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# **MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO ROMANY STUDIES**

Selected Papers from Participants of  
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## NOT ALWAYS THE SAME OLD STORY: Spatial Segregation and Feelings of Dislike towards Roma and Sinti in Large Cities and Medium-size Towns in Italy<sup>1</sup>

The scientific literature on the dynamics of public opinion and racism as a whole has neglected the spread of anti-Gypsy feeling (Morning, 2009). Only recently, with the Europeanization of the Roma Movements' claims, have official data from public opinion research made it possible to reach any empirically-based conclusions on the spread of anti-Gypsy prejudice in Europe. The availability of these data has not yet been fully exploited, and at the same time their use, albeit only partial, has not been critically worked out. On the other hand we know that the use of opinion polls within the public sphere cannot be ignored, because of the resulting reification of the prejudice and the effects on the objectified ethnic category. This will be the focus of discussion for this chapter, which will introduce unpublished analysis and focus on the Italian situation, showing how pragmatic reflection on the use of data may make it possible to tackle the main risks that these investigations entail. We will also be careful not to ignore the political relevance taken on by the research, even if, no doubt, this will have contradictory effects as well.

### Italy, Europe: Prejudice and Reification

“How would you feel if you knew your neighbour was a Roma?” is the question which a year ago, between February and March, Eurostat asked 26,746 citizens of the 27 States of the European Union, 1,046 of whom were in Italy. It is a question typically asked in studies on prejudice and xenophobia. It is a subject that requires respondents to think starting for themselves, to deal with their own feelings, and the intention is to measure feelings of *comfort*—using an English word—towards a specific group. The result is an index that enables us to arrange countries in an ordinal scale from 1 to 10, where the highest scores belong to States in which the majority of the citizens feel comfortable with “Gypsy” groups<sup>2</sup>. Poland, Sweden and France occupy the top positions, while Italy and the Czech Republic are at the bottom end. Within the Italian sample, only 14% feel

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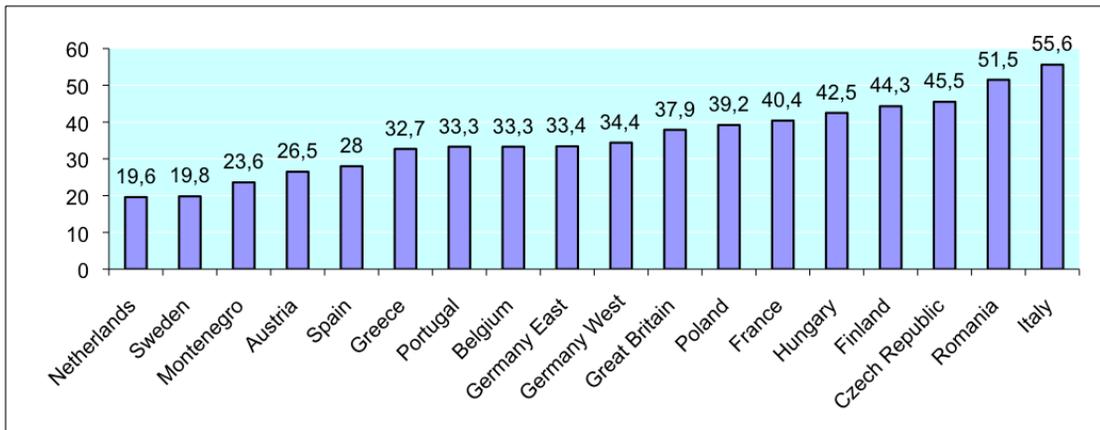
1 Translated by Chiara Ka’huè Cattaneo.

2 The word ‘Gypsy’ should not to be taken as an offensive term, but as a general category including a large variety of very different groups: Roma, Caminanti, Manouches, Sinti and so on.

completely comfortable with the thought of having a ‘Gypsy’ neighbour, and only 5% declare that they have a personal relationship with at least one Roma or a Sinti.

Analysing the data from the 1999 World Value Survey, it rapidly becomes clear that in that year the degree of hostility towards “Gypsy” groups in Italy was far higher than in any other European country (see. graph no. 1).

Graph no. 1. Percentage of people declaring that they would not want a Roma or Sinti as a neighbour<sup>3</sup>



Source: World Value Survey. Data collected in 1999, except for Czech Republic and Hungary (1998), Finland (2000) and Montenegro (2001). Our elaboration.

While it may be presumed that in the last decade in Italy the degree of hostility towards the ‘Gypsies’ has increased in a quicker and more intense way than in the other nations, we do not possess reliable data that would allow us to compare these tendencies in detail. We can, however, start by considering the relative position of Italy compared to the other European countries. In order to better describe the relationship among European countries, we have developed an ordered scale of anti-Gypsyism, comparing data from different comparative sources. The data of the different years taken into consideration must not be compared directly with each other. Such an exercise allows us only to compare the relative ranking of the different countries on a scale of anti-Gypsyism. The diachronic comparison allows us to observe that Italy is always fairly firmly at the top of the scale, even though it is overtaken by the Czech Republic (and Romania goes down the scale of declared hostility to levels much more similar to those of Greece, slightly higher than Spain).

