties and rights within hosting communities etc.) need to be targeted. In the next section, three specific case studies from the Italian reception system are analysed.

2. Case studies presentation and methodology

Despite providing a comprehensive analysis of the Italian reception system is well beyond the scope of this paper, it might be worth to acknowledge some key features of the system. Italy has been involved in relevant migrants' inflows since the 90s (D'Angelo, 2019; Tennant & Janz, 2009); nonetheless, Italian institutions are still struggling to manage migration as a structural phenomenon and not as an emergency or a never-ending set of recurring emergencies (Campesi, 2018; Fiore &

Ialongo, 2018). The Italian reception system is largely based on emergency approaches and temporary measures (D'Angelo, 2019).

After the phase of first aid and assistance implemented in the principal places of disembarkation, the reception system is structured on two main levels:

- First-line reception implemented in collective governmental centres or in centres to be established by specific Ministerial Decrees – Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS). The CAS system was designed as a temporary measure to prepare for transfer to second-line reception, but in practice has become a stable part of the ordinary system, receiving migrants when the capacity in ordinary centre is not sufficient. Despite this, the services that CAS system must guarantee by law are merely essential (ASGI, 2020).

- Second-line reception carried out in structures of the SPRAR - SIPROIMI system. Second-line reception was provided until 2018 under the SPRAR, that was a publicly funded network of local authorities and NGOs that accommodates asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. Since 2019, SPRAR has been substituted for SIPROIMI, available to adults only after international protection has been granted (ASGI, 2020).

The present work is based on data and information collected from three case studies conducted between 2015 and 2019. The investigation has been developed with the support of Third Sector organizations, that are among the main actors of the Italian reception system. The visited first- and second-line reception facilities were small- and medium- sized [apartments or other types of private residences as planned by the "logic of 'dispersal'" (Campesi, 2018) promoted at national level since 2014].

The first case study [CASE1] has been analysed through a participatory research conducted during a period of work training in CAS managed by a local voluntary association (*Misericordia*) in northern Tuscany, between 2015 and 2016. Opportunities and deprivations of asylum seekers in the various steps of migration were analysed, with a focus on specific possibilities offered by the reception system hosting them. 19 migrants from Nigeria, Afghanistan, Guinea Bissau and The Gambia (namely the main countries of origin of the hosted migrants) were involved in the research. Participants were all males aged 20-35. CASE1 contributed to analyse the relation between the migration experience and migrants' capabilities, disentangling the role played by ethnicity and typology of reception facility.

The second case study [CASE2] involved 57 migrants (all males with an average age of 25 years old) living in Piedmont (northern Italy). Their reception experience was managed by *Caritas* as umbrella organisation although hosting facilities were directed by other associations. The research, conducted in 2017, involved migrants hosted in CAS and SPRAR and supported by projects for socio-economic integration in several municipalities in Piedmont (see Table 1). CASE2 aimed at analysing the effects of different typologies of reception facilities and socio-economic integration projects on migrants' multidimensional well-being.

Opportunities and deprivations faced in origin and destination countries were also considered in the analysis.

Reception facility	Location	Migrants hosted	Note
Medium-sized CAS	Biella	27 asylum seekers	First step after arrival in Biella
Small CAS	Biella	14 asylum seekers	Two apartments, second step after arrival in Biella
Small CAS + informal facility	Biella	6 asylum seekers + 3 out of reception, claiming in second appeal	Two apartments, rural area
SPRAR	Biella	12 among holders of protection and particularly vulnerable asylum seekers	Two apartments (men and women)
Small CAS	Asti	4 asylum seekers	Apartment
Small CAS	Cuneo	15 asylum seekers	Two apartments

Table 1. Reception facilities CASE2 (Source: author's elaboration)

The third case study [CASE3] is part of a research made between 2018 and 2019 with *ARCI* in Tuscany (central Italy). The research involved 29 holders of international protection coming from several countries (see table below) hosted in five SPRAR-SIPROIMI facilities. These were managed by *ARCI* and located in different Tuscany provinces (Arezzo, Firenze, Livorno and Siena). This case-study aimed to analyse the links that migrants have with territorial networks within the hosting communities. The investigation considered also where and how migrants try to mobilise the resources needed to enjoy key opportunities (work, training, health, education, etc).

Case study	Tool	Number	Participants (by nationality)
CASE1	SFGD	3	19 Migrants from Nigeria (47%), Afghanistan (21%), Guinea Bissau (26%) and The Gambia (5%)
	Semi-structured Individual Questionnaire	19	
	Semi-structured Interviews	1	Coordinator of CAS
CASE2	SFGD	9	57 migrants from Nigeria (22%), Ivory Coast (20%), Guinea Conakry (11%), The Gambia (11%), Senegal (9%) and Mali (9%) and others (18%)
	Semi-structured interviews	6	
	Semi-structured Individual Questionnaire	21	
	Semi-structured interviews	25	Caritas managers, coordinators and workers of reception projects, volunteers
CASE3	Participatory mapping	5	29 migrants from Nigeria (21%), Senegal (17%), Somalia (14%), Pakistan, The Gambia, Ivory Coast (10% each), Mali (7%) and others (11%).
	Collective semi-structured interviews	5	Coordinators and workers of reception projects + representatives of local institutions

Table 2. Toolbox used for case studies (Source: author's elaboration)

Focusing on the used toolboxes (table 2), it is worth to discuss more in depth the *Structured Focus Group Discussion* (SFGD) with Matrix Score. This tool was at first developed by Biggeri and Ferrannini (2014) to analyse the multidimensional well-being and opportunity level of stakeholders involved in local development projects. Then the SFGD has been adapted to other scenarios including the analysis of migrants' multidimensional well-being.

While participating in the discussion, migrants contribute step by step to build a matrix where each row represents a dimension of their well-being[3]. The scores reported in the table are identified through a *consensus* decision[4]. Column [2] reports a relevance score (1-10) which allows to validate the proposed well-being dimensions and to deepen how they were conceptualised by participants[5]. In column [3] the current level of well-being is reported as a 1-10 score. This tool can also be used to encourage participants to express their views (which are synthesised in the score) about retrospective scenarios (e.g. the level of opportunities in transit countries, column [5])[6].

