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Religions and Sports: Are They Resources For the Integration of Immigrants in the Host Society?

*Stefano Martelli**

Abstract: The social integration of immigrants is a multi-faceted topic, so it needs to be studied using a multidimensional approach and operationalising the main concepts carefully. This paper gives relevance to the socio-cultural dimension; it questions whether religions, and sports and exercise, can make a positive contribution to this social process. The Author reviews the main empirical research, carried out thus far in Italy and in the European Countries; his hypothesis is that these institutions are positive resources, almost invisible but socially relevant, for the social integration of non-EU immigrants. Indeed he suggests that a scholar has to distinguish both the type of religion / of sport and exercise, and the type of place and of chances in it offered. Finally this paper offers some observations about the effects of the politics for social integration via sports and exercise, which some European countries have adopted in the last years.

Keywords: social integration, immigrants, religions, sports and exercise

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Introduction

The experiences of many European countries show that the migration issues have relevant socio-cultural aspects, such as the discrepancy between the expectations of life, nourished by the second generation of immigrants, and the real opportunities to find a home and job open to them. If compared with the better chances enjoyed by autochthonous peers, this discrepancy is viewed as an injustice by the younger immigrants, the most part of whom are born in the host Country, and have attended the same schools. Thus the socio-cultural factors appear to be relevant, as much as the material way of life and the structural factors, in order to achieve a positive integration of immigrants in the host society.

In this paper I will try to explore what opportunities religions, and sports and exercise offer in order to increase the social and cultural capital existing both among immigrants, and among the autochthonous people, in order to facilitate their social integration in Italy. So far, both of these social institutions have been neglected by the Italian immigration policies, perhaps too oriented towards preventing social tensions, descending from the presence of immigrants, in a material sense solely². Indeed social ties are created and regenerated even, and especially, during ones free time. Therefore it is important to observe the places which offer opportunities for encounters among the autochthonous and the immigrants, that religions, and sports and exercise –each institution in its own ways and places– offer to generate social capital, and to encourage –or, on the contrary, to hinder– their integration.

Unfortunately the empirical research, which in Italy and abroad is able to give a clear answer to this double question, is really scarce; therefore, this study will attempt to outline the conceptual “state of art”, as a useful tool for beginning more in-depth studies. First I will give a definition of

² This politics is currently applied in many European Countries; for instance in Sweden the ‘*arbetslinje*’, or the “line of work”, that from a long time inspires had inspired the Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokrat), has been maintained despite the riots, that took place in that Country recently (Bergnehr, & Riniolo, 2013, p. 2). This politics is currently applied in many European Countries; for instance in Sweden the ‘*arbetslinje*’, or the “line of work” that from a long time inspires the Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokrat), has been maintained despite the riots, that took place in that Country recently (Bergnehr, & Riniolo, 2013, pp. 223-225).

social integration, offered by the Ismu Foundation –one of the most relevant Centers of study and research on immigrants in Italy–, which created its own relational and multidimensional sociological approach; then I will discuss the sense in which religions, and sports and exercise can contribute to the inclusion of immigrants in Italian society. Then I will give a first overview of the religions of immigrants in Italy, and of the places in which attempts at inter-religious dialogue can emerge. Moreover, I will sketch a summary of some European studies on sports and exercise, which were used as resources for integrating immigrants into the hosting society. In my final observations I will make a few comments on the social relevance of religions and sports which, when seen as cultural factors that operate a socialization of immigrants, must be taken into consideration if one wishes to develop in Italy and in Europe effective social policies for their integration.

The integration of immigrants into Italian society

A multidimensional phenomenon, which relational sociology helps to illuminate

In more recent times, compared to what happened in other Western Countries, but certainly with greater frequency in the last years, Italy, too, has become the destination of migration flows. The data, that every year the Istat (the National Institute of Statistics) and the Italian Caritas publish on immigrants in Italy⁴, show the continuous increase in their numbers, such as in the one of the children of foreign origin, born in Italy or immigrated; a good numerical equality according to their gender; the growing tendency towards family reunification. These indicators and other ones – such as the increase in the purchase of durable goods for their home– confirm the tendency of immigrants to root themselves in the Italian society. The visible presence of immigrants in Italian towns, as well as the social

⁴ One can see data about immigrants in Italy in a specific section of the annual report, that the National Institute of Statistics publishes (up until now the most recent is: Istat, 2014, chapter 4.2). Moreover, one can see the reports, published by qualified research Centers, such as the Italian Caritas & “Migrantes” Foundation (2014); and the Ismu Foundation (2013). These last two Institutes pay more attention to irregular immigrants, and their reports estimate the magnitude of the total foreign population living in Italy.

tensions that are emerging as spontaneous reactions of the autochthonous people, or as programmed interventions promoted by “political entrepreneurs” for electoral purposes, raise the important question of whether, and how, the integration of immigrants into Italian society is possible, and desirable; and these questions are part of the wider ongoing debate on the transformation of Italian society into a multi-cultural or ethnic one⁵.

