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## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF ROMA AND SINTI IN ITALY

*The case studies of Bolzano-Bozen, Mantua, Milan and Rome*

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

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*Nando Sigona*

### **Aims and methods**

The main aim of this research is to discuss experiences, possibilities and obstacles to the political participation of Roma and Sinti in Italy at local level. The ethos of our investigation is set by the principles stated in the OSCE “Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti”, in particular:

Roma and Sinti people have an equal right to participate in public affairs. This includes the rights to vote, stand for election, participate in public affairs and form political parties without discrimination<sup>2</sup>.

States must be proactive in ensuring Roma and Sinti effective participation in public and political life and in their action they are encouraged, the Action Plan states, to take into account the following principles:

- Early involvement;
- Inclusiveness;
- Transparency;
- Meaningful participation of Roma and Sinti people at all levels of government;
- Ownership.

Bearing these in mind, the research explores in the four case studies (Milan, Bolzano-Bozen, Mantua and Rome) three dimensions: the media coverage of Roma and Sinti’s issues during the last campaign for local elections; the role of the “Gypsy issue” in the political manifestos and electoral campaigns of the main political parties and coalitions; finally, Roma and Sinti’s views on, and experiences of, political participation at local election and at local polity, in general.

In order to investigate these dimensions, we used a range of qualitative research methods: a number of semi-structured interviews with key informants, local journalists; Roma and Sinti’s activists and candidates and local politicians were carried out in each location; the systematic review of local press - using as key words: “Rom”, “Sinti”, “zingari” and “nomadi” -

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<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank all individuals and organisations that helped us with their time and knowledge in Bolzano, Milan, Rome and Mantua.

<sup>2</sup> Decision no. 566, 27 November 2003, Action Plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area: [http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2003/11/1562\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2003/11/1562_en.pdf)

was conducted on two newspapers for each location in the month preceding the election ; finally, we collected and analysed the contents of electoral manifestos, platforms, posters, leaflets and press statements concerning Roma and Sinti.

Even if the main focus of research is the political participation to local election, in our work we looked both at Italian Roma and Sinti and foreign Roma, although the latter currently have no right to vote in Italy. We decided to do so for two main reasons: firstly, as it was immediately clear reading local press, most of the times, newspapers don't make any distinction between Italian Roma and Sinti and foreigners and tend to portray them generically as "nomads" or "gypsies". Secondly, we wanted to look at political participation more broadly including those forms of institutional and associational participation that are implemented at local level and that involve also foreign Roma.

The selection of the four locations was made by taking into account partly the quantitative dimension of Roma and Sinti's presence in the municipal territories, partly with the intent of presenting and discussing local best practices, partly with intent to look at cities with a different Roma and Sinti population and different political orientations.

### **Summary of the key objectives**

- To explore whether and how Roma and Sinti took part to the last municipal elections in four Italian cities (Milan, Bolzano-Bozen, Rome and Mantua);
- To discuss whether and how mainstream political parties address the issues of Roma and Sinti in their electoral platforms and campaigns;
- To find out if local authorities have implemented specific initiatives to promote and facilitate Roma and Sinti's participation to the electoral process and to the local polity in general
- To analyse press coverage of Roma and Sinti's issues during the electoral campaign in the four locations;
- To discuss with Roma and Sinti and key support groups about possibilities and obstacles to Roma and Sinti's political participation at local level.

## COUNTRY PROFILE

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*Nando Sigona*

### Local elections and voting system

The principles of regionalism were laid down in the 1948 constitution, but with the exception of the five regions granted special status — Sicily, Sardinia, Valle d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia-Giulia — the devolution of power to the 15 ordinary regions was delayed until 1970. Since 1970 progress has been gradual. In 1993 parliament approved the direct election of mayors and presidents of provincial governments (Law n.81, 1993).

The new mayoral role marks significant progress towards greater accountability, activism and ambition among mayors, which is related to their increasing detachment from party politics and to an increased weakness of the other participants in local democracy<sup>3</sup>.

The reform of the role of the *comuni* was introduced to “make local government more accessible and responsive”<sup>4</sup>. As a mean for introducing greater stability to local politics, the successful mayoral candidate is guaranteed 60% of council seats, the remainder being allocated according to the distribution of votes among other parties. The new electoral system has greatly boosted the importance of mayors, some of whom have used their powers to rise to national prominence, extending their influence within their parties and coalitions.

In cities and towns with over 15,000 inhabitants (633 in 1993 when the reform was introduced), voters can separate their vote for the mayor from that for the party lists. The candidates for mayor can be linked to one or more lists. But more importantly, in the municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants, whereas no candidate achieves absolute majority at the election, a second ballot is held. The mayor is elected independently of the success of his or her list and the majority of the council is decided by the result of the election of the candidate for mayor.

Every EU citizens residing in Italy have the right to vote and to stand as a candidate at municipal elections, under the same conditions as nationals of that State.

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<sup>3</sup> Magnier, A. (2004) “Between Institutional Learning and Re-legitimization: Italian Mayors in the Unending Reform”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 28 (1), pp. 166-182

<sup>4</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, Italy: Political forces, 13 December 2004:

<http://www.economist.com/countries/Italy/profile.cfm?folder=Profile-Political%20Forces>

## Political participation of non-EU citizens in local politics

Foreign Roma coming from non-EU member states have no right to vote in Italy. However, immigrants can, as Italian citizens, join bodies representing their interests such as trade unions, trade associations, community committees or establish their own NGOs or community organisations in order to preserve and promote their cultures, traditions and languages.

At local level, some interesting experiences have been implemented to enhance immigrants' active participation in the community in which they live. Three initiatives are particularly relevant: the introduction, in some municipalities, of *consiglieri aggiunti* (assistant councillors), elected by immigrants in their municipality of residence, they have a consultative and mainly symbolic role and no right to vote in the City Council; the creation of consultative committee on migration issues to which migrants themselves are invited to contribute; finally, the several ongoing initiatives at local, regional and national level, for the introduction of the right to vote for immigrants in local elections.

## Roma and Sinti in Italy

The commonly used terms 'zingari' (equivalent to the English 'Gypsies') and 'nomadi' are heteronyms imposed on Roma and Sinti by outsiders who have the power to do so. They are still widely used terms, despite being generally considered misleading and derogatory<sup>5</sup>. These terms are used to refer to a number of groups and subgroups which Piasere has called 'a world of worlds'<sup>6</sup>. A further distinction can be made on legal grounds, between those with Italian citizenship and those without (as well as some legally stateless cases). Italian Roma and Sinti began to settle in Italy in the XV century. The Sinti mainly reached Italy overland from the North, while the Roma crossed the Adriatic Sea from the southern Balkan areas, settling in the southern part of the country.

In the absence of official statistics on the Roma and Sinti population in Italy, we have to rely on the estimated figures of approximately 120,000-150,000 Roma, Sinti and Caminanti currently living in Italy. The majority of which (approximately 60 per cent) are Italian citizens. The Sinti almost all fall into this last group. A small percentage of the Sinti have an economic activity which necessitates an itinerant lifestyle. Almost all of the Italian Roma are sedentary.

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<sup>5</sup> Colacicchi, P. (1998) "Zingari in Italia: un furtivo apartheid", *Il Grande Vetro*, 22 (142): 9-11; Marta, C. (1996) "Zingari, rom e nomadi: una minoranza di difficile definizione" in Vallini, C. (ed.) *Minoranze e lingue minoritarie*, Napoli: IUO: 245-260

<sup>6</sup> Piasere, L. (1999) *Un Mondo di Mondi. Antropologia delle culture rom*. Napoli: l'ancora

The remaining 40 percent is made up of foreign citizens who have come to Italy in various migration influxes. The most substantial of which, dates from the '90's, with the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the fall of the communist regimes. The foreigners belong to various groups and come mostly from: Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Serbia and, more recently, Romania<sup>7</sup>.

Amongst the foreign Roma, many of whom have fled from conflict areas or from conditions of extreme poverty, a substantial number periodically have problems with the renewal of their "permessi di soggiorno". A growing number of Roma children born in Italy from foreign parents, have no documents, and only in some cases, have received the status of being legally stateless. These individuals face the suspension of their rights, and live in a legal limbo which affects many aspects of their lives.

About one third of the Roma and Sinti population - including both Italian and foreign citizens - currently live in authorised or unauthorised camps in isolated areas, poorly connected to the towns and with precarious and inadequate services<sup>8</sup>. A study carried out in 2001, shows that there were more than 18 thousand foreign Roma living in camps<sup>9</sup>. Since then, the population has increased further, particularly due to the arrival of a significant number of Romanian Roma.

While most Sinti ask for authorised and equipped residential areas to live in in small groups, foreign Roma are ask for serious policies towards sustainable and dignified housing solutions, which can overcome the eternally precarious situation represented by the 'nomad camps'. They also seek policies that support employment and the regularisation of their legal status<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Piasere, L. (2005) "Qu'est-ce qu'un campo nomadi?", paper presented at the international conference *Les Tsiganes en Europe: questions sur la représentation et action politique*, the British Academy/CNRS, Paris, 24-25 October 2005; Karpati, M. (1969) "La situazione attuale degli zingari in Italia", *Lacio Drom*, no.3-4-5: 77-83; Brunello, P. (1996) (ed) *L'urbanistica del disprezzo*. Rome: Manifestolibri; Sigona, N. (2002) *Figli del Ghetto. Gli italiani, i Campi Nomadi e l'Invenzione degli Zingari*. Civezzano: Nonluoghi; Sigona, N. and Monasta, L. (2006) *Cittadinanze imperfette. Rapporto sulla discriminazione razziale di rom e sinti in Italia*, Santa Maria Vetere, Edizioni Spartaco

<sup>8</sup> ERRC (2000) *Campland. Racial segregation of Roma in Italy*. Budapest: ERRC

<sup>9</sup> Monasta, L. (2004) "Note sulla mappatura degli insediamenti rom stranieri presenti in Italia" in Saletti Salza, C., Piasere, L. (2004) (eds) *Italia Romani 4. La diaspora rom dalla ex Jugoslavia*. Roma: CISU: 3-16

<sup>10</sup> Sigona, N. (2003) "How can a 'nomad' be a 'refugee'? Kosovo Roma and Labelling Policy in Italy", *Sociology*, 37 (1): 69-79; Sigona, N. (2005a) "Locating the 'Gypsy problem' The Roma in Italy: stereotyping, labelling and nomad camps, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31 (4): 741-756; Lapov, Z. (2005) *Vacaré Romané. Diversità a confronto: percorsi delle identità rom*. Milano: Franco Angeli; Marta, C. (2005) *Relazioni Interetniche: prospettive antropologiche*. Napoli: Guida

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance has expressed concern not only for the living conditions in the camps, but also 'for the fact that the segregation of Roma/Gypsies in Italy appears to reflect the general approach of the Italian Authorities, who tend to consider Roma as nomads who want to live in camps'<sup>11</sup>. Similar concerns were previously expressed in 1999, by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination<sup>12</sup> which declared that 'in addition to a frequent lack of basic facilities, living in the camps not only leads to the Roma's physical segregation from Italian society, but their political, economic and cultural isolation as well'.

