

NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Rethinking Citizenship Education in European Migration Societies Political Strategies - Social Changes - Educational Concepts

Conference Paper

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**“Life in a Shadow-Economy Oriented Nation: The Case of Roma in Italy”
Monica Rossi, University of Rome "La Sapienza”**

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The Italian Job:

The Italian Government establishes every year, through the system of quotas, the number of foreigners who can apply for a permit of stay, and this number should correspond to the requests and the needs of our internal job market¹. The system constitutes an attempt to control and regulate the migration flows, but due to diverse factors, not least Italy's geographical position, the mission of "restoring order" at our borders and coasts remains largely unaccomplished. The number of real repatriations is very low, in most cases the sole expulsion order is issued, and more often than not, the person, object to the proceeding, does not comply.

What actually happens is that annually an undetermined number of persons are entering and staying in Italy. In the table below are reported data concerning the refusals of entry, expulsion proceedings and repatriations, as visible, the number of non-complying persons is considerable.

In total invisibility, and out of the reach from every institutional help, these people live and can remain in this conditions for years, either working in black for an employer, or dispersed into one of the many informal activities in which also Italians are involved.

¹ In this quotas are also included Permits of Entry to Refugees, for familial reunions and for Humanitarian reasons.

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Tab I: Italy. Refusals of entry, Expulsions and Repatriations (1999 - 2005).

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Refusals of Entry (at borders)	48.437	42.221	41.058	43.795	27.397	24.528	23.878
Expelled	23.955	23.836	34.390	44.706	37.756	35.437	26.985
Repatriated							
Tot. Persons	72.392	66.057	75.448	88.501	65.153	59.965	50.863
Non complying	40.489	64.734	58.207	61.282	40.586	45.697	65.617
Total involved	112.881	130.791	133.655	149.783	105.739	105.662	116.480
%	64,1	50,5	56,4	59,1	61,6	56,8	43,7

Source: Elaboration Caritas/Migrantes, Immigration Statistical Dossier on Data released by the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In spite of the boasting declarations made by various politicians and members of the right-wing such as the North Liga (who even proposed to attack the immigrant boats and send them back with the use of force), this undocumented and invisible human flow happens to be very useful to the small employers of the small scale Italian industries. Many of them are more than happy to have employees who can easily be blackmailed, and that due to their condition of clandestinity are obviously afraid of any possible encounter with the law.

The table below shows the incidence of irregular migration in small and medium sized companies in Italy. Although limited to the number of companies surveyed, it can give us an approximate idea of the phenomenon.

Tab. II: Italy. Irregular Migration in the findings of Companies Inspections (2000 - 2005)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Companies Surveyed	25.742	24.591	21.572	23.341	26.256	24.555
Foreigners at work	11.172	12.186	12.444	21.031	24.720	23.449
- of whom irregulars	4.612	4.808	3.975	4.154	4.863	5.943
- of whom clandestine	3.046	2.664	2.223	1.159	2.596	3.043
- % of irregulars	41,3	39,5	31,9	19,8	19,7	25,3
- % of clandestine	27,3	21,9	17,9	5,5	10,5	12,9

Elaboration Caritas/Migrantes Immigration Statistical Dossier on Data released by the Italian Ministry of Occupation/Nucleo Carabinieri - Ispettorato Generale del Lavoro.

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Furthermore the kind of occupational sectors where they are employed are very difficult to control. Migrant labour force is mostly employed in services, for example in the role of carers or as housemaids², and in many other unqualified jobs, either in the small industries (mostly in the North) or in the building industry (as in the case of central Italy, and more specifically Rome) and in the agricultural one (in the south mainly). But there is one last but not less important occupational area, which is that of the wide range of activities that can be regrouped under the category of the informal sector³.

In Italy, the phenomena of the shadow economy, definition which comprehends black, informal and illegal jobs, has worrying dimensions and has been a matter of concern for international agencies such as the OECD and the IMF.

A report from the IMF states that: "(...) *In the 21 Oecd countries in 1999–2001, Greece and Italy had the largest shadow economies, at 30 percent and 27 percent of GDP, respectively (...)*", further adding that: "*In some individual countries, the shadow economy labor force was very large: in Italy, 30–48 percent of the total labor force (...)*". (Schneider and Enste, 2002)⁴.

Informal economies have been and are still considered as an economy of the margin, but when we consider how big a part of the world population relies on informal economic activities, then we can reconsider whether it is proper to call it marginal, since the phenomena, as the economist Teodor Shanin pointed out, appears to be unsurprisingly no marginal at all⁵.

