

Changing Democracies in an Unequal World

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5. *The Depoliticization of Immigration. Youngsters and Immigrants in Perugia*

by Rosalba Belmonte, Marco Damiani

1. The social dimension of immigration

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Italy has been experiencing an increase of immigration from the South of the world that made it one of the most affected countries by global migrations, alongside with France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Germany¹. At the same time, Italians are living in a climate of growing social tension due to the economic and labour crisis of the Great recession. In this social context – characterized by precarious work and declining social benefits – citizens tend to perceive immigrants as a threat to their welfare. This is what emerges from the final report of the Committee on hate, intolerance, xenophobia and racism established by the Italian Chamber of Deputies². The data on which the Committee's work is based depict Italy as the least informed country in the world with respect to immigration. According to the data observed by the Committee, most of the Italians think that immigrants living in Italy make up 30% of the population (the true figure is 8%); the 56,4% of Italians believes that «a neighbourhood degenerates when it contains many immigrants» and the 52,6% agree that «an increase in the number of immigrants favours the spread of terrorism and criminality».

Moreover, the 35% of Italian citizens believe that «immigrants are depriving Italians of work», the 48,7% believes that «when jobs are scarce, employers should give precedence to Italians» and the 65% says that «refugees are a burden because they exploit the social benefits and work of the

¹ R. Bichi (2016), *I giovani europei e l'atteggiamento verso l'immigrazione*, AA.VV. La condizione giovanile in Italia, Il Mulino, Bologna.

² Camera dei Deputati (2016), *Relazione finale della Commissione "Jo Cox" sull'intolleranza, la xenofobia, il razzismo e i fenomeni di odio*.

native inhabitants». The data also points out that the current economic and financial crisis is increasing intolerance of immigrants within the lower classes, the most affected by the crisis. According to Ambrosini³ people who are more vulnerable from a socio-economic point of view, tend to develop a behaviour of conflict and rivalry with immigrants. At the same time, the economic and financial crisis of the 21st century and the actions undertaken by several national governments and by the European Union have accelerated the phenomenon of depoliticization. Also, they have contributed to the success of right-wing (and far-right) populist parties that are creating a new social cleavage between “us” (European citizens) and “them” (migrants)⁴.

Starting from these assumptions, this work focuses on the case study of Perugia, a medium sized city of Central Italy that is well-known for its long tradition of welcoming foreigners. In Perugia, the relationship between young locals and immigrants in the last few years is characterized by an increasing degree of depoliticization. Our hypothesis is that nowadays youngsters in Perugia tend to remove the political meaning of migration, that was very relevant in the past, due to widespread political culture that – in a “red” region⁵ – prioritized solidarity rather than either indifference or hostility. Whether in the past the political meaning of this relation consisted in creating egalitarianism, according to a left-wing ideology, today the relationship between Italians and immigrants is isolated from its historical context and local people become increasingly less likely to relate with immigrants.

Starting from these considerations, we will focus on youth’s social representations, attitudes and prejudices towards immigrants, in order to understand whether they are related to unemployment and economic struggle. We will also observe how the difficulties related to the economic crisis resulted in the depoliticization of the issue of immigration, and how they shaped the idea of immigration as something to pay attention to in order to defend one’s interests and rights – Italians – from foreigners, who are increasingly considered as competitors in gaining access to the scarcely available resources and welfare services. Before discussing the data collected in the field, we will describe the theoretical framework underpinning our research and clarify the main concepts that will be taken in consideration in this study.

³ M. Ambrosini (2005), *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

⁴ E. D’Albergo; G. Moini (2019), *Depoliticizzazione e (ri)politicizzazione: le sfide dei populismi*, in E. D’Albergo; G. Moini, *Politica e azione pubblica nell’epoca della depoliticizzazione*, Sapienza Università, Roma.

⁵ C. Trigilia (1986), *Grandi partiti, piccole imprese*, il Mulino, Bologna.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Depoliticization and Repoliticization

The notions of depoliticization and repoliticization are important to better understand how politics has changed over the last decades. More precisely, these notions make us better understand the shifts that have interested the relationship between society and politics in the last few years⁶.