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<sup>11</sup> ECRI (2002) *2nd Report on Italy adopted the 22nd June 2001*. Strasbourg: ECRI; ECRI's view was recently confirmed in the third report on Italy published in May 2006.

<sup>12</sup> CERD (1999) *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Italy. 07/04/99* (CERD/C/304/Add.68). Geneva: United Nations.

## **BOLZANO – BOZEN: A DIVIDED CITY**

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*Francesca Saudino*

### **Introduction**

Bolzano-Bozen is the leading city of the homonymous Autonomous Province and it is part of the Trentino – Alto Adige region. It has a population of 98,657 inhabitants. The province is officially bilingual and in some areas trilingual: Italian, German and Ladino are the official languages. While in Bolzano - Bozen city the majority of the population has Italian as its mother tongue, in the Province the main linguistic group is represented by the German-speaking population. In Badia and Gardena valleys, the Ladino speaking group is dominant.

The elections for the Mayor and City Council of Bolzano were held in 2005 – on May 8<sup>th</sup> with the second ballot on May 22<sup>nd</sup> and again on November 6<sup>th</sup>. The new election was required because the winning candidate in May - the centre-right representative Giovanni Benussi, who prevailed for only 7 votes - was unable to form a government and winning a majority in the City Council. However, for the first time since the WW2, Bolzano had, although very briefly, a centre-right Mayor.

In May, the centre-left candidate was the incumbent Mayor, Giovanni Salghetti Drioli, who couldn't secure the support of the Sudtiroler Volks Partei (SVP) at the first round of the election. SVP is the main party in the Autonomous Province representing the interest of the local linguistic minorities, in particular of the German-speaking group. SVP decided to present its own candidate and to turn its support to Salghetti Drioli only at the second ballot where the lower turn out, mainly caused by disaffected German-speaking voters, facilitate the election of the centre-right candidate Benussi.

Following the resignation of Benussi in November, a new election was held. This time the new centre-left candidate, Luigi Spagnolli could count on the support of the SVP from the beginning. This allowed him to gain a large majority and to be proclaimed Mayor without any need of a second ballot.

Rifondazione Comunista, one of the parties supporting Spagnolli, presented in its party list for the City Council a *Sinto*: Radames Gabrielli.

The most voted party in Bolzano is SVP with 21,84%. Rifondazione Comunista with 3,01% had two elected councillors. Gabrielli received 32 votes ranking 11<sup>th</sup> in his list, not enough to be elected. The right wing party Unitalia which campaigned against Roma and Sinti obtained 3,21% and elected two councillors.

The city is politically divided along ethnic lines with most of the German-speaking population supporting SWP and the majority of the Italian speakers supporting the nationalist centre-right coalition. However, the Italian-speaking voters give their votes among a more diverse political spectrum. The only party which historically can count on an affiliation which cross linguistic boundaries is the Green Party which gained 4.33%.

The ethnic polarisation of Bolzano – Bozen is also spatially visible with a clear division among German and Italian speaking neighbourhoods. In Bolzano there are 5 neighbourhoods: two are mostly inhabited by Italian speakers (Europa Novacella and Don Bosco), one is prevalently German (Gries) and the other two have a mixed population.

Don Bosco is where most Roma and Sinti live and saw a clear affirmation of the centre-right candidate Benossi with 53,65%. In this neighbourhood, Unitalia obtained its best result with 557 votes.

### **Sinti and Roma in Bolzano**

In Bolzano there are both Italian Sinti and foreign Roma. The Sinti are all Italian citizens. Most of them moved in Bolzano before the WW1 from Vienna and Villach, the rest came after WW2<sup>13</sup>. Overall there are 350 Sinti, a hundred live in an authorised campsite called “La Spaghetтата”, because of its location in the midst of motorway junction. Some live in unauthorised sites and the rest, 176 people, live in Province-owned public housing (IPES). These flats are mostly located in Don Bosco (129 out of 176 Sinti lives in this neighbourhood), in particular on “via Cagliari”, where ten Sinti families live in IPES flats<sup>14</sup>.

In Bolzano there are 220 foreign Roma, originally from former-Yugoslavia (mainly from Macedonia). The first family arrived in the area since the 1970s, while the bulk came during the 1990s, with the latest arrival in 2000 following the worsening of the political situation in Macedonia.

106 Roma live in the municipal camp of Castel Firmiano located in the Don Bosco neighbourhood, a small unauthorised camp for 7 people is in Olrisarco and 9 Roma live in a reception centre for asylum seekers in the city centre; the rest live in public and private housing. The majority of the inhabitants in Castel Firmiano are regularly resident in Italy. 50% of them have an indeterminate leave to remain (carta di soggiorno).

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<sup>13</sup> Tauber, E... Elisabeth Tauber nel saggio *Tenkreh tut kao molo ke gam manghel* ( in Italia Romani, vol. II, 1999, Roma, CISU)

<sup>14</sup> V. Paola Dispoto, I Sinti a Bolzano in *La città accogliente, studio per un programma di superamento dei campi nomadi e delle situazioni di precarietà abitativa tra le popolazioni rom e sinti di Bolzano*, Città di Bolzano- Fondazione Michelucci, maggio 06.

Among those living in flats, 3 families are accommodated in flats owned by the City Social Services (ASSB), 10 in Province-owned public housing (IPES) and 16 in privately rented flat.<sup>15</sup>

### **Political parties and electoral platforms on Roma and Sinti**

Only two political parties have an explicit reference to Roma and Sinti in their electoral platforms: Rifondazione Comunista, which then brought the issue also in the centre-left coalition platform, and Unitalia.

Rifondazione Comunista (RC) in its manifesto presents some proposals to address Sinti's housing problem and singles out the building of micro-campsites as the best possible solution. As for the foreign Roma, in the platform they are associated to the other immigrants.

Rifondazione Comunista brought the Roma and Sinti issue also in the platform of the centre-left coalition, although it must be noted that in Spagnoli's electoral platform, both Italian Sinti and foreign Roma are discussed in the chapter dedicated to immigration – "Immigration: rights and duties". Points 6 and 7 of the platform express the will to:

- Move towards the closure of the campsite "La Spaghetata" and the creation of micro-campsites;
- Promote a gradual access of the Roma citizens to IPES housing.

Unitalia discusses the "Gypsy and nomads" issue in the platform chapters dedicated to "Social policies" and to "Security in the city and fight against drugs". In the first of the seven points programme on social policies, Unitalia promises:

- The suspension of all public subsidies to the nomads living in the City and the suspension of public funding to existing nomad camps, in order for them to become economically self-sufficient.

In the chapter on "Security in the city and fight against drugs", among the initiatives proposed, there are two points concerning "the Gypsies":

- Dispersal of the Gypsies living in nomad camps in Bolzano to other camps to be build by the Provincial authority;

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<sup>15</sup> V. Silvia Golino, I Rom a Bolzano, in *La città accogliente, studio per un programma di superamento dei campi nomadi e delle situazioni di precarietà abitativa tra le popolazioni rom e sinti di Bolzano*, Città di Bolzano- Fondazione Michelucci, maggio 06.

- Rigid application of the rules governing the life in the nomad camps with the immediate expulsion of those who commit crimes, infractions to the rules or whatever harm to the camp infrastructures.

It is evident that housing is one of the main issues at the centre of the political debate around Roma and Sinti at local level. The label “nomads” is employed instrumentally to avoid the discussion about Roma and Sinti’s right to adequate housing<sup>16</sup>. As an example, in an interview given to Alto Adige, Seppi, the local leader of Unitalia, rhetorically asks: “If the gypsies are nomads, therefore people on the move, why are they asking for council houses?” (Alto Adige, 28.10.05: 14).

The housing issue is also the focus of a number of posters explaining Unitalia’s views on the “gypsies”. The posters were put up all over Bolzano and distributed in several areas of city (in some cases even outside schools see Alto Adige, 08.05.05:18) (see below).



*Stop to nomad camps. Italians come first in housing and social services*

*No public housing to nomads and gypsies*

*No houses to gypsies and Non-EU migrants. We come first!*

As mentioned above, the other political parties tend to take no side on the issue, in the interview with a SVP official, Stefan Amort said:

Südtiroler Volkspartei is the party of the German and Ladino minorities in Sudtirol. It defends their rights and fight for the conservation of their cultural heritage. Because of this, our main interest is to promote the issues of our land and population. That is why our platform deals only with this.

Finally, the “Gypsy issue” came out also after the first election in May 2005, when catholic politicians supporting the centre-left candidate attacked the then Mayor of Bolzano, Giovanni

<sup>16</sup> See the decision of the European Committee on Social Rights concerning the violation by Italy of the article 31 of the Revised Social Charter on the right to adequate housing

Benossi, of being a “fake” catholic because of his alliance with right wing parties like Unitalia and Northern League which are openly anti-Gypsies.

### **Local press**

The analysis of the coverage of Roma and Sinti in the local press was conducted on the two main local newspapers, one (Alto Adige), in Italian, with an Italian-speaking readership, the other (Dolomiten), written in German, with a German-speaking readership.

