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Forced Migration to Mountain Regions: Empirical Evidence from Two Reception Projects in the Italian Alps*

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Abstract

Following the Italian government's strategy relocating asylum seekers and refugees outside urban centers, by 2016 the presence of asylum seekers became distinctly noticeable in the Italian Alps. This contributes to a substantial transformation of Alpine communities. As the integration of refugees depends on several dimensions, mountain relocation offers both benefits and restrictions: Physical constrains may obstruct integration, but at the same time specific mountain features can create opportunities for innovation and community development that support socio-economic and cultural integration. This paper provides empirical evidence that contributes to the study of the dimensions that influence refugees' chances of inclusion and integration in mountain areas. It uses a case-study approach to compare two reception projects in the Italian Alps, i.e., Welcoming Village (Pettinengo, Piedmont) and Residence Le Baite (Montecampione, Lombardy). It adopts a territorial perspective to answer three research questions: Which strategies have been enacted by local organizations? Which territorial resources have been mobilized in reception

projects? What are the outcomes of reception initiatives for newcomers and local communities? Our hypothesis is that the interplay between structural elements and the agency of local actors determines the framework for the integration and outcomes of reception projects for both newcomers and local communities.

Introduction

The Italian government's response to migration from North Africa during the 2011 emergency resulted in asylum seekers being relocated throughout Italy, including its mountainous regions. By 2016, their presence was distinctly noticeable in the Italian Alps: 10% of the country's reception centers were located in Alpine municipalities with almost 13,000 asylum seekers in total. Their ratio to overall residents reached 10% in tens of cases across the Italian Alps (Perlik, Galera, Machold, & Membretti, 2019, p. 158). Together with other types of mobilities (Sheller & Urry, 2006), the national strategy has contributed to a substantial transformation of Alpine communities by relocating asylum seekers to mountain areas (Corrado, Dematteis, & Di Gioia, 2014; Gosnell & Abrams, 2009; Osti & Ventura, 2012).

This work provides empirical evidence that contributes to the study of territorial dimensions that influence the integration of asylum seekers relocated to mountain areas. This endeavor is especially relevant following the 2018 normative change: Whereas before the reform both asylum seekers and refugees were targeted by relocation policies, this has been reserved for refugees only following the 2018 reform of the asylum system. Given this new legal framework, the launching of reception projects that can create "real" connections with the territory is even more relevant since only refugees, i.e., those with an established legal status, are relocated. This excludes from the relocation program those asylum seekers whose applications are rejected: 50% in the years following the

North African Emergency (Italian Ministry of Interior, 2019).

For refugees relocated to mountain areas following the reform, it is therefore of fundamental importance to be included in territorial projects that support their integration.

The integration of refugees depends on several dimensions (Ager & Strang, 2008) and mountain relocation offers both benefits and restrictions. On the one hand, physical constrains and negative socio-economic factors may obstruct integration and foster social exclusion (Duvanel, 2009; Glorious & Doomernik, 2019, pp. 45–64). On the other, specific mountain features can create opportunities for innovation and community development that support socio-economic and cultural integration (Perlik et al., 2019; Membretti, Viazzo, & Kofler, 2017). The spatial characteristics of mountain areas do not hinder integration per se. Reception centers are not primarily determined by their location but by the capacity of local actors to activate reception projects that provide strategies of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Hence, successful integration projects can be hosted even in locations that are generally regarded as hostile (i.e., remote, high altitude places with a harsh climate) or with low-level potential for successful integration (i.e., places with poor access to jobs and educational opportunities, and few general services).

Studying the relocation of asylum seekers and refugees to mountain areas means examining processes that could favor both local communities and newcomers. Literature on the integration's territorial dimension is substantial. Some works have investigated the role of local actors in managing the arrival of asylum seekers to remote areas and small municipalities (Galera, Giannetto, Membretti, & Noya, 2018; Perlik et al., 2019, pp. 91–103). In rural areas, the socio-economic impacts of these migrations have been explored to determine their potential for triggering processes and activating resources that counterbalance depopulation and economic decline (Berthomière & Imbert, 2019; Bender & Kanitscheider, 2012; Corrado et al., 2014; Heleniak, 2018; Machold et al., 2013). However, empirical evidence on the positive and negative outcomes of reception projects in rural and mountain areas is still lacking in compar-

ison with urban contexts.