Here I have no space to recall, even if briefly, the many contributions made to the debate on the integration of immigrants in Italy⁶: a concept, that of social integration of the immigrants, of which many scholars recognize the complexity, but that rarely has been operationalized or measured by indicators⁷. In my opinion there have been two main attempts in Italy at making operational this complex concept.

(A) From 2004 the Cnel, the National Council for Economy and Labor, together with the National Body for the Coordination of Local Integration Policies, in its 3rd report on Immigration in Italy, has developed a system of indicators on aspects of “objective” integration, such as the rate of absorption of immigrants into the labor market; their access to housing; their school performances; their rate of delinquency; their average annual earnings; etc. This system, which allows you to monitor three areas crucial to social policies, provides useful indicators to guide policy makers⁸. Thus

⁵ Elsewhere I have discussed the possible outcomes of the globalization process, offering a typology that takes into account both the dilemma “universalism / relativism”, and the degree of social cohesion. In a nutshell, the four possible outcomes of this long-term process under the perspective of the integration of the immigrants are: the assimilation; the separateness; the pluralist integration; and the homogenization (Martelli, 1999, 186; Martelli & Porro, 2013, pp. 87-94. On the globalization process, one can see also: Wiewiórka, 2001; Donati, 2010).

⁶ Without any claim of comprehensiveness, here I cite the books of Ambrosini (2010), Catanzaro & Colombo (2009), Djouder (2007), and Finotelli & Sciortino (2009).

⁷ These indicators make it possible to empirically describe the constitutive dimensions of social phenomena studied. Operationalization is a process in four stages, well described by Paul F. Lazarsfeld (in Boudon & Lazarsfeld, 1965), after which it will be possible to check the correctness of the assumptions made by the collected data (quantitative or qualitative ones).

⁸ More exactly Franco Pittau, Luigi Gaffuri and other experts of the Cnel (2004) have identified three dimensions of the placement of immigrants in the area, and have developed five indicators for each area. Thus it was possible to construct the following three indexes of integration: *Index of territorial attractiveness*: measures the ability of each local context to

from its 6th report (2007) the Cnel added a second criterion to the usual method of studying the social integration of immigrants, which aims at determining which Italian macro-area presents the best chance for structural integration (lately it has been the North-East of Italy), i.e. a comparative or a differential method, which is based on the standard deviation between the employment rate of immigrants and that of the Italian people, measured within each Italian region (Caritas-Migrantes 2009, p. 319). In this way you can measure how the behavior of immigrants deviates from the “normal” behavior of the people. This second approach allows you to make interesting discoveries, such as the differences within a regional context: in 2006 among Italian regions, Sardinia “showed the minimum gap between the living conditions of immigrants and those of natives” (Caritas-Migrantes 2009, p. 324 and figure), while Emilia-Romagna –that leads the ranking of Italian regions, drawn up on the basis of “absolute” attractiveness– is placed in the lower-middle ranking, compiled according to the second criterion, the comparative one. In other words, the less the social context offers to everybody, the better –relatively speaking– immigrants are treated.

(B) In turn the working group, collected by the Ismu Foundation and led by Vincenzo Cesareo and Gian Carlo Blangiardo, has developed a multi-dimensional approach, which takes into account various indicators, related to the following four dimensions:

(B1) the *economic* dimension, relating to issues such as housing, employment status and income of immigrants;

(B2) the *social* dimension, covering their participation in leisure activities and voluntary associations;

(B3) the *cultural* dimension, which takes into account factors such as their knowledge of the Italian language and their level and access to the media;

(B4) the *political* dimension, which includes, among others, ways to decline citizenship.

attract as much as possible immigrants and to retain them stably; *Index of social inclusion*: measures the degree of embeddedness of immigrants in the host territorial context; *Index of job placement*: measures the degree and quality of integration of immigrants in the local labour market.

The Ismu Foundation operationalized this multidimensional approach and in 2009 carried out a survey on the integration of immigrants in Italy; in almost all the Italian regions 12,049 questionnaires were collected; this search tool, out of a total of 65 questions, had 22 indicators, oriented towards measuring the immigrants sense of wellbeing. In the data elaboration, the Ismu experts built many partial indices of integration for each of the four dimensions (Cesareo, 2009, p. 25 and figure 2, p. 38). Also Ismu experts have been able to ascertain, in reference to the 9th hypothesis (Cesareo, 2009), that some Christian immigrants, such as Coptics or Catholics, reported the highest scores in the Index of total integration (0.55 and 0.53 respectively). By contrast Buddhists (0.46) and Sikhs (0.47) reported the lower scores; intermediate scores, finally, Muslim immigrants reported (0.48), and also Orthodox ones, Evangelical and Hindus (0.49)⁹.

