Governing diversity in Milan "città mondo":

political discourse and policies towards 2015 Expo

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Abstract

Milan is the first immigrants' destination in Italy and the cosmopolitan city by excellence in the country. Yet the local government has not demonstrated to be particularly prone to the promotion of urban diversity and recognition of the value brought about by immigrants' communities; safety policies, rather than integration or multicultural policies have been implemented. An apparent radical change started in 2011 when the left-wing coalition led by Giuliano Pisapia won the local elections. The paper analyzes the recent evolution of the administration political discourse on diversity and international immigrants' presence in the city, with the aim to highlight (1) the extent to which the discourse about diversity has been evolving and whether and how any of such changes translate into actual initiatives and/or in policy implementation; (2) the prevailing narratives (interculturalism, multiculturalism, integration, etc.) and the related representations of immigrants and the city itself.
Particular attention will be devoted to the initiative called "Forum della Città Mondo", a permanent assembly gathering representatives from migrant and ethnic associations created along the selection of Milan as site of the 2015 Universal Exposition. As a local multicultural policy, the MWCF stands as a privileged observation point to unpack the discourse about immigrant presence in the city, reflecting the cohabitation within the City Council members/departments of divergent political views concerning immigration and cultural diversity. The evolution and implementation of this project are analysed into detail to show its potentialities as well as flaws and critical aspects.

Introduction

Milan is the first immigrants' destination in Italy – with number foreign residents that amount to 22% of the city population - and the cosmopolitan city by excellence in the country, thanks to its position as hub in globalized economic flows. Over the last twenty years, a growing presence of foreign residents has changed many important aspects of urban life: from entire sectors of labour market (construction, caregiving, private security, cleaning sector, etc.) that has been monopolized by foreign workers to commercial streets where "ethnic" shops and symbols have dramatically modified the urban landscape, to schools where an increasing presence of students with foreign background have fuelled a variety of project in multicultural/intercultural education.

Against such transformations, between the beginning of the nineties and the end of the last decade, the local government did not demonstrate to be particularly prone to the promotion of urban diversity and recognition of the value brought about by immigrants' communities; more often than not, at neighbourhood level, the governance of diversity has been translated into urban safety policies leading to interventions aimed at diluting immigrant presence and reducing their visibility in public spaces (Barberis and Marzorati 2014). Such an attitude by local government along more than fifteen years shows a stark contrast to what was going on in many European cities where at least three kind of policies have been triggered by analogous urban transformations (Caponio, Borkert 2010). Firstly, there are nationally or locally framed integration policies (Zincone, Penninx, Borkert, 2011) intended to enhance the socioeconomic integration of immigrants into the local context (policies to facilitate either immigrants' insertion into the local labour market or their access to real estate, public services and welfare provisions, or the '*mixité*' policy launched in some French and German cities in order to prevent residential segregation and the formation of 'urban ghettos').

Secondly, we have multicultural policies aimed at supporting linguistic and cultural diversity in order to promote multicultural cohabitation, new uses of public spaces,

cultural associations, multi/intercultural projects in education, etc. (Martiniello, 1999; Modood, 2007; Vertovec, Wessendorf, 2012).

Thirdly, we can find policies aimed at 'exploiting' the economic potential of immigrants – in this case classified as 'ethnic communities' – deriving from the economic importance of 'ethnic'/transnational networks (Kloosterman, 2010; Morawska, 2003); or through the '*commodification of cultural diversity*': the promotion of ethnic neighbourhoods and precincts, the sponsorship of 'ethnic' festivals and events, etc. (Aytar, Rath, 2012).

These three kinds of policies entail different kinds of governance of urban changes which, in their turn, involve different types of immigrant actors (groups, communities, leaders etc.), as well as institutional players (e.g. local police forces, chambers of commerce), third sector associations and, last but not least, the private sector.

As far as the city of Milan is concerned - and coherently with the dominant discourse at national level, which have associated the concentration of immigrants in certain neighbourhoods with issues of safety, urban decay and the risk of petty crime -, local policies and discourses at the local level have not promoted diversity nor endorsed the positive impact of a growing immigrant presence in the city. Local authorities far from engaging in the promotion of public spaces as places were to linger, encountering people, spending time, strongly supported a fourth type of policy: security, or put better, safety policies, meaning policies to protect citizens (usually native residents and city-users) from the threats and dangers raised by various social groups, principally foreign immigrants (Petrillo, 2003; Bellinvia, 2013).

However, in 2011, a "historical turn" took place. After eighteen years of right-wing government, a left-wing coalition, led by Giuliano Pisapia (a well-known Milanese civil rights lawyer) won the elections after an electoral campaign in which diversity management related to urban policies has been a very heated issue: immigration (e.g. the management of high concentration areas), religion (e.g. the building and location of a mosque), ethnic diversity (the Roma encampments), sexual orientation and new families (e.g. the local register for civil partnerships). Throughout the electoral campaign Giuliano

Pisapia was harshly attacked by his competitors for his commitment to launch a radically new diversity policy in the city. His coalition highlighted very clearly its intention to mark a stark change with the past, thanks also to the opportunity provided by the International Exhibition 2015:

> "Parochialism and closure are not a destiny, but the outcome of an inept and short-sighted ruling class. Projects for international cooperation and Expo can be an extraordinary chance to start a new season." (Comitato Pisapiaxmilano, 2011)

Since it got power, the Pisapia administration has been underlying how crucial civil rights and urban diversity in its multifarious forms, especially with LGBTQ and migrant minorities (see Angelucci et al. 2014), are for a city like Milan. Over the last four years, some important policies and projects have been approved and - at least partially - implemented in this field.