During the electoral campaign, the Italian newspaper published 33 articles mentioning Roma and Sinti, in the same period, the Dolomiten published only one short article concerning an accident happened at the headquarter of Unitalia and in this context, mentions the anti-Roma attitude of the party. The article refers to “Roma and Sinti”.

Of the 33 articles published by Alto Adige: 1 refers to an episode happened outside Italy; 9 refer to national news; 5 are local news in which Roma and Sinti are somehow connected; 17 refer to opinions and views of local politicians on the “Gypsy issue”; 1 to a concert in Trento where a Sinti band from Bressanone was playing.

Only in three articles, the opinions of Roma or Sinti are reported to: two articles concern a national news and 1 reports the opinion of some Sinti on the posters put up by Unitalia against “nomads and gypsies” (see above).

In the latter article, it is reported a press statement written by a group of Sinti and posted to the local newspapers in response to the Unitalia’s posters:

Everyone in Bolzano saw the posters or received at home those leaflets where is written: *Stop houses to gypsies and no-EU citizens or Stop public money to the gypsies* etc. First of all, we want to make a clarification, because we have the impression that the authors of those posters and leaflets know nothing about us. We Sinti are Italian citizens, we all were born here in Alto Adige, and this is our land. We, as all the other citizens, do the military service and our relatives went to war for Italy. We go to vote and we have the same duties of the other citizens, but we want also the same rights as having access to public housing or claim a public subsidy if our earning are not enough to support our families. When someone writes: *Stop public houses to gypsies... we Italian come first* shows ignorance and racism (Alto Adige, 06.05.05, pg. 13)

The relatively high number of articles on Roma and Sinti during the electoral campaign shows the relevance of the subject. Moreover, it can be noticed how some right wing parties use it to mobilise public fear and discontent and to position themselves in front of the

electorate. Some interview suggested that by doing so, parties like Unitalia attempt to take away some voters to Alleanza Nazionale, that in Bolzano have, for tactical reasons, more moderate positions than in the rest of the country.

According to Marco Rizza, a journalist for Alto Adige, this subject is a tricky one for the left wing parties which ultimately are responsible for the current conditions of Roma and Sinti in Bolzano, considering that they have been ruling the city since the end of WW2.

In the interview with Luigi Gallo, City Councillor responsible for participation and personnel and Provincial leader of Rifondazione Comunista, he said:

I believe that also for the nomad camps we can talk of a sort of banality of evil. Who put them into camps is not a right-wing racist but someone who thought that solution was the only feasible because all the others were not practicable and might have caused alarm. This happened because he/she was afraid. Who put them there acted in good faith. What the right wing propaganda generates in the public opinion is terror and also liberals can be worried. Those key words can influence anyone.

Overall, it can be noticed that the press coverage is quite superficial and there is no interest to discuss the subject in-depth. The lack of Roma and Sinti's voices it is an important feature of this approach which doesn't go beyond rooted prejudices and stereotyping.

In the articles published in the Alto Adige, the term used more frequently is "nomads" (17 times). "Gypsies" and "Roma" are also employed often, 12 and 11 times respectively. 7 times it is used "Sinti". Often the terms are employed as synonymous, although it seems that "nomads" is more used to refer to Roma and "gypsies" for the Sinti. While the term "gypsies" has been attached to the local Sinti for decades, for the Roma arrived more recently has been employed a term apparently more neutral "nomads". This is also instrumental to make sense of their location in the local authority-built *campo nomadi*. Occasionally, the articles use expressions like "nomads of Roma ethnic origin". Paradoxically, the Macedonian Roma were sedentary in Macedonia and they have been sedentary in Bolzano since their arrival, while some Sinti families use to move with their caravans for short periods of the year. Nevertheless the "nomads" label stay attached to the Roma only.

Some interviewees stressed local press' lack of understanding and interest for Roma and Sinti. Even during the electoral campaign, very little space was given to the Sinti candidate, despite the fact that, as Luigi Gallo noted, this was the first time a Sinti person was standing for an election in Bolzano. Marco Rizza, a journalist for Alto Adige, agrees with Gallo,

nevertheless he argues that behind the candidature there was a “populist attempt” from Rifondazione to show that they were doing something for the Sinti.

However, Paola Dispoto, a cultural mediator for Caritas, remarks that: “In the last few months, thanks to the public events, meetings and the public interest for the health and safety issues which emerged in connection to the “campo nomadi” of Castel Firminano, they seem to understand better the situation. The term “gypsies” is now less used, the term “nomads” only appear on some types of articles, and Roma and Sinti is more frequently used”.

The most frequent topics of the articles that mention Roma and Sinti are public housing and right to economic subsidies, with some right wing politicians promising that in case of their victory those benefits will not be guaranteed any longer to “nomads and gypsies”. Another issue discussed widely in the local press, concerns the alleged threat to citizens’ security and the anti-social behaviours of the Sinti. For example the increasing violence in local schools is, in an article published by Alto Adige, without further explanation, justified with the presence of Sinti pupils (Alto Adige, 24.04.05). In another article, “nomadic” families are responsible, together with “non-EU migrants”, for “the loss of identity” of the Don Bosco neighbourhood, which “used to be the area with the strongest Italian presence and character”.(Alto Adige, 03.05.05).

### **Political participation of Roma and Sinti**

All Sinti living in Bolzano are legally resident in the city, therefore they have the right to be registered in the electoral list. But, according to most interviewees, they rarely go to vote because of their lack of trust in the impact of their vote. This view is contradicted by Radames Gabrielli, the local Sinti candidate, who argues that Sinti go regularly to vote because they fear to lose their legal residence in Bolzano if they do not participate at the election.

Up to now no targeted initiative has been taken to promote and facilitate Sinti participation to the electoral process. Most of the political parties, as one of our interviewees noticed, do not even think about them as a possible electorate. “There is a lot of confusion, Sinti are seen as foreigners so no effort is made to gain their votes”.

For the first time in November 2005, Radames Gabrielli, a local Sinto, stood as candidate to the City Council for Rifondazione Comunista (RC). His candidature, as RC stressed, wanted to show to the population that Sinti living in the city are Italian citizens with the same duties and rights (Alto Adige, 14.10.05: 14).

The election was not positive for Gabrielli, who didn't get enough votes to be elected. He explains this saying: "I believe I didn't speak enough with my fellow Sinti, I didn't explain well what my candidature represented and why it was important". For Luigi Gallo, the reason of the failure of Gabrielli's standing was "the lack of a specific electoral campaign on him. The number of votes he got, 33, is less than we all expected, especially because half of the votes came from Sinti, half from others". Instead, some interviewees explain the failure with the "different idea of representation" that Sinti, because of their culture, allegedly have.

Another important aspect is highlighted by Gabrielli, who notices that there has been very little effort and interest from the local administration in the participation of Sinti and Roma in the local polity, even when decisions concerning directly the Sinti families had to be taken:

Sinti and Roma should, for sure, participate more actively, and this is indeed their responsibility. And it is true that when they are asked to participate, often, they don't. But it is also true that many times, they are not even asked, not even when issues discussed regard their own families.

Recently a new Sinti association (Nevo Drom) was founded in Bolzano. The organisation counts about 20 Sinti among its members. The main aim of the association is the promotion of cultural and social rights for Sinti in Italy, in particular through the recognition of Sinti and Roma as national linguistic minorities.

The Roma population, instead, does not hold Italian citizenship. They are all foreigners, therefore with no right to vote. In Bolzano, the position of "consigliere aggiunto" doesn't exist and the only institutional form of participation to local polity for foreigners is the "Consulta per l'Immigrazione", set up in 2004. The Consulta can express opinions and suggestions to the City Council on matters concerning immigration. When the first consulta was elected, no Roma stood for a seat.

## Summary

- At the last election, for the first time in Bolzano, a local Sinto stood for a seat at the City Council.
- although unsuccessful, the candidature of a Sinto promoted the mainstreaming of the Sinti and Roma issues in the political platform of the winning centre-left coalition
- nevertheless, the fact that the initiatives for the Sinti were included in the platform chapter dedicated to immigration is telling of the general attitude towards Sinti
- no institutional initiatives have been implemented to empower and facilitate Sinti political participation by local authorities

- Access to public housing and social benefit for Sinti and Roma are a central issue in the political debate
- the vast majority of articles which mention Roma and Sinti concerns issues of petty crime, begging and antisocial behaviour
- Roma and Sinti opinions hardly appear on local media
- Both Italian Sinti and foreign Roma set up some associations in recent years which are gradually building a public visibility for them.

## **MANTUA, A SINTO AT THE CITY COUNCIL**

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*Lorenzo Monasta*

### **Introduction**

In Mantua, the last local election was held on April 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005. For the first time in Italy, a member of the Sinti community, explicitly stating he was part of the community, was among the contenders for a seat at the city council. The administrative elections were limited to the municipal and borough levels. Seven were the contenders to the seat of city mayor, supported by coalitions or single parties, and 14 were the political parties participating at the municipal elections. Mantua has a population of 47.826 (December 2003). A total of 30,175 citizens voted, reaching 75.2% of the total population entitled to vote.

The two candidates – Fiorenza Brioni and Roberto Vassalle – who reached the second ballot (two weeks after the first round) were supported, respectively, by a centre-left coalition of parties (*Uniti nell'Ulivo, Comunisti Italiani, Verdi per la Pace, Italia dei Valori*) and a centre-right coalition (*Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale, Lega Nord, Unione dei Democratici Cristiani*).

For the last nine years, the mayor Gianfranco Burchiellaro, member of the Democrats of Left (DS), the same party of Fiorenza Brioni, ruled the town of Mantua. The DS, *Democratici di Sinistra*, in the last elections formed a single list with *La Margherita: Uniti nell'Ulivo*, which aspires to become the future Democratic Party. Roberto Vassalle, candidate of the *Casa delle Libertà* (the House of Freedom coalition), was a member of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, the party that after 1946 represented the fascist movement.

Fiorenza Brioni got 46% of the votes in the first round (13.478/30.175). Robert Vassalle, 37%. In the second round Brioni was elected mayor with 54% of the votes (13.475/25.336).