Within this context, this article examines two asylum seeker reception centers and related reception projects in the Italian Alps. We consider reception projects as the initial phase of a long-term integration process, which frames the conditions for asylum seekers to stay during the examination of their request for international protection. We have adopted a twofold territorial and spatial perspective. First, we have built upon theories of structure and agency to examine mutual relations between local actors and the contextual resources they mobilize (Giddens, 1984) in setting up and operationalizing reception projects. Second, we have scrutinized the use of spaces and locations in reception projects shaped and negotiated by those organizations in charge of the reception centers. We refer here to the concepts of organizing and sensemaking (Weick, 1995) to examine how local actors help shape the meanings and outcomes of reception projects. Finally, despite considering integration as a two ways process (Ager & Strang, 2008), in the study we focus exclusively on the agency of local communities to better highlight the specificities related to the mobilization of local resources in mountain areas, in support of the settlement and subsequent integration of the asylum seekers.

The paper seeks to answer three research questions: Which strategies have been enacted by local organizations? Which territorial resources have been mobilized in reception projects? What are the outcomes of reception initiatives for newcomers and local communities? Our hypothesis suggests that the interplay between structural elements (spatial/territorial resources) and the agency of local actors determines the integration framework and reception project outcomes for both newcomers and local communities.

The paper uses a case-study approach based on qualitative data collected with in-depth interviews and field observations in 2018/19 when the adoption of Law 132/2018 significantly changed Italy's reception system. The two case studies are the emergency reception centers (*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria*, CAS) Welcoming Village (Pettinengo,

Piedmont) and Residence Le Baite (Montecampione, Lombardy).

Territorial Projects or the Lack Thereof:
The Italian Double-Track System of Asylum Reception

Italy's reception system includes three distinct stages, 1) arrival, when asylum seekers are hosted in government-managed hotspots and identification centers, 2) waiting for the examination of asylum requests, when the national relocation scheme disperses asylum seekers across the country, and 3) recognition of the rights of asylum, when refugees are free to settle according to their preferences.

We focus here on the second phase, which, across the last three decades, has been characterized by recurrent, ad hoc provisions adopted by the government to handle new arrivals, resulting in an inadequate response capacity, a systematic overload of the system and the consolidation of an emergency approach (Corrado & D'Agostino, 2018). Since 2000, the involvement of local authorities (Law n.189/2002; DPR 303/2004) has established a "double-track" system for standard and emergency reception, characterized by opposing approaches and governance (Bona & Marchetti, 2017, pp. 245–248).

The standard channel is the SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, which became SIPROIMI under Law 132/2018). The SPRAR is based on decentralization and the involvement of municipalities, coordinated by the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI). It relocates asylum seekers based on bottom-up initiatives from local actors, leveraging territorial resources as the starting point for territorial projects targeted to the specific needs of beneficiaries (Cittalia-Fondazione ANCI, 2019). This channel offers integrated reception activities that consider newcomers as active protagonists in their integration path and access to services as an essential factor for integration. With Law 132/2018, the SPRAR has been replaced by the system of protection for holders of international protection and for unaccompanied foreign minors (Sistema di protezione per titolari di prote-

zione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati, SIPROIMI), restricting the access to integrated reception services to recognized refugees only. SIPROIMI was amended again with D.L. 130/2020, which brings the current frame for ASRs reception under redefinition.

As a result, the SPRAR/SIPROIMI is regarded as an example of European best practice (OECD, 2018), which acts as an integral part of local welfare, creating "a system in dialogue with the territorial context that support the establishment of relations between asylum seekers and the community" (Cittalia-Fondazione ANCI, 2019).

The emergency channel, on the other hand, consists of reception centers established to respond to peaks in asylum seeker arrivals (Bona & Marchetti, 2017). This often results in large centers isolated from urban settlements. Since 2015 they have become known as CAS (Legislative Decree 142/2015) and are established with a top-down procedure: Government prefectures delegate their management to private sector actors (companies, hotels) or third sector organizations (social cooperatives, associations). Despite their transitory nature, CAS centers host around 80% of Italy's asylum seekers (Perlik et al., 2019, p. 159). No common standard is defined for the services provided by CASs; their territorial impact depends on the discretion and motivation of management actors.

CASs are imposed because local authorities have been reluctant to host reception centers, fearing political backlashes (Fratesi, Percoco, & Proietti, 2018). As a mitigating measure, the so-called 'escape clause' was instituted in 2014: Municipalities that activate SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects on their own initiative can evade establishing CAS centers. Both case studies discussed in this paper were CASs imposed by the government.

