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***The comune versus the state:
the Riace Model and the contours of migration policy conflict.****

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ABSTRACT

When the mayor of a small village is charged, placed under house arrest, and banned from entering, it may come across as punitive action for maladministration. But this is no ordinary account of a politician caught in abuse of public office. In this Paper, I shed light on the *Riace Model*, an experience of a little *comune* in southern Italy, its mayor, and the ensuing tension between central and local government on inward migration. The study is informed by two main driving issues: (1) the collision between the mayor's vision for the village and the national political line (intergovernmental relations); and the nuanced approach towards migratory settlement (contrasting visions of policy implementation). Whilst it has been recognized internationally, the *Riace Model* is now challenged by a resenting political establishment, a displaced mayor (the thinker behind it), and an apprehensive community, unclear and unsure about its future. By examining its empirical development, and engaging with contemporary theories of governance and migration, I argue that the *Riace Model* is a precursor to similar phenomena that are likely to occur in countries where similar tension between central-local politics exists. Whilst the state has the power to cause the model to flounder, it cannot extinguish the recognition and appreciation of the international community.

Key words: Riace Model • Local Government • Migration • Policy implementation

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*“As mayor, in addition to dealing with potholes and ordinary and administrative issues,
I have completed broader paths by building a new community.
I thought global, to act locally.”*

Domenico Lucano, Mayor of Riace¹

1 Introduction

This work revolves around a hilltop village in the region of Calabria, southernmost edge of the Italian peninsula. Until two decades ago, Riace, a *borgo* (village) of less than 3,000 inhabitants² was mostly known for the Bronze Warriors discovered in 1972 in its adjacent sea,³ but it's brush with fame and notoriety started in 1998, when a group of 220 Kurdish refugees made it to the beach after crossing the sea by boat.⁴ A young school teacher noted the opportunity and toiled to offer empty apartments to these refugees, offer them job training, and integrate them into mainstream society. The teacher and subject of this paper, Domenico (Mimmo) Lucano, went on to become mayor of the city in 2004, whilst the refugees built their lives in the little village, that over the years hosted up to 6000 asylum seekers (Fortune 2016). Riace, previously a moribund village due to its ageing population, experienced a reviving period where a diverse community blended with locals, participated in social projects and helped business thrive. Riace became *Città Futura* (the future city), a model of hospitality emulated by others in Italy and abroad:

‘The dream is that of a village based on the same values as the local culture, untouched by capitalism and consumerism. A culture of hospitality, which always finds the way and the space to welcome foreigners. Domenico Lucano, Mayor of Riace, sees migrants not as a threat but as historic opportunity to revitalize a village that seemed destined to be depopulated.’⁵

At the time of this investigation, the village is experiencing a reversal of fortune. Riace is now back to its normal self, dying a natural death. The reasons that led to this are several, and while the case has been the subject to an extensive interest by the media, it still lacks academic scrutiny. In this article I take on the challenge of examining what were the factors that propelled Riace and its mayor to the fame it acquired, how its actions created a model of migrant integration and sustainability, and how this path led to a course of collision with central government. The notion of contrasting currents in policy-making at different levels of governance, is not uncommon. Mayors are sometimes at the forefront in leading national crusades against national political lines, pitching well beyond the confines of their respective municipalities.

This Paper is structured in three main parts. In the introduction, I set the scene and provide a background on the actors behind the Riace model, the state as a passive bystander, the mayor and the *comune* as catalysts, and civil society as an active supporter of the project. In the second part, I draw the assistance of some theoretical considerations to suggest a

¹ Accessed on 1 February 2019 from <https://www.valigiablu.it/riace-arresto-sindaco-lucano-migranti/>

² According to Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), there were 2735 inhabitants in 2017.

³ The Riace Warriors are two bronze statues that were accidentally discovered off the coast of Riace. They were immersed in the cargo of a ship that sank ‘probably’ en route to Rome from Greece, where ‘Greek sculpture was much admired’ (Kleiner 2009, 107).

⁴ The village is divided into two parts, Riace Marina on the coast of the Ionian Sea, and, eight kilometres higher up on the mountains, Riace Superiore, where the model was developed (Unsgaard 2017).

⁵ The Association *Città Futura – Giuseppe Puglisi* was created in 1999 and is dedicated to Rev Pino Puglisi, a priest assassinated by the mafia in his hometown of Brancaccio (Palermo), 1993. See also <https://www.riacecittafutura.org/>

framework for the behaviour of the actors involved. I do this by looking at two strands of theories: (i) central-local (intergovernmental) relations, and (ii) social conflict and the implementation of migration policy. Then I proceed to unpack the Riace model as a controversial local phenomenon that is shaped by endogenous factors but modelled by exogenous ones. I shed light on how various players held a stake in creating a new concept of sustainable localities, drawing from the creativity and innovation of various social forces. Finally, I revisit some of the initial premises and suggest that in times where populism is on the rise and the distinction between left and right is diluted, political tension can emanate as a result of cleavages within central-local relations. Whereas structures not supported by the state are destined to fade or fail by time, their legacy, as the case of the Riace model, has a probability to live on.

This study was carried out by conducting a field trip to Riace. Initial attempts for interviews were unsuccessful, and none were set. I travelled to Riace and its neighbouring villages of Caulonia and Camini and what ensued was a snowball effect where, through various encounters I was led to actors that shared with me their story.⁶ Walking the streets of Riace and its environs was essential to observe and draw my conclusions. For this article I make extensive use of reports, most of which come from international media. Like these journalists, I sought an eye-witness account of a village and the legacy of its mayor, who according to Unsgaard (2017) is a ‘legendary figure’ who ‘could have found, in one unexpected move, the solution to two of the greatest challenges humankind faces at present: increased migration and regional depopulation.’ Whilst I could not observe what most media accounts reported in the years before, I could see remnants of a functioning model, which notwithstanding its withering achievements, deserves academic examination.