Our analysis focuses right on this issue. We aim at highlighting: (1) the extent to which the discourse about diversity has been evolving in the last few years and whether and how any of such changes translate into actual initiatives and/or in policy implementation; (2) the prevailing narratives (interculturalism, multiculturalism, integration, etc.) and the related representations of immigrants and ethnic communities and the city itself. Drawing from both semi-structured qualitative interviews to politicians and policy makers and documents relating to some approved municipal initiatives, our paper proposes to analyze the recent evolution of the administration political discourse on diversity and the presence of foreign immigrants in the city.

Particular attention will be devoted to the initiative called "Forum della Città Mondo" (Milan World City Forum, MWCF) a permanent assembly gathering representatives from more than 600 migrant and ethnic associations that was created along the selection of Milan as site of the 2015 Universal Exposition. As a local multicultural policy, the MWCF stands as a privileged observation point to unpack the discourse about immigrant presence in the city, reflecting the presence within the City Council members/departments of divergent political views concerning immigration and cultural

diversity. Moreover, as it directly involves the participation of immigrants themselves, it discloses important issues related to minority politics showing that the potential intrinsic in its premises in terms of minorities empowerment and recognition is limited by the specificities of the national/local political field about immigration.

1. Governing diversity at the local level: state of the art and issues at stake

Local migrant policymaking (Caponio & Borket 2010) and urban diversity governance (Syrett and Sepulveda 2012, Fincher 2015, Sandercock, 2000) are two overlapping fields of studies referring to different scholar traditions; yet, they have in common the acknowledgement of the relevance of the local dimension in dealing with issues of migrant-related diversity.

The growing interest of what happens at the local level in these fields goes along with a general dissatisfaction with the well-known national models of integration, which are challenged (Caponio 2010, Alexander 2007, Joppke 2007) on the base of the sub-national divergences in the approaches towards diversity (Martiniello, 1997). Thus "the uneven geographies and histories of diversity mean that local contexts, rooted within wider local–global scalar relations, are critical to any understanding of its contemporary governance" (Syrett and Sepulveda 2012, p. 239).

On the background, the political disenchantment with multiculturalism and multicultural policies that emerged in the last decade plays a prominent role if we look at the governance of diversity and the local level. Many words have been written about the "backlash against multiculturalism" and its unfolding in the political discourse as a consequence of a number of critical events (Grillo 2005, Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). It has been argued that the effect of the backlash against multiculturalism has been a return to assimilationism (Grillo 2007) yet, things are much more complex than this, and the backlash itself is "complex, multifaceted, multivocal phenomena" (ibidem, p. 290).

Taylor-Gooby and Waite (2013) show for example that as far as UK is concerned rather than a withdrawal from multiculturalism, a pragmatic form of multiculturalism has emerged. A post-multicultural (Vertovec 2010) or neo-assimilationist model (Zincone 2011, Joppke 2007) resting on the acknowledgement of diversity but the reaffirmation of strong national identity through integration courses, compulsory language courses, citizenships exams etc., has indeed emerged throughout European countries.

Yet, if neo-assimilationist tendencies are indeed evident at the national level policies, it is important not to forget that the urban level has to be seen as a policy-making field in itself in immigration and diversity issues (Caponio 2010, Ambrosini and Boccagni 2015).

To this respect, in her analysis of local migrant policymaking in three Italian cities Caponio (2010) recognizing that the local level has been overshadowed by a few macro variables, wonders if the national models ever existed. Ambrosini and Boccagni (2015) elaborating on the findings of a comparative case study on immigrant and ethnic diversity policies in five European cities and in three Italian ones, evaluate the extent to which national integration policies and discourses affect local policy provision at a city level. Their conclusion is that while indeed paying a tribute to the neo-assimilationist emphasis pervading the current public discourse in Europe, public policies at the local level are in many ways independent of the national philosophies of integration as they are more sensitive to the problems and social dynamics which result from the settlement of foreign-born populations, rather than principles. They point out that multicultural policies in their many context and path-dependent variants can indeed be appreciated in some cities.

To this respect, we argue that the MCWF case implemented in Milan under the Pisapia administration can be indeed labelled as a multicultural policy. Yet, it clashes with the approach of other departments in the city council, which are more influenced by the general trend focusing on integration and social cohesion, accepting diversity but not encouraging it.

Moreover, there is a spread awareness among policy makers and other actors engaged in diversity management and promotion at the local level that what should be pursed is an

intercultural approach to diversity. In Europe, for instance, such an approach has become concrete in programme such as the "Intercultural cities" programme whose premises can be found in Wood and Landry (2008). In their promotional approach interculturalism appears as "a remedy for failed multiculturalism, intended not to offer an objective social science account of our situation, but is rather […] intended to serve as a new narrative, or if you like, a new myth' (Kymlicka 2012 in Marconi 2015). Other scholars have questioned the usefulness to dismiss to concept of multiculturalism in favour of that of interculturalism (Meer and Modood 2012) or more pragmatically have tried and investigate "the validity of embracing interculturalism as a viable urban approach towards the governance of difference" (Marconi and Ostanel 2015).

Diversity itself is emerging as a new label for projects and initiatives concerning ethnic and cultural minorities, often taking the place of multiculturalism (Boccagni 2015; Faist 2009; Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010).