The concept of depoliticization consists of moving decision-making from elective arenas to places presented as politically neutral⁷. Consequently, it implies the loss of political character of certain issues and the annihilation of divergences and conflicts within the field of political actions⁸. This does not mean the disappearance of the functions and the space of politics, but a loss of transparency of the processes of government. This happens because many issues, crucial to plenty of citizens, stay out of public debate and are all handled by experts and technicians⁹.

Especially in Western Europe, the tarnishing of values and programmatic differentiations between right and left are the proofs of this type of depoliticization.

⁶ G. Moini (2019), *Depoliticizzazione e politicizzazione: una chiave di lettura*, in E. D'Albergo, G. Moini, *Politica e azione pubblica nell'epoca della depoliticizzazione*, Sapienza Università, Roma.

⁷ M. Flinders; M. Wood (2014), *Depoliticisation, Governance and the State*, "Policy & Politics", 42(2), pp. 135–149.

⁸ P. Burnham (2017), *Neo-liberalism, Crisis and the Contradictions of Depoliticisation*, "Partecipazione e conflitto", 10(2), pp. 357–380; E.A. Foster; P. Kerr; C. Byrne (2014), *Rolling Back to Roll Forward: Depoliticisation and the Extension of Government*, "Policy & Politics", 42(2), pp. 225–241; C. Hay (2014), *Depoliticisation as Process, Governance as Practice: What Did the 'First Wave' Get Wrong and Do We Need a 'Second Wave' to Put it Right?*, "Policy & Politics", 42(2), pp. 293–311. M. Flinders; M. Wood (2014), *Depoliticisation, Governance and the State*, "Policy & Politics", 42(2), pp. 135–149; P. Fawcett, D. Marsh (2014), *Depoliticisation, Governance and Political Participation*, "Policy & Politics", 42(2), pp. 171–188; F. De Nardis (2017), *The Concept of De-politicization and Its Consequences*, "Partecipazione e conflitto", 10(2), pp. 340–356; E. D'Albergo; G. Moini (2019), *Depoliticizzazione e (ri)politicizzazione: le sfide dei populismi*, in E. D'Albergo; G. Moini, *Politica e azione pubblica nell'epoca della depoliticizzazione*, Sapienza Università, Roma; F. De Nardis (2020), *Depoliticization, antipolitics and the moral people*, in M. Anselmi, F. De Nardis, *Multiple Populism*, Routledge, Londra.

⁹ E. A. Foster et al. (2014), *Rolling Back to Roll Forward: Depoliticisation and the Extension of Government*, "Policy & Politics", 42(2), pp. 225–241; Burnham P. (2017), *Neo-liberalism, Crisis and the Contradictions of Depoliticisation*, "Partecipazione e conflitto", 10(2), pp. 357–380; De Nardis F. (2017), *The Concept of De-politicization and Its Consequences*, "Partecipazione e conflitto", 10(2), pp. 340–356; De Nardis, F. (2020), *Depoliticization, antipolitics and the moral people*, in Anselmi, M.; De Nardis F., *Multiple Populism*, Routledge, Londra.

zation¹⁰. Actions are based on horizons of meaning presented in the form of “public truth” by non-political actors such as creators and disseminators of expert knowledge and companies¹¹. In particular, the latter takes directly advantage of a specific social depoliticization and a redefinition of the border between the political and the non-political. In this way, issues of collective interest are transferred to the private spheres of the market with the consequent reduction of the political potential of social issues, such as immigration and the problems related to it¹².

However, with the advent of populism many issues that were no longer polarising, public knowledge regained their political content. It is the so called “repoliticization”, that is fostered by the intensification of opposing values and the dramatization of argumentative regimes. Both of the aforementioned aspects are very typical of populist movements (in particular, the right-wing populist parties) which – deploying narratives that convey a sense of crisis and threat to citizenships – justify opposing attitudes towards the actors associated with such threats.

2.2. Social representations

Both the phenomena of depoliticization and repoliticization lead to the construction of new social representations. That is to say, systems that interpret reality and that allow small, specific, big and highly structured social groups¹³ to act, communicate and regulate their interactions in order to organize collective cohabitation. According to Moscovici, social representations are «system(s) of values, ideas and practices, that serve to establish a social order that enables individuals to orientate themselves and master the material and social world they live in, and to enable communication among

¹⁰ F. De Nardis (2020), *Depoliticization, antipolitics and the moral people*, in M. Anselmi; F. De Nardis, *Multiple Populism*, Routledge, Londra.