The State

Undoubtedly the state is the prime actor in policy-making at the national level and this is manifested clearly in this case study. Under the lens here is migration as a policy theme and contentious issue in the electoral arena, where the notion of a migration crises played a role in the election of parties that ran on an anti-immigration platform.⁷ Barker (2018) stresses that in order to win public trust on immigration, political leaders in the European Union must show that they are exerting ‘stricter controls over the bloc’s external borders and crack down on people traffickers.’ European Summits have not yielded any progress with leaders barely ‘budging an inch’ on new proposals to create common fronts (Barigazzi and Herszenhorn, 2018). In Italy, the political trajectory from 1998 to 2018 (the two decades where the Riace model unfolded) involved a number of political configurations.⁸ As is customary in Italian politics, legislatures are often subject to discontinuity in the policy process due to early termination or new configuration of governing coalitions.⁹

⁶ This research would not have been possible without the assistance of Maria Paola Sorace. I am also grateful to Giuseppe Gervasi (Deputy Mayor of Riace), Giuseppe (Pino) Alfarano (Mayor of Camini), Rosario Zurzolo (local SPRAR Coordinator of Camini), and the people of Riace, for their gracious hospitality, and for igniting a flame that shall never be extinguished. Their deeds give credence to Mohammed Badran’s (a Syrian refugee) assessment that ‘the real crisis here is not a refugee crisis, but a crisis of responsibility’ (Badran 2019).

⁷ Party leaders in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the UK have whipped up anti-immigrant rhetoric increasing their popular base and winning elections (Barber 2018).

⁸ Between 1998 and 2018, there have been 6 legislatures and 10 Prime Ministers leading 10 different coalitions.

⁹ For the historical reasons behind political instability in Italy, see Sapelli (2017).

The state started flexing its muscles during the *Partito Democratico* (PD)-led government with Paolo Gentiloni as Prime Minister and Marco Minniti as Interior Minister (1996-1998). It was in 2016 that Riace had its funding temporarily blocked, putting hundreds of refugees and workers at risk (Gilbert 2018), with the Minniti-Orlando law of April 2017, introducing stricter policies on immigration and public security.¹⁰ After the 2018 elections, no political coalition had enough seats to govern, and an alliance was forged between the two biggest parties, *MoVimento 5 Stelle* and *Lega Nord*. Whilst a technocrat was invited to take the oath of Prime Minister, a contract was drawn up by the two parties to put forward a government programme.¹¹ With regards to migration, it was made clear that local autonomy on the management of migrants would have to make way to an alternative arrangement, more specifically:

‘At the same time, provision must be made for the identification of temporary residence sites for repatriation, with at least one location for each region, subject to agreement with the Region itself, and with one sufficient capacity for all irregular immigrants, present and tracked on the national territory, guaranteeing the protection of human rights. ..To date there are about 500 thousand irregular migrants present in our territory and, therefore, a serious and effective return policy is non-deferrable and a priority.’¹²

The discord between central and local government grew with the appointment of Matteo Salvini as Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. After taking office, a decree to hasten the expulsion of immigrants was adopted by Parliament in September 2018 (Giuffrida 2018a). Under this decree, immigrants would be stripped of their humanitarian protection and placed in reception centres, thereby preventing them from living in communities such as Riace. Those who do not qualify for asylum, but are still considered at risk if they return, would also be denied humanitarian protection. To date, Italy retains a hard stance on migration blocking its ports and refusing entry to NGO vessels.¹³ The accusation levelled by government has been that, by serving as ‘migrant taxi services’, such vessels are abetting illegal migration and providing opportunities for human smugglers.

The hostility towards the Riace model has not only been manifested through rhetoric interventions. On 2 October 2018, the Tribunal of Locri placed Mimmo Lucano on house arrest for ‘aiding illegal migration’,¹⁴ and issued a *divieto di mora* (prohibition of stay)

¹⁰ A number of jurists argued that the decree was not in line with the Italian constitution and with the European Convention on Human Rights. In particular, it violated Article 111 of the Constitution (the right to a fair trial), Article 24 (the right of defence), and Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to be heard). Various NGOs gathered outside Parliament to protest against it (Camilli 2017).

¹¹ The anti-establishment 5-Star Movement, acceded to Salvini’s request of a hard stance on migration and gave the new Interior Minister ‘a free hand in pursuing his immigration clampdown’ (Jones 2018).

¹² See ‘Contract for the Government of Change’, Accessed on 4 March 2019 from https://www.quotidiano.net/polopoly_fs/1.3919629.1526651257!/menu/standard/file/contratto_governo.pdf

¹³ In June 2018, a stand-off between a number of Mediterranean countries occurred when the Panama registered NGO vessel, Aquarius (with 629 on board), was denied entry by Malta and Italy. Aquarius was leased by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and SOS Méditerranée. The ship was diverted to Spain. In September 2018, it had its registration revoked (BBC 2018).