(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*
Well-being/ Opportunity dimension	*Relevance [1-10]*	*Score NOW [1-10]*	*Score in origin countries [1-10]*	*Score in transit countries [1-10]*
…being free from violence and exploitation	*10*	*7*	*5*	*2*
[…]	*[…]*	*[…]*	*[…]*	*[…]*

Table 3. Stylised Structured Focus Group Discussion score matrix

(Source: author's elaboration on Biggeri 2014).

Other tools included *semi-structured individual questionnaires and interviews*. Questionnaires were used to collect basic information on migrants. *Semi-structured interviews* mainly involved reception facilities staff and managers: these interviews were conducted in the view to better understand the structure of different reception facilities. Concerning CASE3, these interviews also involved representatives of local institutions in order to consider the relation between the reception facilities and the local institutional context.

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3 The well-being dimensions proposed in the SFGD were identified through a participatory research conducted in Italy in similar settings where migrants were asked to identify which opportunities (capabilities) are more relevant to live the life they have reason to value (ARCO, 2009).

4 A possible extension of the SFGD is to add further items to indicate whether a list of potentially relevant actors plays any (positive or negative) role in determining the score reported in column 2.

5 Note that the relevance score is not displayed in the charts.

6 A further interesting extension is the use of the tool to evaluate a hypothetical/counterfactual scenario (e.g. which would have been the level of opportunity in absence of the intervention of NGO "xyz", column 6). See, Biggeri, Ciani and Ferrannini (2017).

Participatory mapping (Mikkelsen, 1995) was used to deepen the issue of relations between migrants and the context where they are living. Migrants were asked to indicate places which are relevant for them and the reason for it, thus providing a rapid assessment of the local "subjective" geography according to migrant's perspective.

3. Results

3.1. Migrants capabilities during their migration history

This section reports an assessment of how migrants' opportunities evolve following their migratory path from origin to destination countries, considering as intermediate stages the main country of transit and the moment of their arrival in Italy [CASE1 and CASE2]. In CASE1, the three Structured Focus Group Discussions with matrix score (Biggeri and Ferrannini, 2014) involved 19 asylum seekers divided by nationality. The results from similar SFGDs conducted in the framework of CASE2 are briefly discussed as well.

Figure 1.a shows the results of the *Structured Focus Group* conducted with participants from Guinea Bissau and The Gambia during the investigation of CASE1.
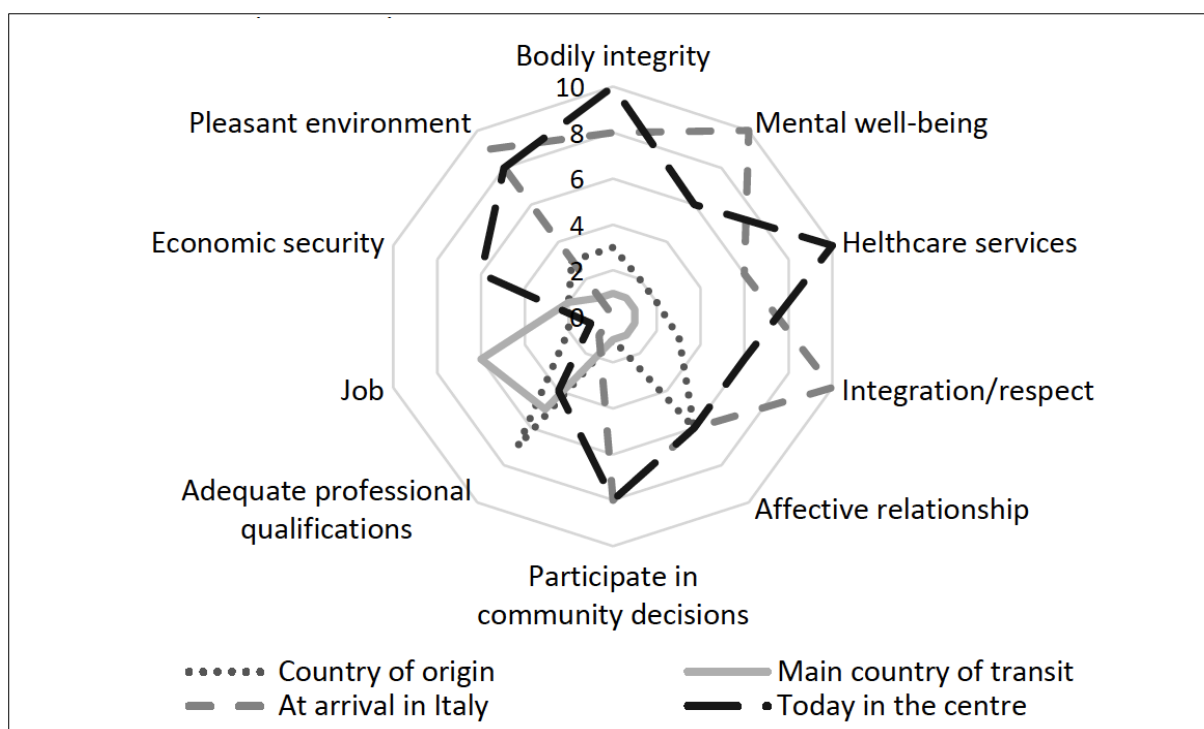

Figure 1.a – Evolution of opportunities, asylum seekers from Guinea Bissau and The Gambia (CASE1). (Source: author's elaboration)

As regards the situation before departure, asylum seekers declared low levels of opportunities in domains such as personal security, environment and mental health. According to their view, the low level of opportunity was mainly due to a scarce

respect for human rights and political instability. Furthermore, specific opportunities such as *to access healthcare services*, *to be respected/integrated in the community* and *to participate in community decisions*, are constrained by critical economic situations, characterised by widespread poverty and high inequality. Consistently, the score level for other specific opportunities including *to get a job* were low. Participants explained that the social and economic family background is particularly relevant and affects different aspects such as healthcare utilisation, education level and integration status. During the discussion, the majority of migrants defined themselves as coming from middle-low class households (i.e. not the poorest). Their status (and the surrounding context, including the political and institutional framework) in the country of origin seriously limited the ability to build their future according to personal aspirations (i.e. create a family, build a house, get a decent and stable job etc.).