A Sinto, Yuri Del Bar, was elected city councillor for Rifondazione Comunista.

### **Roma and Sinti in Mantua**

No Italian Roma families and few families of foreign Roma (from Serbia and Romania) live in Mantua. The *Sinti* community counts 45 families, for a total of approximately 150/200 people. Most of the *Sinti* families live in mobile homes in the settlement of *Viale Learco Guerra*. Few families live on private land or in apartments.

### **Politicians and electoral platforms**

The fact that in Mantua the presence of Roma and Sinti groups is limited to the presence of the local Sinti community makes it more difficult to ride the fear of *nomads* and *nomads' camps* in the electoral campaign. The Sinti candidate, Yuri Del Bar, is a member of associations (*Opera Nomadi* and *Sucar Drom*) that have been working with municipal, provincial and regional institutions to build knowledge and positive interactions between the Sinti and the rest of the local community for ten years. The energy spent in Mantua by these associations produced the feeling that there is someone in town that knows about these issues enough to react to injurious campaigns. However, this does not mean that parties would easily take the Roma and Sinti issue on their side without the fear of losing votes.

For these reasons, none of the parties, a part from *Rifondazione Comunista*, included in their electoral platform any positive reference to local Sinti.

After the election, however, the new local government opened discussion with Yuri Del Bar which led to the inclusion in the coalition platform of a chapter on “Ethnic and linguistic minorities – Roma and Sinti”. In the platform, after a brief description of the Sinti community living in Mantua, the platform lists four main priority areas: 1. Extend and support the initiatives of cross-cultural mediation and facilitate their dissemination; 2. Work towards the closing down of the nomad camp and for the development of micro residential areas. 3. Implement projects to reduce the problem of unemployment. 4. Support a culture of peaceful ethnic relations.

Differently from other towns, in the last three municipal elections in Mantua, *Rifondazione* was not in the centre-left coalition, and had its own candidate to the seat of city mayor (Matteo Gaddi). Yuri Del Bar, member of the *Sinti* community, was an independent contender to a seat of city councillor in the list of *Rifondazione Comunista*. *Rifondazione Comunista*, with 8.05% of the votes, managed to get three councillors elected.

### **Media representation of Roma and Sinti during the electoral campaign**

The content analysis of the local newspapers for the 30 days previous to the first round of municipal elections was conducted on *La Gazzetta di Mantova* and *La Voce di Mantova*. *La Voce di Mantova* is considered more right wing oriented and in February 2006 its Director, Davide Martellini, had to resign because he was accused of anti-Semitism for articles published on *La Voce*.

*La Gazzetta di Mantova* published 13 articles mentioning the words: *nomadi*, *sinti*, *rom* or *zingari*. Five mention the word *nomadi* (“three nomads under trial”, “fire in the nomads’ camp”, “five nomads arrested”, “a nomad girl looked like her daughter“, “nomads in the foresight”) and one the word *zingari* in the title (“two ‘secret’ videos show the Gypsy guardians”).

Out of the 13 articles, nine were published on the national pages. The first article was about a fire that destroyed a camp in Foggia (a regular camp built by Caritas ten years before) and hosting foreign Roma. The author writes about *nomadi* and *rom*. The second article is short and reports on five *nomads*, members of a family accused, in *Secondigliano* (Naples), of kidnapping an 11 years old *nomadic* girl (title: “Five nomads arrested – for kidnapping a little girl”). Seven articles are about the case of Denise, a three years old girl from Mazzara de Vallo (Sicily) disappeared one year before. In Milan, a video made with a cell phone by a private security guard showed a girl with a group of Roma. The mother of Denise was sure the girl was her daughter. This was one of the major media cases in which Roma were accused of kidnapping gypsy children. Camps and settlements were searched in Northern Italy. DNA analysis was conducted on several Roma children. No serious evidence ever demonstrated that the girl in the video was Denise, and the “Gypsy track” seemed frankly mostly motivated by prejudice. In this series of articles, the terms used were *zingari*, *nomadi*, *giostrai*, *rom* and *sinti*. Denise was never found and the most important person under investigation remains her stepsister. In an article published on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March by the title “The hallucinations of a reality show”, the journalist states:

There is no logic, it does not make sense, but it was on TV, it was written in the newspaper and the mind becomes a crazy sponge in which every girl with big eyes becomes the victim of a Gypsy

The remaining articles were published in the local news section. Three referred to the same story: two *zingarelle* (young Gypsy girls) were caught by the police while trying to get into the apartment of the member of a rich entrepreneurial family of Mantua. The media attention to this story and the tone of the articles appears disproportionate to the facts presented.

In the 30 days prior to the elections, no articles were found on *La Gazzetta* about the candidature of Del Bar or portraying a positive or neutral representation of Roma and Sinti.

*La Voce di Mantova* also published 13 articles on Roma and Sinti related issues. Out of these, seven are letters, and two of these letters are by the Sinti candidate, Yuri Del Bar.

The first letter, by Del Bar, was published on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March and was a reply to Paolo Moschini, a member of the *Lega Nord* party. The title of the letter is: “To understand each other we first need to know each other – Too many prejudices against the Gypsies of via Learco Guerra”. The letter is followed by a comment of the vice-director of *La Voce*, Romano Gandossi, stating:

It is not enough to eat bread and salami to become friends and know your world. You should put your effort not to have Sinti and Roma boys, adolescents and children in the streets begging and selling roses avoiding school.

The tones of the replies to Del Bar are similar to this one. *Nomads* are accused of not producing anything good, of begging, living on benefit, exploiting and ill-treating their children.

One article, published on April 1<sup>st</sup>, is on the press conference held by Del Bar and Matteo Gaddi. The title is: “*Alarm from the nomads: we are being discriminated – Under accusation the road signs forbidding the parking and stop of Roma and Sinti*”.

The remaining four articles were published in the local pages. The only term used in these articles is *nomadi*. The first was published on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March (“*Trickeries to old people, two nomads caught – the couple is suspected of other strokes*”). In the article, it is stated: “they are two settled nomads”. The second and third articles were published the 15<sup>th</sup> of March and are on the same issue (front page and page 13): “*Grabs the thieves from the neck – 30 years old fisherman from Verona forces couple of nomads to give back the ill-gotten gains*”. The strong reaction of the fisherman against the nomad thieves is what seems to be the core of the news.

The last article, published the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, refers to the case of the two Roma girls caught by the police on the roof. Also in this case the focus is on the age of the *nomad* girls, on the fact that the 13 years old girl was pregnant and both were too young to be prosecuted.

### **Political participation by Roma and Sinti**

None of the people interviewed for this research could point at any institutional intervention to encourage the participation of Roma and Sinti to local elections, neither as voters nor as candidates.

In terms of stimulating the participation of the Sinti community, as voters, the Sinti candidate and the Sinti associations supporting him made all the efforts. Two main problems were encountered. The first was related to the lack of a tradition of active participation in elections, mainly due to lack of interest and distrust. The second problem was illiteracy. In these

elections voters had to express their preference by making a cross on the party and writing the name of the candidate on the side.

Considering that the campaign in the Sinti settlement had been very strong, and that people were encouraged to participate, and free transportation service was available, the main problem in these elections was illiteracy. This limited the votes of Del Bar to about half of the votes he could actually get. Probably, more work and more time had to be devoted to the technical aspect of how to vote and the political aspect of why to vote.

Besides, the community perceived the fact of having a Sinti candidate as very positive. The fact that Del Bar was bringing the Sinti issue up in a very explicit way, gave a sense of pride to most of the community. The only jokes were on the poster carrying the slogan: "Sinto is beautiful" with a picture of Mr Del Bar. The second electoral leaflet was entitled "Diversity enriches everyone" and listed the electoral priorities of the candidate.



A key element to point out is that Del Bar despite presenting himself as a Sinto candidate, covers in his manifesto broader issues of general interest, with an emphasis on the importance of supporting families.

The idea of a Sinto candidate to be presented in the 2005 campaign grew in the Sinti community and associations since 2001. The decision that Del Bar would be the candidate was made later. Mr Del Bar had been working as a cross-cultural mediator since 1994. *Rifondazione Comunista* was the only party to show any interest to this candidature.

The general feeling was that his candidature was a political move to give voice to the Sinti, but that he actually had no chance of being elected. In the previous elections, only one candidate in the lists of *Rifondazione* had been elected in the city council.

In general, the reaction to Del Bar's candidature, as confirmed by Nicola Corradini (a journalist of *La Gazzetta*) and Mauro Vinci (a new elected councillor of *Forza Italia*), was neither negative nor positive, with most people external to his entourage feeling a sense of diffidence, tolerating the Sinti "as long as they stay in their own place".

For Mattia Palazzi, provincial coordinator of Arci and city councillor responsible for welfare and social policy:

By presenting himself as an independent in the list of RC, Yuri rightly stressed his role as representative of the interests of the Sinti of Mantua. In general, apart from a few idiots, there was not a great deal of interest, neither positive nor negative, in the city for his candidature. No major contestation or protest marked the fact that he was the first nomadic person participating as a candidate at a local election

Mr Del Bar was the third elected in the lists of *Rifondazione* with 64 votes, half of which from members of the Sinti community.

One of the advantages of participating with *Rifondazione* was that many voters, unlike other parties, tend to vote for the party without explicitly writing the name of the candidate. At the end of the election, all the votes to the party without explicit preference to a candidate get redistributed to the candidates according to the percentage of preferences. With this redistribution, Mr Del Bar was elected with approximately 1100 votes.

In the past, during the electoral campaign, candidates of several parties used to approach the Sinti associations and ask about priorities and needs. In most cases, however, these approaches were exclusively opportunistic.

As Mr Vinci (a new elected councillor of *Forza Italia*) pointed out, he was not surprised a Sinto was a candidate in the list of *Rifondazione*: "a member of the Sinti community could probably only be a candidate of *Rifondazione Comunista*". This idea that minority rights are an issue of a restricted political side, and not an issue to be considered crosswise is a serious limit for a constructive discourse on human rights, anti-racism and socio-economic integration.