It is important to note here that the acceptance rate for asylum cases in Italy has varied significantly across years. In the period 2015–18, denials of asylum applications exceeded 50% of the cases (Italian Ministry of Interior, 2019). It is important to note that in most cases, the examination of the request takes a period of 2–3 years, due to the very high number of requests presented to the Italian authorities. As is well known,

the failure to reform the Dublin system means that asylum applications submitted on Italian territory have to be examined by the Italian authorities, with a considerable overload on institutional capacity. This means that almost half of the asylum seekers entering reception projects, whether in the form of CAS or SPRAR, find themselves years later unable to rely on international protection as a channel for legal residence in the country, and forced into the black-market economy.

Theoretical Framework

First Steps of Integration: Reception Projects from a Territorial and Spatial Perspective

The examination of asylum requests in Italy and, consequently, reception projects can last up to three years. As a result, reception projects are highly important for long-term integration outcomes defined here as the multidimensional, non-linear set of interdependent processes through which new population groups are included in the existing systems of socio-economic, legal, and cultural relations (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, pp. 11–29). Ager and Strang (2008) identified ten interdependent integration domains, including access to labor markets, housing, education, and health. Performances in each domain result from negotiations and reconfigurations that take place on a local scale (OECD, 2018).

It has now been scientifically established that the spatiality and territoriality of social phenomena is of fundamental importance (Maggioli, 2015): Where things happen is crucial for an understanding of how and why they happen. *Spatiality* can be defined as the set of conditions and practices related to the position of individuals and groups relative to one another (Maggioli, 2015). It encompasses all actions, whether effective or solely virtual, that human beings living in society perform (Lévy, 2014, pp. 45–46). *Territoriality* is defined as the process built "according to the forms, structures, and contents of the territory that individuals and groups have helped to shape" (Maggioli, 2015, p. 54). It is "the ensemble

of mediated relationships linking individuals and/or social groups with exteriority and alterity, to increase their possible autonomy whilst taking into account the resources of the system" (Raffestin, 2012, p. 129). Multidimensional processes such as integration can be examined both through their spatiality and territoriality to unify notions of space and territory. Space and territory influence reception projects, contributing to the definition of a) how forced migrants and locals are positioned relative to one another; and b) the processes that mobilize contextual resources to increase or reduce asylum seekers and refugees' chances of integration.

Structure, Agency and Social Capital in Mountain Areas

Research on integration points to the role of locations and their contextual features in determining integration pathway outcomes (OECD, 2018). In migration research, the "spatial turn" has led to conceptualize the "local" as the setting determining the "opportunity structure in which migrants' integration trajectories can unfold" (Schiller & Cağlar, 2011, p. 63).

A structure-agency framework that considers how actors are influenced by their contextual resources has been applied to examine how local organizations use resources to develop reception projects (Giddens, 1984). Although physical configurations, geographical positions, and the specific set of territorial resources available in mountain areas influence the design and outcomes of reception projects, they are also significantly shaped by the agency of local actors. Migration studies have adopted a structure-agency framework to account for migrants' agency in shaping their integration path (Bakewell, 2010). Here we focus primarily on the agency of local actors. As for structure, we intend social, natural, human, financial, and cultural capitals (Goodwin, 2003). Among the set of territorial resources mobilized by local actors, social capital has been considered an explanatory factor for the spatial distribution of forced migrants in Italy (Fratesi et al., 2018). We refer to Putnam's definition of social

capital, which encompasses features of social organizations such as net-works, norms, and inherent trust that facilitate coordination and coopera-tion for mutual benefit (Putnam, 2000).

Process of Enactment and Sensemaking

We use Karl Weick's concept of "enactment" (1995) to explain the capacity of local actors to create and give sense to their socio-cultural and physical environment through organizational dynamics. Weick's con-cepts of organizing and sensemaking are useful in understanding how local organizations create meanings, environments, and contexts of action. In this light, we consider reception projects as the result of actions and sensemaking strategies enacted by local actors. Looking at how space has been organized and other territorial resources mobilized, helps grasp the meaning attributed to reception projects on a local scale.