Scholar narratives involving trendy concepts such as super-diversity (Vertovec 2010) and hyper-diversity (Tasan-Kok et al. 2014) contribute to such a turn. Hyper-diversity refers to "intense diversification of the population, not only in socio-economic, social and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles, attitudes and activities" and "(1) it has a multilayered character and goes beyond ethnicity and socio-economic differences (making concepts of multiculturalism or assimilation problematic); (2) it tackles the complexity of mutual interactions between the dimensions of diversity (such as intersectionality); (3) it relates to the action space of people (where they work, live and have diverse activities), not just to their residential space" (Tasan-Kok et al. 2014: 13).

Irrespective of the category that we consider more useful in order both to analyse urban cultural transformation and/or to promote cultural diversity ("multicultural", "intercultural", "diversity" or "hyper/super-diversity"), we can identify among scholars the emergence of a increasingly shared perspective (Wise, Velayutham 2009), that is grounded upon the constructivist assumption that trying to define once and for all which kinds of differences must be analysed/promoted represents an epistemological stance

that should be overcome. We should be aware that we live in a world full of differences (concerning gender, religion, life-styles, cultural consumption, ethnicity, social class and so on and so forth) that are constantly (re)created, invoked and asserted by a variety of social groups pursing many different goals. Within such a framework, promoting cultural differences means implementing urban policies that create opportunities for a variety of differences to "emerge" in everyday public sphere (Amin 2002).

As we will show later in the paper, MCWF was originally imagined on this premise.

But before describing and analysing MCWF, we have to review the policies that the municipality of Milan have launched and implemented in order to govern immigration and cultural diversity over the last decades.

2. *Governing diversity in Milan: a radical change?*

As we mentioned in our introduction, Milan has started to receive international migrants from the 80's, with a steep increase in the 90s and 2000s. The incidence of the resident foreign population on the total resident population has raised from 2,8% in 1990 to the 23% in 2014 (Municipality of Milan - Statistics). Hosting dozens of national groups – the main ones being Philippinos, Egyptians, Chinese, Peruvian, Singhalese and Ecuadorians - Milan is a multicultural city *de facto*. Yet, it can been argued that in the last 20 years the political discourse has hardly recognised the city as such and the diversity brought by immigrants has hardly been promoted as a social, economical and political asset.

2.1. *Governing diversity in Milan 1993-2011*

Analysing local policymaking about immigrants and cultural diversity in Milan from 1993 to 2001, Caponio (2010) has identified, as far as the official policy model is concerned, an assimilationist approach "that favours individual integration and assistance to particularly disadvantaged categories" (p. 64); looking at the implementation level, she highlights the

crucial role of Catholic third sector organisations, and how their focus on foreign people needing to be assisted or integrated, has somehow prevented immigrant participation and recognition in the local public sphere. Actually, the first approach to foreign immigration in late eighties was quite different. An interesting initiative, which yet yielded to contradictory outcomes, was the Foreigners' Centre (*Centro Stranieri*) that opened in 1989 as a reference point for immigrants, providing social services with the informal collaboration of ethnic leaders, and members of the Consultative Committee[1] acting as interpreters and mediators. Facilities to community associations and the creation of immigrants' cooperatives were also present. Since the very beginning, *Centro Stranieri* was framed into a rather *naïf* multiculturalist perspective. It was thought to provide a place where "natural" ethno-national communities/associations could organize themselves and interact with the local administration (Barbesino, Quassoli 1997). However, after a few years, the project failed because of internal quarrels and lack of representativeness of the ethnic leaders involved, leaving only a small Foreigners' Office, operated by Italian social workers, open to deliver first reception and assistance services. With the Northern League ruling the municipality since 1993, multicultural policies were completely dismissed: "In Milan, the prevalence of Catholic NGOs in delivering services to immigrants, together with a public discourse emphasising issues of law and order, did actually prevent the emerging of any programme explicitly dealing with immigrants diversity" (Caponio 2010: 76). A sort of functional strategy prevailed, in that accommodation of diversity is regarded first and foremost by practitioners as a way to overcome obstacles in the delivery of existing services to foreign users.

With the Moratti administration (2006-2011) the approach has not gone through significant changes. In 2007 Milan hosted the "Integrating cities"[2] network meeting. In her

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[1] An appointed body providing the local administration with advice and suggestions on immigration issues established in1986 (Caponio 2010).

[2] "The Integrating Cities process was launched in Rotterdam in 2006 and is a partnership between EUROCITIES and the European Commission to promote local level implementation of the Common Basic Principles on Integration. It is based on a conference series and a programme of work led by EUROCITIES in close cooperation with the European Commission. Commitment to this process was reconfirmed through the

opening speech, the Mayor expressed as follows:

> "Milan is a laboratory of experiences and it was a front runner for the other Italian cities and for the European policies explicitly inspired by the model proposed by our City. I am particularly referring to Social Policies based on the Pact for Legality and inclusion[3] which was introduced in favour of the foreign communities. Milan offers to non-Italian citizens social services indispensable for achieving a positive integration, such as inclusion and territorial services, support for those suffering for disadvantage due to adaptation to the new context and language, access to labour market, social and housing services, legal and medical assistance[4]".

In that occasion the Mayor wished for foreign residents "a full integration, fruit of the respect of identities and rules", and stated that "it is important to welcome because it is the only way to be enriched by cultures and different experiences. At the same time, nevertheless, we must welcome in the full respect of the rules and laws of our city and our government"[5]. The both assimilationist and "law and order" approach to immigration and diversity, which can be appreciated from the former mayor words, clashed with other cities approaches, more welcoming and inclusive one, at least in theory. The city of Barcelona, for instance, had at that time a person appointed as "Commissioner for Immigration and Interculturality", responsible to implement the Barcelona Intercultural Plan, i.e. the city global strategy for managing diversity on a long term basis.