3 Bear in mind that the question in the WVS questionnaire was “On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours? Jews, Arabs, Asians, Gypsies, etc...”

Table no. 1. Scale of anti-Gypsy hostility in European Countries, 1999–2008

1999			2008	
Italy	55.6	1	Czech Republic	78.5
Romania	51.5	2	Italy	70.8
Czech Republic	45.5	3	Germany East	56.4
Finland	44.3	4	Austria	55.9
Hungary	42.5	5	Hungary	55.6
France	40.4	6	Finland	51.9
Poland	39.2	7	Germany West	51.5
Great Britain	37.9	8	Portugal	48.9
Germany West	34.4	9	Great Britain	46.4
Germany East	33.4	10	Greece	45.5
Portugal	33.3	11	Romania	43.5
Belgium	33.3	12	Spain	37.3
Greece	32.7	13	Belgium	36.6
Spain	28.0	14	France	35.5
Austria	26.5	15	Netherlands	34.4
Sweden	19.8	16	Sweden	34.2
Netherlands	19.6	17	Poland	28.4

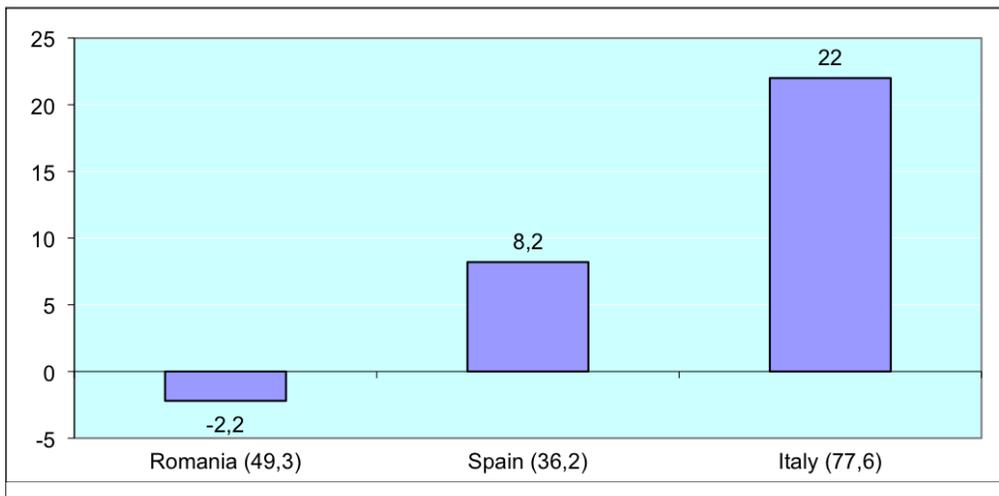
Source: World Value Survey 1999, except for the Czech Republic and Hungary (1998) and Finland (2000); Eurobarometer 2008 69.1 code SI233. Our elaboration.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, in Italy, hostility towards ‘Gypsies’ has been growing steadily over the last decade: it has risen by 22 percentage points. The WVS data do not allow us to compare growth tendencies in all the Countries, because not many nations have kept the question: nevertheless they allow us to compare the dynamics of hostility in two countries particularly relevant for our purposes. First of all with Spain, often associated with Italy in terms of a number of structural characteristics (Migliavacca, 2008), but with remarkably different political dynamics, cohabitation policies and

4 In both the surveys the question was the same, but the way of answering differs: in WVS survey hostility towards Roma people had to be explicitly stated, while in the Eurobarometer questionnaire respondents were asked to give a score of hostility from 1 to 10, allowing also the possibility of not answering or of responding “don’t know” (in this case, in order to produce an ordinal scale we have dichotomized the answers).

relations with minorities. Here the hostility has increased by only 8 percentage points in six years, giving an increase equal to a quarter of that in Italy one. In the second place, with Romania, a nation with which Italy entertains delicate diplomatic relations concerning the Roma issue, and often depicted in the Italian neoliberal press as a locus of strong anti-Gypsy hostilities. Among the States analysed by us, it was certainly the one with the highest level of hostility at the end of the 1990s, but the level has not increased in the first years of the third millennium: instead, it has fallen slightly (see graph no. 2).

Graph no. 2. Change in hostility towards Gypsy groups 1999–2005.  
Difference in the percentages of people who declare they would not want Roma or Sinti as neighbours.



Source: World Value Survey 1999 and 2005. Our elaboration.