In other words, according to participants perceptions, deprivation in terms of future opportunities was much more crucial than current deprivation in terms of basic material needs (e.g. nutrition, housing etc.). Participants argued that the situation in the main country of transit was even worse than in the country of origin: in Libya, where participants lived for a period between four and twelve months, there was no respect for human rights and widespread racism towards Sub-Saharan Africans. Migrant smuggling networks were strong and participants, if not locked in Libyan jails[7], managed to survive by performing occasional low-skilled jobs, often without regular payments and robbed by local criminals.

The risks associated with irregular migration flows are major and have a strong impact on migrants' deprivations during the transit period. After their arrival in Italy, the overall level of opportunities improved. Specifically, the level of opportunity *to be not afraid for bodily integrity*, *to reach mental well-being*, *to feel respected/integrated*, and *to live in a pleasant environment* increased. The last migratory stage is represented by long term stay in Italy (i.e. within first-line reception structures). The level of opportunities was on average higher than in the previous stages, except for the specific opportunity *to get a job* and *to have adequate professional qualifications*. At the same time, the opportunity *to reach mental well-being* and *to feel integrated/respected in the community* had a higher level immediately after their arrival in Italy than during the following period (months or years) in the reception system. The difficulties to learn Italian and to communicate with locals, the long distance between accommodations and cities and the perception of not being welcome in the host communities (several participants reported racism episodes) constituted the main problems during the second period in Italy.

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7 Detention experiences are cited and reported by most of Sub-Saharan migrants who participated to the research. However, SFGDs where maybe not the right framework to share this kind of experience more in depth: it could be interesting to deepen this issue through other methods such as life course interviews.

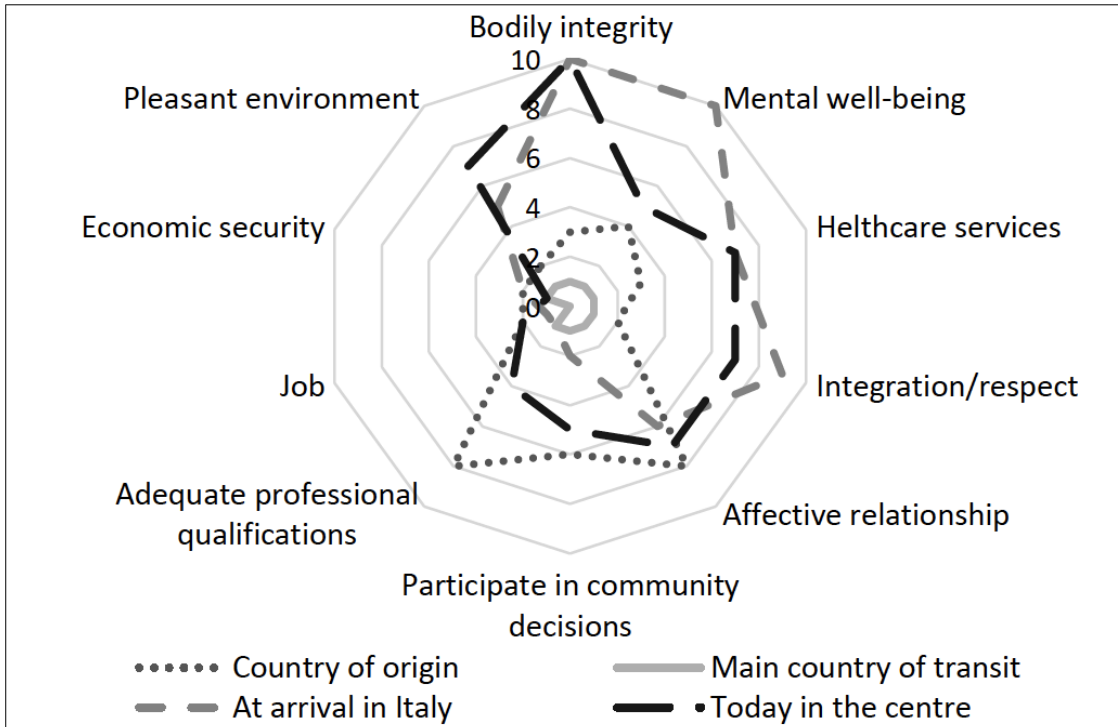The following figures show results of SFGDs with Nigerian and Afghan migrants.

