Policy Paper –Italy- Florence

Inclusion policies aimed to Roma populations have had in the last few years in Italy an important redefinition toward complex medium and long term strategies, with the intent of overcoming the previous policies on the subject focused on emergency and securitarian approach.

The strategic framework has changed both because of the pressure coming "from below" - by civil society and in particular by the Roma and pro-Roma associations - both because of the pressures coming from "above", - by international organizations and the European Union -.

Although even today the Roma minority has never been recognized as such and so not protected by our legal system (while another 12 far fewer minorities than the Roma are recognized as such), it was approved in 2012 the National Strategy for Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti populations pursuant to the communication number 173 of the European Commission in 2011.

The National Strategy provides a structured framework and very articulated and advanced legislative guidelines geared toward the inclusion of Roma populations, although, to date, have often evaded or only partially accepted by the local levels.

The axes followed by the national strategy are 4: health, education, work and housing conditions. The last axis, the housing condition, is the most problematic for the Italian level, considering that almost 40% of the Roma are still living in authorized or not authorized camps, percentage among the highest - if not the highest - in Europe.

Even the Regional laws that have taken place in Tuscany, have focused mainly on the residential location of the Roma populations (Regional Law 73/1995, L. 17/88, L. 2/2000) often relegated to different spaces and separated by the local community.

For what concern policies and practices supporting Roma child and youth participation in the places where we are working we can mention that the PEER sessions are conducted in two different districts in the Municipality of Florence, in particular in the district number four (“Isolotto – Legnaia”) and in the district number five (“Rifredi”). They are both working – class districts and peripheral areas of Florence.

The district number four is located in the south – west of the city, in proximity of the access to the trunk road (Florence – Pisa – Leghorn).

Since nineties the Municipality of Florence in cooperation with the district number four, has structured interventions on Poderaccio Roma’s behalf. Important are the services active for education and the service active for gynaecological promotional. For what concern education, since many years some street educators and social workers of CAT social

cooperative, works with Roma children of Poderaccio obtaining important results in terms of educations. For the social and health questions, from 1999 is active a contract between the hospital unit of the district number four and the President of district itself to guarantee free gynaecological clinic with Romanes cultural-linguistic mediation for Roma women. Moreover In 2014, for the second year, the Municipality of Florence promoted a Ministerial project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Children. The project considers interventions during school time oriented towards all class and interventions in the afternoons for a group of Roma and non-Roma children. The project involves schools of the districts number four and the district number five and it is conducted by the CAT social cooperative and by the IL CENACOLO social cooperative. Moreover from some years the IL CENACOLO social cooperative conducts a no-alcool social bar called “L’Approdo” in the district number five. It is a community centre where is possible recreational and educational activities.

In addition to the Ministerial project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Children, there are not active other recent policies for Roma Children and youth. In general the municipality conducts securitarian policies but there are absents policies encouraging Roma young people active participation.

Therefore, most of the policies and activities aimed the Roma populations - in Florence as elsewhere in Italy - are centred in supporting families living in spontaneous and/or authorized camps and specifically for what concern the schooling of Roma minors.

Up to date is totally failed a policy supporting the direct participation of Roma and their organizations - adults and young people - and also for this reason in Italy there are few Roma associations and these are not very representative.

In Florence, as we described in the research work of this project, it has been operating only one reality of Roma youths a few years ago, named Amengià[[1]](#footnote-2) (see WS2 ET1), which has exhausted its activities for several years.

The two PEER paths in District 5 and District 4 have been very different and in many points of views have led to very different outcomes and directions.

In a nutshell, the path in the District 5 has encountered many difficulties and scarce or discontinuous participation by Roma youths while at the District 4 we had a very active participation by the group and a good response by local policy makers in terms of "listening" and "acceptance" related to the proposal and claims emerged by the meeting sessions.

The two contextual elements that in our opinion have played a central role in the difference of the results outcomes in the two paths have been: a) the age of the children (aged 11 to 14 years in District 5; 13 to 18 years in district 4); b) the presence / absence of a strong content of the claims (in the District 4 the youths involved in the project live with suffering the difficulties caused by living in a Roma camp).

Among the positive elements emerged from the meetings and highlighted by the youths, we can mention:

* Roma youths while belonging to two different Roma groups (Macedonian and Kosovan) have overcome the differences by working together in a cohesive group
* The desire to confront each other and express themselves about their condition inside and outside the camp
* The desire to have fun and attend a cultural and social place of the district as the public Library
* The desire to confront each other with the local decision-makers
* The interest of policy makers regarding to a different mode / interaction with groups of young people, compared to classical "negotiation" with groups or associations representatives of Roma interests.

On the basis of the experience of the PEER meetings in Florence a few key words and concepts to promote the effective participation path with Roma children and teenagers, are: **fun, empowerment, concreteness.**

The aspect of **fun** is fundamental to "draw" and involve a significant number of Roma children, especially when in the local territory there are no contexts, structures or pre-existing organizations able to "move" and start independent paths independently on which "count” on.

This is the case of the Florentine territory (like almost all the Italian territory), where - as mentioned - there are no significant delegation of Roma adults and none of Roma youth and adolescents.

The Structure of Magic Six and the role play proposed in the PEER project have "worked" very well in creating an informal and friendly spirit in the group, encouraging the participation of all and surpassing even distances existing between different groups.

The element of **empowerment** of adolescents, as well as youth Roma facilitators is a strategic result for the success of the path. It is empowerment to reflect on their living situation and on how to promote possible positive changes and it is also the empowerment in structured and organize the activities of the PEER meetings.

In particular, the young Roma facilitators, have played a key role by sharing with the coordination and NGO workers the organization of all sessions and adapting them to the objectives and to the needs of the group.

The highest age group (14-18 years) has enabled a greater assumption of responsibility and a greater reflection than the younger group.

To **give substance** to the path, through various activities (visits in the district, video creation, processing proposals for policy makers) facilitates the creation of common objectives and limits the disintegration of the group especially in the medium and long term.

In the district number four, for example, the concrete aspects related to the demand for council houses and the consequent definitive overcoming of the Roma camp, allowed the group to join in formulating requests and proposals.

From the reflection on the two group’s path of Italian PEER project, therefore, we call on policy makers to encourage the participation of Roma young people in the manner described above, to increase the awareness of the youth and encourage the creation and the growth of Roma associations and Roma organizations Roma, now non-existent on the Florence area.

We also ask, (as it was also in part the fact) to start a debate with these groups to know each other and share strategies of improving the conditions of Roma communities.

Finally, we reinforce that for years the world of research[[2]](#footnote-3) and associations/ NGOs that support the Roma people are calling on policy makers that is to create the conditions for a complete overcoming of Roma camps - authorized or not - in the direction of a policy for entries in council houses or alternatively, creating micro family-size areas.

1. Amengià acted from 1999 until 2002. In particular youths conducted visits in Roma camps over a period of one year, doing photo, video and interviews. However the activities of the Amengià Associations continued until 2002 making periodic meetings with students and the grassroots to raise public awareness of the Roma living conditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Colacicchi, P., “Rom a Firenze”, in Brunello, P., (a cura di*), L’urbanistica del disprezzo. Campi rom e società italiana*, manifestolibrisrl, Roma, 1996.Marcetti, C., Mori, T., Solimano, N., (a cura di), *Zingari in Toscana. Storia e cultura del popolo rom; zingari e comunità locali; i campi nomadi: l’urbanistica del disprezzo; orientamenti per soluzioni insediative diversificate: una ricerca della Fondazione Giovanni Michelucci 1992-1993*, Pontecorboli Editore, Firenze, 1993.

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