In reference to the hypothesis of the cultural distance, the Ismu experts concluded that the empirical findings corroborate “the existence of a connection between integration and cultural distance, or rather, between integration and cultural proximity ... a lesser cultural distance corresponds to a higher degree of integration in each considered area” (Cesareo, 2009, p. 84). In the second generation of immigrants, however, things change: “For the children of immigrants a most evident cultural proximity does not seem to be ... an element that can have a positive influence on the propensity towards integration” (Cesareo, 2009, p. 83; my translation). From the point of view of the theory of assimilation, these data are counterfactual: the second generation of immigrants –perhaps because they “feel themselves” more Italian than that of their parents– are less willing “to settle” and have rising expectations, which make it less likely to accept an integration, seen as a simple act of homologation.

A definition of social integration and its operationalization

I briefly summarized the setting of the two most important long-term studies on the immigrants integration in Italy until the time of this paper; both have adopted a multi-dimensional sociological approach. In my opinion by adopting only this approach it is possible to take into account

⁹ These scores of integration, based on religious affiliation, are average values, which were calculated according to the four dimensions of the Integration Index –the cultural dimension, the social one, the political, and the economic one (see above, and in Cesareo, 2009, p. 83, table 4).

the complexity of social phenomena, generated by the integration process of immigrants in Italy, and at the same time it will be easy to operationalize it, i.e. to trace back the numerous facets of the integration process at measurable aspects and empirical indicators¹⁰.

In my opinion the more comprehensive and fruitful way is the one opened by the second research, and so I shall draw from the Ismu study the following definition of integration: it is “the multi-dimensional process aimed at peaceful coexistence, within a specific social and historical reality, between individuals and groups culturally and/or ethnically different, based on mutual respect for ethnic and cultural diversity, provided that these do not adversely affect fundamental human rights and do not jeopardize the democratic institutions. Integration is always a process that takes time [...] It is decreased in economic, cultural, social and political ways. [...] Each of these dimensions gives rise to different degrees of integration ... Finally, integration is a bi-directional process: it does not affect only immigrants, but also citizens of the host country” (Cesareo, 2009, p. 23).

This definition is clear and, as well, able to be operationalized: empirical results, collected in the course of the above mentioned Ismu survey, show as much. Hence there is evidence of the heterogeneity of the local contexts of integration: a multidimensional index, built by Ismu experts, established a ranking, according to which in 2009 the city of Trento, followed in order by Massa-Carrara, Chieti, Modena, Ravenna, Campobasso and Isernia (values between 0.57 and 0.54), held the top positions in the ranking of the better integration of immigrants. On the contrary, the last positions were occupied by Catania, Pistoia, Naples, Pisa and Pescara (values between 0.46 and 0.40) (Cesareo & Blangiardo, 2009, p. 126 and table 2).

Moreover, the index allows for highlighting the link, between the nationality of immigrants and their level of integration into Italian society. It is much easier to integrate Hispanics, for instance people who come from Brazil, or from the Dominican Republic and Ecuador; and also there are

¹⁰ Many reasons recommend adopting the relational and multi-dimensional approach in the study of any social phenomenon; I presented them in some books of mine, both on issues of Sociology of cultural and communicative Processes (Martelli, 1999; Martelli, 2009), and in Sociology of Sports and Exercise (Martelli, 2010; 2011; 2012; Martelli, & Porro, 2013). Also these books offer some ideas on the social integration of immigrants through religions and sports.

good chances that the same occurs for immigrants who are coming from Eastern Europe, for example from Albania, Russia, Poland, and Romania. Going down in the ranking, Ukrainians, Nigerians, and the people from China, Senegal, or Bangladesh have lower chances (Gilardoni 2009, pp. 77-82 and table 3).

The Ismu survey also lists the main socio-demographic characteristics that accompany the two opposite situations of immigrants, the one of a greater integration, or of a lesser one. Who is less integrated, more frequently is a male; he has fewer family ties, he has a low income and a level of education relatively low; he has little seniority as a migrant; he shares his home with other parties (relatives and/or friends); he belongs to a Christian denomination, or he is a Buddhist, or a Muslim (Cesareo & Blangiardo, 2009, pp. 133-136 and table 2). On the contrary, the socio-demographic characteristics that identify the most integrated immigrants are: to be a woman; to be married; to have a degree, and an upper-middle income; to be a Catholic; to share a home with his/her spouse and children without other co-inhabitants; to stay in Italy for over 15 years (Cesareo & Blangiardo 2009, pp. 133-136 and table 3).

The Ismu report also points out the structural factors that affect the integration of immigrants in Italy, such as the density of their presence: it decreases with the increase of “the level of integration, while in the contexts in which immigrants are less numerous, their integration is more facilitated” (Cesareo & Blangiardo, 2009, p. 139).

Additional barriers are noted at the socio-cultural level, such as the problem of recognition of qualifications. The report by the Ismu Foundation wishes that, in the absence of an international treaty, “qualifications obtained abroad may be recognized in Italy, (because) the more educated immigrants show a greater knowledge and a more expert use of the Italian language, more (frequently) than those who have lower educational qualifications; indeed they more (frequently) use the media, show a more keen interest in what happens in Italy, say they live well in Italy and feel they belong here, more than the lower educated immigrants” (Cesareo & Blangiardo 2009, p. 140; my translation). This recognition, in addition to being an act of justice toward those who already possess an objective cultural capital, would also have positive effects on the same Italian schools, that have to face the challenge of giving a legal title of

education to hundreds of thousands of immigrants, in order to allow them to find a job in Italy¹¹.