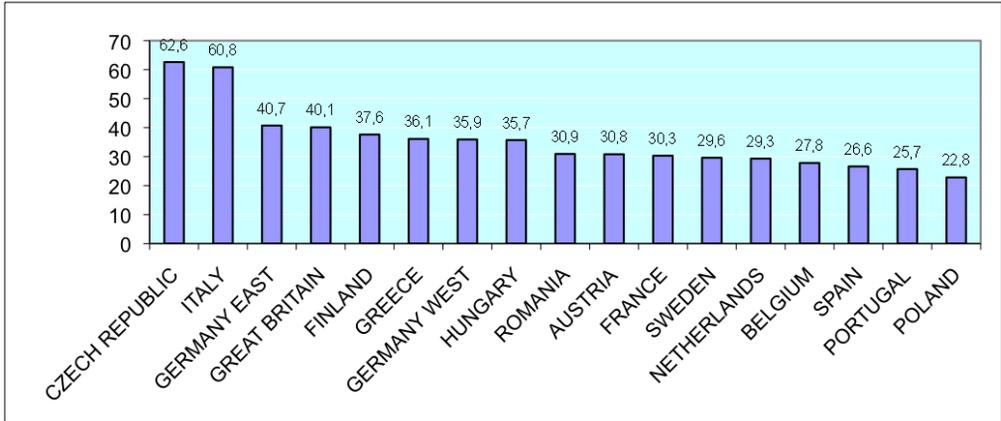
On the y-axis the difference in the percentage between 2005 and 1999 of those declaring they would not want a Gypsy as a neighbour. On the x-axis in brackets the 2005 percentage.

On the other hand, in Italy hostility towards Gypsy groups is so strong that even considering only those who declare that they “do not to have any problem with neighbours from other ethnic groups,” this group contains a higher percentage than in other countries of people who do not welcome the presence of Roma and Sinti.

As a matter of fact, what emerges in many countries is a strong correlation between the declared absence of prejudice or tensions regarding neighbours belonging to other ethnic groups and the absence of anti-Gypsy attitudes (see table no. 2). In the Italian case the correlation is dramatically lower. Here, even among those declaring themselves anti-racist and open to multiethnic cohabitation, over 60% declare that

they do not want any Roma or Sinti in their neighbourhood. This percentage is more than double the average of the other countries taken into consideration in the present paper.

Graph no. 3. Level of anti-Gypsy hostility among those claiming to be tolerant towards ethnic differences



Source: Eurobarometer 2008 69.1 code SI233. Our elaboration.

The main risk of these comparative research projects lies in the uses to which they are put. The publication of their findings, their accessibility in the public sphere, allows political and social actors to make them their own and to use them to support their activities. There is no way to maintain control over the potential use of data, whereas it is possible to reflect on their potential use.

First of all, comparative investigations at European level allow us to better historicize and contextualize the dynamics of prejudice. Publishing the data of a single country may actually have very strong naturalising effects. In Italy, for example, through a public-opinion poll on a probabilistic-representative sample of the population (Vitale, Claps, and Arrigoni, 2009), we have estimated that the increase in the hostility towards Roma and Sinti has reached a disconcerting level, at which only 6.7% of Italian *gagi* (the non-Roma population) declare that they do not feel any hostility towards these groups. The trend of hostility has pushed the Roma into a terrifying social hostility zone. Such a piece of data, on its own, has a powerful reifying effect: if the vast majority of the population feels this way, may there not be objective (or natural, in other words) grounds? The reasons for hostility are thus automatically sought in the object of prejudice (its alleged behaviours, its alleged homogeneous culture, incompatible with the dominant culture) and not in the political dynamics that has caused the hostility to emerge and spread.

Table no. 2. Cross-tabs of anti-Gypsy hostility  
and hostility towards ethnicities different from one's own

Nation		Do not want Roma as neighbours	Are not bothered by Roma neighbours
Belgium	xenophobe	77.60	22.40
	not xenophobe	27.80	72.20
Germany West	xenophobe	94.10	5.90
	not xenophobe	35.90	64.10
Germany East	xenophobe	91.20	8.80
	not xenophobe	40.70	59.30
Greece	xenophobe	82.80	17.20
	not xenophobe	36.10	63.90
Spain	xenophobe	82.80	17.20
	not xenophobe	26.60	73.40
Finland	xenophobe	91.00	9.00
	not xenophobe	37.60	62.40
France	xenophobe	86.40	13.60
	not xenophobe	30.30	69.70
Italy	xenophobe	89.70	10.30
	not xenophobe	60.80	39.20
Netherlands	xenophobe	79.60	20.40
	not xenophobe	29.30	70.70
Austria	xenophobe	91.70	8.30
	not xenophobe	30.80	69.20
Portugal	xenophobe	85.30	14.70
	not xenophobe	25.70	74.30
Sweden	xenophobe	92.40	7.60
	not xenophobe	29.60	70.40
Great Britain	xenophobe	83.50	16.50
	not xenophobe	40.10	59.90
Czech Republic	xenophobe	96.50	3.50
	not xenophobe	62.60	37.40
Hungary	xenophobe	91.50	8.50
	not xenophobe	35.70	64.30
Poland	xenophobe	84.60	15.40
	not xenophobe	22.80	77.20
Romania	xenophobe	89.50	10.50
	not xenophobe	30.90	69.10

Source: Eurobarometer 2008 69.1 code SI233. Our elaboration.