Figure 1.b. Evolution of opportunities, asylum seekers from Nigeria (CASE1)
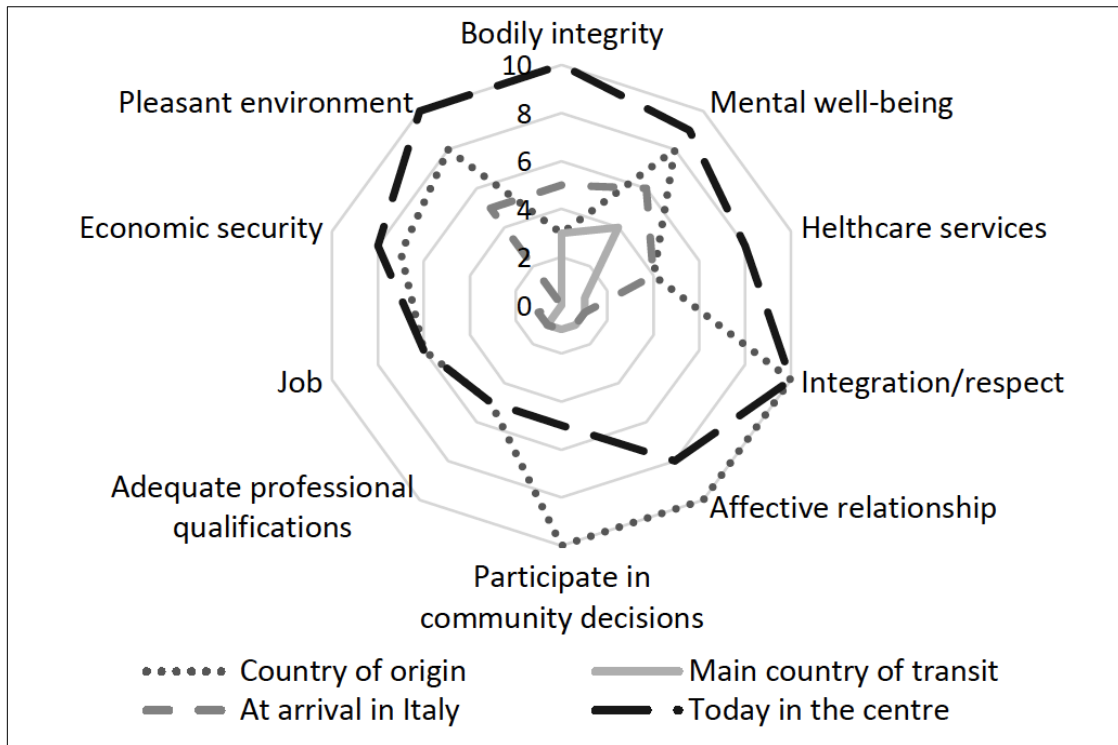(Author's elaboration)

Figure 1.c Evolution of opportunities, asylum seekers from Afghanistan (CASE1)
(Author's elaboration)

The following analysis is focused on the level of opportunity in origin countries and in the Italian reception system, based on previous Figures 1.a, 1.b, 1.c.

The former level allows us to understand the main motivations behind the decision to migrate; these reasons are crucial to distinguish between economic migrants and refugees. Considering the level of opportunity in the origin countries, some brief considerations may be useful: the low level of opportunity *to be not afraid for your bodily integrity* and *to access healthcare services* differs according to the nationality of participants; Afghan asylum seekers declared a very good level for social life and integration and economic/labour situation, while Western Africans (from Nigeria, Guinea Bissau and Gambia) declared a low level in both these dimensions (due to the labour situation, remarkable income inequalities and poverty). Overall, the level of opportunities declared by Western-Africans asylum seekers are lower than those declared by Afghans. According to these results, the low level of economic opportunities and lack of personal security and freedom linked to the political situation are factors more important for Western Africans than for Afghan migrants.

A possible bias could have contributed to these differences: African migrants are often not awarded holders of international protection or refugees -the recognition rate[8] was 24% for Nigerians, 34% for Gambians (Eurostat, 2016)-. As a consequence, since they arrive in Italy, these migrants have to prepare the narrative of their personal experience for the *Commissione Territoriale* (the commission which decides about the refugee status), considering that the worse the picture they provide, the higher the probability of being awarded holders of international protection or refugees. This awareness might introduce a conscious or unconscious bias while describing the level of opportunities in the home country. On the contrary, Afghan migrants do not necessarily need to provide an extremely negative description of their own experience at home since their country (after decades of war) is almost universally knew as a place where one's life is in danger[9] and their recognition rate is much higher (59%). The lower level of uncertainty about the future is likely to introduce a sort of "optimism-bias" in the recorded scores including those concerning job and economic security.

Regarding the level of opportunity that participants declared while hosted in the Italian reception system, the following aspects can be highlighted. The average score level for *bodily integrity* and *access to healthcare services* show a sharp increase with respect to the level enjoyed in the origin countries. The opportunity *to get a job* remained low, mainly due to the legal status that has a direct influence on available opportunities: the lack of a long-term visa is a decisive barrier to access to

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8 Chance to receive some form of recognition after the asylum request, refugee status, humanitarian status or subsidiary protection.

9 A further possible explanation are adaptive preferences and expectations: Afghanistan has been disrupted by war and conflicts since 1979. It means that for a large share of Afghans below 50 years old, to live in a high or low intensity war zone is normal. This is likely to have direct consequences on perceived well-being and opportunities.

decent job. However, Afghan participants gave higher scores than Nigerian and Guinean / Gambian participants, as they positively assessed voluntary activities and one of them was employed as trainee in a small local company. Finally, *mental well-being* was on average higher at destination with respect to origin countries. However African migrants underlined their condition of stress and depression due to the high uncertainty about their future legal status and the quite high probability of being considered 'economic migrants' (thus without a permit of stay). On the contrary, focusing on Afghan migrants, the higher probability of being awarded the status of refugees is linked to a more optimistic aptitude toward the future and to a higher level of mental well-being.