Methodology

We have considered four evaluation dimensions to analyze the case studies (Figure 1):

1. Structure characterized by physical configurations and territorial resources. Physical configurations and geographical position of reception centers, including altitude, mountain typology, isolation, physical accessibility, and access to services. Territorial resources that frame the context in which reception projects take place, considering socio-economic processes and regulatory frame-works, as well as material and intangible resources (social and cultural capitals, actors' expertise).
2. Agency of local actors involved in reception projects and their capacity to mobilize territorial resources.
3. Processes of enactment and sensemaking enacted by local actors that are triggered by reception projects, including activities and the organization of spaces in relation to territory.
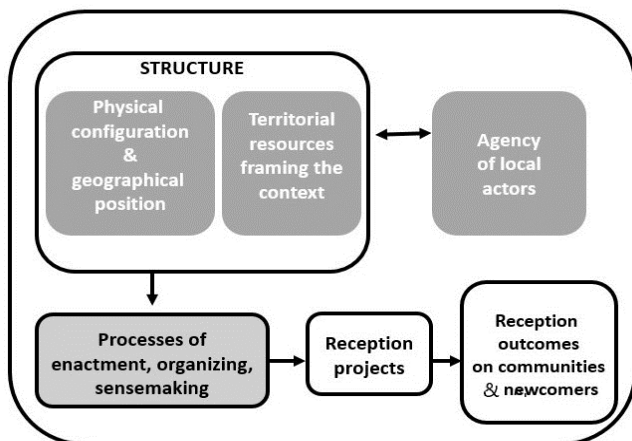4. Outcomes of reception projects on material and immaterial re-

Figure 1. Elements of the Evalution based on theoretical framework.
Source: authors' elaboration.

sources from the local community (the economy, society, environ-
ment, and governance domains of receiving communities, includ-
ing the transformation of existing spaces, changes in intangible
resources, and how location is conceived).
    We adopted a micro-scale analysis when referring to the organ-
izations that led reception initiatives and a meso-scale when considering
the territory where the reception initiative was implemented.

Data Collection and Analysis

    A case study approach (Yin, 2009) was adopted to explore the agen-
cy and the strategies enacted by local actors within the framework of
reception projects. The research design started in 2017 and data collection
took place in 2018, which used a qualitative approach based on in-depth
interviews, analysis of local media reporting, and field observations. Data
analysis was concluded in 2019. In each case, two in-depth interviews
were undertaken with key stakeholders (i.e., local actors with a deci-
sion-making role in the design and implementation of reception projects).
Interviews, which lasted between 60 to 90 mins, were recorded, tran-

scribed, coded, and then analyzed using qualitative content analysis methods (Mayring, 2010). For Case Study A, we interviewed the person responsible for the Pacefuturo reception project (Interviewee 1) and a social worker in direct contact with asylum seekers (Interviewee 2). For Case Study B, we interviewed the President of the cooperative K-Pax (Interviewee 3) and a volunteer at the Montecampione CAS (Interviewee 4). The interviews collected information on the involvement of local actors and investigated the strategies enacted to organize CAS spaces and their connection with the territory. The empirical work's limitations relate to a lack of data on the relations established between the asylum seekers and local population. We could not explore power relations within the reception centers nor the forms of conflict that may have arisen.

Case Study Selection

The cases were selected for their shared common features in terms of location and temporality, which formed the basis for comparison. Both case studies are in mountain areas, where the activation of local actors is crucial given the absence of migration networks that can support the integration of newcomers. This is a key point that differentiates integration path in mountain areas compared to the ones taking place in urban settings. Both were activated in 2011 as emergency reception centers. As a result, the research project was not initially determined by the initiative of local actors, whose involvement was defined after asylum seekers had been placed in the centers by prefectures. Simultaneously, the case studies display divergent aspects that make their comparison important for singling out factors that determined the diverse use of territorial resources. The case studies represent different mountain typologies, socio-economic contexts, and polarized stances in terms of the local actors' role.

Results

This section assesses the research questions by analyzing the evalua-
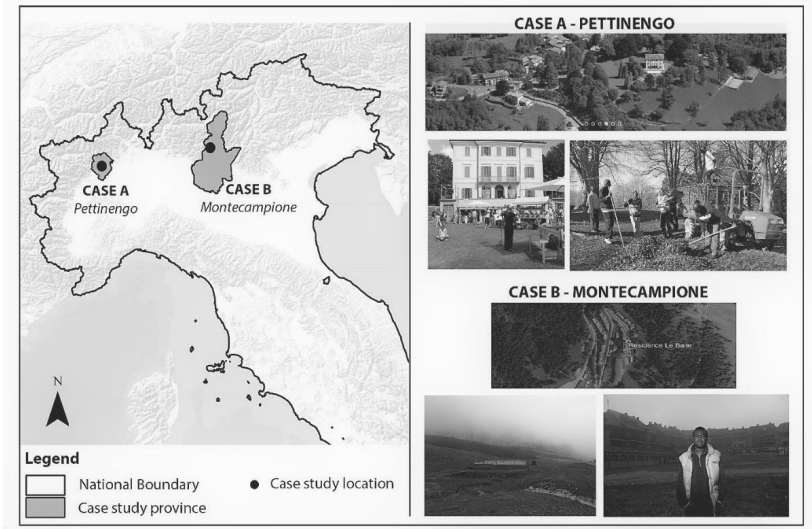
Figure 2. Map showing the location of Case A and B (Source of images: credit to Pacefuturo; Montecampione: credit to Claudia Burlotti.

tion dimensions for each of the two case studies (Figure 2). It includes excerpts of interviews conducted with key stakeholders and comparative charts for each dimension (Figure 3–6).