¹¹ C. Hay (2014), *Depoliticisation as Process, Governance as Practice: What Did the ‘First Wave’ Get Wrong and Do We Need a ‘Second Wave’ to Put it Right?*, “Policy & Politics”, 42(2), pp. 293–311; R. Jessop (2014), *Repoliticising Depoliticisation: Theoretical Preliminaries on Some Responses to the American Fiscal and Eurozone Debt Crises*, “Policy & Politics”, 42(2), pp. 207–223; F. De Nardis (2020), *Depoliticization, antipolitics and the moral people*, in M. Anselmi; F. De Nardis, *Multiple Populism*, Routledge, Londra.

¹² M. Flinders; M. Wood (2014), *Depoliticisation, Governance and the State*, “Policy & Politics”, 42(2), pp. 135–149.2014; R. Jessop (2014), *Repoliticising Depoliticisation: Theoretical Preliminaries on Some Responses to the American Fiscal and Eurozone Debt Crises*, “Policy & Politics”, 42(2), pp. 207–223; F. De Nardis (2020), *Depoliticization, antipolitics and the moral people*, M. Anselmi; F. De Nardis, *Multiple Populism*, Routledge, Londra.

¹³ A. Palmonari; N. Cavazza; M. Rubini (2002), *Psicologia sociale*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

the members of a community through a shared code for social exchange and for naming and classifying various aspects of the social world including their individual and group history»¹⁴. This system, that he refers as the “consensual universe” is neither definite nor stable. It undergoes many transformations and evolutions related to social practices and to interpersonal and social communication forms, which can create new social representations and change the existing ones¹⁵. Through the understanding of social representations, it is possible to identify many social practices, phenomena and situations that are relevant to individuals and groups and can be interpreted by them as a threat, a resource or something to control¹⁶.

In this work social representation theory has been used to explore the phenomenon of immigration in Italy, which has undergone a significant intensification in the last two decades. Indeed, nowadays in the country there are more than 5 million regularly resident immigrants who suffer, for the most part, from intolerance and struggle with integration. Such difficulties tend to worsen in the contexts and social groups most affected by the crisis. In other words, in hosting societies negative attitude towards immigrants increases in those social classes that are closer to them in terms of housing and employment conditions¹⁷.

2.3. Attitudes and prejudices

Within the framework of social representations, on the individual level of analysis, prejudice consists in «the aversive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to that group»¹⁸.

People raise individual and/or collective awareness through the use of generalizations which are based on collective categorizations on specific cases they are familiar with, in order to spare cognitive effort. Conversely, this may result in attributing to a whole group the characteristics of one or some individuals within that group.

¹⁴ S. Moscovici (1973) *Foreword*, in C. Herzlich, *Health and Illness. A Social Psychological Analysis*, Academic Press, London, pp. 13.

¹⁵ S. Moscovici (1984), *The phenomenon of social representations*, in R. Farr; S. Moscovici, (edited by), *Social Representations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge ; J.C. Abric (1994), *Pratiques et représentations sociales*, PUF, Paris ; T. Grande (2005), *Che cosa sono le rappresentazioni sociali*, Carocci, Roma.

¹⁶ P. Moliner (1996), *Images et représentations sociales*, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, Grenoble.

¹⁷ M. Ambrosini (2005), *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

¹⁸ G. Allport (1954), *The nature of prejudice*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc., Cambridge, p. 9.

The consequence is an oversimplification of reality and the “flattening” of the differences between individuals, that lead to the formation of stereotypes¹⁹. From the collective perspective, prejudice is an intergroup behaviour that consists in highlighting the common aspects shared by ingroup members and the characteristics that distinguish themselves from the outgroup²⁰. When members of an outgroup have nationalities, habits, customs, religion creeds and somatic features different from one’s own ingroup and when these differences are thought of by means of one’s own criteria and moral norms, we talk of ethnic prejudice. This kind of prejudice can reach forms of ethnocentrism and xenophobia in the cases of individuals who are afraid and hostile towards immigrants. Such hostility comes from groups who are less well-off and perceive immigrants as a threat to their welfare²¹.