Since the elections, it is a general opinion (including his own) that Mr Del Bar should have been more active and more prepared in facing other than Sinti issues. Members of

segregated minority groups can end up having a particular, and sometimes limited, perspective of the life and problems of their own town.

But, as Mr Palazzi argues:

It is crucial that the City Council represents everyone and I find understandable that when someone from a previously not represented group get elected he/she may focus attention on the interest of his/her community, however it is important that this action initially focused on a specific set of interests begins to link and relate to the plurality of interests and actions that involve the whole local community

For Mr Del Bar, other difficulties are related to the conflict between his technical role as cross-cultural mediator and his political role as city councillor.

However, as pointed out by Carlo Berini, president of the *Sucar Drom* association, it needs time to understand the administrative mechanism and fully master the role of councillor. The election of Mr Del Bar needs to be considered as a first fundamental step, the opening of a new path.

### **Summary**

- In the local newspapers, we did not notice any positive initiative to portrait a positive or neutral image of the Sinti community. The feeling is of a great distance between the journalists (and not only) and the Roma and Sinti world in general.
- When Roma and Sinti were involved, crime related news was usually treated using tones and space disproportionate to the actual facts.
- The voice of the Roma and Sinti, apart from the letters of the candidate, received little attention.
- The candidature of a local Sinto is the result of the work done by local Sinti associations in promoting a positive imagine of the community.
- No initiatives have been implemented to empower and facilitate Sinti political participation by local authorities. Sinti associations mobilised their own resources in order to support Mr Del Bar.

## **MILAN: “NOMADS” OUT OF TOWN**

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*Nando Sigona, Lorenzo Monasta and Andreea R. Torre*

### **Introduction**

Milan is the main city in northern Italy, and is located in the plains of Lombardy, the most populated and economically developed of Italian regions. The city proper has about 1.3 million inhabitants (2004), but when including the surrounding metropolitan area the population of the conurbation totals more than 4.5 million. The city is administratively divided in 9 zones (*zone di decentramento*), each of which elects its zonal council composed of 41 councilors.

The local election for the renewal of the Mayor, the City and Zone Councils were held on the 28th and 29th of May 2006. Letizia Moratti, candidate for the House of Freedoms, won with 52% (353,000) of the votes. The centre-left coalition led by the former prefect Bruno Ferrante obtained 47% (319,000) of the votes. One of the lists supporting Ferrante was led by the Nobel Prize for literature Dario Fo (*Uniti con Dario Fo per Milano*). Two councillor candidates in the list led by Fo focused their campaign on the improvement of the situation of Roma and Sinti in Milan. No one of them was elected.

### **Roma and Sinti in Milan**

According to figures provided by the local branch of Opera Nomadi, in the territory of Milan there are 3585 Roma and Sinti, both Italian and foreign nationals. 1580 of them live in 9 municipal campsites. 6 out of 9 campsites are inhabited by Italian Roma (530 Harvati Roma and 160 Abruzzo Roma). The remaining two thousands live:

- in squatted public areas or buildings (1085), especially Roma from Romania;
- in squatted private areas or buildings (110)
- in private land for agricultural use but used as residence (680)
- in areas assigned temporary to some Sinti families by the local authority (130).

### **Media representation of Roma and Sinti during the electoral campaign**

The media analysis was conducted on *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*. They are respectively the two most read national newspapers in Italy and locally in Milan where they publish a rich local section.

Between the April 25<sup>th</sup> and May 28<sup>th</sup>, *Il Corriere della Sera* published 24 articles on the local pages mentioning the words: *nomadi*, *zingari*, *rom* and *sinti*.

An article, published on April 25<sup>th</sup>, is about a one month old girl who died in the camp of *Via Triboniano*. The causes of the death are not clear. Another article (13 April 06) is about a *sans papier* died while trying to take some clothes from a container for the collection of second hand clothes. In the article mention is made to other two similar deaths, one of which was of a 25 years old *nomad* woman.

In the same period two articles reports on the disappearance of a dog allegedly by some non-EU migrants which led “the police to organise a series of inspections in local nomad camps”.

It is remarkable the coverage of this news compared to the very little attention paid to the death of the little girl in the camp of *Via Triboniano*.

On May 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, three articles were published on the desecration of a local Jewish cemetery. Forty graves were damaged, but no messages or political signs were left. The same night, in the nearby camp of *Via Triboniano*, the Romanian Roma were having a party. With no evidence, the three articles suggest that the Roma could be responsible for this act. The link was suggested by a police detective who stated: “Maybe someone hid in the cemetery when the police arrived, and later he gave vent on the graves”. Instead of looking for those responsible for the damages, the municipal councillor for security, Guido Manca, stated: “It would not be the first time that nomads create problems in cemeteries. Some citizens already denounced [...] strange activities of stolen and re-sold flowers”. The only contrary voice is that of Raffaele Barki, a Jewish man, who stated: “The Roma of the nearby camp are not responsible for sure. It is clearly an obscene act that should be placed in the area of prejudice”.

Four articles are about *nomads* caught stealing or about people complaining because of robberies allegedly by *nomadi*, *rom* or *zingari*.

Two articles ( 25/4 and 19/5) report on the local elections and the standing candidates. One mentions the candidature of Dijana Pavlovic, a Romni born in Serbia of Italian nationality, wrongly saying that she is a “Romanian nomad who has been living in Milan for many years”. The second is about the conflict between the two mayoral contenders, Moratti and Ferrante and at some point the journalist says: “apart from major public works, the main problems in town are: traffic, pollution, taxes, nomads, formal education and research”.

Four articles are about cultural activities in town. Two are about concerts and Romani music. One is about a literary contest, where the third prize was given to a clerk from Milan who had written a novel “*identifying himself with the dreams of a Gypsy child forced to beg*”. The last one, published on May 28<sup>th</sup>, describes the experience of a journalist who went on a promotional but expensive city tour and she reports the words of the tourists’ guide: “*Ah, be careful to your wallets: as you can see, there are lots of Gypsies around*”.

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, an article reports on a seminar on “Rom and Sinti children and youth at school” and sums up the discussion saying that 500 “*nomad* children go to school in Milan and that they shouldn’t be isolated and marginalized” and that more effort should be done for the integration of Roma and Sinti children in public schools.

In the same period *La Repubblica* published 30 articles mentioning the terms *zingaro*, *nomade*, *rom* and *sinto*. The word *nomade* or *nomadi* is used in 19 articles. *Rom* and *zingaro/zingari/zingare* are used, each, in 10 articles. The word *sinti* was used just once.

Out of these 30 articles, seven are on cultural initiatives: mainly concerts by Romani bands and multicultural events. One reports on a monologue on Italian emigrants’ experiences in Switzerland in the ’50s and ’60s; at that time the Italians were commonly called *cincali* (Gypsies).

On April 25<sup>th</sup>, *La Repubblica* reports on the death of the one month old girl in the camp of *Via Triboniano*. The article is supported by an interview with Mr Pagani, deputy president of Opera Nomadi Milano.

Two articles, published on May 13<sup>th</sup>, one on the local pages and one on the national pages, are about the story of the *sans papier* who died trying to take some clothes from a container for the collection of second hand clothes. As for *Il Corriere*, the journalist mentions the case of a “25 years old nomad woman” who died in a similar way in 2004. On May 16<sup>th</sup>, a reader writes a letter to the newspaper saying:

And I get even more angry because I realise that if the person who dies is “only” a Gypsy, an immigrant from the third world, and on top of all a *sans papier*, nobody cares at all.

Eight are the articles about the desecration of the Jewish cemetery citing the words *nomadi*, *zingari*, *sinti* and *rom*. Even in this case, however, the tones are slightly better than the one we found in the articles published by *Il Corriere*. In three articles the authors mention the detectives’ idea that the *nomads* of *Via Triboniano* could be involved. No evidence is ever

brought to confirm this hypothesis. The first article (17/05: 19) is titled: “For the detectives it could have been a vandal act by the nomads of the nearby camp”.

The same day, on the local pages, an article states:

There was a party at the nomad camp, one of those nights in which one jumps over the fence of the small lake for sports fishing nearby to steal some trout. The Gypsies enter the cemetery often. They use it as a toilet, take the water from the fountain with the copper pot with two handles. The one that Jews hold with their right hand to wash the left, and vice versa. A gesture that separates life and death. The fear is that they might have been responsible for the desecration, even though in those who have discrimination marked in the soul there can't be any desire of summary justice. Today a group of nomads got together in a meeting outside the fence, sitting in circle [...] At least half million Gypsies died during the Nazi persecution.

A few lines later, an article's headline says: “*In Italy racism is growing – Alert*”, the article states that a report by the Council of Europe shows how in Italy discrimination, prejudice and xenophobic phenomena are growing against extra communitarians, nomads and Muslims.

Gad Lerner, a well-known Italian Jewish journalist, in his commentary on the event on the first page argues that if the investigation finds that some drunk *nomads* are responsible for the destruction of the graves, “we will find ourselves in front of a paradox”:

How can we forget that the Gypsies themselves ended up in the gas chambers together with the Jews, and still now they are victims of hostility, which is difficult to defeat? Of an integration rejected by too many?

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, the desecration of the cemetery is again in the national and local news. The main difference in the coverage is that in the local news a Romanian Rom has a chance to speak out and to state their innocence.

We are innocent. We respect dead people and cimiteries. Everytime something happens in this area, immediately someone points his/her finger against us. That's too simpe.

### **“The Gypsy issue” in the electoral campaing**

On May 19<sup>th</sup>, *Il Corriere* reports a statement by Mr Salvini, a member of the *Lega Nord* party and MEP: “Nomad camps? No, only transit areas. Stable settlements must be dismantled.” Moreover, Salvini invites Letizia Moratti, the centre-right candidate, “to expel” the four thousands *nomads* living in town. His argument is based on the *nomadic* axiom:

Nomad camps must be only transit areas and not places where people abusively build their houses and villas and where families live for more than 30 years.

The same day, reporting on Salvini's statement, the headline of *Quotidiano.net*, an online newspaper linked to three broadsheet papers - *Il Resto del Carlino*, *Il Giorno* and *La Nazione* – is: «Lega attacks: 'Expel the nomads from Milan'». The article is accompanied by an online poll on “nomad camps: what solution?” (see below).