Similar evidence emerged during the SFGDs conducted in CASE2 and involving migrants hosted in Piedmont reception facilities (Figure 1.d). An important improvement from origin to destination countries is registered in several dimensions concerning migrants' safety and health status, such as *pleasant environment*, *bodily integrity*, *mental well-being* and access to *healthcare services*. On the contrary, and in line with Nigerian and Afghan migrants of CASE1 (see figure 1.b and 1.c), there was a decline in the scores for the relational sphere, such as *affective relationships* and *communication with family and friends*. Finally, the difference between origin and destination countries was marginal for professional and economic opportunities: levels were negative in both scenarios, with a slightly higher level in origin countries for the specific dimensions of having a *job* and an *adequate professional qualification*. This might be linked to the low probability of getting a decent job in Italy where the joint impact of pervasive unemployment and/or underemployment and of legal constraints tend to shrink migrants' opportunities.
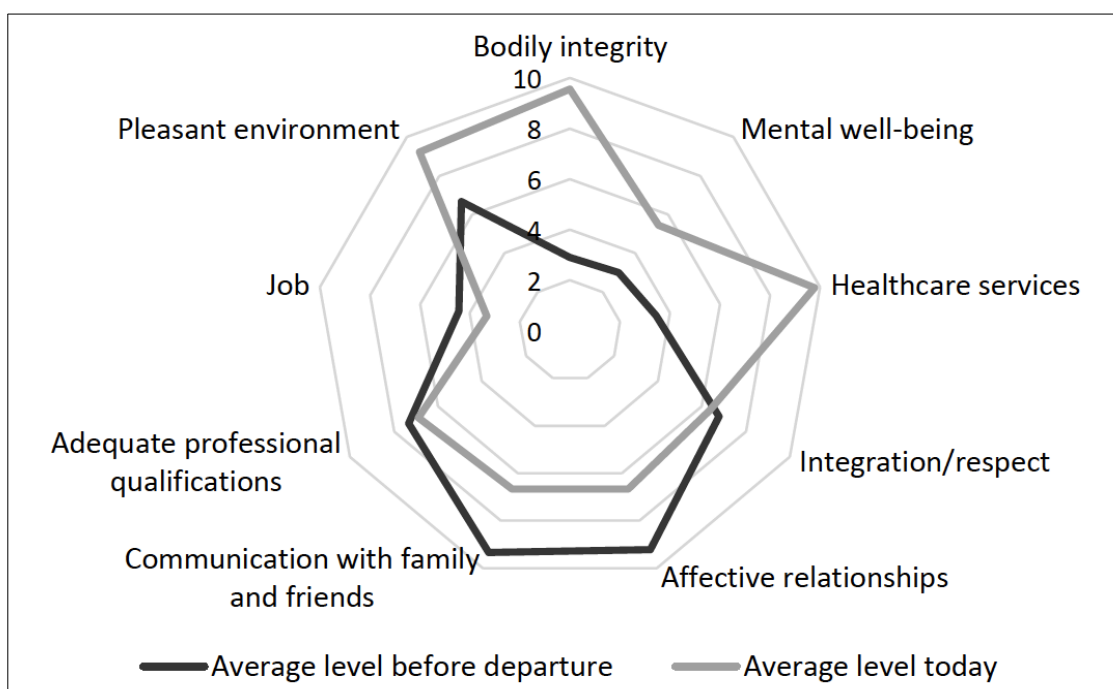

Figure 1.d. Evolution of opportunities, before departure and today (CASE2)
(Source: Author's elaboration)

3.2 Analysis of the different reception system's accommodations and their effect on refugees and asylum seekers multidimensional well-being

The present section compares the level of human development and well-being of focus groups' participants hosted in different structures in Piedmont Region [CASE2]. The objective is to understand how different facilities and/or initiatives influence the multidimensional well-being of asylum seekers and holders of international protection. 48 migrants participated to 9 SFGDs implemented during the research, that took place in 2017.

Figure 2 shows the results of SFGDs conducted in different reception facilities in Biella (see table 1).
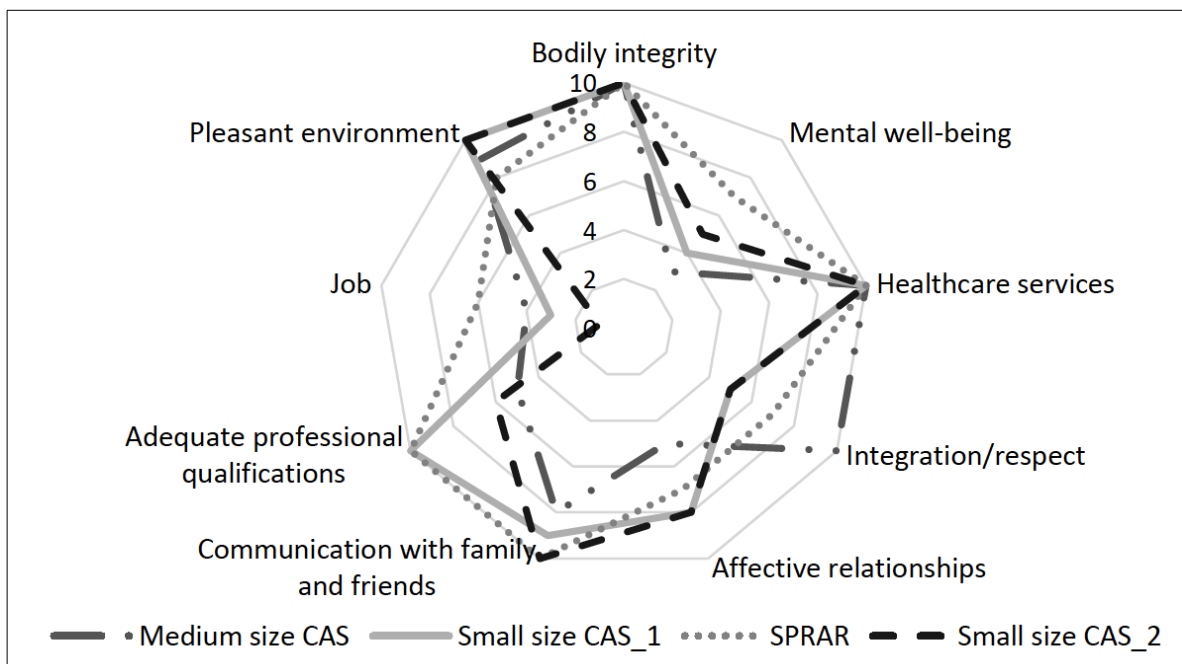

Figure 2. Level of opportunity, comparing different reception facilities and projects in the same city (CASE2) (Source: Author's elaboration)