Other obstacles to socio-cultural integration of immigrants are then given by the ideological and political trends taking place in Italy: both in the political debates, and in sporting matches, episodes of ethnic prejudice occur with increasing frequency¹²; representations of immigrants, based on stereotypes, and combined with xenophobia, make the process of integration of non-EU immigrants into Italian society more difficult.

Conversely, cases of double integration are signalled. The Ismu survey also identified a small minority of *transnational immigrants* (6.9%), i.e. of people who feel they belong simultaneously to the Country of origin and to Italy. They express this dual feeling, both as an interest in what is happening in Italy, and as a sense of caring for their familiars, whom they send money to, more frequently than other immigrants do (Caselli, 2009, pp. 112-113 and tables 2, 3).

Since the socio-cultural aspects are relevant resources in the integration process, in the following pages I will focus first on religions and, in the last section, on sports and exercise. With this choice, I do not mean to underestimate the importance of the project Emill¹³, which in the last year

¹¹ In Italy the *Ctps-Centri territoriali permanenti* (Territorial Permanent Centers) are the public schools of long life learning for everybody: attending them, Italian and immigrated workers can recover their compulsory school attendance, and so gain the “legal” title of education, which is acknowledged by the Italian Republic, and is necessary to find a regular job. Now these Centers are crowded with tens of thousands of immigrants, who have already gained a high school diploma or even a degree in their own Country; but missing an international Treatise between their Country of origin and Italy, these immigrants have to restart their educational career. Importantly, the Ctps fulfil a function of secondary socialization towards immigrants, and make their integration into Italian society easier.

¹² Between 2013 and 2014 Cecile Kyenge, once Minister of the Italian Republic in the Government led by Enrico Letta and then elected to the European Parliament in the Socialist Group, and Mario Balotelli, who once played as striker for AC Milan and for the Italian football team, were frequently the targets of attacks, in the political arena or in the stadiums, that made use of these prejudices. One can read an overview of the (weak) outcomes, obtained by anti-racist campaigns among the spectators of recent English Football Championships, in Spracklen, & Long (2011).

¹³ Via Emill-European modules and integration at local level, the Ismu Foundation has joined the intention of the European Commission of promoting effective exchanges of good practices of integration among the Member States. The effectiveness of such practices is measured by socio-structural indicators: indeed the Emill project begins with the premise that the effectiveness of the good practices of integration is based on knowledge of the

the Ismu Foundation has joined, as one can read in its 19th report (2013). This project enhances the size of legal-normatives and allows you to observe and catalogue the good practices of integration of immigrants, from a contextual analysis based on the socio-material structures. Indeed Emill is an international project¹⁴ and therefore it adopts the dominant European approach; the latter, at the present time, takes into account the *material* size of the integration¹⁵ only. On the contrary, this article aims to enhance the cultural dimensions, namely religion and sport, showing how these institutions can inspire positive practices for the social integration of immigrants in Italy.

The religions of the immigrants: factors of dialogue or of conflict?

Belonging to a religion and freedom of its public expression: places and good practices for promoting the social integration of immigrants

The 2014 Idos report on immigrants in Italy states that, from the point of view of the religious affiliation, more than half are Christians (53.9%), about one third are Muslims (32.9%) and, to a much lesser degree, are followers of Eastern cults or other religions, still (8.9%); very few are atheists or agnostics (4.3%) (Idos 2014, p. 17). Inside the Christian majority, the most represented faiths among immigrants in Italy are Orthodoxy and Catholicism; much less frequent Protestantism and other Christian denominations (Cipriani & Roldàn, 2014, p. 327).

respective social contexts, which the judgment on the transferability, or less of the practice, depends (see: Ismu Foundation, 2013, pp. I-II).

¹⁴ The Emill network of European experts links 6 countries: Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Italy. Three Italian regions have been monitored: Lombardia, Umbria and Campania. Both European States, and regions or *lander* inside them were chosen with the criterion of the variety and the ability to represent different situations, measured by the structures for the integration of immigrants (Ismu Foundation, 2013, p. II).

¹⁵ The Emill project has developed tools for the analysis of social contexts (6 modules) covering “only the legal and institutional framework. The latter fact is the main element that makes the development of interventions possible” (Ismu Foundation, 2013, p. II; my translation). In practice, among the socio-cultural factors of integration Emill only considers the courses for learning the Italian language, and the access to social services (information desks for immigrant integration plans) (see: Van Volleghem 2014). Shortly, Emill does not take into account other socio-cultural factors, neither religious affiliation, nor sports or exercise.