Xenophobes: people declaring that they are not comfortable with neighbours of other ethnic groups. Not-xenophobes: people who are comfortable with neighbours of different ethnic origins.

Even comparing this piece of data with the one related to prejudice towards foreigners in Italy, although it does bring up some interesting elements, does not help from this point of view, because it reinforces the same logic of ascribing responsibility to the objectified category, moreover hinting that Roma and Sinti are immigrants, ignoring a centuries-old history of residence in all the urban and rural areas of the Italian peninsula. The negative effects of removing the historical memory are extremely dangerous (Asséo, 2005).

Quite differently, comparison with other European countries, in particular with the countries considered relatively similar to Italy as far as government traditions, social models and types of industrialisation are concerned, may produce a preliminary effect of putting things into perspective, leading people to wonder what gave rise to the spread of such strong prejudice precisely in Italy. It has a first effect of contextualisation.

### **Long Term Stereotypes on Roma and Sinti Behaviour and Imperatives of Contextualisation**

We have already discussed elsewhere how even the anthropological and social sciences have partially contributed to a homogeneous and a historical representation of Gypsy groups in Italy, with powerful decontextualisation effects in the public discourse, including anti-racist discourse, in Italy (Vitale, 2009b). Two additional remarks need to be made before we can proceed. First of all, presenting data aggregated on a national basis tends to hide the effects of drawing averages between very diverse dynamics operating at regional and local level. With reference to Italy, for example, the region of residence constitutes quite a strong factor affecting the likelihood of an individual 'falling' into racist prejudice.

Overall, there is the risk of obtaining 'plain' representations of what happens within a nation state neglecting structuring dynamics; that is to say that hostility towards Roma, even though it has some peaks spread out across the whole national territory, is characterised by extremely local mobilisations. This is of course part of the dynamics of moral panic, which always starts from the aversion towards a group *located* in a very confined local context, whose behaviours are stigmatised, and generalised to the identified population as a whole (Maneri, 2001). These mobilisations are never 'spontaneous': they are indeed mobilisations, that is to say, collective actions, organised by 'entrepreneurs', in which the actors involved raise local problems and make them public, interacting with authorities and public policies and pursuing one or more shared objectives. There are subjects which initiate deliberate action, finding resources which they place at the disposal of whoever wants to organise and support a mobilisation. Often and not by chance, when referring to mobilisations, we talk about political or moral entrepreneurs.

The feeling of hostility is never the automatic consequence of confrontation between socially and culturally different groups, as Tajfel has clearly shown (Tajfel, 1984), but is always the result of a political and moral construction: the analytical observation of the presence of entrepreneurs of mobilisation, like the careful observation of the tools used to manage the presence of Gypsy groups (Vitale, 2009a) is important because it allows one not to presume that anti-Gypsy prejudice manifests itself in hostile actions directly, and without any mediation.

But what does anti-Gypsy prejudice consist of? We know that in Italy it is structured in the constitution of the State-nation and the tightening of borders between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We do not know its contents in detail, though. This is why we have conducted qualitative research to try to specify its components. Let us now examine them very briefly, before going back to the main theme of our argument, which is related to how to present the research results without producing effects that fuel new forms of discrimination.

We conducted in-depth interviews to gather people's emotional reactions and deep feelings, by showing them photographs and video clips, and asking them to complete cartoon stories previously prepared by us.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly the most frequent reason for stigmatisation and intolerance towards Roma people is their alleged 'inclination' to theft, considered a cultural trait. Moreover, a link with 'blood' emerges: it is not their living conditions that push the Roma towards deviant behaviours but their 'nature'. It is worth noting that prejudice does not have a purely automatic dimension: people are thoughtful and they place the effects of reification reproduced by their representations within a chain of cause and effect. One specific form of the tendency to steal is the 'abduction' of children. Already back in the '50s in Italy there was a widespread rumour according which Gypsies abducted Italian children in order to make them beg. We know very well that a negative action performed by a member of another group is interpreted according to the principle of individual responsibility, whereas similar actions performed by members of one's own group of origin are ascribed to context, adversity, chance and another external factors (Mazzara, 1997) and we therefore observe a different emotional response depending on the socio-cultural 'home' of the wilful subject: the deviant behaviour (of, for example, a child beggar) tends to be justified if it is performed by a member of the group one belongs to (stirring emotions such as compassion or astonishment, conveying more understanding and a more sympathetic approach), whereas when Roma are involved the same behaviour is ascribed to natural characteristics—according to an unjust equivalence between culture and nature (giving rise to negative emotions)—and it is also considered to comply with the prejudicial expectations of society.<sup>6</sup>

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5 The authors wish to thank Stefano Arcagni, who realised the interviews (Marradi, 2005).