Analysing the collected results, the following aspects can be highlighted. Regarding *mental well-being*, the only group that declared a positive value was the one composed by those hosted in SPRAR. The main reason was that most participants already received international protection and were performing internships in local enterprises. Concerning *integration/respect in the community*, SPRAR guests reported quite high scores: socio-economic integration was granted by SPRAR network and migrants had already spent a longer period in Italy. Migrants hosted in the two isolated small size CAS (one hosting also rejected asylum seekers) declared a low level of the same opportunity due to the scarce possibility to meet and know locals through social activities. The rejected asylum seekers – waiting for second appeal results without granted hospitality, but informally hosted by the association – stressed a particularly negative view about their current and future status. The group hosted in medium size CAS affirmed to enjoy a high level of integration, thanks to the

initiatives promoted by Caritas and other social cooperatives to deepen the relation with the local community. Those arrived more recently in Italy (up to one year since their arrival) reported a lower opportunity to have *affective relationships*, as they had less time to know each other, and to get in contact with workers and volunteers, and locals. Regarding the economic/labour situation, the assigned scores present great variations. The perceived level of *professional qualification* was higher for the first-arrived in Italy (one to three years since their arrival). Both migrants in SPRAR and small size CAS reported high scores, although vocational training were available only for the ones hosted in SPRAR. Moreover, the level of opportunity to get a *job* and *being financially independent* was considered as sufficient only by those hosted in SPRAR project, due to the higher chance to be involved in income generating opportunities. Several participants highlighted the scarce possibility of being hired after the internship period of 3-6 months and the low wage which does not allow to reach economic independency.

In Figure 3, the level of opportunities of migrants hosted in small and isolated accommodation facilities in different cities is compared (see table 1).
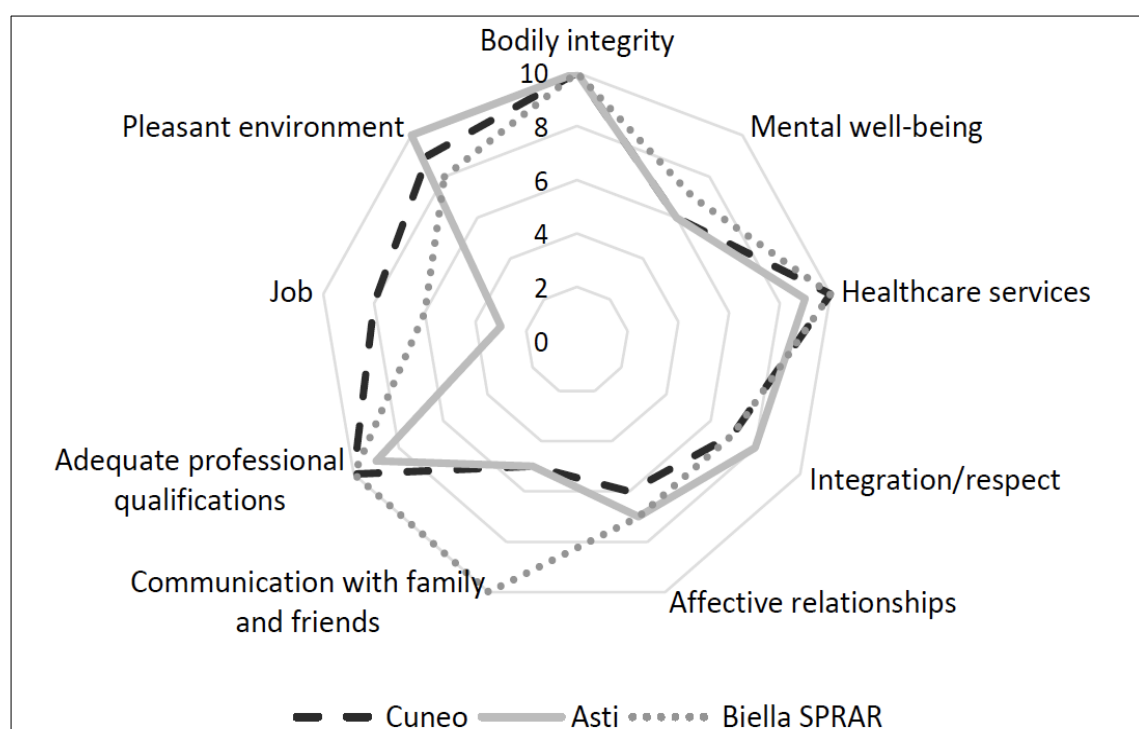

Figure 3. Level of opportunity, comparing small and isolated facilities (CASE2)
(Source: Author's elaboration)

For six over nine opportunity dimensions, SFGDs participants affirmed to have remarkably similar and positive levels. Scores for social life and integration and economic/labour situation need some remarks: positive values were assigned for *integration/respect* and *affective relationship*, as the restricted number of migrants hosted facilitated mutual knowledge with workers and volunteers, and several integration activities were promoted with local communities; regarding the level of opportunity to have an *adequate professional qualification* and to get a *job for*

economic independence, the values for SPRAR and in Cuneo's CAS were higher than for Asti and for facilities analysed in CASE1, due to courses of professional qualification and job trainings available to migrants.

3.3 Participatory mapping with holders of international protection hosted in second reception facilities

This section summarizes the results from CASE3. The objective is to analyse how holders of international protection living in different second-line reception facilities perceive the territory in which they live and how well-established relations between reception facilities and the surrounding context can play a relevant role in favouring the social and economic integration of migrants. Moreover, the results of participatory mapping provide a first appraisal of how migrants are able to pro-actively "read" the hosting context to mobilize resources and create opportunities. The participatory mapping involved 29 holders of international protection and was conducted in 2019.