<b>Nomad camps: what solutions? (280 voters)</b>	
They all must be dismantled	64.3%
Camps should be under stricter control	18.2%
The problem can't be solved by evicting residents	17.5%

To frame the Lega Nord's position in a larger picture, it may help to recall Salvini's comments on the march his party and others organised during the electoral campaign “to defend Milan from the Islamic extremists”:

The risk for Milan is to end up in the hands of Islamists loyal to the Jihad, nomads dedicated to stealing, the Chinese and their unfair competition against our commercial activities (*Il Corriere*, May 18).

During the electoral campaign there were some tensions in the centre-right coalition regarding the ways to tackle the “problema nomadi”. Letizia Moratti, who promised a new approach to social issues, was accused of softness by fellow coalition members and ambiguity by political adversaries.

For Mr Penati, centre-left president of the Provincial Authority and a vocal person on Roma and Sinti issues in Milan, “Letizia Moratti would like to represent a discontinuity but this is not permitted to her because the men behind her candidature are the same that were behind Mr Albertini [the previous mayor]” (*Il Giornale*, 24/07/06).

During the electoral campaign the political debate around Roma and Sinti focused almost exclusively on nomad camps and, in particular, on a possible relocation of them in the province of Milan. The centre-left summed up its position with two keywords: solidarity and legality. As a representative of the coalition put it:

we want to experiment a model of institutional interaction to implement initiatives that guarantee legality , avoid any forms of discrimination of the nomads and facilitate their access to social services

This approach find a partial agreement in some sectors of the centre-right, although as the deputy mayor of Milan, Mr Decorato, made clear:

That's alright. If the Provincial Authority wants to build small camps in the hinterland of Milan, there is no problem. If it wants to spread 150, 200 nomads out of 400 living in Triboniano in the province is ok. But we don't want the problem back to Milan.

Interviewed by a local newspaper, Mr Ferrante, clarifies his position:

The case of the nomad camp of Triboniano should never happen again. Camps like that only generate uneasiness to the residents and are inhuman for those who live there. Better to have small reception spaces, involving the no-profit in the social and cultural mediation.

A more positive view of Roma and Sinti was presented in the manifesto of *Uniti per Dario Fo*, although, considering limited support of the list, it didn't change substantially the terms of the political debate.

A group of NGOs and associations promoted a document "Milan, a city for everyone" which was publicly presented to the leader of the centre-left coalition. Point 4 of the document whose focus is the promotion of proactive policy initiatives on immigration, proposes: "To build a reception system for refugees and asylum seekers not based on emergency and to move away from the logic of the nomad camps".

In the zone council election, Fabrizio Casavola stood for councillor with a platform elaborated together with the inhabitants of the Romani village of via Idro<sup>17</sup>. The project is an interesting attempt to build a shared platform, but he also didn't get enough votes to be elected.

Maurizio Pagani, deputy president of Opera Nomadi Milano and a candidate himself in Fo's list, remarks how in the centre-left coalition there was a tendency to an charity-based approach all focused on the latest emergency instead of taking into account also long established communities.

Overall, it seems that the debate got monopolised by the most visible situations, like that of Triboniano, with very poor interest for a more long term approach based on non emergency responses and that takes into account not just the late comers (mainly Romanian Roma), but also long established communities.

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<sup>17</sup> Material is available on Casavola's blog: <http://www.sivola.net/dblog/>

## Political participation of Roma and Sinti: obstacles and possibilities

There is a total lack of communication between the institutions and the Roma. Everybody would gain from looking for solutions through dialogue

Dijana Pavlovic is a Serbian Romni with Italian passport, an actress and a cross cultural mediator, she stood for a city councillor seat at the election, her list was led by Dario Fo and affiliated to the centre-left candidate Mr Ferrante.

I've never been actively involved with politics before this. I stood for the election because it was important to show a positive imagine of Roma, to say ' we are here'. In Milan the situation is really critical for Roma. And there is no way of solving it because there is no political will, because for the rightwing parties in government it is useful this way.

To confirm this point, it can be said that all main centre-right parties (Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord) - despite the fact that they have been leading the local government for the last decades - campaigned against *nomad camps* during the election period.

The election of Ms Pavlovic didn't go well, she wasn't elected but her presence contributed to raise to some extent the profile of the debate on Roma and Sinti and for the first time, a Romani person was allowed to contribute to this debate.

This point is confirmed by Giorgio Bezzecchi, an Italian Rom and president of Opera Nomadi Milano, who argues that Pavlovic's candidature was very useful especially to improve the quality of the public debate, "when she was participating at public meetings and political debates on tv, the Roma and Sinti issues got surely a better and a more respectful treatment".

The failure of Ms Pavlovic's candidature has several reasons. As the candidate put it:

I don't think Italian Roma really understood the importance of voting. This was our main mistake: not being able to communicate effectively with them. Moreover there was the problem of illiteracy and of the voting system that is very bureaucratic.

Moreover, Mr Bezzecchi suggests that in order to promote Roma political participation "you can't just rely on the voluntary sector [...] and as far as I know, no institutional initiatives has ever been implemented to enhance Romani participation". Regarding Ms Pavlovic's experience, he also suggests that "more time was needed. Her campaign didn't manage to change Roma and Sinti's attitude towards voting"

Ms Pavlovic thinks that the voluntary sector has its part of responsibility for the poor participation of Roma and Sinti to local polity. “There is a need – she argues - for an approach that goes beyond charity”. She explains this point more in details saying:

Some associations seem too much inclined to mediation with local authorities because of the funding dependency. The situation in camps is dramatic and there is a need for courageous initiatives. Romani voice is always mediated by associations. If there is a violation of human rights you can't simply ignore it, you can't negotiate other people's rights.

While the lack of initiatives to promote participation by local authorities and, to some extent, local NGOs is an important aspect to consider when discussing the causes of Roma and Sinti poor involvement at political level, it is also crucial to take into account, as some interviewees suggested, the long years of illusions and promises by politicians that didn't bring to any significant improvement in the quality of life of Italian Roma and Sinti. The words of a Romani resident of via Idro sum this up well:

They used to come here with vans full of pasta and tomato juice. They came this time as well. They promised that ten days after the election the maintenance work we have been long waiting will finally started. The ten days passed and I haven't seen anyone working in the camp.

## Summary

- The transfer, relocation or closure of nomad camps was a key topic in pre-electoral public debate
- The presence of a Romani candidate contributed, although to a limited extent, to make the debate on Roma and Sinti more issue oriented
- No institutional initiatives have been implemented to promote Romani political participation
- Italian Roma and Sinti have been long neglected as institutional attention has focused on newly arrived Romanian Roma and illegal settlements
- Disaffection for electoral process can't be addressed focusing only on Romani communities as its reason lies also in local authorities and associations' attitude and behaviour.
- Despite the extensive media coverage of Roma and Sinti news very little space is dedicated to Romani voices

## **ROME: NO VOICE FOR THE ROMA**

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*Andreea Torre and Nando Sigona*

### **Introduction**

Rome is the largest city in Italy covering an area of 1,290 square kilometres. The city is administratively divided in 20 boroughs (*municipi*) and the population is of 2,669,873 people at 2005. The local election for the renewal of the Mayor, the City and Municipality Councils were held in Rome on the 28th and 29th of May 2006. The number of voters was of 1.545.085, representing the 65,98 % of the electoral body.

At the election, there were 12 candidates to the Mayor job and 36 party lists. The two main candidates were Walter Veltroni, incumbent mayor supported by a coalition of forces led by *l'Unione* (The Union), and Giovanni Alemanno, prominent member of the National Alliance and Minister for Agriculture in the second Berlusconi cabinet, representing the *Casa delle Liberta* (The House of Freedoms).

Veltroni, former national leader of the Democrats of the Left (DS), won the 2006 election with 921.491 votes (61,4%), against the 556.176 votes (37,1%) gained by Alemanno.

### **Roma and Sinti in Rome**

In Rome there are 35 large Roma settlements scattered in most of the twenty municipalities, with an estimate population of 6.400 people, most of them coming from the Balkan area, only 5 out 35 settlements are inhabited by Italian Roma (445 residents), representing 7% of the total. In addition to the 35 camps there are other smaller settlements (*baraccopoli*) where about 5,000 Romanian Roma live. There are also about 2,000 Italian Roma and 1,500 foreign Roma who live in houses. In total, the number of Roma living in Rome is estimated about 15,000 people. Among the foreign Roma, many have no, or expired, leaves to remain (*permesso di soggiorno*). The Italian Roma, Sinti and Caminanti hold Italian citizenship<sup>18</sup>.

Most of the camps are located in the East part of the capital, mainly in the Municipalities V, VI, VII and VIII. But some of the camps with very critical sanitary, infrastructural and logistical problems are located in the Municipalities XI, XV and XX<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> See Opera Nomadi Sezione Lazio (<http://archivioromanolil.blog.tiscali.it/jz2674929/>)

<sup>19</sup> Source: Comune di Roma, "Piano di Intervento finalizzato all'integrazione delle comunità rom/sinti"

## Politicians and electoral platforms

Roma played an important role in the last electoral campaign and occupied a tiny but relevant space in the party platforms of the two main candidates for the Mayor job in Rome. Indeed, Walter Veltroni and Gianni Alemanno addressed the “problema nomadi” in a number of circumstances during the months preceding the election.

Similarly to the language used by the journalists, the two main coalitions and their candidates employed mainly the term “nomads”. In their electoral platforms there is no direct reference to Italian Roma or Sinti or any specific initiative related to the “nomads” other than in relation to housing, “campi nomadi” and security in the city. In their public statements, they refer to “nomads”, implying immigrants, and more frequently irregular immigrants. In both cases the main issues of concern are related to the eviction of the residents from authorised and unauthorised camps, the redevelopment of those areas and, in the case of Veltroni, the resettlement of some of the residents in newly built areas at the very periphery of Rome<sup>20</sup>.. As a journalist of “Il Manifesto” observes, “Roma have been discursively incorporated into a preexisting rhetorical frame, that of the “baraccati” (shanks’ dwellers) which has been in the public debate for over 40 years”.