¹⁴ Lucano was arrested as part of the police operation “Xenia”. The two accusations were: i) the organization of a marriage of convenience to allow a Nigerian woman, whose application for international protection had been rejected, to remain in Italy; and ii) assigning by direct order a waste collection service to two social cooperatives in Riace to provide jobs for locals and migrants. According to the Judge Domenico Di Croce, Mayor Lucano lives and acts as if he is ‘above the law’ and for him the ‘ends justify the means’ (Trinchella 2018).

banning him from the village.¹⁵ The Prefecture of Reggio Calabria suspended his mayorship, with administrative jurisdiction of the *comune* transferred to Deputy Mayor Giuseppe Gervasi. The full force of the law was applied on the premise that Lucano was not only in breach of the law, but an instigator of illicit practices. In what seemed a personal vendetta, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini retorted ‘chi sbaglia paga’ (who makes a mistake, must pay for it) and declared the Riace model to be now defunct.¹⁶

The mayor and the *comune*

The behaviour of the mayor and the role of the *comune* are crucial in putting forward the Riace model (in the second section I discuss the often complex relationship between central and local government). What started as a refugee integration project, soon became ‘good practice’, a model of how local government can be an active protagonist in migration policy. The rejuvenation efforts of Riace, and its innovative ideas to immerse migrants into the local economy attracted both local and international attention. Over the years, Lucano garnered several accolades, a popularity (or rather notoriety) that might have landed him into hot water since attention was now heavily drawn on the ‘controversial’ mayor.¹⁷

In 2010, he scored a third place in the *World Mayor Prize* receiving a special commendation in ‘recognition of his approach to helping refugees settle in his small community’ (von Hove 2010).¹⁸ In 2016, Fortune Magazine ranked the mayor of Riace in 40th place of the *World’s Greatest Leaders* hailed for ‘saving the village’, ‘rejuvenating the economy’ and providing a model that is ‘studied and adopted as Europe’s refugee crisis crests’ (Harris, 2016). In 2016, Pope Francis wrote a letter to Lucano saying that the doors will always be open for the mayor, and invited him to the Vatican to share the experience of the Riace model as best practice (Candito 2016).¹⁹ In 2017 Lucano was the Laureate of the *Dresden Peace Prize* for being ‘a role model regardless of political conviction, skin color, religious belief, and national borders’, pointing out that ‘without the citizens of Riace, the brilliant ideas of the mayor would have been in vain’ (Dresden-Preis, 2017).

Mimmo Lucano played a proactive role in going beyond the ‘normal’ administrative remit of running a municipality. In the eyes of those promoting social change, this behaviour is not only welcomed, but expected. Pope Francis remarked that ‘it is necessary that the voice

¹⁵ Rosa Gilbert (2018) reports that ‘after 14 years as mayor, Lucano has been subject to increasing attacks from the political establishment culminating in the Guardia di Finanzia – a police force which sits under the Finance Ministry – putting him under house arrest.’

¹⁶ Despite the arrest, several were the calls to retain the Riace model. The President of the Federation of Consumers, Emilio Viafora, referred to the integration model proposed in Riace as ‘an example to follow, especially on the social and human level’ and it should be promoted as a ‘real antidote against the growth of hatred, distrust and, even worse, indifference’ (Studio Cataldi 2018).

¹⁷ Interview with Giuseppe Alfarano, Mayor of Camini, 17 January 2019. The car of Mr Alfarano’s wife was set on fire on 28 August 2018. The motive behind this was never proved, but the mayor argues that his support to Mr Lucano’s project might have been a reason for the attempted intimidation. Alfarano is reported to work ‘closely with the social fabric of the country and supports courageous choices such as that of welcoming migrants’ (Maiolo, 2018).

¹⁸ According to the report, during the course of the 2010 World Mayor Project, Domenico Lucano was supported by ‘more people than Riace has citizens’.

¹⁹ The Vatican heaped praise on the Riace Model. The Pope writes "I know your initiatives, personal struggles and suffering .. I therefore express my admiration and gratitude for your intelligent and courageous work in favor of our refugee brothers and sisters" (Candito, 2016). The aim of the summit was create a worldwide network of mayors, supported by the Holy See, committed to building a different model of hospitality (Facchini, 2008).

of the Mayors be heard to promote the construction of bridges and not of walls. Their authority must be at the service of sustainable and global development, justice and peace.’²⁰ Lucano was neither cajoled nor intimidated by higher authorities, and pursued a tack of civil disobedience (Trinchella 2018).²¹ The rebuttal to the Deputy Prime escalated into a verbal confrontation. Lucano’s response evoked a moral conscience with respect to the hard line by the national government:

‘How can a Christian vote for him? “. Some want to use immigration to increase the fears of the population. What threatens us is fear, not immigrants. Salvini represents the chaos, the disorder and the destruction of Europe. The destruction of the very idea of democracy. Italy is not Salvini.’²²

Civil Society

The Riace model, as I expand later on, is the product of a concerted effort. The village espoused the ideas of the mayor and embraced the notion that welcoming newcomers meant an injection of life into a hitherto dying society. Zolin (2019) remarks that the ‘most happening spot during that time’ (when the population receded) ‘became the post office, on pension day.’ By civil society here I refer to the ‘space for collective action around shared interests, purposes and values .. distinct from government and commercial for-profit actors’ (WHO). Those who contributed to the Riace model are the citizens of Riace, charities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), churches, cooperatives, social movements, and advocacy groups. The inclusion of civil society voices was essential to give expression to the marginalised and those who are often not heard.²³ In contrast with the legal line sustained by central government, civil society supported the mayor’s vision of inclusion, backed by the right for asylum entrenched in Article 10 of the Constitution:

‘The foreigner who is denied in his own country the effective exercise of the democratic liberties guaranteed by the Italian Constitution has the right of asylum in the territory of the Republic, in accordance with the conditions established by law.’²⁴

Various NGOs and representations of Civil Society reacted to the Salvini decree. Fabiana Musicco, the founder and president of *Refugees Welcome Italy*, argued that ‘expanding reception centers would hinder integration and lead instead to more frustration and violence’ (DW 2018). When the funds were permanently blocked in 2016, Riace was denied the funding required for the model to work. In August 2018, Lucano protested that a point of no return was being reached and without funding ‘165 refugees will end up on the street, 80 workers will lose their jobs and everything will collapse under a pile of rubble’ (Giuffrida 2018b). In view of this situation, mayor Lucano went on a hunger strike receiving the support of the local population, in addition to various personalities from the

²⁰ *Quotidiano del Sud*, 10-10-2016, Accessed on 1 March 2019 from <https://comunivirtuosi.org/lesperienza-di-riace-dal-santo-padre/>

²¹ In an intercepted phone call, Lucano says "I am an outlaw" referring to the release of an identity card to a woman who had been denied a residence permit three times (Trinchella 2018).