6 Let us not forget that stereotypes are more effective as the idea that all individuals of the target group possess certain characteristics equally becomes stronger and stronger within society (Mazzara, 1997).

Nomadism too, considered in general a trait peculiar to ‘Gypsy culture’ (please note the singular), contributes to this ambivalence. But the ambivalence is considerably reduced, and in the in-depth interviews we did not find any significant traces of something that a few years ago still had a certain relevance: the fascination with the ‘children of the wind’, sensual, knowledgeable about the secrets of magic. The Roma are the objects of what Boltanski (Boltanski, 1999) defines *unanimous indignation*, meaning the kind of indignation that identifies the offender immediately and demands punishment,<sup>7</sup> the accusation accompanying indignation may be interpreted as a verbal trial fuelled by the voices and the judgement of the street (being therefore prejudicial), and it targets a homogeneous subject.

Beyond each stereotypical representation of Roma people, what is worth stressing is that it seems as if a significant lack of emotional control towards them emerges: when dealing with Roma people, all inhibiting factors seem to vanish. Prejudices shape emotions: contempt and hatred,<sup>8</sup> always appearing in combination with resentment, are the forms taken on by a feeling of rage and a sense of hostility towards a group considered objectively inferior. The result of this contempt is represented by the desire to physically eliminate this “*minority of the worst*” (Elias, 1965), given their uselessness and their ‘bestiality’. These strongly negative emotions are linked to a disgust that also becomes a refusal to have any contact with them.

Qualitative research based on in-depth interviews is extremely important because it allows us to truly grasp the content of certain prejudices and their emotional overtones. It does not, however, enable us to say anything about how widespread they are, either in terms of extension or with reference to the prevailing common social characteristics among those showing different positions and feelings. Research of this kind may easily run the risk of leading once again to a homogeneous and undifferentiated interpretation of the reactions towards Gypsy groups. The construction of the sample has no relevance, because the logic of qualitative research pursues an aim of saturation rather than a circumscribed question (in our case, the relationship between stereotypes and emotional expression), and not a representative logic of (Small, 2009). There is therefore a risk of delivering data that may once again be moulded in a deterministic fashion by political actors who, in this case, will finally obtain a repertory of sophisticated topics to use in their attempts to mobilise consensus and to fuel renewed anti-Gypsy feelings.

Setting up sample-based investigations which also permit multi-varied analysis does not solve all the problems raised by our knowledge of this field, but it does enable us to improve the situation by putting those problems into perspective.

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7 Indignant people make up a united crowd which, encountering no opposition, restricts the scope of the inquiry and passes straight to action (Boltanski, 1999).

8 Contempt is a result of the idea that the other person is inferior, hate derives from the idea that the other person is evil (Elster, 1999, p. 28).

## The Social Basis of Anti-Gypsyism

From a panel research project conducted in June 2007 it emerged that in Italy Roma and Sinti are perceived as a single people, and an unpleasant one: 81% of respondents considered them not very or not at all pleasant, while only 39% expressed such a harsh opinion of migrants as a whole.<sup>9</sup> Leaving out the ‘don’t knows’, only 6.7% found them pleasant, a significantly smaller percentage than had been found only 8 years earlier, in October ’99. Another point worth noting: our data show that the higher the level of education, the stronger the liking for foreigners, except for Romanians and above all for Roma and Sinti people. Indeed, the higher the level of education, the stronger the dislike of Roma and Sinti: while 71% of respondents with 5<sup>th</sup> grade education have no sympathy for these groups, the percentage soars to 90% among those with a university degree. Finally, the feeling of dislike is equally distributed across self-ascribed political affiliations, with almost no difference between those considering themselves to be of right and centre-right political views (88%) and those belonging to the left (86%).

The resulting representations are almost never positive, but they immediately relate, and as a first response, on one hand to images and feelings of hostility (for 47%), and on the other hand to an idea of marginalisation and poverty (35%). The image of the ‘Gypsy’ tends to coincide with that of the ‘thief’ (according to 92% of our sample), of someone living in a closed group (87%), living *out of a personal choice* in camps on the outskirts of the city’s (83%), and who in many case exploits children (92%). At the same time there are also some more positive opinions: 65% of the sample admits—and it is an important admission—they are marginalised people, among the most discriminated-against, suffering under living conditions which they have not chosen. Around 73% tend to consider Roma and Sinti as having a great sense of freedom (in this faintly recalling the cinema stereotype of the children of the wind) and as extremely united communities (85%). They are also credited with a ‘positive’ imagination, even alongside negative opinions, especially in the case of retired people (73%), those living in North-eastern Italy (74%) and those claiming to be left-wing (71%). The most radically hostile positions and those which show no openness at all are dominant among those less informed, i.e. the ones who know less about Roma groups, either some basic data.