What is instead surprising is the fact that in one of the most industrialised Western country the role of the informal sector is so well established and flourishing, that this invisible system provides nonetheless the possibility for many men and women to carry out a living, while these invisible, although real jobs, offer them a chance to start anyway the migratory project.

Why talk about Roma?:

Here I will not deal with the issues raised by the presence of an average migrant, but I would like to focus my attention on a very peculiar linguistic and cultural group: that of Romani people.

Roma communities are very diverse and they are dispersed in the whole world in many different areas and regional communities.

Studies and reports produced up to date by international agencies such as the World Bank, the OSCE and the EU, all agree that the Roma situation is one of the most dramatic. Although their presence in European countries is historically documented since centuries, their access to citizenship rights is still very far from being completed. In numerous countries they are subjected to living conditions that have no equal for any other minority in Europe (Ringold, Orenstein and Wilkens, 2003).

In Italy in particular the situation is very diversified, and it includes:

- Roma who are born in Italy and are Italian citizens.
- Roma who are born in Italy and who are not Italian citizens.
- Roma migrants (i.e. Serbian migrations of the 1960s).
- Refugees and displaced persons of Roma origin.
- New European citizens of Roma origin (Romania).

Roma presence in Rome is hard to quantify because of the lack of recent official data⁶. Most recent

² The care of elders in Italy has traditionally been one of the duties expected from sons, and especially and more effectively from daughters, wives and mother in laws; but the demographic changes that are affecting the Italian population, coupled with the fact that familiar roles have changed, have deeply altered this scheme, creating a demand for carers that is new for the Italian context.

³ It must also be remembered that Italy does not have strong and diffused forms of social protection such as the ones we can find in northern European countries, therefore the so called *weak categories* are very much left by themselves to cope with their everyday's needs and urges.

⁴ See also: Oecd, *Employment Outlook 2004*, Chapter 5, Annexes 1 and 2 to "Informal Employment and Promoting the Transition to a Salaried Economy", and World Bank, F. Schneider (2002), *Size and Measurement of the Informal Economy in 110 Country Around the World*, Paper presented at the Anu Workshop in Canberra, 17/7/2002.

Pdf Report available at: http://rru.worldbank.org/Documents/PapersLinks/informal_economy.pdf.

⁵ On the world of informal economy and its importance see the extensive ethnographic works of French scholar Serge Latouche, and in particular: Latouche S., (1998), *L'autre Afrique. Entre don et marché*, Ed. Albin Michel, Paris.

⁶ The last Roma census conducted by the Special Immigration Office in 1995 recorder a number of 5.467 Roma, half of which were under age and dispersed at the time in one of the fifty encampments of Rome distributed throughout the municipal

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estimates attests their number at about 10.000, 7.000 of which living dispersed in the 25 "authorised" encampments of the capital, and in the many unauthorised one. These persons are mostly coming from Bosnia, Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Romania. Many are classified as irregulars, while many others had even been the object of an expulsion proceeding because of their violation of the norms regulating the entrance and permanence in Italy. This situation afflicts also people who are born in Italy, in many cases, people who have been living here for generations, so that they do not even speak the language of their country of origin.

As far as citizenship is concerned, for example, this is linked to the concept of stable residence in a given locality, even though it does provide for categories with no fixed abode, the possibility of registering in the population register, choosing between the municipality where they were born, or the one where they reside⁷. However, it is very difficult for Romani people to make use of this possibility; the municipalities often refuse them to grant citizenship precisely because of this double option, stating that it was the *other* municipality to which they should have applied. Besides, even when the application is accepted, new problems arise. Because of the frequent evictions, that force them to move according to the situation, children are often born and registered in municipalities different from the ones of their parents, making it even more difficult for them to become citizens. For this, and other reasons that cannot be dealt with here, many Romani people, although living in Italy since many years, are still in fact considered as foreigners (Council of Europe, 2002).

The large majority is forced to live under conditions of severe socio-economic exclusion. Differently from other foreigners, they have very scarce possibility of an integration in the world of occupation, also because of the many prejudices against this minority.

To all this we must add the problem related to housing. Actually, the Italian policies of the encampments⁸ have forced them to live in huts and shanty towns. Many of these dwellings are illegally built, and therefore the inhabitants are subjected to sudden evictions and destruction of their homes, a factor that compelled Roma to re-learn after centuries, the long time abandoned nomadic practices. The existence and the persistency of these dwellings are the symbol of an *apartheid* in which the Roma communities have been kept up to date (Council of Europe, 2006a) and which led them toward a forced nomadism, and a forced "gypsiness" that is instead the product of a stereotyped idea of the Romani culture and history.