At the question of whether the interviewed immigrant is in agreement or disagreement with the following statement: “Every person has the right to openly and publicly profess his or her own religious faith in any country he or she is in” (Cipriani, Roldàn, 2014, p. 158, table 30; my translation), a great majority of immigrants in Italy said they “totally agree” with that statement (78.4%), and other respondents have agreed “very” (7.5%). In contrast, those opposed to the open and public profession of religious faith are less than 6% of the respondents (“strongly disagree”: 3.9%, and “not agree”: 1.8%). It is clear that the immigrants in Italy raise a strong demand for recognition of their own religious identity, which is intertwined and reinforced with that of other social, economic and political rights.

This claim has already become effective: today in Italy there are a lot of places of worship, opened by religions or Christian faiths¹⁶. Really these buildings are a measure of religious pluralism, because they give evidence of a strong discontinuity with the religious tradition of Italy: indeed, until a few years ago, Italian people declared that they belong to one religion, the Catholic faith (Cesareo & Cipriani et al., 1995).

The non-Catholic religious map of Italy also noted that such non Catholic places of worship have been founded more frequently in Northern Italy and in the Lazio region, especially in Rome and nearby (Cesareo & Cipriani et al., 1995, p. 118). Indeed this map is incomplete and, furthermore, it is silent on the (alleged) function of social integration, developed by these religions of immigrants in Italy¹⁷. So to date the National survey, carried out by the Ismu Foundation, is the one that allows for the deepening of the bond between the integration of immigrants into Italian society and their religion. For instance, it allows you to discover that

¹⁶ The map of religions in Italy, traced by Enzo Pace (2014, table 1, p. 117; 2013), reports over 1,800 places of worship (except the Catholic ones), including: 655 Muslims prayer halls –in Italy there are three mosques only, the most important one is in Rome; 355 temples or other cult places, opened by Orthodox Churches; 658 cult places, opened by the neo-Pentecostal African Churches; 36 by the Sikhs; 126 by Buddhist movements; and 2 by Hindu groups.

¹⁷ Up until now only three areas of research have provided data on the integrative function performed by the other religions present in Italy: the survey, led by Giuseppe Giordan among the Orthodoxes (2013); the study of Barbara Bertolani on the Sikhs (2013); and at the Tamils Giuseppe Burgio devoted a monograph (2007). Unfortunately these interesting studies, carried out with qualitative methods, do not use a statistically representative sample, so that they cannot offer chances to do generalizations or comparisons.

the Copt immigrants are even more integrated than the Catholic ones; on the contrary Muslims, Sikhs and immigrants who claim not to belong to any religion, are less integrated (Gilardoni, 2009, p. 83, table 4).

Surely the integration of immigrants into the host society varies in dependence on the symbolic-cultural system, generated by the professed religion: this correlation has been well known for a long time, i.e. from the research on the different social effects of the world-religions, initiated by Max Weber (1982) and carried out by structural-functionalist sociologists, anthropologists, and so on; and some empirical studies in Italian society, today, allow you to see corroborated these hypotheses. However further steps can be taken by completing the above outcomes with observations on the relational dynamics, that occur in these numerous worship places, and that offer multiple opportunities for immigrants to participate in the social life of Italy.

The inter-religious dialogue and its places

In addition to the buildings of worship and prayer, immigrants in Italy are attending numerous other places, where their religious identity – claimed, testified or only made visible by their presence– produces reactions. At least four types of places could be as many “laboratories” of inter-religious dialogue –or of ethno-religious conflicts–, the following ones are:

(A) *Public schools*: in the year 2013-14 (latest data available at the time of writing) there were about 786,000 students of foreign origin in the Italian schools of every type and grade, equal to 8.8% of the total school population (A.n.f. 2014)¹⁸. At least two aspects show that Italian schools can be a laboratory for social integration and for the management of potential conflicts –more probable in the Northern regions, where already many classes in the primary schools are composed of more than 30% of pupils of foreign origin (Colombo & Santagati, 2014; Besozzi, Colombo &

¹⁸ More precisely, in Italian *kindergartens* about 164,500 children of foreign origin were enrolled in the 2013-14 year; 276,120 were in the primary schools; 170,790 in the middle schools; and 175,120 in the high schools, most of whom were enrolled in technical and professional institutes (about 131,000): only 34,000, in fact, attend a “liceo” (a humanistic high school), and about 5,000 an artistic institute.

Santagati, 2013). Here the teacher of the Catholic religion may be a resource, if he/she will be able to use issues and opportunities, offered by the presence in the classroom of students belonging to other religions: for instance, the festivity of Ramadan, and other similar events¹⁹;

(B) *Pluri-religious families*: today in Italy there are about 300,000 mixed pairs, i.e. composed of persons belonging to different religions that have married, and about the same number could be the “de facto” couples, having the same pluralistic religious orientation (Salvarani, 2014, p. 237). This condition may generate a lot of problems – you can see a list of them in a document by the Cei, the Conference of Italian Catholic Bishops (2005) –, for instance, at the moment of choosing the religion, which to educate the children in; or it can be a condition of richness: the family, “mixed” in ethno-religious terms, can reach a stable equilibrium in spite of diversity, and it may be a laboratory of good practices, oriented towards religious dialogue and mutual tolerance (Ghiringhelli, Negri 2008; Martelli, 2009);