²² This statement was made in a public event (4 August 2018) where Lucano was flanked and supported by Luigi de Magistris and Ada Colau, mayors of Naples and Barcelona (Spain) respectively (Musolini 2018).

²³ For example, the LA Times reported that the church organizations flew refugees to Rome and then took them to their new homes in communities around the country (Sewell 2017).

²⁴ Constitution translated by Carlo Casonato and Jens Woelk (2008) and accessed on 3 April 2019 from <http://www.jus.unitn.it/dsg/pubblicazioni/costituzione/costituzione%20genn2008eng.pdf>

world of politics, entertainment and civil society. A festival was organized, with a series of meetings and debates being held and aimed at explaining the model.²⁵ A crowdfunding campaign was also launched to offer respite to the Riace coffers. When Lucano was arrested, around 6000 people held a demonstration as a sign of solidarity with the besieged mayor (Gostoli 2018).

The Riace Model enjoyed support at different levels; local (its citizens), regional (Cooperatives operating in the region of Calabria), and national (through a network of municipalities across the Italian territory). One of the main players in the region of Calabria is the GOEL Group of Cooperatives, a community of people, businesses and social cooperatives, founded in 2003. Its mission is to bring about ‘true change in Calabria through legal work, social promotion and active opposition to the 'Ndrangheta and diverted Freemasonry’ (GOEL). The social cooperative PATHOS (part of the GOEL group), was another important component in the Riace model. It was constituted with the specific purpose of social solidarity, and strived to facilitate the reception and social integration of disadvantaged people, while enabling them to have a degree of autonomy.²⁶ These organizations provided a very important link within the system that facilitated the Riace Model to work. The reception, resettlement and integration of young and adult migrants became only possible with the creation of projects made available through state funding.

2 A conceptual framework

The interdisciplinary nature of this study renders it difficult to provide a singular theoretical explanation. At the centre stage is a migration policy adopted by a mayor leading a municipality, that, with the assistance of civil society is utilizing government programmes to fund projects in an innovative way. However, the tension experienced by the two levels of government brings to fore the complexity of both policy implementation as well as central-local government relations. A deeper study would also shed light on the notions of resistance at the local level, but that is beyond the scope here. In the case of Riace, the media played an important role in reporting the story, amplifying it to a wider international audience and providing different versions of what was happening on the ground. In this section I problematize the issue according to some of its theoretical implications. I do this by drawing a connection between the various components, themes and players, highlighting two main aspects: i) central-local governmental relations; and ii) the tension in the implementation of migration policy.

1. Central-local government relations

Under the lens here is the nature of the relationship between local and central government. The election to office of representatives from contrasting positions of the political platform, inevitably produces conflict within different levels of government. With decentralization, players at the local level are given autonomous (not free) reign to implement policy, that might be in conflict with the national executive. Laffin (2009, 22) defines central-local relations as one that broadly includes ‘not just the direct governmental relations between

²⁵ See <http://www.riaceinfestival.it/>

²⁶ PATHOS, established in 2003, adheres to the GOEL Group and collaborates with SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), the entity that channels the funds which are used in various social projects (PATHOS).

central departments and local authorities, but also those interactions involving non-governmental actors from both the central and local levels as well as the national-level world of local governance.’ By delving deeper into the question, it is apparent that the two levels of government have problems with their respective parameters of governance. Turner (1999, 1) claims that the degree to which decision-making power and authority should be concentrated is in fact a 'source of perennial tension in states'. Boundaries of action are problematic because both central and local government are at odds in accepting distinct political positions, with the former ready to use extraordinary measures, in exceptional cases, such as the use of force. Relations between these two tiers of government have produced a vast amount of literature to explicate an often convoluted nature of governance. One such example is the ‘dual state’ or ‘dual politics’, a thesis succinctly synthesised by Saunders (1985, 153) accordingly:

‘dual politics thesis reflects our view that the state is not a homogeneous entity which can be approached through any one political theory, but rather that its characteristic 'relative autonomy' is a product of different types of political forces operating in different types of policy areas, at different levels of organisation, and through different modes of interest mediation..’

What we have is an arena where different layers (or tiers) of government, rather than being in negotiation with each other (multi-level governance), actors ‘behave strategically within a system .. to pursue their objectives’ often with ‘central encroachment on local autonomy’ (Laffin 2009, 24). In a pluralist paradigm, the struggle and competition for power is a product of the political system (see Connolly 1995), yet it is the extent of control that can be exercised by the state, which becomes the key criterion in how policy can be swayed. Strong actors, like the state, can act in various ways to enable or restrict the ability of actors at the subsidiary level to play an effective role. This nature of governance behaviour, is synthesized by Bevir and Rhodes (2008, 731) as one which studies ‘the ubiquity of power and resistance’ where ‘actors restrict what others can do in ways that thwart the intentions of’ (other) ‘policy actors’.