In Milan, the policies implementation network remained very much in the hands of the Catholic third sector organisations (Pilati 2012), and part of a functional recognition approach where accommodation of diversity is regarded first and foremost by practitioners as a way to overcome obstacles in the delivery of existing services to foreign

2007 Milan Declaration and developed further through the INTI-CITIES and DIVE projects. This process was further endorsed by the launch in 2010 of the EUROCITIES Charter on Integrating Cities which sets out cities' commitment to integration of migrants."

http://www.integratingcities.eu/integrating-cities/home (accessed on 12th June 2015)

[3] She is referring to the so called "Patto per la legalità", an agreement established with Roma people.
[4] http://www.integratingcities.it/ (accessed on 11th June 2015)
[5] http://www.comune.milano.it/wps/portal/ist/it/news/primopiano/archivio_2007-2011/sindaco/Sindaco_INTEGRATING+CITIES (accessed on 11th June 2015)

users (Caponio 2010: 80). Another important initiative under the Moratti administration was the programme for international cooperation, which specifically targeted local migrant associations for the implementation of development projects in their respective countries.[6] Such a project was perfectly consistent with a political agenda on immigration issues that underlined the importance of both preventing new immigrants from coming to Milan and creating opportunities for those who already had arrived to come back to their country of provenience. On the top of that, Moratti administration has especially stood out for initiatives and policies targeting urban diversity influenced by the more right wing and anti-immigrant sections of the City Council (Northern League and the National Alliance, the latter represented by the vice mayor Riccardo De Corato, well known for its initiatives in clearing out squats and Roma camps). Control and repression in the public space somehow became a flagship for the local administration. Urban contentions involving migrant and Italian residents have not been dealt with long-term policies but with emergency initiatives framed in a political discourse linking immigrants presence with issue of security/safety. Institutional discourse has reproduced the fears of Italian residents in a tautological way, reinforcing the established residents' perception of being threatened in their (physical, economical and social) safety (Marzorati 2013).

Urban conflicts in Milan as in other Italian cities have followed a well known script: in front of the feeling of loss of control related to urban transformations (social, demographic, commercial etc.) those who occupy a relatively advantaged position (Italian established residents in general) invoke the intervention of public authorities to restore a social order that cannot be attained through endogenous and informal social processes. Therefore, conflicts among different groups for the use of public spaces/resources were overtly redefined as a security issue. Through the distinction between a legitimized interest (the 'victim') and an illegitimate one (the 'threat'), the expected resolution of conflicts –

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[6] "Milan for co-development" 2007-2010 programme http://www.cespi.it/WP/DOC10-11%20Analisi-%20risultati-bando.pdf

reframed as an urban security issue by those actors socially advantaged in terms of their legitimization, political credibility, access to the media, etc. – matched the demand for safety addressed to the local political powers by (autochthonous) residents (IReR 2006, Allasino et al. 2000). Examples of the specific ways in which urban conflicts have been managed, and the specific discourse that has supported this, are those of the Sarpi-Canonica neighbourhood (the Milanese "Chinatown") and the more recent viale Padova situation (see Cologna 2008; Monteleone and Manzo 2010, Arrigoni 2010, Barberis e Marzorati 2014).

Via Padova, a working-class and partly dilapidated area, with one of the highest share of immigrant residents, has been subject to a stigmatization process after clashes between groups put a strain on in it in 2009. The local administration dealt with emerging problems by introducing measures centred on security and public order, and in particular, ordinances and regulations aimed to limit shops opening hours. At the same time, police checks were carried in the buildings where immigrant were most present and the centre-right wing parties and groups marched in the streets asking for "safety and legality". Sarpi-Canonica neighbourhood - inaccurately defined as the Chinatown of Milan - is a middle-class neighbourhood which saw the growth of Chinese wholesale. As a consequence of conflicts raised over the different functions of the neighbourhood a renovation project started, with the pedestrianization of the area that limited wholesaling and speeded up gentrification processes. What was clearly a conflict about different uses of public space, was presented as a clash between an ethnic minority and the Italian population and the local authorities showed to be unable to mediate and reach an agreement with the Chinese citizens, insisting in proposing an image of them as an homogenous community.

This opposition between groups in highly asymmetrical positions with regard to the social legitimization of their interests and their respective resources (in terms of economic, social and cultural capital) had manifold consequences: an increase in the relative disadvantage of the weak, an increase in social exclusion, and the risk of a perverse securitarian loop (short circuit) generating not only a lack of integration but also the

segregation and the exclusion of those groups identified as the preferential targets of repressive action.

Moreover, such policies threatened the sphere of rights and liberties in two ways: on the one hand, by limiting access to public spaces and 'militarizing' them (to the point of creating gated/fortified communities); on the other hand, by increasing social inequalities with regard to the risk of victimization and criminalization to which the members a minority group are subject.[7]

In summary, we can say that in Milan local, authorities over more than fifteen years were reluctant to govern immigration-related changes in the city and remained committed to a parochial and ethnocentric vision of it, also missing the opportunity to promote diversity as an economic asset (Marzorati and Quassoli 2012).

2.2. Governing diversity in Milan 2011-2015

For many of our interviewees the change brought by the Pisapia administration in terms of immigrants recognition has been very significant, at least in terms of the willingness to engage in a dialogue with foreign residents.