The trends indicated by these results find additional confirmation in the most recent Eurobarometer data, although these were collected from a numerically smaller sample compared to the research that we conducted in 2007. The new data nevertheless shed some light on certain tendencies to change following the wave of criminalisation of Roma that has taken place between the two research projects.

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9 The authors wish to thank Paola Arrigoni, who coordinated the research, and the ISPO research centre, which supported it. Statistical information on the sample and on the research itself can be downloaded from the CEU Press website.

Table no. 3. Cross-tabs. Socio-demographic variables, political and value aspects of sympathy towards Gypsy groups on the feeling of sympathy, on opinion regarding the possibility of coexistence and on preference for integrative policies (2007)

	Sympathy for Gypsy groups	Coexistence with Gypsy groups is considered possible	Integrative social policies should be preferred
Age			
18-29 years	7.40	32.60	19.80
30-39 years	4.70	27.80	14.00
40-49 years	6.00	27.00	14.90
50-59 years	8.70	34.70	23.00
60 and over	4.20	29.30	10.10
Total	5.80	30.00	15.30
Education			
Degree	4.40	34.60	25.40
High school	7.40	32.20	19.00
8 <sup>th</sup> grade	5.60	26.00	13.30
None or primary education only	5.00	31.30	11.10
Total	5.80	30.00	15.40
Social-professional category			
Bourgeoisie	8.40	35.10	21.90
Upper middle class	7.20	25.40	18.80
Middle class	5.90	29.60	15.90
Worker	5.80	27.60	16.30
Unemployed	2.30	27.80	17.30
Student	9.30	39.40	18.60
Housewife	7.00	24.60	16.30
Retired	3.20	33.30	7.60
Total	5.90	30.00	15.30
Attendance at mass			
Never	4.50	29.90	15.30
1 or 2 times a year	9.00	29.00	13.40
Several times a year	6.80	29.70	12.20
1\3 times a month	6.20	25.60	15.00
Every week	5.50	34.60	16.10
Total	6.50	30.20	14.50

	Sympathy for Gypsy groups	Coexistence with Gypsy groups is considered possible	Integrative social policies should be preferred
Political self-identification			
Left	5.50	29.80	15.90
Centre-Left	8.90	39.80	18.30
Centre	7.20	25.70	12.50
Centre-right	6.00	25.90	13.40
Right	5.10	24.50	15.20
Total	6.90	29.70	14.90
Interested in politics			
Very much	9.30	48.80	20.90
Quite	3.30	29.80	21.10
A little	3.90	26.50	12.60
Not at all	9.00	27.00	13.70
Don't know	8.70	34.60	4.80
Total	6.20	28.80	14.30
Geographical macro-area			
North-West	7.70	27.90	13.30
North-East	5.00	31.40	12.00
Centre	5.10	27.00	14.00
South	6.20	37.10	19.40
Islands	3.80	26.70	21.00
Total	5.80	30.00	15.30
Urban dimension			
Less than 5,000 inhabitants	5.50	38.40	13.20
Between 5,001 and 20,000	7.20	31.50	12.40
Between 20,001 and 50,000	7.00	27.20	21.60
Between 50,001 and 100,000	4.40	26.10	15.30
Above 100,000	4.60	27.20	16.10
Total	5.90	30.00	15.30

Source: ISPO 2007. N= 2.171. Our elaboration.

Percentages of row. The column "Sympathy for Gypsy groups" is an index merging the answers "very much" and "quite" to the question "We do not like everybody in the same way. I ask you now to state your degree of sympathy towards other groups". The column "Coexistence with Gypsy groups is considered possible" is an index merging the answers "yes, for sure" and "probably yes" to the question "Can the Roma, the Gypsies, coexist with us?" The column "Integrative social policies should be preferred" is an index of those who completed the statement "The condition of Gypsies in Italy could improve if..." choosing as the first of three possible answers "...they could live in healthier and more proper housing", or "...they were offered more opportunities of getting a regular job", or "...their children attended compulsory schools".

Table no. 4. Social profile of anti-Gypsyism in Italy (2008)

	Do not want Roma as neighbours	Are not bothered by Roma neighbours
Gender		
Male	71.50	28.50
Female	70.40	29.60
Total	70.80	29.20
Age		
15-24	68.90	31.10
25-39	65.30	34.70
40-54	71.40	28.60
55+	76.60	23.40
Total	70.80	29.20
Years of education		
15-	81.70	18.30
16-19	71.50	28.50
20+	56.00	44.00
Still studying	61.10	38.90
Total	71.00	29.00
Employment		
Students	61.10	38.90
Managers	61.40	38.60
Unemployed	62.10	37.90
Self-employed	69.40	30.60
House person	69.60	30.40
Other white collar	70.00	30.00
Manual worker	75.10	24.90
Retired	80.20	19.80
Total	70.80	29.20

	Do not want Roma as neighbours	Are not bothered by Roma neighbours
Political orientation		
Left	66.70	33.30
Centre-Left	64.20	35.80
Centre	71.00	29.00
Centre-Right	61.70	38.30
Right	91.20	(only 8 cases) 8.8
Refusal	74.50	25.50
Don't Know	72.80	27.20
	70.80	29.20
Religion		
Atheist, agnostic, non-believer	67.10	32.90
Religion stated	71.10	28.90
Total	70.80	29.20
Has Roma friends		
Yes	66.00	34.00
No	71.00	29.00
Total	70.80	29.20
Comfortable with neighbours of different ethnic origins		
No	89.70	10.30
Yes	60.80	39.20
Total	70.50	29.50

Source: Eurobarometer 2008 69.1 code SI233. Our elaboration.