Structure: Physical Configurations, Geographical Position and Territorial Resources

Case study A concerns the CAS that was set up as a "welcoming village" in Pettinengo, a municipality of 1,300 inhabitants at 750 m AMSL, located near Biella, an old Piedmont textile town with 44,000 inhabitants. Its first reception project was initiated in 2011 when Pacefuturo accepted the Biella-based social cooperative *Filo da tessere's* proposal to host 25 asylum seekers. The second project, which started in 2014 with 25 asylum seekers, later increased: "We now have 14 structures, hosting 140 asylum seekers, in line with the model of decentralized reception" (Interviewee 1). Pettinengo's depopulation was accentuated by the local textile company's closure, which had once employed a sig-
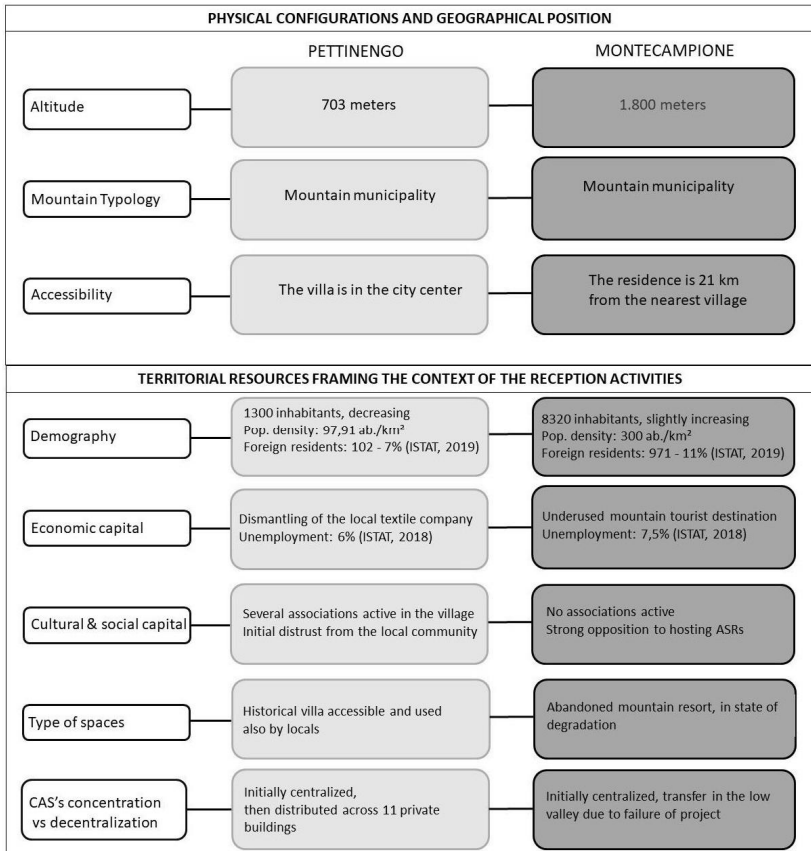
Figure 3. Physical configuration, geographical position and territorial resources. Source: authors' elaboration.

nificant share of the municipality's workforce. It had limited experience with foreign residents, as noted by one of the interviewees: "It's a small village. It was the first time 'tanned Martians' had arrived with everything they brought with them. […] Back then, they were all considered rapists, carrying all the diseases of the world. That was the narrative" (Interviewee 1).

Reception projects were initially located in Villa Piazzo, a historical building owned by the municipality and managed by the local association

Pacefuturo for social and cultural activities. The villa is located within the village and it is surrounded by a park. Services available in Pettinengo were therefore as accessible to asylum seekers as they are to local inhabitants.