On the other hand, as predicted by the Allport’s theory of social contact, when the interactions between groups are characterised by cooperation and mutual understanding and are supported by institutions, prejudices and stereotypes are dismissed. Negative prejudices and stereotypes are the basis of either denial or hostility towards immigrants. In this circumstance, we use the term “attitude” to refer to the cognitive structures through which individuals and groups organize, encode and decode received information according to their representation and evaluation of an object, and act accordingly²². Thus, through experience, communication and observation, individuals have either positive or negative attitudes toward a specific subject.

Starting from the theoretical framework outlined above and analysing the data collected through a questionnaire, in the next paragraph we will deal with the attitudes of young people living in Perugia towards immigrants, their social representations of migration and the role of ethnic prejudice as an important constituent of such attitudes and social representations.

The work aims at understanding how Perugia young people perceive migration. In particular, we will focus on how socio-economic status influences the attitude towards migrants.

Our hypothesis is that the current economic and cultural crisis – which mainly affects young generations and causes a feeling of uncertainty –

¹⁹ G. Allport (1954), *The nature of prejudice*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc., Cambridge; V. Cotesta (1999), *Sociologia dei conflitti etnici*, Laterza, Roma-Bari; M. Ambrosini (2005), *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna; R. Segatori (2016), *La libertà possibile*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.

²⁰ H. Tajfel; J. Turner (1979), *An integrative theory of inter-group conflict*, in J.A. Williams, S. Worchel, *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, Wadsworth, Belmont.

²¹ M. Ambrosini (2005), *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

²² R. H. Fazio; C.J. Williams (1986), *Attitude accessibility as a moderator of the attitude-perception and attitude-behavior relations – An investigation of the 1981 presidential-election*, “Journal of Personality and Social Psychology”, 51(3), pp. 505–514.

produces negative prejudice against immigrants and the intensification of intolerance and hostility towards them.

3. Empirical research

The research is based on a multi-thematic questionnaire addressed to a sample of 348 individuals, both male and female, from 18 to 34 years of age living in Perugia. For what concerns the theme of immigration, the questionnaire contained seven questions dealing with: a) the level of either openness or reticence towards incoming immigrants; b) the kind of services that the Italian government should guarantee to immigrants; c) the behavior immigrants should adopt in order to be integrated in Italian society; d) the impact of immigration on specific current issues and the perception of the number of immigrants in the country; e) the level of proximity among interviewees and immigrants; f) the representation of immigrants. In order to verify our hypothesis, we relied on variables related to socioeconomic status, cultural capital and political orientation.

3.1. *Attitudes towards immigrants*

With reference to the attitudes of openness or reticence towards immigrants, question number 10 of our questionnaire focuses on integration, namely the process through which individuals step into society by interiorizing norms and values. From the answers given to this question we can see how half of the interviewees (41.1%) seems to be in favour of integration policies. However, the 23,4% declared to welcome only workers who have steady jobs and the 20.5% believes that immigrants' problems must be solved in their own countries of origin. Moreover, 7% of the interviewees said to welcome only refugees and the 7% thinks that if the migration will keep being so intense there will be no Italians left.

The widespread tendency in believing that migrations should be limited only to migrants with steady jobs and refugees, and that migrants should solve their problems in their own countries of origin can be explained by the current economic crisis, as Ambrosini²³ rightfully suggests. According to the author, the worsening socioeconomical condition of young Italians may lead the latter to perceive migrants as potential competitors to access the national welfare system.

²³ M. Ambrosini (2005), *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

As demonstrated in table 1, the higher the cultural capital value, the more favourable the declarations towards policies of welcoming and integration of immigrants. Conversely, the less cultural capital is available, the less favourable the declarations towards openness and cohabitation with immigrants. Moreover, we also have to consider that youngsters who are in favour of integration policies are mostly (43%) middle-class students²⁴. Conversely, the declaration that denotes criticism towards immigration, namely «if we keep going like this there will be no more Italians left», was made mostly by young precarious workers from the lower-class (42,9%)²⁵.