In a report published in “Il Messagero” (22.05.06), Alemanno states: “this city has become a safe haven for the nomads of all Europe. We need to invert this tendency by evicting people from illegal settlements and enforcing the law”. In response to this accusation, Veltroni recounts among the merits of his previous government, which are listed in 70 bullet points, how in the last five years he managed to dismantle 9 old Roma camps and to resettle the population of 3.350 people in other newly equipped authorised “villages”<sup>21</sup>. It must be noted that he does not mention in which areas of the city those people were resettled and how the transfer was conducted. Moreover, Veltroni argues that “his cabinet will continue in this direction, hoping also in the help of the national government, because such realities are dramatically linked to the clandestine immigration”.

The “nomads’ camps” are among the priorities of the candidate Alemanno and his coalition. His platform directly relates the current presence of Roma people to issues of (lack of) security in the city. He proposes compulsory identifications cards for each “nomad” and their census by the local authority. Moreover he proposes the clearance of unauthorised camps

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<sup>20</sup> Veltroni, “Programma Amministrativo 2006-2011”, p. 26  
[http://www.veltroniroma.it/allegatidef/programma%20master\\_totalesito599%7BF411F74F-11E2-4051-9BD5-475D1999482D%7D.pdf](http://www.veltroniroma.it/allegatidef/programma%20master_totalesito599%7BF411F74F-11E2-4051-9BD5-475D1999482D%7D.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Veltroni, “Settanta motivi per essere orgogliosi”, p.16, point 41  
<http://www.veltroniroma.it/romaoggi/70motivi/70motivi.pdf>

and the progressive removal of the authorised camps from the city. In this way, he says, “Rome would lose its attraction for the nomads” (Il Messaggero, 07.05.06).

Alemanno’s statements are often rhetorically constructed around the term “nomadi” and what this should imply in the sense of temporariness of stay. The following quotation is a typical example of this approach which is widely spread in Italy: “If they are nomads they should come and go, not stay here for 20 years. [...] And if they want to stay, in that case they must accept the rules for living in Rome”<sup>22</sup>. In another statement reported in the local press he suggests the relocation of nomad population in short-stay campsites outside the city where “nomads should be allowed to stay only for short periods of time and not for entire generations as it is happening now” (Il Messaggero, 27.05.06).

There is, therefore, on both sides the will to get rid of, or to make “disappear” – a verb used quite frequently - those sites that are becoming too visible in the capital. The stress on “disappearance” is telling. It shows how there is no interest in a more articulated process of resettlement and regeneration of the areas including the Roma themselves in the process.

During the electoral campaign, the “nomads” appeared also on some large billboards commissioned by the both main coalitions. Early in May 2006, it appeared a poster by Alemanno in which Veltroni was accused of lack of intervention against illegality:



«In Rome, 34 squats, 106 nomad camps and no eviction! Veltroni hurts Rome”

A few days later, the parties supporting Veltroni replied with the poster below:

<sup>22</sup> Il Foglio elettronico, 19.03.06 <http://www.impress.it/stampanotizia.asp?idnotizia=17944>



«New small lies from Alemanno. While in Rome in five years 8,000 people were moved out of illegal settlements and tens of Romani camps have been closed. Berlusconi's government, of which Alemanno was a minister, allowed uncontrolled arrivals without rules and border controls».

This attitude appears even more blatant at the borough level, where candidates for borough councils mention the Roma issue only in relation to the removal of existing camps or to the mobilisation of local inhabitants against the resettlement of some Roma in their territory. For instance, in the XX Municipality, leaflets were spread around by the Forza Italia party accusing Veltroni for the resettlement of 750 "nomads" from the VI Municipality and for offering free energy, water, hitting, transport to them, "instead of spending public money for local taxpayers" (see below).



#### AVVISO ALLA CITTADINANZA

Dal 23 gennaio 2006 il Sindaco Veltroni e la sua sinistra ha istituito il servizio di **Trasporto Scolastico** (scuola bus) per i nomadi di Via Tiberina, a spese dei cittadini onesti!

Una vettura di 30 posti provvede, tutti i giorni, al trasporto presso le Scuole di Via Baccano, Via Brembio e Via Stazione di Prima Porta.

Alla sinistra non basta aver rovinato i nostri quartieri con il trasferimento di 750 nomadi dal VI Municipio a Prima Porta, ma ora gli fornisce gratis anche tutti i servizi (mezzi di trasporto, posti riservati nelle scuole, mensa scolastica, nettezza urbana, acqua, luce e riscaldamento).

#### TANTO..... PAGHIAMO NOI!

Dopo le tante promesse elettorali, ecco come la sinistra ha migliorato i nostri quartieri, che diventano ogni giorno sempre più invivibili.

Noi di FORZA ITALIA ci siamo battuti per portare il **Trasporto Scolastico** a Valle Muricana, mentre la sinistra, senza vergogna alcuna, continua a premiare, sempre, quelli che non pagano le tasse.

CITTADINI.....RIFLETTETE QUANDO ANDATE A .....VOTARE!

Il Coordinatore di Forza Italia  
XX Municipio  
Gianni GIACOMINI

Via della Giustiniana 204 - Tel. 06.33615428 - 06. 33625200

In interviews and statements released to the press, politicians never mention what happens once campsites are cleared, what happens to the people living in there, where exactly are they moved etc. The only preoccupation that seems to shine through their statements is related to the forthcoming EU enlargement which will make things even more difficult. As the Prefect of Rome, Achille Serra, states: "[...] most of the irregulars are Romanians and with Romania's accession in the EU, we will not be able to remove them anymore" (Leggo, 05.05.06).

As a commentator suggested:

The divergence of policies, of initiatives, of attitudes between the opposition and the ruling coalition in Rome is getting thinner when Roma are concerned»<sup>23</sup>. Although there are some little difference in the public discourse, they seem to have reached consensus around two points: increase control over 'nomads' and their spatial marginalisation.

<sup>23</sup> Daniele, U. (2006), Spostati/sgomberati. Discriminazioni, vecchie politiche e nuove retoriche: [http://host.uniroma3.it/laboratori/osservatoriorazzismo/note.php?subaction=showfull&id=1149008848&archive=&start\\_from=&ucat=4&](http://host.uniroma3.it/laboratori/osservatoriorazzismo/note.php?subaction=showfull&id=1149008848&archive=&start_from=&ucat=4&)

### **Media representation of Roma and Sinti during the electoral campaign.**

The content analysis of print media in Rome was conducted on two newspapers chosen among those of largest circulation in the city: Il Messaggero and Leggo. The former is a daily national broadsheet paper based in Rome with a large section dedicated to the Italian capital. It was established in 1878 and it is distributed in 300,000 copies daily. The latter is a free newspaper distributed in about 1 million copies daily in several Italian cities. It publishes a Rome edition distributed in 220.000 copies daily. It reaches a significant and variegated proportion of the population and focuses on events happening in Rome. Both newspapers can be located within the centre of the political spectrum. As an interviewee put it, «Il Messaggero historically tends to support the ruling coalition».

The two newspapers published a total of 25 articles on issues somehow related to Roma people in Rome in the month preceding the local elections. Of those, 11 were published by Leggo and 14 by Il Messaggero. While all articles are located in the internal part of the newspapers - mainly in the “Cronaca” section - it is interesting to notice that on Il Messaggero, all the articles but two, are referred to, often with large titles and photographs, also on the first page.

#### *Who are they talking of?*

The articles mainly refer to Roma and Sinti by using the term “nomadi”. Only by reading the article it is sometimes possible to identify which groups they are referring to. Italian Roma and Sinti never appear in these articles. This is an important point on which we will come back later when presenting the views of local NGOs and support groups. Left aside the fact that the term “nomadi” implies a characteristic, that of having an itinerant lifestyle and being without a fixed abode which in most of the cases does not apply to the people is used for, this category is also lacking in any kind of national or ethnic connotation. Indeed only in few cases, the writer clarify if he/she is referring to foreigners or Italians, irregular migrants or regular residents, Romanian, Kosovo or Bosnian Roma. The word “Rom”, instead, is used only in 9 of the 25 articles, in most of the cases together with, or as a synonymous of, “nomadi”.

#### *What are they talking of?*

What emerges quite clearly, is an overall negative attitude based on commonsensical and stereotypical knowledge. This attitude both generates and reinforces an already widespread negative public opinion towards Roma. Indeed, most of the articles present stories of petty

crime, begging, disturbance to *locals*, unauthorised settlements in different areas of the city or evictions from unauthorised settlements.

11 articles, in particular, deal with issues related to “campi nomadi”. Such issues were central in the discussion among the two main candidates over the electoral campaign period. Both candidates frame those issues as “problems” which must be dealt with and solved by the new elected Mayor.

6 out of the 25 articles, instead, tackle the issue of begging with a particular focus on the behaviour of Romani mothers which allegedly exploit their children. Sometimes the articles even question the parental relationship between mother and child. Most of these articles denounce the “irresponsibility” of Romani mothers who take their little babies with them on the street. In particular, Leggo carried on a campaign, supported with photographs, on a Romani woman who was on the street to beg with a 14 days old baby, which led to the intervention of the municipal social services. In all these cases, parents are blamed for their behaviour towards their children but no reference is made to the socio-economic conditions in which they live or to the stigma attached to these people which often make impossible for them to find a regular job.

8 articles talk of the Roma with reference to their involvement in petty crimes.

The only positive article features a family which managed to leave the camp where they were living following the participation of one of their daughters in a film directed by an Italian Sinti filmmaker (Tonino Zangardi). Even in this case, the successful story of this Romani family, which managed to successfully “integrate”, is presented in contrast with the rest of Romani population living in Rome.

Moreover, even when a more positive image of Romani people is put forward, this goes together with a different process of stereotyping which portrait them as guardians, in a timeless present, of a millenary tradition of nomadic lifestyle, dance and music.