The enhanced institutional capacity of local government can be seen as McDermott and Forgie (1999, 247) argue, ‘a viable alternative to traditional centralist solutions to problems’. But this can be problematic, even if we look at central-local government relations as a dual polity. Whereas central government can be isolated and separated from local issues and details of implementation (Newman 2014, 27), central government would ‘still be in a strong position to exert significant influence over subnational policy-making’ (Eckersley 2017, 85) since it would be providing most of the resources to help with implementation’ such as the ability to link funding streams with policy objectives, congruent to its national line.

The implementation of local programmes have as Reid (1999, 165) formulates it, created a ‘constructive tension with the central government.’ Subnational units in democracies seek autonomy and independence. These units of self-government, irrespective of size, can grow a ‘capacity to support development projects in their territories .. in order to create optimal conditions for sustainable and inclusive growth’ Schuster and Vallier (2011, 1). The dynamics of central-local relations vary according to size of municipality, political traditions, the empowerment of civil society and policy areas. I shall now turn the attention to migration and its conflicting approaches to policy implementation.

2. Tension in the implementation of migration policy

The second facet to a conceptual understanding of the Riace model, is underlined by the difficulties in the formulation and implementation of migration policy. A cursory look at the discourse on migration shows a policy area where consensus is hard to reach. Reasons vary, but the transversal nature of migration, make it more complex than other policy areas. Several efforts have been made to harmonize migration policy, but this has always encountered several hurdles. Richardson (2000, 1008) argues that policy making within European states ‘is often much more fluid and unpredictable – and less controllable’. At EU level, Migration is one policy area where deadlock seems intentional, rather than accidental, due to incomplete governance structures (Jones et al. 2016) that eventually spark future crises (Sciponi 2018, 1358). We know that ‘interests and ideas on migration are diverse and conflicting, within states and at the EU level’ (Boswell 2008; Joppke 1998 in Wunderlich 2011, 1416), but the intergovernmental (supranational level) dimension is not the only one under strain.

According to Sales (2007, 115) ‘the national state is the central focus of immigration management and control’, and although national power has been ‘eroded through the development of international and regional political institutions, migration policy remains an area for the assertion of national sovereignty.’ Subsequently, discussions on migration issues at the sub-national level have ‘been relatively neglected in comparison to analyses at the national and supranational levels’ (Leitner et al. 2002 in McCollum and Packwood 2017, 155). However, it is erroneous to assume that the state is a unitary actor (despite its efforts) in migration. Peterson (2003, 1) points out that public policies are now made and delivered via some kind of hybrid arrangement involving a range of different actors, including some representing private or non-governmental institutions. Whereas migration has increased the power of the nation state (Hirst and Thompson 1999 in Sales 2007, 115), it is ‘ultimately local government that is responsible for providing services to immigrant communities and ensuring that they successfully integrate into their new surroundings’ (Mc Collum and Packwood 2017, 156). The hybrid approach merits closer inspection.

As I stated earlier, at both national and supranational level, the national interest make it harder to reach consensus. Governments often face stiff opposition for entertaining the idea of seeking a compromise.²⁷ Moreover, even when pledged, migration policies often fail to achieve their declared objectives due to factors (competing interests) within political systems. Amongst the problems of migration policies mentioned by Castles (2004, 865) we find: interest conflicts and hidden agendas in migration policies; the political ability to control migration; contradictions within the policy formation process; the importance of rights; the importance of civil society; and the welfare state.

Finally, in the case of Italy, ‘immigration policy-making appears as a widespread process which can originate bottom-up from civil society and from the peripheries’, however ‘the parties in power and .. immigration and integration policies tend to change continuously due to negative feedback and the failures of previous polices’ Zincone (2006, 1). The municipality of Riace attempted to address this discontinuity by creating its own model.

²⁷ On 18 December 2018, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel resigned after facing a populist revolt over his signature of the UN Compact for Migration, which opponents say threatened Belgian sovereignty (NYTimes 2018).

3 The Riace Model

In this section I shall examine the attributes of a locally adopted system that tested legal and traditional norms to become an internationally acclaimed migration model. As I will underline, this system had defenders and detractors. Both had an impact on its longevity, and both fought for its survival or its destruction. At the end, the model was dealt a significant blow rendering it inoperable and therefore defunct, but it has become a norm setter, setting an example for many to follow suit. Despite the nuances, Riace was developed into a model due to a consistent and coherent approach of the actors involved. The model rests on two pillars: 1) Hospitality (social integration); and 2) Revival (economic regeneration).

Between 2004 and 2018, Riace gave refuge to 6000 people from 20 different nations. According to Lucano, the idea behind the Riace model was to give the village ‘a new lease of life’ and instil ‘new values to the people involved’ (BBC 2016). The behaviour of Lucano, persistent with the intention to revitalize the community, and in defiance of a national political line, was mirrored in the actions of the little village he was leading. People welcomed, cooperated and assisted their new neighbours. As Needleman (2017) argues, an act of humanity become an act of self-preservation. The mayor had an almost utopic vision for Riace, an ideological one that fosters sustainable goals:

‘We dreamt of a village where people could live according to local traditions, free from the inhuman rules of capitalism and consumerism. Only 20 years ago, there was nothing of all this. The village was dying. Look how lively it is now!’

According to Zolin (2019), ‘though it was technically operating outside of the law, Riace was hailed around the world as a model of integration, and came to be seen as a political laboratory for many other struggling and depopulated villages around the country.’ After the arrest of Lucano, the *Rete dei Comuni Solidali (Re.Co.Sol)*²⁸ passed a motion of solidarity towards Riace and its besieged mayor making reference to how the village became a model, for Italy, the region and the world.²⁹

‘Riace has become a rich and esteemed patrimony that does not belong only to those who created it, but to all those who in Calabria, Italy, and the world regard it as a model; a story born in 2001 and built day after day painstakingly, an experience that has managed to regenerate a community at risk of depopulation - like the reality of many other small Municipalities of Italy - in which men and women live together with different stories and backgrounds..’