Tab.1 - Declaration on immigration and cultural capital (Values in %)

<i>Statements on immigration policies</i>	<i>Low cultural capital</i>	<i>Low-middle cultural capital</i>	<i>Middle cultural capital</i>	<i>High-middle cultural capital</i>	<i>High cultural capital</i>
Integration and inclusion policies should be promoted by the government	37,0	34,5	37,0	52,3	41,0
Immigrants should enter the country without any restrictions	3,7	3,5	0,0	3,1	4,2
Only immigrants with steady jobs should stay in the country	11,1	22,1	30,1	20,0	25,4
If we keep going like this there will be no more Italians	0,0	6,2	6,8	1,5	2,8
Only through contributions paid by the immigrants we will be able to afford pensions for Italian people	3,7	0,0	1,4	1,5	1,4
We should make only refugees stay	11,1	7,1	9,6	4,6	5,6
The problems of immigrants should be solved in their own countries of origin	33,3	26,5	15,1	16,9	14,1
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: our elaboration on own primary data

²⁴ The youngsters who have answered in this way are mainly from a father who is either a freelancer or an entrepreneur (21,5%) an artisan (20,1%) and from a mother who is either a housewife (25,9%) or a clerk (14,7%).

²⁵ The youngsters who have answered in this way are from a father who is a construction worker/farmer (28,6%) and from a mother who is a housewife (40%).

3.2. Guarantees for immigrants

From table 1 attitudes of criticism towards migration can be found. These attitudes are confirmed when interviewees are asked what services the government should or should not guarantee to migrants²⁶.

As shown in table 2, many interviewees declared their availability to granting essential services, such as healthcare, proper education and the regularization of irregular work to immigrants. However, there are still some doubts on the possibility of accelerating the procedures for the acquisition of the Italian citizenship and on the possibility of extending the right to vote to immigrants. The interviewees are also split in two at the rising of the question concerning the possibility of granting spaces for cultural and religious activities, social housing for migrants and contributions to associations in support of them. The percentages of agreement and disagreement show that most of the people declared their availability to grant essential services and social security to immigrants. Conversely, there is uncertainty about whether offering to the immigrants' services which are already poorly available for Italian citizens or not. Many of them, in fact, interpret an extension of such guarantees as a reduction of resources available to them.

Tab. 2 - Agreement and disagreement with policies in support of migrants

<i>Migrants' guarantees</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>Total</i>
Social housing	52,3	47,7	100,0
Spaces for religious and/or cultural activities	41,8	58,2	100,0
Proper education	8,3	91,7	100,0
Healthcare	8,3	91,7	100,0
The right to vote to regular migrants	42,7	57,3	100,0
Regularization of irregular work	15,0	85,0	100,0
Quick procedures for the acquisition of citizenship	58,5	41,5	100,0
Italian language courses	22,0	78,0	100,0
Contributions to associations that support migrants	51,9	48,1	100,0

Source: our elaboration on own primary data

²⁶ Question 11 asked to the interviewees whether they were in favour or against the following policies towards immigrants: social housing; spaces devoted to cultural and religious practices; proper education; healthcare; the right to vote for residents, regularization of irregular work, quick procedures for the acquisition of citizenship, courses of Italian language, contributions to associations that support migrants.

3.3. Migrants' behaviour and the impact of immigration on current issues

By focusing on the level of individual responsibilities, we have also asked our interviewees what an immigrant should do in order to integrate in the host country. Before proceeding with our considerations, it must be pointed out that the process of integration is related to and depends on a variety of factors such as the labour market, the inclusion of immigrants and the interaction with them, the conditions for the access to welfare benefits and that this process is defined by a complex path which implies various elements such as the mastery of the language and the respect towards the host society's customs²⁷. Among the answers given by our interviewees, the most relevant percentages concern the necessity to respect the laws of our country and focus on the importance of finding stable jobs and housing (table 3).