The task of getting a job becomes even more difficult when we consider the background of an overall situation where steady employment is getting progressively scarcer, and where flexibility has become the key word for nearly every worker in Europe and abroad. Furthermore, the access to most kind of jobs in Italy, is based on familiar or personal relations. Meritocratic considerations are the very last to be considered when applying, and this model, widespread and well known to every Italian citizen, pushes the Roma at a cosmic distance from any real possibility of social emancipation⁹.

Few of the youngest, in the new generations have learned to work as cultural mediators, but their number is very small, and they can be considered therefore only as a small *avant garde*. For the largest majority the only activity they can legally undertake is the *manghèl* (begging), depenalized in Italy in 1999.

Their situation appears to be so marginal that even in the motherland of communitarism, England, Roma are not even quoted in official statistics¹⁰.

Why then, talk about Roma?

They constitute one of the most "ethnically recognisable" group in Europe. Since the assimilation practices toward this minority have often taken the form of a silent ethnocide, Romani people have long time learned how to protect themselves while living in a generally hostile non-Roma society. The ties with their cultural heritage, language and traditions is still strong and well alive, but in spite of this "traditionalistic" appearance, Roma have since long time engaged a confrontation with the issues raised by modernity and in my opinion this confrontation has been quite successful, in spite of the tragic life

territory. According to the data of the total, 1.675 were Italian Roma (Sinti or Napulengre or others) while 4.812 were foreigners, out of whom only 724 complied with the regulations of the permit of stay.

⁷ Law n.1128, 24/12/1954.

⁸ See in Bibliography the Errc Report about Italy for more detailed information on the politic of encampments.

⁹ The social immobility of the Italian society has been deeply studied by sociologists. See in particular: Schizzerotto A. and A. Cobalti, (1994), *La mobilità sociale in Italia*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

¹⁰ An exception is the Republic of Ireland, which considers Travellers as an internal ethnic minority.

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conditions to which they are forced to adapt to.

Citizenship or Ethnicity? A Question Unsolved.

As it happens with other groups considered as *disadvantaged*, also Roma have been the object of several institutional and NGO's interventions during the last 40 years. In lack of a national legislation regarding this minority, the Roma question is handled entirely by local governments (*Regione, Provincia and Comune*)¹¹. And here, in the world of real social policies, the dialectic between multiculturalists' and integrationists' issues becomes more confused.

The eternally prolonged indecision between these two approaches gave origin to the many contradictions visible in the institutional interventions directed toward them. The Municipality of Rome can be considered as a good example of this see-saw attitude.

Policies directed toward Roma until now have been influenced by a static idea of multiculturalism, that misinterpretation of the right to cultural diversity has instead required that Roma adapted to the ethnic stereotype that has been built upon them (and one example of this attitude is the perversive building of encampments instead of allowing them to gain access to social housing¹²).

At the same time, however, the duty of securing citizenship rights (as affirmed by the Art.3 of our Constitution), led to "Jacobin" actions of a totally opposite sign.

On one side, the Municipality pushes toward integration, to the point of allowing access to the encampments only to the families who regularly enroll their children in schools¹³. On the other hand, the same administrators, including the left-wing Mayor Walter Veltroni, asks openly for the deportation of Roma communities into four or five large encampments outside the city's perimeter, a hypothesis that became one of the proposals of the city's "Patto di Legalità"¹⁴.

Consequently to this act, their placement will be far away from every infrastructure, eradicating and destroying any social and economical relation they could have established during the decades. A misunderstood respect for a supposedly nomadic ethnicity led to the idea of the encampments destined to Roma. An idea that as we have seen, continues to be proposed up to date, in spite of the official recommendation by the Council of Europe which states that: "*[in Italy] The lack of tangible progress in the integration of the Roma, Sinti and Travellers, the widespread discrimination they often face and the poor living conditions prevailing in many camps is a source of concern.*" (Council of Europe, 2006b).

During all those years, they have remained in the same conditions: considered as marginal and residual. Viewed by non-Roma as a parasitic and peripheric form of life, leftovers from the past.

I would like to present here aspects of Romani life that shows how these communities have instead dealt successfully with modernity, managing to survive even under the extreme living conditions to which they are subjected in Italy. A case study, excerpted from my fieldwork, will be used to give some insights on the dynamics of the informal economy in urban areas, and a proposal for a practical intervention.