The thrust behind the mechanism is the funding provided by SPRAR (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* - Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), made possible through state funding. The monies are intended to be used for the reception of refugees and integration projects.³⁰ In addition to various assistance and

²⁸ The number of *comuni* that signed up to Re.Co.Sol is 273 with a total population of 5 million people.

²⁹ See motion presented by Recosol “Mozione di solidarietà al Comune Riace Mozione di solidarietà al Comune Riace”. The motion makes further reference to Riace being a ‘host model’ and hails the Mayor as a ‘symbolic model of the experience’ provided. The motion was Accessed on 10 February 2019 from <https://comunisolidali.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/bozza-mozione-Riace.pdf>

³⁰ As of January 2019, SPRAR is supporting 875 projects with a total of 1800 *comuni* involved. SPRAR is funded by the Ministry for Home Affairs. Accessed on 25 February 2019 from <https://www.sprar.it/i-numeri-dello-sprar>

protection measures, the various municipalities dispense the funds in various ways, such as the employment of cultural mediators, linguists and educators to teach the Italian language and promote social and economic integration. In the wake of the Riace experience, a number of *comunes* within the Locride areas opened their doors to refugees; Camini, Badolato, Gioiosa Jonica, Stignano, Benestare, Africo and others, adopted ideas from the Riace model. In the tiny village of Camini, just a few kilometers north of Riace, the social cooperative EUROCOOP launched a comprehensive migration project in 2011, the *Jungi Mundu* ('Join the World' in the local dialect) which paved the way for further integration. The operation centre, open 24/7, 'facilitates asylum seekers' reception and integration, adopting a scattered hospitality approach in contrast to the transitory way of life that typifies the crowded migration centres in many larger cities.' The centre is considered 'a safe haven for the new residents, especially families and minors, who in turn have actively contributed to community development since their arrival.'³¹

Some tensions were recorded, but adaptation by the newly arrived has been facilitated by learning the language, and living amongst the population without the risk of ghettoization (Riace is too small for that).³² Although the model gained the general support of local citizens who experienced the new injection of life, the idea of running the village in a different way came at a personal cost for the mayor. Lucano suffered a number of acts of intimidation³³ whilst many reported that the local mafia was hostile to the idea.³⁴

3.1 Social Integration

Riace was the first Italian municipality in which migrants were not held in reception centers, but welcomed into houses entrusted to them (Candito 2016). Rather than creating open-centres to host refugees, a new model was created where vacant (often derelict) properties, were taken on loan by the *comune* to be used by migrants repopulating Riace. In Lucano's words 'there were people without a house here, and there were houses without people here - it's simple' (BBC 2016). This method was considered as an 'innovative model of hospitality and inclusion' (Left 2018) where 'welcoming would replace rejection and solidarity would replace prejudice and hostility' (Zolin 2017). The *comune* was able to do this by adopting a different management of the funding provided. Rather than being distributed as a daily allowance (30 Euros), the *comune* used the money to renovate the old houses of the village and start new activities which the migrants would be able to carry on (Facchini 2008).

³¹ EUROCOOP *Servizi Società Cooperativa Sociale*, Accessed on 1 March 2019, from https://europa.eu/youth/volunteering/organisation/914318024_en

³² Lucano confides that resistance in the territory is not absent. The import of new cultures made some citizens of Riace uneasy with the new arrivals. According to the mayor, not every citizen was in 'welcome mode' (BBC 2016).

³³ In 2009 shots were fired at a window of a restaurant whilst he was dining with friends. Two of his dogs were also poisoned (Giuffrida 2018b).

³⁴ The New York Times reported that 'organized crime syndicates are known to have a strong grip on every level of the Calabrian economy'. In January 2010, the Calabrian village of Rosarno experienced race riots after hundreds of African workers took it to the streets to protest against slavery conditions and random attacks. In September 2008, Italy sent 400 members of the National Guard to Castelvoturno, outside Naples, after violent protests broke out over the shooting deaths of six African immigrants in clashes with the Camorra, the Neapolitan Mafia (Donadio 2010).

As I mentioned earlier, several other mayors followed this model. For example in 2014, the mayor of Sutera (Sicily) joined a resettlement programme that funds villages to host incoming migrants in the community's vacant homes (Tondo 2018a). As the mayor of Sutera reports, the initiatives strike a chord with the social fabric of the community:³⁵

'Since 2014, Sutera has augmented its fast-dwindling population with dozens of asylum seekers. The school has been reborn; the butcher and grocer are happy with the growth in turnover; the birthrate has rocketed...It is thanks to children from Ethiopia, Pakistan and Nigeria that the school's pupil numbers are now sufficient for its survival. The refugees are also helping to support the businesses of the butcher, grocer and baker. ..Sutera has become a symbol of integration, with its model emulated by other Sicilian municipalities at risk of disappearing. The neighbouring villages of Mazzarino and Milena have followed suit, settling their own asylum seekers.'

The arrival of migrants provided an injection of life within the community; bars, bakeries, shops, the elementary school and the kindergarten did not have to close their doors. The social integration of migrants was supported by two main fronts. First, the *comune* played the role of providing housing, and second, civil society and NGOs worked on funded projects to assimilate refugees into community life. Novellino (2018) posits that immigrants used these work activities as 'occupational therapies' to treat the past and enter the new environment keeping in touch with a lifestyle - and linking one's presence to the revitalization of activities that were getting lost.