The intrinsic and contextual characteristics of SPRAR change according to the area where the project is implemented. On the one hand, we must consider different geographical and socio-economic contexts. On the other, different organizational architectures and various levels of commitment of local institutions are present. These features, indeed, have a remarkable impact on how migrants structure their relationship with the surrounding environment. All the participants were hosted in facilities placed in small- and medium- size communities in rural Tuscany. In several cases, they needed to move towards close-by cities to access services and to implement different activities.
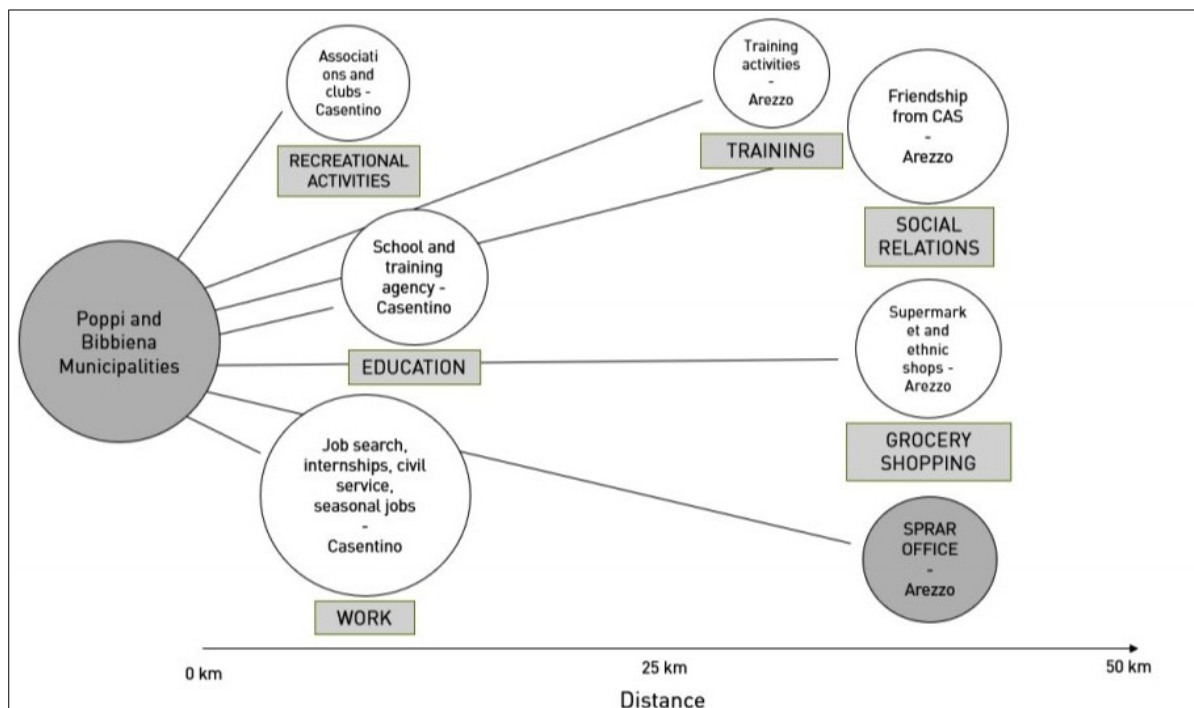

Figure 4. Participatory mapping with migrants hosted in Casentino area (CASE3)
(Source: Author's elaboration)

Figure 4 provides an example of how the participatory mapping has been schematically represented: the circles size is proportional to how often participants visit the place (number of times per week).

The horizontal axis reports the distance between the reception facilities and the other places they need to reach for education, training, work, recreational activities, social relations, grocery shopping.

Since the analysed SPRAR project is quite scattered across several municipalities into the Arezzo department, services and project activities were decentralised and involved local institutions and associations. Migrants were hosted in small-size facilities located in apartments. The municipalities of Poppi and Bibbiena, that are included in the landlocked area of Casentino, have a long-lasting experience with SPRAR projects and sound relationships with concerned third sector organisations including ARCI, the managing organisation. ARCI intervention method is aimed fostering migrants' ability to structure an autonomous relationship with the surrounding territory. The small dimensions of the involved municipalities are expected to facilitate this goal. The objective of participatory mapping was exactly to verify to which extent targeted migrants were able to show a proactive attitude towards the territory. 8 men aged between 19 and 37 were involved. Most of them arrived in Casentino after 12-24 months spent in first-line reception facilities (CAS) of Arezzo. Only a narrow minority was hosted in the area since their arrival in Italy.

Figure 4 clearly shows that the city of Arezzo continued to be attractive also after the transfer: migrants used to frequently travel to Arezzo for several reasons (friendship and social relations, training and professional qualification activities, visit to the SPRAR project office, shopping). Most of the beneficiaries reported positive opinions about the hosting territory of Poppi and Bibbiena, being particularly satisfied with respect to the availability of job and housing opportunities. However, the difficulty to find training and professional courses in the territory was indicated as a problem. Given the greater size of the city, Arezzo presented more opportunities in this sense. Moreover, in Arezzo it was easier to meet people and build relationships. Despite these comparative limitations, most participants expressed their willing to live permanently in the area of Poppi and Bibbiena if able to find a stable accommodation. All in all, participants seemed to have developed autonomy and pro-activity towards the area surrounding the reception facilities. They appeared to be able to seek for opportunities by identifying territorial strengths and weaknesses. Despite Casentino (and often Italy) was not the final destination of the initial migratory project, several participants explicitly expressed the desire (and the plan) to settle down in the area. It is thus interesting to observe that the individual migration project is dynamic and prone to change in accordance with the constraints and the opportunities faced by migrants during their experience: as long as a valuable relationship between the migrant and the surrounding context is built, migrants are ready to modify their project of life thanks to the acquired autonomy.

Conclusions

The distribution of opportunities is extremely unequal around the world. Inequality is a key driver of human movement and migration has a huge potential for improving human development (UNDP, 2009). People migrate to find new opportunities and freedoms, benefiting themselves as well as the areas of origin and destination. Although aggregate macro analyses of the phenomenon are useful, we have observed that migration is part of human lives and, thus, its impact on people evolves during the migration experience. Migrations effects on personal well-being are influenced by a wide range of factors, including the opportunity to be integrated in host communities.

Reception systems are an extremely interesting context where it is possible to analyse inclusion or exclusion processes of asylum seekers and refugees (Tomei, 2014). The direct participation of migrants to this kind of analysis has the potential to foster the effectiveness and efficiency of reception systems. Consistently with the capability approach, promoting participation means to unlock spaces where to exercise citizenship. In this perspective, the capability approach offers both an ethic and epistemic opportunity: by participating in the research process, migrants can improve their agency and achieve a better understanding of the changes occurring in their multidimensional well-being. In particular, they can reflect and elaborate upon their living conditions during the period in the reception system and, in general, during the different phases of the migration path.