> "The difference is that the doors are now open wide… this has been the impact after the election of Pisapia (…) now they pay more attention and there is more availability to see immigrants as main key players of social inclusion". (Member of MWCF)

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[7] As far as security policies are concerned, we may say that between 1993 and 2011, political parties and civil servants in Milan (and throughout the centre-north of Italy) have done anything but mitigate growing worries and fears caused by complex changes in contemporary societies and that cannot be alleviated by stronger crime prevention and suppression measures. When safety concerns have come to the fore, political institutions have seemed unable to appraise social problems in all their complexity. On the contrary, politicians and public administrators went into a sort of hysteria that even induced them to take to the streets and lead street protests against urban insecurity (as if it were not their duty to reassure citizens) and evoke draconian policies often contrary to the basic principles of Italy's constitution, European law, and declarations of human rights.

"With the new administration there's a new attention. The round tables with the previous one was frustrating: they didn't even faced up to you, or addressed you directly". (Member of G2 network[8])

The approach to diversity can greatly vary from one department to another, and in some cases it is possible to see the continuity with the previous assimilationist/assistance approach: migrants are people in need that have to be helped to cope with very basic difficulties (work, house, education, health) and have to be supported in their integration in the local contexts. However, some of the policies implemented by the Pisapia administration, such as the attention given to LGBTQ minorities and immigrants, mark a quite radical change with the past.

"<It is also about> diversity in the concept of the family itself I mean <…> the opening towards the register of the partnerships <giving> the freedom to homosexual couples too; the idea is to know and recognize the lifestyles and the will of life of people, of Milanese citizens, which should not just be exclusively traditional <…> diversity as a resource for the city is one of the thread of the campaign and which goes with the administration <…> When we talk about diversity, we also talk about disability and many other things <…> on the Expo and on the opening to the world – that is to say all the countries that have subscribed and will subscribe – we will build the wealthy of the city, its development and openness". (City Council policy maker)

Analysing the approach to diversity as a whole is not an easy task, because there is no strategic plan on this issue; therefore the local strategy can be grasped by analysing approved initiatives and the interviewees' representation of diversity through the elicitation of their view on specific cases that have been at the centre of the local political and media debate. In general, diversity is considered something problematic, more to be overcome than promoted. This happen especially with immigrants-related diversity.

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[8] The most important local and national association of youth from an immigrant background in Italy.

"Diversity is a problem beyond certain thresholds. There's an effort to look at immigration as an opportunity, but it causes problems that cannot be kept hidden". (Manager of City Council Department)

Yet there is also a very positive vision of what diversity can be and represent for the city, also in terms of "brand". Nevertheless, this is seen as a second step; first, basic rights and services have to been restored, in the "desert" left by the previous administration.

"We are still very much on the aspects of cohesion, inclusion, services, as to say, restore, how to say… we are not really on the impact <of diversity> on the economic development, on the brand, on the image… that is still to be seen, because we had to start from the very beginning, and so, first <it comes> dignity and rights of the people". (City Council policy maker)

Two of the main initiatives of the Pisapia administration for immigrant residents are in fact coherent with this view: the "Centro per le Culture Migranti"[9] (literally Centre of Migrant Cultures, CMC and before known as "Immigration Center") is a public service that will be launched in Autumn 2015; it is aimed at helping foreign immigrants integration in the city and should provide an easy access to institutions and services, giving assistance on any kind of administrative procedure. It is thought as a hub for all relevant actors in the field for immigration: migrant associations, the third sector, the unions, the communities, the school, the enterprises and the citizens of course: "a gateway to city in the name of the culture of rights and legality". In the words of the Alderman for Social Policies, the Centre is meant to be:

"A visible house, well known, that we don't keep hidden because we are afraid to say that we assist immigrants, which is a classic of some representatives of the institutions <…> things have always been dealt <…> the Foreigners' Centre of the Municipality has been working for years, the problem is if you are brave enough to say it or not and in this you find the opportunity to enrich the offer

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[9] The CMC is one of the outcomes of a FEI project (the European Fund for the Integration of Third Countries nationals): "Constitution of the local system for the integration of Third Countries nationals" which followed another project based on a participatory planning strategy involving all relevant local actors in the immigration field.

of services together with all those who want to lend a hand starting of course from the migrants themselves, which is a crucial issue for us, because we don't believe to be in a logic of top down assistance <…> there will be never an efficient service about immigration <…> as long as it will be an issue of *us* and *them*. Luckily many of the experiences of these years have been marked by a healthy crossing of biographies and persons with different stories". (Alderman of Social Policies)[10]

The GLab was an information service and a project lab located in the city centre. It was planned in cooperation with G2 Network – a national association of youth from an immigrant background, that provides also the staff. G.Lab opened in March 2013 (it closed in December 2013). It aimed at supporting youth and families from an immigrant background, but also teachers and, social workers to access local services, to access naturalization procedures and to get information concerning study and job opportunities. As a lab, it was aimed at promoting diversity and social mix as a value, creating a context in which young people with immigrant background could sustain both active citizenship and debates on their cultural identities.

"We have found ourselves within a local administration that for many years had politically neglected the issue of citizenship, together with any project aimed at including young people with an immigrant background. They did not even included such a function within the administrative structure". (City Council policy maker)

Policy makers emphasise the cultural turn implied in these initiatives: while their main target are immigrants and their children, the idea is to make them as mainstream as possible, both attracting non-migrant users and

"The Immigration Centre is based on the idea to have a cultural turn. We have the idea to make it attractive also for non-migrant people […] G.Lab, too, has been located within the Youth Information Centre (not to ghettoise)." (City Council policy maker)

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[10] Verbatim of the speech at the 4th Forum for Social Policies on Thursday the 5th of March 2015.