3.2 Economic integration

There are two dimensions behind the economic revival of Riace: A) the innovative mechanism employed by the *comune* to absorb and process the funds available; and B) the creation of business opportunities for migrants to work and develop in synergy with the community. In this section I elaborate on the plan to utilize existing resources effectively, and to circumvent bureaucratic hurdles in the transfer of funds essential to make the model work. In the first instance, an efficient processing of funds was deployed to waste a minimum amount of time whilst utilizing man power in the community. The premise behind this haste is that when these villages are depopulated, they go through a slow and natural death where activity ceases, and so do the unique traditions and skills associated with the place. The swift transfer of funds would ensure that the *comune* is able to dispose of the monies without delays. The novel concept revolves around two main ideas; a *purchase bonus*, and *job grants* (Novellino 2018).

Purchase bonuses were created to mitigate the problem of delays with the processing of allocated funds. Delays by the Ministry to transfer money to SPRAR resulted in delays by SPRAR to distribute the funds to the municipalities participating in projects. Lucano sought permission to utilize the daily allowance (€35) in a different way and rather than channel the money in what would be a purely welfare model, introduce a payment system to compensate for the significant delays with which the funds arrive. According to the mayor

³⁵ Sutera's experience is very similar to the one of Riace. On 3 October 2013, a boat carrying 518 people sank off the Italian island of Lampedusa. The boat caught fire - 155 survived whilst over 360 people lost their life (see Nelson 2014). The mayor of Sutera, Giuseppe Grizzanti, welcomed the survivors to the vacant homes through a resettlement programme.

this gives more dignity to the people by enlarging their purchasing power, and secondly bypass the banking system to remedy the administrative delays, rather than asking for subsidized loans as other municipalities would do.

Lucano therefore devised an original idea to create a local currency that can be utilized only in Riace.³⁶ Coupons were printed as a commitment to an exchange of value based on the premise that it corresponded to something real, over time, albeit within the confines of Riace. The local currency (a sort of social bonus convertible into euros) gave credit entitlement to migrants. The debts incurred were then paid in two or three months, this with the sole purpose of supporting the delay of public funds and to provide refugees with purchasing power.³⁷ Thus real bills were born, worth 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 euros, on which the mayor imprinted various historical figures.³⁸ Lucano complained: 'I receive the money late - so I must proceed in this way' Sarzanini (2018).

Secondly, job grants are provided to pay people (foreign or local) engaged in artisan workshops (approx. €600 per month), independently from sales and revenues. Money is therefore put back in circulation to help support the local economy enabling shops to buy raw materials for the workshops, and attract educational and cultural tourism towards the village. Whilst the efforts to introduce migrants to the local economy are substantial, some would still experience the dissatisfaction with the limitations of a small village. The lack of job opportunities, which have forced the inhabitants of the village to emigrate in the past, is also a constraint for migrants, who are eager to seek better pastures elsewhere (Villafrate 2018).

The strength of the Riace model relied in its ability to recover trades and services that revive the village to its 'old' patterns of life.³⁹ Roads were repaired, houses restored, bread baked, and cafes reopened. Activities included the direct sales of producers on the local market; expansion of craft activities and revival of traditional crafts (frame making, ceramics and pottery, glass mosaic, weaving, wool, wood); using donkeys for door-to-door waste collection; ecotourism initiatives (destination to visiting empty apartments, promotion of visits to the landscape and places to visit historical-cultural value); organization of events related to local culture (Calabrian popular and literature and music, and activities celebrating cultural diversity). Migrants were employed to push forward these activities.

The ideas put forward above worked in a local setting but did not gain any formal acceptance by central government. The model was considered as a parallel / alternative economy that existed on the confines of legal parameters. Until funding was severed, this financing system kept the model alive and supported the infrastructure the held it in place.

³⁶ Detractors of the Riace model frowned upon the idea of having a parallel currency whose value is confined just to the village of Riace. Lucano defended it as a localized effective measure that got things moving.

³⁷ Accessed on 10 February 2019 from <https://comunivirtuosi.org/lesperienza-di-riace-dal-santo-padre/>

³⁸ The coupons featured the portraits of people who, were killed by the mafia, fought for peace, freedom and social justice, and gave their life to social change. These included Che Guevara, Gandhi, Charles Chaplin, Martin Luther King, Peppino Impastato, Gianluca Congiusta, Rocco Gatto and Pio La Torre.

³⁹ In a New York Times article, Needleman (2017) refers to the 'nearly 2,500 rural Italian villages that are perilously depopulated, some semi-abandoned and others virtual ghost villages.' When these villages die, 'it's not just the population that suffers: so too do the unique traditions and skills associated with each place.'

3.3 A model revisited, implications and generalizations

The Riace model is about the collision of different tiers of government over the direction of policy. The active role taken by the mayor and *comune* of Riace has been cause for observation and replication, but also of indignation and consternation. In this schematic below, I attempt to provide a synthesis of the Riace model, built primarily on experiences that developed it. Other villages adopted it with variations.

Table 1: The Riace Model

POLITICS (vision)	PROCESS (operational)	Dependency
<i>Policy attributes</i> Social Integration Economic regeneration <i>Behavioral attributes</i> Autonomy Resistance	Schooling Nursery Language training Artisan workshops Food Culture and traditions Folklore and music	National laws State funding Civic participation Local suffrage
FRANCHISE: Consistency Replication International recognition		

What I highlight above is a conceptual mapping of the model, namely the politics and processes involved. As Batley and McLoughlin (2015, 278) argue, the ‘political returns from responding to visible problems and producing visible outputs are greater than those from tackling lower profile challenges or improving systems and processes that are obscured from public view.’ As other examples show, Lucano is not the only mayor that ‘thinks global but acts local’. The paradigm that emerges from this model is also one that carries a mistrust (bottom-up) in national institutions. Italy is often cited in literature for the low levels of trust of its citizens in the political system at regional and national level (see studies by Fazio et al 2018, Gunnarson 2008; OECD 2013).