Case study B, the CAS Residence Le Baite, is in Montecampione at 1,800 m AMSL, which has only 30 permanent residents. It lies between the municipalities of Artogne and Pian Camuno in Valle Camonica, Lombardy. This CAS, established in 2011 by the prefect's edict with no local mediation whatsoever, accommodated 116 asylum seekers: "The Lombardy Region rejected cooperation with the national reallocation scheme. The prefect, who was the commissioner designated to manage the emergency without needing to negotiate with the province or the city of Brescia, directly assigned the CAS's management to a private company, which agreed to rent the abandoned structure (Interviewee 3). Le Baite is a remote, abandoned ski resort. The nearest municipalities of Artogne and Pian Camuno are 20 mins away by car "with only one connecting road, which is not safe, because, if it snows, the road closes" (Interviewee 4). No shuttle service was set up when the CAS was established, making it impossible for asylum seekers to access services and nearby hubs.

Agency: Local Actors and their Capacity to Mobilize Resources

The Pettinengo reception project was coordinated by Pacefuturo, which has been active in promoting values of peace and conviviality since 2001. In 2003, the association established a center for people with disabilities in Villa Piazzo; therefore, the local community already associated the building with openness and diversity. The embedded reputation of Pacefuturo enabled it to involve key local actors (the parish, the mayor and other municipality associations) in supporting the reception project and establishing a welcoming network. The association's experience in international cooperation in Africa "guaranteed knowledge of the culture, customs, and traditions of asylum seekers, along with the knowledge of the local context, its needs, and resources" (Perlik et al., 2019, pp.
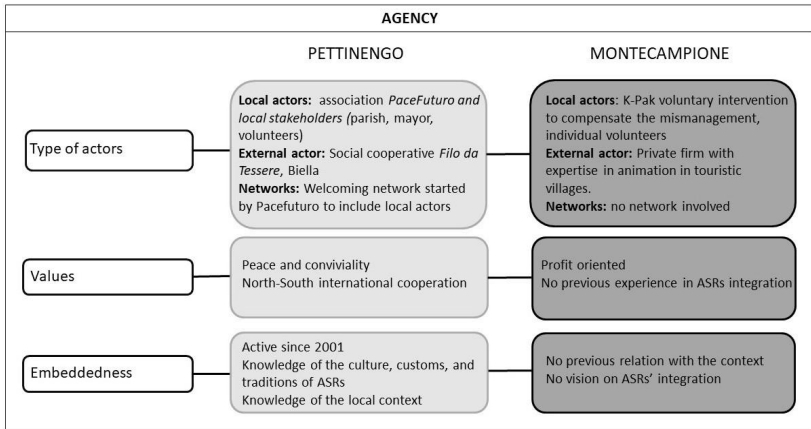
Figure 4. Agency. Source: authors' elaboration.

185–190).

The reception project's management in Montecampione was as-signed to a private enterprise with no previous experience of reception projects for asylum seekers. Staff were almost non-existent: "There were only a couple of Romanian security guards in the facility who didn't know what their function was. I never saw a check-in; you could go in and wander around the rooms" (Interviewee 4). The firm that managed the Montecampione CAS failed not only to adapt the building to its new function but also to undertake any action that would favor encounters and exchange among locals and asylum seekers. Occasionally volunteers vistied the center from the surroundings, but no systematic program was organized.

Processes of Enactment and Sensemaking

In Pettinengo, Villa Piazzo's second floor was transformed into a dormitory. The Villa Piazzo restaurant remained open to the public and provided meals for asylum seekers. The other floors and the garden were used for social, educational, and cultural initiatives open to the public that facilitated contact between the locals and asylum seekers. Basic lan-
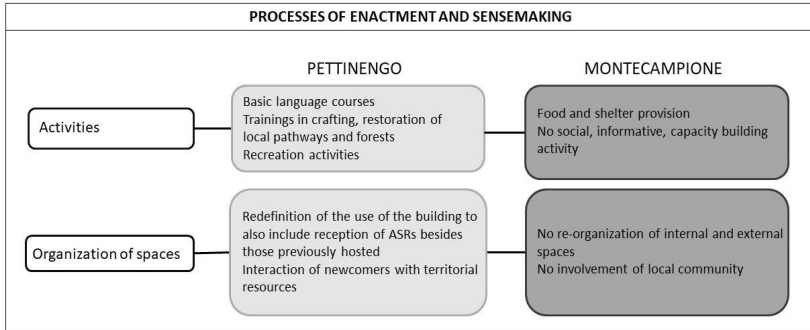
Figure 5. Processes of enactment and sense making. Source: authors' elaboration.

guage lessons were provided alongside courses related to local resources, including tailoring and the maintenance of forests and hiking paths. One of the interviewees recalls the motivation that oriented the villa's re-organization and activities, "We didn't want to create an island within Pettinengo […] Our goal was to relate two worlds, […] that did not previously know one another that take decades if not generations to integrate (Interviewee 1).