Tab.3 - Behaviours immigrants should have to integrate into our country

<i>Migrants' responsibilities</i>	<i>Fre- quence</i>	<i>%</i>
Master the language	35	10,1
Follow our laws	144	41,4
Find stable jobs and housing	59	16,9
Conform to our customs and habits	53	15,2
Stay only with co-nationals	1	0,2
Have a proper social behaviour	36	10,4
Not to influence Italian working rhythms	8	2,3
Other	12	3,5
Total	348	100

Source: our elaboration on own primary data

Moreover, the limited number of interviewees that believes that integration depends on the mastery of Italian, on proper social behaviour and on the ways of adapting to our customs and habits highlights that among young people in Perugia the fact of adopting the host country's culture is not fundamental. Instead, what emerges from the majority of the answers is the need for social security. This is shown by the fact that 41,4% of the interviewees believes that integration depends on the respect of our country's laws. This tendency is assessed when, in order to reconstruct the perception of social problems that shape social representations of immigration, the interviewees are asked to quantify the degree of responsibility they attributed to

²⁷ M. Ambrosini (2011), *Il multiculturalismo è finito? Le esperienze europee di integrazione degli immigrati*, "Studi e ricerche", n. 5, p. 343-354.

immigrants for several current issues (question n.13). The highest scores (an average of 6,6 in the Cantril scale) concern the increase of social insecurity and social expenses. It follows the spread of new religions (average of 6,5), spread of diseases (average of 5,1), unemployment (average of 4,2) and lack of housing places (average of 4,1).

3.4. Social representation of immigrants

In order to understand their representation of migrants we have asked our interviewees to express by a score from 1 to 10 their degree of agreement/disagreement with 12 items (question number 16) evoking a series of points of view on immigration that we find in the common thought and in specialized contemporary literature²⁸. We applied a principal component analysis and a cluster analysis on the variables according to the Ward's agglomerative hierarchical clustering procedure²⁹, from which three main groups of variables – having in common their approach on migration – emerged. These three groups represent three different social representations of migration: a positive one, a neutral one and a negative one. The first cluster is constituted by the following items: immigrants increase our country's cultural heritage; since immigrants escape from desperate circumstances they should better be rescued; immigrants are friendly and always available; immigrants are useful as they take jobs that Italians don't want. All these items conceive **migration as a resource**.

The second cluster is constituted by items that deal with concrete resolutions: immigrants should stay in specific neighbourhoods; immigrants are useful as they have plenty of children who make Italian population younger; we should look up to immigrants as they work hard but are badly rewarded. This set of items represents **migration as an inevitable phenomenon**.

The third cluster is made by items that express the following statements: when immigration increases so do drugs and prostitution; immigrants' values are too different from the Italians' ones; only migrants who have a steady job should stay in Italy; giving migrants the right to vote is too risky; immigrants steal jobs and houses to Italians. Thus, this cluster includes rather pessimistic items that conceive **immigration as evil of society**.

Having analysed the variables which have been grouped in three main

²⁸ F. Crespi; R. Segatori (1996), *Multiculturalismo e democrazia*, Donzelli, Milano. Alietti, Padovan, 2005; M. Ambrosini (2014), *Non passa lo straniero?*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi; V. Calzolaio; T. Pievani (2016), *Libertà di migrare*, Einaudi, Torino.

²⁹ G. Di Franco (2001), *EDS: esplorare, descrivere e sintetizzare i dati*, Franco Angeli, Milano.

representations of immigration, we now turn to the attitudes shown by our interviewees.

In order to describe their attitudes, we developed a new cluster analysis on the cases that allowed us to split the 348 youngsters in 4 groups which had homogeneous attitudes toward immigrants. After comparing the average scores obtained by each group for the three social representations on migrants, and after observing the polarization embedded within these results, we have developed a map of the interviewees' attitudes towards immigration (table 4).

Tab. 4 - Groups of attitudes for each social representations of immigration

Attitudes		Social representations		
		Resource	Inevitable phenomenon	Evil of society
	Welcoming	0,92	-0,37	-1,32
	Indifferent	0,50	-0,08	-0,57
	Annoyed	-0,06	0,20	0,28
	Hostile	-0,98	0,07	1,05

Source: our elaboration on own primary data

The first group shows positive polarization towards the representation of migration as a resource (0,92) and negative towards the idea of migration as evil of society (-1,32). This is the group of **welcoming** people composed of fifty-four youngsters, namely 15,6% of our interviewees. This group appears to be very open-minded towards migration, either because of pragmatic or ideological reasons. Its members, the welcoming people, are young liberals inclined to interact with migrants, who are perceived as an opportunity of personal and social growth. As far as the last statement is concerned, migrants are perceived as a resource and not as competitors since they do not belong to the interviewee's social class. The welcoming people group is relatively small compared to the other groups that contain twice the number of people.