(C) *Places of health and life/death*: schools and company canteens, public clinics, hospitals and cemeteries are many places where the presence of non-Catholic immigrants presents issues and raises questions which may be an opportunity at the same time to enlarge the space of civil rights and to promote an inter-religious dialogue (Allievi, 2003) –or, on the contrary, might be sources of tension and conflict. For example, you see parallels between Catholics and Muslims on the commitment to protect life (Darius, 2009), as well as about what it is to be effective in restoring peace in the world and safeguarding the environment;

(D) *Media and immigrants*: this is a very complex issue, also for the great number and variety of communication tools. Today –just think of the

¹⁹ According to Brunetto Salvarani (2014, pp. 240-241), the TCR-Teaching of the Catholic Religion in Italian schools, can become an opportunity to promote inter-religious dialogue. Indeed an increasing number of students, although they belong to another Christian denomination or religion, at school attend the TCR, despite having the right to be exempted from it. The TCR National Office of the CEI, the Italian Bishops' Conference, estimated that in the 2003-2008 years the number of students of foreign origin, who attended Italian schools, have more than doubled, reaching 7.2% in primary school; 6,2% in the secondary schools of 1st grade; and 5.8% in the high schools; and about 40-50% of them attended the TCR courses (Battistella, Castegnaro & Olivieri, 2009, p. 85). One can read the results of an analysis of how the school textbooks for the TCR introduce other religions, in M.C. Giorda (2014).

differences between old and new media– and also because of the problematic generated by the same media “logic” – e.g. the need to gain audience pushes journalists towards dramatizing religious differences, presenting them as dangerous conflicts, etc. It should also be kept in mind that immigrants do not only expose themselves on the Italian media, but they have also established their own media in Italy (Martelli, 2007; Vitullo, 2014). In other words, these “virtual” places offer the most opportunities simultaneously for religious dialogue and conflict; therefore, the media should be “handled with care” (Bernardini, 2014).

Moreover other places, such as the meetings among religious leaders, which annually are organized by the Community of Saint Egidio, or the Museum of the three Monotheistic Religions, opened by the University of Bologna “*Alma Mater Studiorum*” in the Castle of Bertinoro (FC), may offer opportunities, in order to integrate immigrants in Italy. Though these realities are limited in their number and size, from the point of view of symbolic and cultural dynamics they hold great relevance in Italy, and could be as many laboratories of good practices in the inter-religious dialogue.

Sports and exercise: are they resources for integration in a pluriethnic society?

Journalists, sports leaders, and public administrators of social matters agree that sport and exercise produce many positive effects on people and society; in particular, they would be extremely effective in the socialization of young people to the values and in the social integration of minorities of different ethnicity or culture.

Unfortunately until now little empirical evidence has been gathered; thus Marc Falcoz and Dominique Koebel, in their *Préface* to the book, *The intégration par le sport* (Eds., 2005, pp. 7-14), denounce an ideology – the oversimplified vision of reality, that athletes, politicians and media convey: they argue that “sport integrates by its very nature” (Falcoz & Koebel, 2005, p. 9). More than just a belief, this statement “has become a postulate; it has gained the status of a myth and now it is reality: a certainty, which is independent of the conditions in which the practice (sport or exercise) occur” (Falcoz & Koebel, 2005, my translation).

In order to counter this tendency towards oversimplification of a complex reality, and to promote the development of social policies in Italy which are sensitive to the problems of integrating the ethnic and cultural minorities through sports and exercise, in this third and final section of my paper I will present some results of sociological research, conducted on this topic in the international field²⁰. I will present them by trying to answer the following three questions:

(i) what are the main lines of social policies in sport, adopted in major European countries? and how do they integrate themselves with the local policies toward immigrants?

(ii) are sports and physical activities useful for the integration of ethnic and cultural minorities in the host society?

(iii) are the sporting environments –schools, voluntary associations, sports facilities, outdoor spaces, etc.–, useful in promoting the production of social capital?

In the following pages I will briefly introduce the main results of empirical research led in European countries, which are useful when reflecting on the real potential of integrating immigrants into Italy through sports and exercise.

Sports and exercise in the EU social politics for the integration of ethno-cultural minorities

In the European Year of Sport (2004), the EU Commission instructed PMP Consulting and the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy of the Loughborough University (UK) to prepare two *Studies on education and sport*; they were published in 2004 and in 2005 respectively. The first book, entitled *Sport and multiculturalism*, is the most important contribution in clarifying the latent functions performed by sports and exercise, in order to integrate young people from different ethnic groups and cultures; and in making a balance between the many experiences and initiatives, taken in different European countries, in order to promote sport through dialogue among ethnic groups, which sometimes have battled bloody conflicts (Pmp Consultings, Institute for Sport, 2004, pp. 30-80). This study concludes by highlighting the implications of these initiatives for social policies on sport;

²⁰ Really on Italy one can have some suggestions from the reading of Cecchi's paper (2012).

and it submits recommendations to the European Commission (Pmp Consultings, Institute for Sport, 2004, pp. 83-94).