In its agreement with the prefect, the company in Montecampione was only committed to provide shelter and food. No social, informative, or capacity-building activities were organized. Guests could not work or do any constructive activities. As noted, "They had to self-organize their daily routine—the internal bartering of cigarettes, alcohol and other products was set up, and continuous meetings for obtaining information on their situation were organized among migrants" (Interviewee 4). The project was not guided by any integration perspective. Spaces were not re-organized to suit the new use: "The building was not entirely suitable from the point of view of safety regulations. It was a closed environment, not tested but considered fine in an emergency" (Interviewee 3). In terms of care services and activities offered in the center, "The local doctor was asked to visit the guests but could only attend once a week." (Interviewee 3).
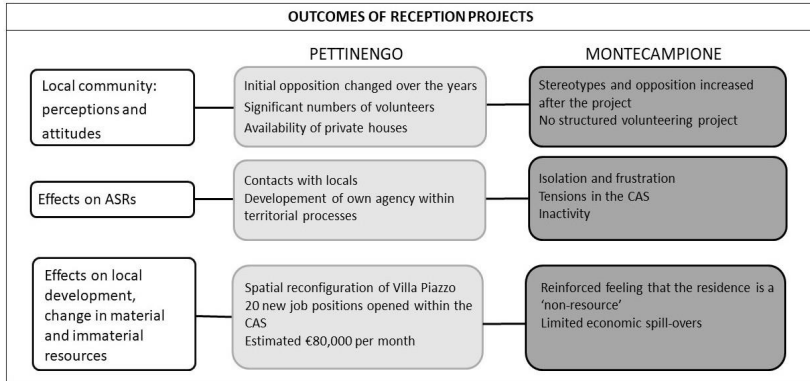
Figure 6. Outcomes of reception projects. Source: authors' elaboration.

Outcomes of Reception Initiatives

The reception project in Pettinengo employed more than 20 residents, with an estimated €80,000 mobilized per month for wages, food preparation, rental costs, medicines, and other consumption by asylum seekers. Simultaneously, the project managed to leverage private accommodation provided by local inhabitants, "Even though I was born here, and my family has been here for several generations, at first no one wanted to rent their houses to refugees. Today it's common for someone to approach us saying, 'Here's the house, we'll rent it to you'" (Interviewee 1).

Montecampione's marginality and the absence of interaction between asylum seekers and residents reinforced hostility and fears in the local community, further leading to their stigmatization, especially after 50 asylum seekers attempted to escape. As "municipalities were worried about what might happen up there" (Interviewee 3), the social cooperative K-Pax, active in nearby Valle Camonica, intervened to transfer asylum seekers to structures and apartments located in nearby municipalities (Ravazzoli, Torre, & Streifeneder, 2019). The crisis provoked by mismanagement made visible the need to create local links, "This is a system that we invented there, which was based on public responsibility in the management of reception" (Interviewee 4).

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper examines the strategies enacted by local actors and their use of territorial resources, spaces, and locations in mountain area reception projects to highlight how these elements have led to different outcomes for both newcomers and residents. Two case studies in the Italian Alps were selected for analysis. They share common features in terms of location and start date but also display divergent aspects. Their comparison is important to establish those mountain-related factors that determine the potential use of territorial resources.

Analysis indicates that different structures and agencies (i.e., mountain locations at different altitudes, with diverse proximity to urban settlements, different territorial resources, and distinct managers) change reception project outcomes for both locals and newcomers. This supports our hypothesis that the interplay between the agency of local actors, location characteristics, and territorial resources determines the framework for reception project outcomes and integration to unfold, in line with Schiller and Cağlar's work (2011, p. 63). In both cases, the geographical position, physical configurations, and the fragility of mountain territories (in socio-economic terms) conditioned the reception projects. Montecampione's isolated location and the CAS's physical distance from nearby municipalities prevented any contact between asylum seekers and residents. Conversely, the Pettinengo CAS's central location facilitated contact with the local community and aided the integration process. To explain the different perspectives of the two local communities towards reception projects, it is crucial to consider the agency of the territorial actors involved in management. In the area of Pettinengo, the leadership of the project by a well-established association with a social mission, steered the project to success and mobilized support from the residents. On the contrary, in Montecampione, the management of the project by a body extraneous to the territory prevented it from being properly communicated and thus supported by the residents. In Pettinengo, the management actor was able to mobilize existing networks, whereas, in