When our respondents have been stimulated with the cases of via Sarpi and via Padova quite all of them have highlight the ethniciziation of the urban space as a problem, as a risk of "ghettoization":

> "The Italian solution is not a multiculturalism in the Anglo-Saxon way, that would allow a Chinatown. The Italian intercultural way doesn't love ghettoization; it's more about interaction in diversity than about a multi- that doesn't crossbreed". (City Council project manager/policy advisor).

In this sense, as explained by Barberis and Marzorati (2014) the visibility and display of ethnic diversity is seen as a threat to social cohesion, within a discourse that his primarily integrationist and focused on an idealistic model of interculturalism in which tough ethnic diversity is not encouraged and recognized in the public sphere.

From the tourist and urban marketing point of view there has been a change compared to the past (cf. Marzorati and Quassoli 2012). Yet it seems more symbolical than factual. The attention given before to the Milanese identity is now less strong or at least the Milanese identity is conceived as something open, cosmopolitan:

> "Milan has an history which characterises it as a middle land, where contaminations have been daily bread, with a reciprocal advantage. So, this doesn't mean to abjure to a tradition or an identity; then of course there are some specific problems, linked for instance to the fleeing from other countries which poses problems that Milan as a metropolis has to face. But I don't see cosmopolitism as detrimental to a <local> identity, these are things that should stay together and find an integration". (City Council Department Director).

The keystones of the dominant integrationist approach labelled as "intercultural" are the idea that cultural difference should have a limited public visibility and the focus should be on social cohesion. A quite shared idea is that social contact and mix are a basic condition for success, and hence there should be a specific attention on that side, since its achievement is not spontaneous: "Diversity seems to be considered positive, acceptable and enriching when it's not too much related to public visibility and inequality. Rarely there's an appreciation of minorities, especially those stigmatized, by themselves: the two

discourses on inequality and recognition stay largely separated." (Barberis and Marzorati 2014: 23). The MWCF and the approach endorsed by the Department of culture were meant to go in a different direction, more pluralistic and prone to recognizing difference as good in itself.

3.   The Forum della Città Mondo initiative

The *Forum della Città Mondo* (Milan World City Forum, MWCF) is a permanent assembly where representatives from migrant and ethnic associations gather and meet local authorities. Main promoter of the MWCF was Stefano Boeri, a famous Milanese architect and Alderman for Culture at the Municipality of Milan, then removed in March 2013.

The MWCF officially includes more than 600 associations. It was created between October and December 2011 while the city was preparing to be the site of the 2015 Universal Exposition[11]. The MWCF "was supposed to have a proactive, advisory and planning function in collaboration with the Municipality of Milan. This project, which aims at promoting an environment of collaboration and participation among the many foreign communities and the city of Milan, is achieving at the local level what will happen during the semester of Expo 2015, when the representatives of Participating Countries from all over the world will meet to find global solutions to food and environmental challenges".[12]

The Forum was meant to be a supportive structure for the coming Universal Exposition, in particular helping organizing the reception during Expo 2015 (training volunteer international guides, for instance) and promoting initiative and projects for the cultural and economic policies of the city, also in the Expo 2015 frame. Projects were to be made

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[11] The MWCF was instituted from the Municipality of Milan on the 24th of Octuber 2011 during the convention "Expo Milano chiama mondo" (Milan Expo calling the world) linked to the first International Participants Meeting (IPM) of Expo.

[11] http://www.expo2015.org/it/forum-delle-citta-mondo-verso-expo-milano-2015

[12] http://www.expo2015.org/it/forum-delle-citta-mondo-verso-expo-milano-2015 (accessed on 14th May 2015)

via public-private partnerships and with the participation of people from different cultural backgrounds living in Milan (Angelucci et al. 2014)[13].

In a broader sense, the Forum was thought as a place for the active participation of the international associations in the city cultural and economic life. In a vision that wished to overcome the image of the immigrant as a social problem, the Forum aimed at giving visibility and engage with the skilled, educated and active immigrants and their potential to benefit the city and urban life.

> "<the aim of the Forum> is to make visible the belonging <of foreign people to the city> which is present but willingly or not, it is often ignored; the other's diversity, of the stranger, the fulfilled, integrated immigrant and their children, the second generation... sometimes, when it's useful, it's recognized, when it is not useful, it is not. And when it is useful it is also exploited for political aims...". (Member of the MCWF committe)

The name chosen for the MWCF reflects the cosmopolitan and inter/multicultural purpose of the initiative. It is not about "immigrants" but it is about the city itself, where the whole world is represented. The MWCF was thought as a space where to make possible the encounter and exchange between cultures and specifically:

> "The City-World Forum was born to recognize the variety of traditions seeping through the urban experience; to give voice in a way different from the usual advisory bodies, where communities are divided according to the country of origin.
> <...>
> It was created to try and see how in the Milanese context it was possible to translate the dialectic between the conservation of the origin culture and the willingness to modify it so to exchange, to engage in a dialogue which modify both the speakers involved". (Former Alderman for Culture)

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[13] In the Forum there are different workings groups, each one dedicated to a different topic: (1)Food, Urban Gardens and events related to Expo 2015, (2) Comunication and Cultural Events, (3) Women and Culture, (4) Museum of Cultures, (5) Participation and Active Citizenship.