Laffin (2009, 23) posits that the ‘increasingly complex relationships within policy delivery structures, and the involvement of non-governmental actors, raises questions of democratic accountability and legitimacy’. Issues of administrative and legal legitimacy have played a determining role in the model being discontinued in its place of inception, Riace, but continuing in other municipalities in Italy. Novellino (2008) contends that the Riace model is mainly positive for providing a virtuous link between reception, integration and local development. This experience allowed a small municipality to be connected to a three level network of funding; regional, national and European. Hence structures of policy-making especially in migration are multi-variate (various instruments and approaches are used), multi-level (different levels of governance – for e.g. in the acquisition of funds), and multi-organisational (different stakeholders chip in).

The model elevates the concern for mayors who have had similar experiences. Giovanni Maiolo from Re.Co.Sol argues that ‘mayors that operate in difficult territories cannot and should not be left alone’ (CdC 2018). When the new Salvini decree was issued, a number of mayors elected on left-wing tickets condemned or refused to obey the new law. The mayor of Naples vowed to defy the decree and publicly stated he would not only allow migrant ships to dock, but coordinate rescue efforts (DW 2019). Other mayors of big cities like Barcelona and Madrid publicly condemned the political rhetoric against migrants and refugees.⁴⁰ Robert Biedron, mayor of the Polish city of Slupsk, has made his city a platform to countenance right wing politics of the Law and Justice Party (PiS), currently the largest political party in Parliament (Shotter 2018). In this sense, Riace became a ‘metaphor of the resistance of those who do not recognize themselves in this drift of inhumanity, odium and fascism’ (Repubblica 2019).

The weak aspect of the model is that it relied on ad-hoc and temporary solutions, unlikely to give the idea of a multi-ethnic society any permanence. The scope of the model was to create durable structures that first, give dignity to migrants and therefore facilitate their social integration, and second, give longevity to the village and community through economic exchange. Notwithstanding the effort, the model was killed in two ways, by suspending all money transfers to SPRAR (the lifeline behind the funded projects), and by prosecuting Lucano for his legal transgressions. The first is imposed by government, whilst the second one is pursued by the Courts of Law.

Conclusion

The media coverage and international recognition of the Riace model led to a consensus that the experience in this Calabrian village was novel and provocatively ground-breaking. By defying legal and traditional administrative norms, the mayor of a shrinking community revived a town, and offered a subsidiary migration policy that could be supported by a robust structure, which however, entirely depended on state funding. At the time of writing, the legal case against Mimmo Lucano is being exhausted,⁴¹ but the Riace case offers multiple avenues both for scholarly research and future policy-makers.

The new way of thinking about municipalities, as microcosms, but influential players of the broader political environment, has been useful in conceptualising the connections and linkages of complex political processes. The two dimensions that characterize the dynamics of this case are *politics* (intergovernmental) and *policy* (migration governance). Where the policy vision is contentious, politics becomes a disruptor rather than an enabler, interlocutor or facilitator. Policy at the local (micro) level is procedural (regulated routine administration), but allows for creativity and innovation, roping in players from civil society. Moreover, the capability to manage such a model depends on a multitude of

⁴⁰ In September 2015, the mayor of Madrid and former Judge Manuela Carmena hung a banner ‘Refugees Welcome’ on the Madrid City Hall. She also pledgedpledged €10 million to receive migrants in the city (AFP 2015).

⁴¹ On February 26 the supreme Cassation Court ruled that Lucano's ban from returning to Riace should be annulled (The decision still needs to be ratified by a lower court for the ban to be completely lifted.). On 3 April 2019, the Supreme Court cleared him from the accusation of fraud and arranged marriages for migrants (ANSA 2019a). On 11 April 2019, Lucano was indicted along with 26 other people in relation to Riace's management of migrants (ANSA 2019b).

variables. There is no successful formula for the model to work, and a number of municipalities (Italian and foreign) have tempted to replicate the ideas of social integration and economic regeneration.

Some other reflections are in order. First, the balance of power between state and *comune* is too disproportionate to reconcile, or mitigate. Peterson's (2003, 3) view that 'governments remain ultimately responsible for governance, but that is not the whole story' is confirmed here, where the asymmetry of power plays a fundamental role in the nature of policy outcomes. With Riace, the governance model made a full swing, from government – to governance – (and back) to government, by force majeure.

Secondly, social harmony is achieved through a process of dialogue and integration. This process can be initiated, promoted and sustained at the local level. If the community at the local level perceives an advantage (social and economic) of this process, it will lend its support. In the face of increasing challenges such as globalisation, national governments are exiting from many of their traditional roles, especially in the areas of welfare provision, ownership and regulation. With the Riace model, we need to look at the governance of migration by both public and non-public actors, considering it a suppressed (and suspended) experiment, rather than a failed one. Ironically, the model outlived the village and the mayor that conceived it.

Finally, as Limiti (2018, 8-9) called it, Lucano spearheaded a 'gentle revolt', ushering a wave of discontent that was widely acclaimed by the media, and branded as a model. The 'metaphor of resistance' will not be an isolated case. With migration remaining a defining policy issue, instances where political actors enter into a course of collision, will be inevitable. Mimmo Lucano's legal battles are still ongoing, but an organization of actors from a wide spectrum of civil society is nominating him for the Nobel Prize 2019 (Left 2018). Whether triumphant or not, it is another step to keep the model's legacy alive.

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