Montecampione, managers had no local contacts or networks to mobilize and no aim other than to keep asylum seekers in the building. The motivation of local actors has been identified as the main cause; whereas Pacefuturo acted for the mutual benefit of both newcomers and locals, the company managing the Montecampione CAS had no aim other than profit. A key distinction relates to the external or local character of the actors; in Montecampione, actors were profit oriented in a narrow sense, whereas, in Pettinengo, they were embedded within the local context, with a long-term experience in the social sector, and promoted both mutual knowledge and contacts between residents and newcomers. Based on this, they were able to address the economic stagnation of the local textile manufacturing industry by revitalizing dormant knowledge and professionalism (Perlik et al., p. 187). Furthermore, the actors' capacity to activate territorial resources and local networks was crucial for positive reception project outcomes and rests on their long-term activity in this area. In Pettinengo, Pacefuturo mobilized the existing social capital and adopted a participatory approach to involve the local community. Conversely, the company managing the Montecampione CAS had no connection with local resources; the absence of social contact made the physical isolation more acute. This resulted in a crisis that required K-Pax to develop new reception projects involving different municipalities across the valley.

The two case studies confirm that the organization of spaces within reception centers affects the framing of meanings (Weick, 1995) and determines how integration services are provided and perceived by beneficiaries. This also equates with the understanding that the organization of spaces in service provision can either promote the empowerment and capability of beneficiaries or not (Vitale & Bifulco, 2003, pp. 96–97). In Montecampione, both internal and external spaces were not re-organized to suit the guests' needs, which increased their sense of disorientation. Isolation and imposed inaction precluded newcomers from detaching themselves from the "temporality of waiting" (Kobelinsky, 2012) increasing a sense of boredom and powerlessness. The absence

of any internal space reconfiguration in the Montecampione CAS was paralleled by a lack of change in the meaning attributed to the reception center by local residents, who saw an abandoned place "occupied" by a project they were not part of with no concrete benefits for the community. Conversely, the reorganization of space in Pettinengo facilitated contact between asylum seekers and residents, turning their spaces into a means of empowerment and capability (Vitale & Bifulco, 2003). The process of spatial reconfiguration that placed Villa Piazzo at its center, contributed to altering the relative position of asylum seekers and locals by reducing distances between them (Maggioli, 2015; Felder, 2016), favoring proximity. The building maintained a central role in reception activities, consolidating its symbolic meaning (i.e., a shared space for the entire community).

In terms of the outcomes of reception projects on asylum seekers, empirical evidence reveals opposing effects for the two case studies. In Pettinengo, they acquired an active role and developed their own agency in territorial processes. In Montecampione, physical isolation and social exclusion prevented asylum seekers from developing any agency, turning their stay into a conflictual experience that left no option but to dismantle the project and transfer them to other locations. A key aspect that explains these differences is the role of knowledge and information; Pacefuturo provided asylum seekers with knowledge they could use to relate to the territory (e.g., expertise in maintaining forests and hiking paths); whereas, conversely, in Montecampione, no information was provided to asylum seekers on the length and purpose of their stay there, increasing frustration, misunderstanding, and attempts to escape. In terms of the outcomes of reception projects on local development, the new demand for services, housing, basic commodities, and the creation of new employment opportunities varied significantly between the two case studies. The Pettinengo CAS promoted new employment opportunities for residents and mobilized economic resources, having a direct positive impact on environmental resources. This equates with research that highlights the short-term contribution triggered by most reception projects (Galera,

Giannetto, Membretti, & Noya, 2018). However, in Montecampione, eco-nomic spillovers within the territory were scarce and the project's failure reinforced the abandoned resort's image as a "non-resource" for the local community. The definition of analytical categories enabling a detailed and systematic analysis of the territorial impact of reception projects re-mains open for future research. At the same time, it seems important for future research to address the conditions and mechanisms to favor the activation of local social capital and civil society to support their participation in reception activities.

A final point deserves to be made on reception projects initiated within CAS, which are commonly regarded as the weak link in the Italian double-track asylum system based on their failure to create local links and implement virtuous integration processes (Bona & Marchetti, 2017, p. 249). The case studies presented in this paper show a more complex reality, highlighting the central role played by the local agency in shaping the meaning of reception projects. As a result, even projects sharing phys-ical and geographical characteristics can lead to uneven outcomes. The comparison of experiences in Pettinengo and Montecampione demon-strates that good practices arise wherever local actors succeed in framing reception projects as an opportunity to mobilize territorial resources and adapt existing spaces for local development.

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