They dance as gods [...], they sway/wave, sing and seems happy here in Vasca Navale .  
Their movements seem to say: there is no time, no hurry, there will be more time later for all the rest. (Il Messaggero, 25.05.06)

Below the writer is talking of a Romnì which helps people coming out of the train station to grab a taxi:

A thousand year of nomadic life taught this people that an exhausted traveler looks forward to put down his luggage and sit as quickly as possible in a car. (Il Messaggero, 09.04.06)

A final point to make concerns the absence of Romani voices in all but two articles. Journalists seem to have no time, no hurry to go to talk to them and record what they have to say.

Moreover, as an interviewee mentioned, “newspapers never report any initiative or event that has been done in the city for or with Roma people unless there is something folkloristic about it”. What is represented on newspapers seems to be more of a one-side story where Roma are always *the problem*. Within this framework, by talking about Roma only when a unauthorised camp is dismantled or when somebody denounces the alleged kidnapping of a child by the *gypsies*, local newspapers contribute a great deal in creating a negative myth of the Roma. They contribute at the creation of a social fear towards the Romani population and towards the Roma camps which are seen as *the places* where most horrible things happens with the complicity of the people living there<sup>24</sup>.

### **Political participation by Roma and Sinti**

The will of moving them away, of getting their presence less visible in the capital, is, as shown in the previous section, shared between the two main coalitions. As one of our interviewees highlights, “the only difference is that the current administration uses a different language which justifies the relocation of Romani settlements outside the city as a solution for the overcrowding of the old camps and an opportunity for the creation of “better” living spaces. What the city administration is not dealing with when adopting this kind of discourse is the fact that pushing Roma on the outskirts of the Rome means also isolating them and making them even more marginal socially by breaking existing links with locals and NGOs.

It seems therefore that there is very little effort on behalf of the local administration of allowing social cohesion or undertaking effective measures to promote participation and for the improvement of the relations between Roma and Sinti people and other inhabitants.

In 2002, during the previous Veltroni administration, the City Councillor for Social Policies approved an “Action Plan for the Integration of the Roma and Sinti” as part of the overall Social Plan of Rome. The Action Plan was thought as a move forward from a mere assistance-based approach towards a more integrated one which sees Roma as actors in the integration process in a more dialogical and less top-down perspective. One of the aims of the plan is to facilitate the participation of Roma through the creation of community leaders and organisations. But, as an interviewee pointed out, Roma immigrants didn’t take part at all in the election of the community representatives (*consigliere straniero aggiunto*) at

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<sup>24</sup> From the interview with Cinzia Gubbini, journalist for *Il Manifesto*.

the City and Municipality Councils<sup>25</sup>. Despite an initial attempt from a Serbian Roma to present himself as candidate, eventually no Roma candidates took part at the election and, an interviewee said, no NGOs or associations really made any effort to have them on board<sup>26</sup>. The reasons of this absence are multiple, according to some interviewees from the NGO sector, the cause is mainly the lack of a Roma leadership able to represent the community outside, “their lack of maturity”, someone said. Although this may be part of the truth, it is clear that no effort has been made to build Roma capacity to participate at the civic society. Moreover the main NGOs working on Romani related issues tend to occupy all the available political spaces and to take on them the responsibility to represent Romani interests with the local and municipal authorities, this leaves a very limited and ultimately irrelevant space for the Roma for contributing to the policy making process, with tokenism and disengagement as likely consequences for the Romani community.

### **Summary**

- The “Gypsy problem” played a significant role in the electoral campaigns and platforms of both the main coalitions at the local election.
- The focus of the discussion was mainly around housing, and in particular the location and relocation of “campi nomadi”
- There is a general consensus among the main coalitions around: increased control and resettlement in rural areas of the “nomads”
- This policy of resettlement broke existing and long established social and support network, isolating even more the Romani communities from the rest of the society
- Although the media pay much attention to the “nomads”, Roma and Sinti have no voices in the media.

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<sup>25</sup> The initial proposal for the *consiglieri aggiunti* was presented in 1995, but only in 2003 it was eventually implemented with the Delibera n.190 and n.191, as an attempt to get migrants involved in the political life of the city. Each *consigliere aggiunto* is elected to represent all foreigners (not-EU citizens) living in the constituency. There are 4 *consiglieri aggiunti* at the City Council, one for each continent of origin (Europe, Asia/Oceania, Americas and Africa), and one for each municipality. These *consiglieri aggiunti* represent the non-EU citizens living in Rome, they have right to intervene at the City Council but no right to vote. In order to promote the civic and political rights of the migrant communities, a “Consulta Cittadina per la rappresentanza delle comunità straniere della città di Roma” has also been established. The Consulta can produce recommendations for the local administration on issues concerning migrants.

<sup>26</sup> From the interview with Cinzia Gubbini

- No initiatives have been implemented to empower and facilitate Roma political participation by local authorities and the main NGOs.
- Italian Roma and Sinti almost don't exist in the public debate and the label "nomads" tend to capture indistinctly all those living in camps whatever their origin and legal status.

## CONCLUSIONS

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*Nando Sigona*

1. The participation of Roma and Sinti, both as voters and as candidates, to the last local elections in Italy was extremely limited, nevertheless, compared to past elections, there were some signs of political engagement in the electoral process. This happened despite the absence of institutional initiatives aimed at facilitating and promoting the political participation of these communities to local polity. On the contrary, often local authorities (see for example the resettlement of Roma in rural areas in Rome) implement policies that, directly or indirectly, discourage and obstacle Roma and Sinti participation.

In the four cities we examined, three members of the Roma and Sinti communities stood for a seat of city councillor, although only in Mantua, the Sinti candidate managed to be elected.

Despite being mostly unsuccessful, those candidatures proved to be extremely important for the mainstreaming of Romani issues, to promote a less biased political debate and to set up a precedent and a reference for Roma and Sinti in other parts of Italy.

However, two more points can be made: first, not participating to the elections is in itself a political statement and can be a response to the existing situation of social marginalisation and widespread racism; second, often, given the size of the Italian Roma and Sinti population, there are more effective ways to promote the interest of the community, for example through the creation of community organisations and the lobbying of politicians.

2. The political debate on Roma and Sinti issues during the electoral period revolved mainly around security, urban regeneration/deprivation and access to/exploitation of social welfare provisions. In the debate Roma and Sinti voices are rarely heard, this contributes to the dehumanisation of real Roma and Sinti which are presented as a “problem” which requires, according to the political side of the speaker, either the intervention of social workers or of the police. It is telling the fact that frequently Italian Roma and Sinti are dealt with in the electoral platform sections dedicated to immigrants.

This happens also because local authorities and politicians show interest for Roma and Sinti only when they can not avoid to intervene any longer. Their approach therefore is based on short term emergency responses and it is triggered by situations of extreme marginality as it is the case of many newly arrived Romanian Roma. Therefore, Italian Roma and Sinti ends up incorporated into political initiatives which do not address their needs.

Politicians often refer to Roma and Sinti generically as “nomads”: especially, in the right wing discourse this becomes an argument to support the closure of settlements and the expulsion of the residents.

3. Media coverage of Roma and Sinti appears on average biased, incomplete and lacking any sort of depth. Most articles cover issues of petty crimes, antisocial behaviour, begging and folklore. Together with these, nomad camps are by far one of the main topics of the articles. Locals’ demonstrations and right wing parties’ initiatives against nomad camps, politicians’ concern, anger or solidarity, when incidents happen inside and outside these areas, are the most recurrent subjects.

A key aspect of local press coverage is the absence of the voices of Roma and Sinti. Despite the significant number of news published, they rarely have the possibility to speak out and have their response in the media.

The table below shows the number of articles on Roma and Sinti published in the four cities during the electoral campaign. It shows how Roma and Sinti were referred to – although some articles use more than one term – and if they give space to the voice of Roma and Sinti.

	Number of articles:	“nomads”	Roma/Sinti	“zingari”	Roma/Sinti’s voices:
<b>Rome</b>	25	17	9	4	2
<b>Milan</b>	57	38	22	15	2
<b>Mantua</b>	29	19	7	8	6
<b>Bolzano</b>	36	17	16	14	3
Total	147	91	54	41	13

The widespread use of the term “nomads” as an ethno-denomination to refer indistinctly to both Italian Roma and Sinti and foreign Roma testifies this attitude towards broad generalisation and stereotyping. Italian Roma and Sinti almost do not exist in the public debate and the label “nomads” tends to capture all those living in camps whatever their origin and legal status.

Finally, it must be noted that in Mantua, where the Sinti candidate was elected as city councillor and Sinti have their own community organisation that actively promote a positive image of the local Sinti community, the newspapers give more space to their views.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The following recommendations address problems related to Roma political participation at local level in Italy

### Concerning local authorities:

- They should develop and implement initiatives aimed at supporting the political participation of Roma and Sinti
- When drafting policy aimed at addressing the needs of local Roma and Sinti population, they should consult and involve them in the decision making process at an early stage
- Initiatives for Roma and Sinti should account political participation as a priority and should therefore take into consideration the impact of policy on it
- Develop a greater understanding of the different needs of Roma and Sinti populations

### Concerning political parties

- Mainstream political parties need to be more open to the inclusion of Roma and Sinti not only as voters, but as party members, candidates, election commission representatives, party poll watchers and, where possible, members of the local and national executive bodies.
- Parties should pay targeted attention to training their Roma candidates, members and affiliates to increase their political skills and prepare them for good governance.
- Parties should make serious efforts to develop policies with significant Roma and Sinti input to promote their inclusion in the political, economic and social sectors and include them in their party platforms and manifestos.

### Concerning local media

- Local Media should make a serious effort to offer an image of Roma and Sinti not biased by prejudice and stereotyping
- Should allow more space for Roma and Sinti to express their views on events concerning their communities
- Should use a more appropriate and precise language when reporting on events concerning Roma and Sinti and avoid to use the label “nomads” that is generic and misleading

### Concerning Roma and Sinti and support groups:

- Implement initiatives aimed at develop a better knowledge of the electoral process among Roma and Sinti
- Implement initiatives aimed at increasing Roma and Sinti trust in the political system
- Develop initiatives aimed at channelling community demands to political parties and to give Roma and Sinti voters a voice in shaping the policy debate.
- They should continuously monitor local press coverage of Roma and Sinti