¹¹ The minority of the Roma has not been included in the Italian law on the Protection of Linguistic Minorities (L.482/1999).

¹² The access to public classifications for social housing is open to Italian citizens and to foreigners registered as regularised residents (i.e. in possession of a Permit of Stay), and with a minimum of three years of documented employment in Italy.

¹³ The Ordinance N. 80 of the Municipality of Rome states that only Roma who have no criminal records can have a right to access the encampments. A condition that from what I know has been applied only to Roma, since I have no knowledge of anyone being evicted from his house because of a criminal record. (Comune di Roma, Ordinanza Comunale n.80, 23/1/1996).

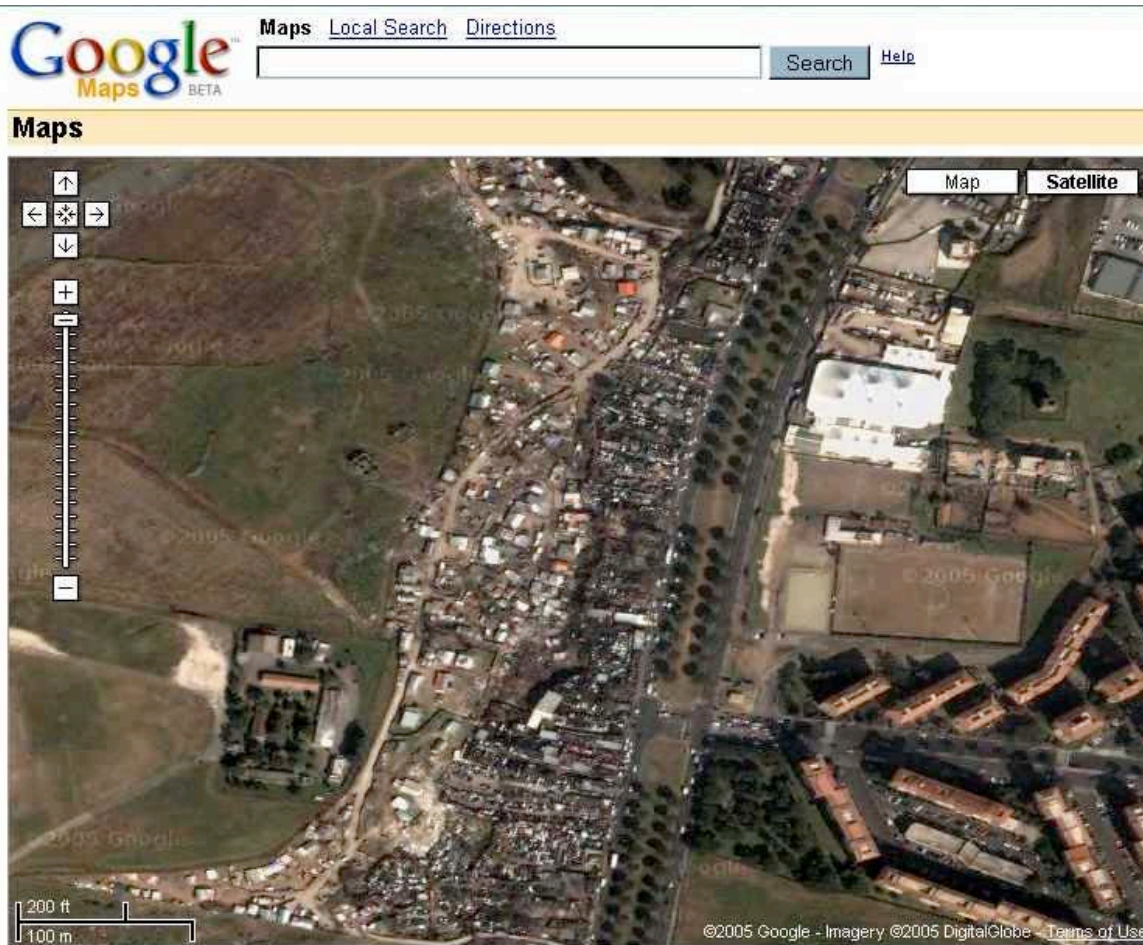
¹⁴ The so called "Patto per la legalità" (Pact for Lawfulness) is a series of proposals made by Mayors of different cities in Italy and including measures and steps to be taken against urban criminality. See G. Vitale in: *la Repubblica*, 4/5/2007, "Rom e lucciole, sul patto di legalità braccio di ferro in Campidoglio".