In the words of the conceiver of the MWCF, the forum arrangement would have somehow allowed to go beyond the ethnic/national community division that are implicit in other forms of representation such as the consultative and advisory bodies implemented in some cities (Mantovan 2013):

> "Here the all thing is, being a forum, more interesting: you have far more variability which cannot be labelled so easily, so the cultural dimension comes out in the true sense, and this is not a mere geographical or historical path… it is a mix which also links to the personal biography… so a forum is made of individuals… then, of course, in the Forum more than 500 associations are represented, representing more than one hundred communities, at the formal level… but then the Forum in itself is an assembly, where all can intervene, speak, where everybody represent his experience". (Former Alderman for Culture)

The Alderman himself recognize nonetheless how to make such an ensemble working can be extremely complex. A fact that is confermed by our bservation in a plenary meeting of the Forum[14], as well as by the interviews we did. Problems are related to the internal differences and cleavages in the forum: the national divide and the generational divide – between a first generation migrants - those arrived in the 80s-90s or before - and the younger generation, those arrived later or born in Italy. Among the first group, there are people with a long experience in the social and political activity in Italy, some of which, according to our interviewees with an excessive willingness to be in the limelight.

Interestingly enough, the involvement of the first migrant associations and their leaders is considered by some as a right compensation of the attention given by other Department in the City Council to the youngest generations – which in some cases have taken position in the Council itself. The eagerness to participate and the competition which arise between migrant associations can be understood in the light of the scarce possibilities of participation that the Milanese – and the national context more in general – have

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[14] 5th November 2014.

provided to immigrant people, where Italian associations in the field of immigration generally prevail (Kosic and Triandafyllidou 2005, Pilati 2012).

Moreover, from our interviews' excerpts clearly it emerges a sort of ambivalence between a representative body for communities - though not formally organized on an ethno-national base - and a space of encounter for individuals. So, if on the one hand the idea is to overcome a simplistic division according to ethnic and national belonging, the fact that most of the associations are in fact nationally-based, bring the issue back in. Consequently, tensions and problems related to such divides have emerged in the Forum, requiring, for instance, the introduction of specific requirements, such as to guarantee the presence of representatives of the four continents in the leading charges.

One of the weakness of the Forum lies in the scarce clarity of its objectives and mission. The "aphasia" on what the Forum will be and do in the future – as reported by some policy-makers – may come also from this ambiguity, as mentioned by a municipal key official working on internationalisation and strategic planning:

> "Today the problem of the Forum is its aim […] The principle is good, but we don't know how to put it into practice." (Municipal key official).

Besides, the connection with Expo has not been achieved. This "failure" is explained by some interviewees referring to three interplaying factors: (1) too few resources and political support by the local administration to sustain a very ambitious and innovative projects (the MWCF) whose goals were and still are too unspecified; (2) too little time to create connections with a complex organisational machine, such as EXPO2015, that was afflicted by so many troubles (conflicts between stakeholders, judicial investigations, delays, etc.) that put into danger the success of the whole initiative until few weeks before the opening date:

> "Everything has been done too much in a rush, it was difficult to manage the relations between different representatives of the Forum. Diversity is very beautiful, but resources are needed to make it… managing diversity is not a

small thing, it needs time, resources and competences" (Member of the MWCF)

On the top of that, the MWCF remained fatherless as the main Forum's instigator – Stefano Boeri – gave up his offices both as Council member and as City Council representative at EXPO 2015. More broadly, paucity of resources became quite soon a serious problem for the Forum. In fact, it does not have a dedicated budget and the initiatives are financed by the associations involved. Moreover, the interviewees highlighted that its existence is somehow limiting the possibility of participation and public funding of the single associations.

> "When someone with its own project goes and present - because it used to do like that, and it has already showed to be a quality association and was doing things - now they ask them "are you from MWCF? And so go to MWCF". Yet they haven't provided MWCF with a budget able to give an answer to this association". (Member of the MWCF)

In order to face the financial problem and other weaknesses of the MWCF, a second-level association, called Associazione Città Mondo (Milan World City Association, MWCA) was created. Gathering 96 associations (84 at the beginning) the MWCA was also constituted with the aim to give visibility to the Forum ("we wanted that the Forum became more than just a movement") and to make it operative, overcoming some of the Forum limits such as participating in public announcements. The new association can have a stronger role in advocacy, bargaining and programming (Angelucci et al. 2014) being bigger than any other association it contains and being - in the words of a member of MWCA - "the juridical mirror" of the Forum.

The need to create a new body other than the Forum makes evident the partial failure of the latter, especially for what concerns its participatory aim, which remains the weakest point of the whole project. As a matter of fact, it is not clear how the idea to give immigrant associations' representatives a "leading role" in the urban social and economic life of the city should be achieved. Initiatives have primarily involved cultural events and

activities, which somehow reinforce the idea of the immigrant as the cultural "other" more than the citizen with rights and duties and the potential to contribute to the city development. To this respect, according to the members of the MWCF interviewed, a more social and political scope and mission is indeed present in the Forum or should be sought.

> "<The Forum> seems <something> cultural but it is more – not to say political – at least social". (Member of the MWCF).