Extreme ignorance of the Roma world and a negative, hostile image of them leads the *gagi* to perceive coexistence with Roma as very problematic. As far as the issue of coexistence is concerned, we can outline three segments of public opinion: 1) the first, consisting of 30% of respondents, is *possibilist*, and tends to consider *gagi* as co-responsible for the present situation; 2) the second segment, including 36%, is *worried*, tending to think that the two cultures are difficult to reconcile, but does not ascribe specific responsibilities to Roma and Sinti; 3) the third, up to 34%, thinks coexistence is impossible and that the ‘Gypsies’ are responsible for this.



Destruction on a Roma settlement within an industrial building  
Milan 19 November 2009

## 1. The *Gagi* Who Think It is Possible to Live with Roma People

When presenting our results, we deemed it important to highlight the character of the most possibilistic subjects, in order to show that there are pockets of consensus which could easily be strengthened by putting forward social policies and not demagogic actions of the ‘clearing out and segregation’ kind (Vitale, 2009c). In order to better understand the 30% of people who declared that coexistence with Gypsy groups was possible, we traced their valour and socio-demographic profile with some cross-tabs (see table no. 3), later checking potential spurious relations through logistic regression (see table no. 5). Let us therefore focus only on the significant variables in the model. First of all, the cohort of people in their fifties (50–59 years) proves to be significant: they are still working, many of them have experienced internal migration, they lived through the cycle of workers’ and students’ protests between ’68 and ’77 and, most of all, they still retain memories of a phase during which local relations with Gypsy groups were *also* positive and marked by exchanges and economic complementarity. Not going to Mass, or not going very often, has quite a strong negative impact, suggesting that places where the parish as such congregates are contexts in which even though a feeling of sympathy for Gypsies is not promoted, there is nevertheless an atmosphere open to the possibility of good urban coexistence of all social groups, even those most stigmatised (see also table no. 3). A political leaning towards the centre-left proves to be significant, clear of all the other variables, with a powerful effect: it is worth reflecting on the fact that the “odds” of the possibility of coexisting with Gypsy groups of those claiming to hold centre-left ideas are almost double the “odds” of those claiming to be ‘left-wing’ (who are traditionally hostile to groups perceived as unproductive and sub-proletarian). Living in a small village has a positive impact compared to living in a little town, whereas living in a medium-size city has a negative effect. Among people living in Southern Italy, the percentage of those who believe coexistence is possible is absolutely higher than in all other Regions (see table no. 3), proving that Roma people in Southern Italy are better rooted in urban and rural areas; it emerges therefore that living in the North-West, in the Centre and on the Islands has a negative effect.

## 2. Coexistence and Social Policies

When asked to put forward some proposals to improve Roma and Sinti conditions in Italy today, more than half of the Italians (57%) first suggest either that Roma people should abide by the laws (32%) or that they should cease begging, stop relying too heavily on welfare, and should behave in a more pragmatic and active manner (24%). In other words, these are suggestions which identify the Roma and Sinti themselves as the main cause of their own condition of exclusion. For this last segment, victim and

tormentor coincide, and the ‘Gypsies’ are responsible for their own dreadful conditions: “if they respected the rules and got down to it, they would come out of it.” This is why we define this segment as “dominant”, domination being definable precisely in relation to the mechanism of assigning guilt to the victims themselves (Boltanski, 2008).

We have worked out an index related to those who feel that it would be important to favour *first of all* social policies favouring coexistence, that is to say active policies of employment or policies of school integration or of improvements in housing conditions. Around 15% of the population falls into this category, that is, almost three times as many as the extremely limited circle of those showing feelings of sympathy, but only half as many as those who think that coexistence is possible. This group has very interesting characteristics (see table no. 3). The age distribution follows the same trend as the group sympathising with Gypsies (higher levels among young and retired people), while as far as the level of education is concerned, there is a different profile, following

Table no. 5. Logistic regression. Socio-demographic variables, political and value aspects of opinion regarding the possibility of coexisting with Gypsy groups

	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
50–59 years	0.623	0.013**	1.864
Never attending Mass	-0.535	0.049**	0.586
Attending Mass many times a year	-0.51	0.037**	0.6
Centre-left	0.661	0.017**	1.936
Size of urban centre < 5.000	0.497	0.026**	1.643
Size of urban centre 50,001–100,000	-1.644	0**	0.193
North-West	-0.723	0.005**	0.485
Centre	-0.943	0.001**	0.389
Islands	-0.887	0.002**	0.412
Constant	-0.312	0.537	0.732

Source: ISPO 2007. Our elaboration. \*\* Sig.  $\geq 0.05$ ; N = 1.025; R<sup>2</sup> of Nagelkerke 0.168; Log. Likelihood 1.028.541.