The second group includes ninety-nine cases, meaning 28,5% of the interviewees. These cases are young people who express neither approval nor disapproval towards immigration and have **indifferent** or neutral attitudes. Youngsters who belong to this group are either working students or workers who do not see the value of welcoming immigrants but do not consider them as a threat to their interests, since they are socially distant. That is why they are rather indifferent to the phenomenon of immigration.

The third group, made of ninety-nine cases, is not polarised to any of the three representations of immigration but agrees on perceiving immigration

as ineluctable (0,20), as social evil (0,28), rather than as a resource (-0,06). This is the group of **annoyed** people, persons who are not hostile but who tend to distance themselves from immigrants whom they consider to be a “necessary evil”.

Finally, the fourth group is composed by ninety-five cases, 27,5% of the interviewees, and shows clear polarizations: immigration as resource (-0,98) and immigrations as evil to be fought (1,05). The members of this group manifest **hostility** towards immigrants and refuse the idea of relating with foreigners. Moreover, they consider immigration as an issue to be stopped. The hostile people are influenced by ethnic prejudices that make them conceive immigration not only as something that will worsen their own social conditions, since immigrants will hardly be integrated in the host country’s socio-culture and are dangerous, but they will also impoverish the economy because of the cost they imply.

Intertwining the four attitudes with the variables of family’s employment history, cultural capital and self-attested political ideologies, it has been noted that:

1) welcoming people are mostly students (53,6%) coming from various family working conditions³⁰, with high cultural capital (51,8%) and who are left-wing oriented (55,6%);

2) indifferent people are also mostly students (37,4%) and temporary workers (13,1%) coming from middle-class families³¹, with a high cultural capital (46,5%) and politically oriented to either the centre or left-wing (34,7% centre; 33,7% left);

3) annoyed people are also mostly students (35,4%), from various family working circumstances³², with low cultural capital (44,2%) who are conservatives (43,2%);

4) hostile people are also almost all students (33,3%), unemployed (18,2%), from low social status³³, with low cultural capital (44,4%) and politically oriented towards the centre (43,2%).

³⁰ Their fathers are either construction workers (34,6%) or entrepreneurs /freelancers (23,6%). Their mothers are mostly housewives (22,2%), clerks (20,4%) or primary school teachers (18,5%).

³¹ Their fathers are either artisans/traders (23%) or entrepreneurs/freelancers (21%). Their mothers are almost exclusively housewives (38,4%).

³² Their fathers are construction workers (33%), artisans/traders (19,6%), entrepreneurs/freelancers (17,5%).

Their mothers are either housewives (27,1%) or artisans/traders (18,8%).

³³ Their fathers are construction workers (48%), traders/artisans (19,6%) and entrepreneurs/freelancers (17,5%). Their mothers are housewives (26%), construction workers (21%) and trader/artisans (15%).

3.5. Prejudice against immigrants

On the level of analysis of prejudice, we asked our interviewees the frequency with which in the last year they have socialized with migrants, watched movies set in migrants' countries, listened to ethnic music and taken part into multicultural manifestation/events. From the answers given, it emerges that 90% of the interviewees has very limited, if not inexistent, contacts with immigrants.

Intertwining the results of this survey with the variables of socio-economic status, cultural capital and self-assessed political ideology we see that the people who want to have a friendly relationship and are interested in immigrants' cultures is constituted by a minority of students (36,8%) from diverse social status³⁴, who are either centre or centre/left-wing oriented³⁵ and possess a high cultural capital (45,9%). This last data confirms the idea that with proper tools it is possible to deconstruct prejudices against immigrants. Under these circumstances Allport's theory on social contact (1954), which has already been mentioned in the previous paragraph, is confirmed. According to this theory the exchange between *ingroup* and *outgroup* determines the deconstruction of the ethnic prejudice and of the stereotypes towards migrants.

4. Conclusions

Throughout human history a series of internal and international migrations have generated transformations in the economic and cultural development of many destination countries³⁶. Even Italians have always been migrants. In the past, they predilected internal migrations, from the South to North of the country. Afterwards, migrations became international and have never stopped since. This is evident if we consider that, on the 1st of January 2019, the Registry of Italians Resident Abroad (AIRE) registered 5.288.281 Italians living in other countries (8,8% of people living in Italy)³⁷.