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1: An informal encampment in the periphery of Rome (via della Serenissima), Aug. 2001. (Photo by the Author).

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2: Another informal encampment along via Casilina ("Casilino 900") taken from Google maps, July 2005.

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3: A house built with recycled materials in the old "Casilino 700", Rome, 2000. (Photo by the Author).

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4: Another house in the old "Casilino 700". In the back, the shed used to store the goods gathered, Rome 2000. (Photo by the Author).

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5: The new encampment built by the Municipality of Rome in via Salviati 2 (former "Casilino 700"), Rome, 2003. (Photo by the Author).

The prominent economic activity that Roma are practising in Rome is that of *recycling*. This job comprehends mainly two kinds of marketable goods: that of metal heaps recycling (iron, copper and aluminium, sometimes wood), mostly carried out by men and their sons in public discharge and in and around the city, and the "small" recycle of other objects. This second activity is mainly considered a women's task because it is generally practised in the neighbourhood where the encampment is located.

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6: Materials gathered and divided at the old "Casilino 700" encampment, Rome, 2000. (Photo by the Author).

During these "searches" as they are called, small groups of Romani women search the whole area's dustbins. Everything that can be fixed and resold is examined carefully and gathered: garments, shoes, small furnitures and objects (De Angelis, 2006). Everything, if saleable, is picked up.

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7: Wood gathering at the old "Casilino 700" encampment, Rome, 2000. (Photo by the Author).

In both cycles of recycling the goods and materials are transported to the encampment to be divided into categories to be fixed and cleaned. On Sundays, Roma will load their Ford Transit and travel to the various open air markets in town to sell the objects gathered in the searches.

While for groups of recent arrival such as the Bosnian Xoraxanè this activity is still undertaken with low-priced objects and in peripheral markets, other Roma groups have learned to work in the field of Antiquities and Modern Antiquities, acquiring both customers and expertise. This second group is working in more specialised and refined markets such as Old Porta Portese, Flaminio or Tor di Quinto.

Unfortunately in the new authorised encampments, the area's dimension and the systemation of the containers prevent them from constructing the small self-built sheds that in the informal ones were used to keep in store the materials gathered. (See pictures no. 3, 4 and 6).

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8: Xoraxanè Roma at the Roman market in via Collatina. Rome, January 2007.

(Photo courtesy of: <http://www.sucardrom.eu/>.)

In total invisibility and in the total absence of any institutional help, Roma living in Rome have, during the last 40 years, survived with these activities but within a regime of complete informality, and these informal activities have been long considered as marginal, and have been given scarce attention from both local government and institutions. Only recently their commerce has been encouraged as an experiment in three Roman market areas¹⁵.

In spite of their tragic condition, Romani people are far from being an *ethnic driftwood* and are instead a well alive culture, much more engaged with modernity than many people think.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the action plans are strictly linked to one another and, in order to change this thirty-year-old ghettoisation, actions are needed to solve the main problems, and those actions call for institutional co-operation which can no longer be put off.

First and foremost, the only civilised way to legalise their status and reduce the condition of outcasts suffered by the Romani people is a new amnesty.

This is the first, irrevocable objective and must be pursued as an emergency measure pending a national law taking the specific characteristics of this group into account.

Having no citizenship makes you invisible. It means that you cannot work, live, reside.

It means that you have no rights.

It is obvious that leaving people in this state of legal invisibility and financial insecurity means condemning them to isolation and keeps pushing them further on to the fringes of society.

Only resolute and well co-ordinated inter-institutional action and great commitment will be able to overcome the phenomena thus far described and guarantee a decent future for these people, who have suffered so many persecutions.

My proposal of intervention concerns the extension even in first world countries urban areas, of small projects such as microcredit dedicated to members of the Roma community. Setting up small

¹⁵ The *Pijats romanò* project regards Romani markets. They can be found every Sunday from 8 to 12, in via Collatina, in via Casilina (Grotte Celoni) and in lungotevere Dante (zona ponte Marconi). The project is organised by: Rom Lavoro, Sportello di Segretariato Sociale per l'avviamento al lavoro delle comunità Rom e Sinte, Municipality of Rome.

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independent cooperatives could also help in regularising their situation, offering them a chance to obtain a permit of stay, and later on hopefully, also citizenship.

In this way Roma's activities could be turned legal and become both a mean of income and a creative employment in which the many qualities of the Romani culture can be used as a tool for democratic, egalitarian and respectful integration.

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