The presented research proved that a participatory capability-based methodological toolbox can be effectively used to analyse the evolution of migrants' capabilities during the migration experience, considering the specific role played by the reception system. Certainly, this study presents some limitations. The results cannot be generalised without caution and additional evidence would be necessary to investigate more deeply the issue. This analysis is almost exclusively focused on young male migrants: it could be interesting to involve women in similar investigations in order to account for the gender-related heterogeneity linked to the migratory experience.

As concerns the evolution of migrants' capability space during the migration process, we observed that deprivation in terms of access to services, personal and economic security and mental well-being was the main driver behind the decision to leave the origin country: this kind of deprivation was perceived as a fundamental obstacle to build a future life consistent with migrants expectations.

The research confirmed that migratory paths outside from legal channels are extremely harmful. A dramatic and multidimensional contraction in the level of opportunities enjoyed in transit countries was stressed by almost all participants. West-African migrants had to spend several months in Libya living in dramatic conditions, and Afghan migrants travelled through the Balkan route experiencing violence, material deprivations, and violation of basic human rights.

This evidence suggests at least two strong policy implications. At the macro level, the international community should work to structure safe legal migration channels. This is motivated by the fact that violence and deprivations experienced in transitory places are likely to have long lasting consequences on migrants' well-being. At the micro-level, our participatory analysis shows that mental well-being scores tend to be low in origin countries and even lower during transit. Low level of mental well-being in Italy is reported also by migrants who perceive a high uncertainty about their future due to their legal status. All in all, the mental well-being of migrants seems to be threatened by stressors during the entire migration process. These findings are coherent with the evidence reported by psychiatric and ethno-psychiatric studies (Blitz et al 2017, Nosè et al. 2018, Crepet et al. 2017): a high prevalence of acute psycho-social stress and post traumatic disorders among migrants is common (particularly among those transited from Libya). This epidemiological framework would require additional investments to provide structured and effective psycho-social support services, particularly within reception structures. Quite disappointingly, after the Law n°. 132 of 1 December 2018 (the so-called 'Salvini Decree' or 'Security Decree'), the Italian reception system evolved in the opposite direction by narrowing the range of services provided in first-line reception facilities; nowadays de facto these are limited to food, shelter and basic health care (InMigrazione, 2018). The second-line reception has been also disempowered by the new law (HRW, 2020). To speed-up the procedures related to the recognition of the refugee status is an urgent need and could have positive effect on mental well-being by reducing the amount of time spent in a condition of complete uncertainty about the future.

Developing a sound assessment to analyse the impact of possible changes in the legal framework (and in the structure of the reception system) can be the objective of a further research; it is important to acknowledge that the evidence presented in this paper refers to the "pre-Security Decree" phase.

The arrival in Italy implies a general expansion of the capability space even if the level of opportunities in terms of job opportunities and capability to be respected/integrated within the community is not higher than the one experienced in the origin countries. Concerning the probability of getting a job, the level in Italy is lower than in some origin/transit countries, mostly for those hosted in first-line reception facilities who wait for the recognition of their asylum request and are often employed in voluntary or training activities. All in all, the reported results point out a weakness of the Italian receptions system in the field of economic and social integration. At the same time, job is identified as an important driver of integration and capability expansion: for the minority of migrants who get a job, the higher level of economic security and the increased social recognition positively influence both material and not material well-being dimensions.

The long-time stay in first-line reception facilities – up to two-three years at the time of the research, considering the entire asylum procedure – without certainties about

the outcome of the request negatively affects migrants' multidimensional well-being; this causes a precarious situation that is interrupted only with the recognition of international protection or refugee status. The legal status is fundamental in increasing the opportunities to elaborate a medium-term life project, given that the uncertainty about the legal status strongly undermines the integration process. The opportunity to stay in second-line reception facilities and to receive the multidimensional support offered has also a positive effect on well-being and integration. Moreover, the way first-line facilities are managed impacts migrants' capability building process. In the considered case-studies, SPRAR tends to outperform CAS facilities and to give more space to the relation between migrants, facilities and the surrounding context instead of focusing only on the satisfaction of basic needs: the results obtained in terms of well-being of the asylum seekers hosted are mainly positive (although limited by the absence of comparison with "post-Salvini decree" CAS facilities. These results are valid both for small- and medium- size facilities (the largest involved facility hosted 27 migrants). Obviously, limitations and uncertainties due to the legal status of asylum seekers hinders their opportunities, particularly those related to job. Moreover, the current legal framework tends to create "perverse" incentives: according to art.23 of the reception decree, material reception conditions can be revoked in case an asylum seeker possesses sufficient financial resources. Being the amount of resources considered sufficient extremely low (5.954 € per year), it is quite clear that this threshold is an obstacle to economic autonomy and an incentive to get involved in irregular jobs.

The participatory mapping shows the capacity of migrants to identify resources (and the lack of) in the surrounding territory and, thus, to develop strategies for seizing opportunities. Integration processes supported by managing organisations should build on this potentiality by strengthening and exploiting migrants' individual agency: managing organisations' ability to build a sound network linking reception facilities and the surrounding context can be a catalyser for migrants' agency. The location of facilities is not neutral: as witnessed by migrants during participatory mapping, rural areas tend to provide less opportunities both in terms of social relations and job. At the same time, to find appropriate housing is much easier in rural than urban areas. The presence of territorial network of public and private (non and for profit) actors supporting the reception service is crucial to mobilise opportunities and resources at the local level in order to foster migrants integration (e.g. the lack of job opportunities might be mitigated through a targeted mobilisation of existing enterprises or by working on innovative forms of collective transport to favour commuting).

Finally, the weaknesses of the territories are inevitably reflected into the integration process (e.g. lack of job and training opportunities). It is therefore important, especially in a post-emergency phase when the numbers of asylum applications sharply declines, to take advantage of the territories "knowledge" in order to better locate the reception facilities for developing a proactive environment around migrants.

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