Moving on from these results Ian Henry (2005) identified five ideal-typical positions in sport policies that European States adopted in favor of ethnic and cultural minorities. The first three positions –culturalism, market pluralism, and equitable opportunities of development for each ethnic group– emphasize or even strengthen the diversities within the host society; on the contrary the last two policies of sports –the assimilation, and the non-interventionist position– emphasize the cohesion and unity of the national culture of the host country. Italy – along with Poland, Hungary, Denmark, Greece, Ireland and Portugal– is assigned to the third group, which is characterized by the “assimilationist politics of sport and the homogeneity of the population”, although the trend is expected to move towards “interculturalism/multiculturalism”, or “integration policies that deal with diversity” (Henry, 2005, p. 7, figure 2; see also Penninx, 2005, p. 139, figure 1).

In some European countries there were studies done on policies of sport, especially those aimed at social integration of immigrants –such as in Germany (Frogner, 1985), in France (Arnaud, 1998, 2002), and in Holland (Elling, De Knop & Knoppers, 2001); their results urged the extension of similar initiatives in Italy, also. In Southern Europe, including Italy, Eurobarometer shows a lower level of sports practice or regular exercise (Pioletti & Porro, 2013); and the rapid transition, which is taking place in Italy too, from a substantially homogeneous population to a multi-ethnic landscape, makes the adoption of policies, for the social integration of immigrants via sports and exercise, no longer deferrable.

Sports, social capital, and civil society

Are sports and exercise really effective in integrating the ethnic and cultural minorities in the host society? Lincoln Allison (1998), who studied sports institutions in three states –Georgia, Thailand and South Africa– tried to give an answer; he showed that sports and exercise perform many of the functions usually attributed to civil society –of course they do so in a manner, proportional to the different level of development, achieved by these practises in each Country.

And Janet C. Harris (1998), who shares the concerns of David R. Putnam on the decline of social capital and the ongoing weakening of civil society, believes that sports and exercise are often good opportunities to

revitalize the civic commitment, and urges the sociologists of sport to work from this perspective.

Thomas Perks (2005) corroborated empirically on the hypothesis that sport, practiced in youth, sets a good precedent for the activities of civil commitment, carried into adulthood. The results, by himself obtained studying a statistically representative sample of Canadian youth on the assumption that sports generate social capital, corroborate this view, though feebly. In fact, in order to obtain the most obvious evidence, he would have had to follow the respondents for their entire life cycle: only in this way could the results, obtained on the predictive capabilities of sport on civic engagement as adults, have been validated.

In recent years, some studies have shown the possibility of using sports for increasing the development of poor countries (Darnell, 2012) and, in the case of the richer countries, to use it as an anti-discriminatory tool for minority groups, such as ones based on gender or race²¹. Studies on the effectiveness of anti-racist campaigns carried out in England and Norway denounce the difficulty of achieving objective results on the effectiveness of sport in preventing discrimination against athletes of color –for instance, racist chants from the stands, and throwing of objects with the aim of taunting the black athletes (Andersson, 2011, p. 160). On the other hand, however, these studies allow you to fine-tune your sight and thus discern the more ‘subtle’ shapes of racism; for example, those that lurk within the sporting regulations, which often were written assuming that the practitioners were only males, whites and Christians (Foley, Taylor & Maxwell, 2011, p. 180).

Sports and exercise may be also strategic resources in rebuilding social ties among different ethnic groups, sometimes broken by a war. Evidence is offered by the challenging study, carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 2002 and 2005 by Davide Sterchele (2008); he showed that football has allowed for the re-establishment of social relationships between Serbs and Bosnians, opposed by the conflict, based on ethnic differences, which in the ‘90s erupted in the Balkans.

²¹ On these “sensitive” issues since the '80s a lot of studies is emerged, especially in the United States and Australia, as well as in some European Countries, such as England, Holland and Denmark (see Jarvie 1985; Long & Spracklen, 2011; Bonilla-Silva, 2013).

Are sports and exercise useful for the social integration of the “second generation” of immigrants?

The third and last question, concerning the possibility of integrating through sports and exercise the “second generation” of immigrants, finds an affirmative answer –but cautiously, due to the scarcity of these studies, and the contradictory nature of their results.

Initially some studies gave an affirmative answer: in addition to the reflections, presented by Lionel Arnaud in his previously reported work on the social policies of sport in Lyon and Birmingham (Arnaud, 1998, 2002), here some studies have to be mentioned, such as Marc Clément's book (2000). This French sociologist did not hesitate to include sport among the possible paths of integration for young immigrants into the host society; he indicates Vaulx-en-Velin (a municipality of the Rhône department in Eastern France) as a town that has been able to develop concrete actions and good practices in sports and exercise to obtain this goal. So to the policy of Jacques Chirac, a previous French President, who frequently pointed out Zinedine Zidane and the French football team, composed of “*blancs*, blacks *et beurs*”, as models of integration, seemed to have success, when this team won the 1998 FIFA World Cup. But the riots, that repeatedly flared up in the French suburbs in the fall of 2005 and in 2006, showed that this politic cannot be a persuasive model for the second-generation of “*beurs*”, i.e. the immigrants from the countries of Northern Africa, already French colonies. Without the same opportunities as their autochthonous peers already have, to find a job and a home, neither football nor other sports are sufficient to facilitate integration into French society for these young males and females, who live their social distance as an injustice (Wacquant 2006).