Yet, the political mission of the Forum is hardly put in practice. For instance, one of the internal working group in the Forum is devoted to "Active Participation and Citizenship", so having a political mission by definition; yet, after having inspired and made the constitution of the Association possible, it has not continued with other initiatives. While the associations – or at least some of them – would aim to be more involved in strictly political issues involving immigrants' rights, citizenship and so on, the Forum in itself must avoid to take a political turn ("the word 'politics' cannot be pronounced" a member of the Forum reported). This is a political matter: according to our informers, in fact, a political turn of the Forum could break the balance in the local council and open up the Forum to criticism by the representatives of the opposition.

Divergent discourses about diversity and immigration have also emerged between different departments in the City Council. As said, the Forum has been implemented by the Department of Culture; other important initiatives for foreign residents and minorities – such the above mentioned GLab and the Immigration Center - have been put in practice by the Department of Social Policies. While there are indeed forms of collaboration and dialogue in respect to the initiatives above mentioned[15], it seems that a silo-culture in department practices clearly has prevailed (Barberis et al. 2014). In the words of one of our interviewee:

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[15] A positive point in this respect is that after the resignation of Stefano Boeri, the Forum has not been dismissed but has continued to work.

"For a long time the Department of Social Policies has not taken the project of MWCF as its own and so it has tried to create some halfway organisms <…> like the second generation <initiative> things like that, they have even created the immigration centre… actually it wanted to become a sort of MWCF, then they have turned back because there had been a massive adhesion of communities to the MWCF… in the city council there are always this kind of reciprocal envies, it's a problem of visibility". (Member of the MWCF leading committee)

"The principle <of the Forum> was very beautiful, we have the world inside us, we don't have to look it somewhere else… <…> from the point of view of the principle is wonderful… but… nobody has told us how to do that or at least, when we have tried to tell how it could be done, resistances have emerged, in the meaning that the forum… well, you know, political problems… and so it got more a cultural connotation <…> so the objective has been modified". (City Council Policy Advisor)

While discrepancies inside the City Council can be seen as the expression of divergent political streams, what interests us here is that the different initiatives reflect different discourses about diversity and representations of the immigrant population in the city. As we have seen, the dominant discourse about diversity and immigrant presence focuses on integration and social cohesion, accepting diversity but not encouraging it. Initiatives such as the GLab and the Immigration Centre frame the immigrant as a city resident to whom provide specific services in order to guarantee a fuller enjoyment of citizenship rights. Yet, they still somehow reproduce the idea of the immigrant as the needy in a general context in which diversity is seen as problem to solve rather than an advantage. The MWCF, on the contrary, stands as a multicultural and pluralist policy which - as it was conceived - aimed at promoting diversity as an asset for the city, giving immigrant people a prominent role in the urban life and development.

Discussion and conclusions

The Milanese case shows that not only are urban immigrant policies independent from national integration policies (Ambrosini and Boccagni 2015) but different discourses and relative initiatives can cohabit in the same municipality. This is especially the case in a

context marked by the absence of a general and coherent diversity policy both at the local and the national level and where a silo-culture prevails among departments (Barberis et al. 2014). As we have seen, the MCWF stands as a pluralist and multicultural policy in a political context marked by an integrationist discourse, in which diversity is not openly recognized and endorsed, but immigrant residents needs are firmly taken into account. Sometimes this approach is labelled as "intercultural" and conceived as the overcoming of a multicultural approach: mixing and social cohesion are its key words. So even in a city where multicultural polices have never been truly implemented, the backlash against multiculturalism arise and interculturalism emerge as the new model (Grillo 2005, Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). On its side, the MCWF was thought to give immigrant residents – through their associations – visibility and a leading role, therefore recognising the value of ethnic and cultural differences in the city. Yet, as we have seen, the evolution of the MCWF has been fraught by difficulties and the objectives have only been partially achieved. To our view these are the results of both characteristics of the project itself and of factors related to the urban government and politics. As for the first, the project, which look very ambitious on paper, shows an excess of naiveté: limits related to cleavages that cross cut the heterogeneous world of immigrant associations have been underestimated; moreover the project lack clears objectives and a proper planning. As for the second, the scarce resources and political support by the local administration has play a crucial role in the partial "failure" of MWCF both in its connection with the EXPO and for the others – rather blurred – goals. This situation is the result of the circumstances described before: competitive, rather than collaborative relations between departments and the resulting fragmentation of policies, rather than a coherent, overarching policy addressing diversity and immigrant issues. Another critical point regards the politicization of immigration in Milan and in Italy more in general, which make politically risky to implement policies that give the immigrant population opportunities and resources. The cultural turn that the Forum has taken and the frustration of the participatory role that it could play are to some extent a result of this political opportunities structure. In this sense, although a highly

innovative initiative, at least on paper, the MWCF reproduce the general trend of participation/representation of immigrants in Italy: high presence of local associations "fragmented along ethnic, national and religious lines" which are "cultural, recreational or solidarity-based groups" with a scarce political impact (Mantovan 2014). The visibility of the immigrants is problematic both in the public space and the public sphere, meant as the representation and participation in the institutions. Therefore, the initiatives of the MCWF, no matter how praiseworthy and interesting are, risk to reproduce the image of the immigrant as the cultural other. To conclude, if we had to answer to the question if the left wing Pisapia administration has brought a change in the treatment of diversity and immigrant issue, it will be definitely yes. After almost two decades of ignoring immigrant presence in the city, and their positive contribution to the city or, worse enforcing repressive measures and safety policies, the discourse and initiatives of the Pisapia administration represent a breath of fresh air. Yet, as we have seen through the paper, the change in the discourse is not as radical as it might seem and several critical issues can be highlighted in the policies enforced.

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