Notwithstanding, Italians tend to be more and more reluctant towards incoming immigrants. Other than for xenophobic reasons, this reluctance can be explained by the crisis that affected the country throughout the last decade and worsened living conditions for most of the Italians. This has increased

³⁴ Their fathers are either entrepreneurs/freelancers 32,4% or construction workers 24,3%. Their mothers are either housewives (28,9%) or clerks (21,1%).

³⁵ Centre: 37,8%; left-wing: 29,7%; right-wing: 16,2%; not oriented: 16,2%.

³⁶ V. Calzolaio; T. Pievani (2016), *Libertà di migrare*, Einaudi, Torino.

³⁷ Migrantes (2019), *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo 2019*, Tau, Todi.

negative attitudes towards immigrants, leading to hostile behaviours and even phenomena of hatred and discrimination. Thus, we are witnessing a re-thematization of immigration that is centered on the safeguard of the rights and interests of Italians towards the immigrants, who are considered as a threat and as competitors to access the national welfare system and the labour market.

This research has explored attitudes, social representations and prejudices of young people from Perugia towards migrants and focused on how the cultural and economic status have influenced their formation. Our main hypothesis was that the current economic and cultural crisis that affect mainly young generations, produce a sense of instability which generates negative prejudices and the spread of attitudes of intolerance and hostility towards migrants.

As far as the question of whether there is either openness or closedness towards immigration, this research has showed that the attitude of youngsters is rather favourable to integration policies aimed at better the conditions of cohabitation of different cultures. However, the interviewees have not showed complete availability to welcoming everyone indistinctively and are doubtful on the extension to immigrants of the right to vote. The reason explaining these tendencies can be found within the genericity of this question: young people in Perugia are favourable to integration policies but, when facing the idea of less available social housing, job opportunities and welfare services, they are doubtful on whether to extend all the rights Italian have to immigrants.

Moreover, in our attempt to reconstruct the perception of social problems that shape social representations of immigration, we noted that young people living in Perugia tend to consider migrants as responsible to the spread of insecurity and social expenses. These results can be explained by the higher salience of immigration in the in public debates in recent years and by the amplification of this phenomenon through the media³⁸, that inflates prejudices against immigrants and non-EU citizens.

In this regard, another important outcome is that just a slight percentage of the interviewees (10%) wants to make friends with and deepen their knowledge of immigrants' cultures. One of the factors that is shared among the members of this small percentage is the high cultural capital. Thus, the hypothesis according to which culture is fundamental to dismantle ethnic prejudice has been confirmed.

From our research it emerges that, although Perugia is known as a

³⁸ A. Masini *et al.* (2017), *Measuring and Explaining the Diversity of Voices and Viewpoints in the News*, "Journalism Studies", pp.1-20.

multicultural city and ready to welcome people from all over the world, we found out that the young people living in the city at the beginning of the 21st century, especially the ones belonging to the lower-class, are interested more than everything in fighting for their individual rights, rather than building a more open and more inclusive society. To this extent, on the one hand, it has been noted that the group of welcoming people, though numerically inferior to the other three groups, is composed by youngsters characterized by high cultural capital. The same can be said of the indifferent people that are numerically inferior to the welcoming group. On the other hand, for both annoyed and hostile people, we noticed a reduction of the percentage of students belonging to the groups and a low cultural capital of their components. Moreover, in the hostile group also the percentage of unemployed people increases, and the economic conditions of the members seem to be the worst compared to the other groups.

All this data confirms the hypothesis of the research, namely that prejudices and negative attitudes toward immigration depend on the economic status. Our data are also useful to reflect on the ongoing political change in Umbria region. In the past, in a “red” region like Umbria, the relation between locals and immigrants was politically relevant and aiming to guarantee equal conditions and to abolish every kind of discrimination.

Nowadays, due to the crisis of the traditional political parties that led to a decline of political participation, the relation between youngsters and immigrants has lost its historical political content, as it emerges from the comments of the interviewees who were hostile to immigrants and who declared to belong neither to the right-wing nor to the left-wing.

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