In turn the Fethi Sakouhi's study (2003) is likewise materialistic: he calls “illusory” the recourse to sport to gain social inclusion for young immigrants; indeed, without the convergent support of the three major agencies of socialization –family, school, and work– no integration of the second and third generation is possible. To the same conclusion did Floris Müller, Liesbet van Zoonen and Laurens de Roode (2008) arrive: these Dutch sociologists analysed the outcomes, obtained from a football tournament, organized in Amsterdam to promote the social inclusion of immigrants.

Up until now perhaps the greatest effort to ascertain the integrative function of sports and exercise, at least as far as Great Britain is concerned,

was made by Yi-De Liu (2009), who has questioned the database of Sport England's National Benchmarking Service, in order to verify if the leisure public facilities have had positive effects in integrating socially disadvantaged ethnic groups. His analysis shows that the measures taken by the heads of British social policy over the last 10 years have had weak effects: among young people aged between 11 and 19 years, the elderly and the immigrants, large pockets of deprivation and marginalization remain. Liu concludes that further study is needed to determine whether this is the effect of a real exclusion, implemented by the British society, or, more simply, if the social marginalization of immigrants is the aggregate result of a multiplicity of individual choices.

Briefly Luigi Fabbris' wish (2007, p. 15), that schools, sports clubs and gyms can be as many places that offer opportunities "to melt" together people of different countries and ethnicities through sports and exercise, can be achieved if the social services help immigrants to troubleshoot basic material problems (to have a job, to find a house, etc.). The experience of other European countries shows that policies to integrate immigrants through sports and exercise are a facet, neither marginal but nor decisive in itself, of the social policies.

Final remarks

In this paper I have explored the issue "Religion and socialization", proposed by this Journal, observing it jointly with sports and exercise, and referring it to the problem of social integration of immigrants in Italy. I examined the (scarce) empirical research, carried out so far in Italy and in the European Countries on religion, sports and exercise. My hypothesis was that these institutions may become resources, in order to integrate non-EU immigrants into Italian society; to the extent that that they are used (in part or in full), religion, and/or sports and exercise, at least implicitly, play a socializing function: the one of integration in the host society.

Firstly, the main results obtained from the most recent qualified research in Italy, such as CNEL reports and national surveys led by the Ismu Foundation, highlight the importance of adopting a multidimensional sociological approach; it allows you to capture and, at the same time, to better weigh the various aspects of this social phenomenon: the cultural dimension, the social, the political and the economic one. The

multidimensional approach invites everyone to consider each facet of the integration issue, and not only those materials: even the cultural structures, up until now undervalued, contribute positively in integrating immigrants into the host society; among them religion, and sports or exercise may have a positive effect.

For both institutions the theory of integration, based on the results of the (scarce) empirical research conducted on this issue, has been put to the test; for obvious reasons, I have limited my discussion on the research led on religions to Italy; and to the European Countries for the ones, led on sports and exercise, because one can read Cecchi (2012) for a review of the Italian literature in this field. Therefore this paper offers an initial assessment of the results, obtained from such research –still too little to be able to offer a clear picture, especially if one considers the plurality of religions and the variety of sports or physical exercises–, this article has focused on the places, where the integration of immigrants can move forward:

(A) for *religions* in Italy, they are: schools, places of worship, hospitals and cemeteries, and the media –both those which report on immigrants and those who give voice to the immigrants themselves:

(B) also *sports and physical exercise* have their places: stadiums, gyms, swimming-pools, and other sports facilities, kept open by private owners or by local public authorities, clubs or voluntary associations.

Referring to these different social spaces, this paper has proposed the need to observe social relations as the fuel for the socialization process. This choice also allows one to achieve a second objective, to dispel prejudices about religions and sports; really these institutions are often viewed in a double manner: either positively, as social resources which easily help the integration of immigrants; or, on the contrary and negatively, as dangerous occasions for social dis/integration.

A second and more ambitious goal of this paper was to provide the results of studies and research, useful to intervene in society, as cognitive resources for local decision-makers in the field of social policies, aimed at promoting the integration of immigrants. In Italy politics on socio-cultural aspects have still to be developed; while at a European level they are only used as facilitations in the search for work and/or a home, i.e. as interventions on the material plane only. In both cases, this article has sought to provide some assessed evidence, in the hope of stimulating further research, useful to test the contribution of religions, and of sports

and exercise, at the level of social integration of immigrants in the host country.

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