The dichotomous dependent variable is obtained by merging the answers “certainly yes” and “probably yes” versus “certainly not” and “probably not” to the question “Can the Roma, the Gypsies live together with us?” In the table are listed only the significant variables, but in model also included other variables related to gender, the cohorts of age (reference category: 40-49), level of education title, social-professional category, frequency of the attendance at Mass (reference category: every week), political self-identification (reference category: left), interest in politics, size of urban centre (reference category: between 5,001 and 20,000 inhabitants), geographical macro-area (reference category: North-East).

a clear linear and positive relation: as the level of education rises, the agreement with social policies favouring integration increases (this agreement is 14 percentage points higher among degree-holders than among people with only primary education); the relation is spurious of course, given the well-known effects of age. The same linear trend may be observed in relation to social stratification and interest in politics. In the South and on the Islands, even though there are higher levels of intolerance, there are nevertheless higher percentages support for the primacy of social policies, far higher than in the other Regions, which is probably due to a stronger tendency to expect the state to play an active role in supplying public policies and services. Even living in a small to medium city of between 20,000 and 50,000 inhabitants, in which the local authorities are usually more responsible and capable of adopting a consequential logic in tackling problems, leads to an increased percentage of people who would expect social policies to favour integration.

However, analysing not only the first answer, but also the others, we come across more constructive and articulated solutions, that take into consideration the opportunity to implementing initiatives of public responsibility and politics for integration in schools and workplaces. Examining the whole range of answers given regarding possible solutions (and not only the first answers), three different positions emerge on what could be done: 32% of the *gagi* suggest as preferred solutions both that Roma should abide by the law and that “they should do something” (corresponding to a more closed behaviour). Mirror-like, another 30% of *gagi* suggest only policies of inclusion and public responsibility (in general they are the same people who show



A public demonstration against a Roma settlement eviction in Segrate (Milan), 16 February 2010

Placards saying:

- “If you evict me, I do not fade away”;
- “State has to guarantee aid and accommodation”;
- “Each eviction costs 100.000 Euros.”

more open behaviour). Finally, 38% fall between the two positions, suggesting mixed solutions, that is to say respect of the law by the Roma but also more structured and active policies by Italian institutions.

### **The Voice of Italian Roma and Sinti Leaders**

The data in question could be subjected to other forms of analysis, including even *cluster analysis* to explain the *gagi*'s behaviour in relation to the problem of civil coexistence with Roma and Sinti, which would outline a synthesis typology (Vitale, Claps, and Arrigoni, 2009). But we are not interested in going beyond this point. The aim of the previous section was to account for the possibility of differentiating the analysis of prejudice, and to highlight also the characteristics of those rejecting repressive and xenophobic solutions, an analysis that, as we have seen, also presents some unexpected elements which we feel could have a positive impact on the public sphere, should they be circulated.

This did not seem enough for us, however, and that is why, after having elaborated the data presented here, we asked some Roma and Sinti opinion leaders to comment both on the stereotypical images the *gagi* have of them, and on the main prejudices that, according to them, Roma and Sinti have towards *gagi*.<sup>10</sup> What emerged is an impressive and deeply felt confrontation that has shed light, despite the differences, on a mirror-like view of prejudice.

#### 1. On the *Gagi*'s Prejudices

The Roma and Sinti we interviewed tend to group prejudices towards their communities in three areas: 1) prejudices they perceive as not responding to reality: 'they kidnap children, they're nomads, they don't want to work, they're dirty'; 2) prejudices that may refer to individual and not to widespread behaviours: 'they exploit children, they break the law'; 3) prejudices fuelled by more or less widespread behaviours: 'they don't send their children to school, they steal, they beg'.

Let us start with the first group of prejudices, those considered to be 'false'.

"They kidnap children": despite a number of research projects which show that in fact this is untrue, the interviews single out this prejudice as the one which weighs most heavily on Sinti people's everyday life. A real mark of shame, continuously reiterated by the media: "... after they arrested that woman, accused of having 'stolen

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10 Between July and September 2007 we interviewed 12 people (8 male and 4 female), the majority with Italian citizenship (9 out of 11), who are or have been active in the fields of social mediation, politics, culture and health, almost all of them involved in associations committed to safeguarding of Roma and Sinti rights. Here we report excerpts from their interviews in italics.

a child', the witnesses admitted they weren't sure about it and that actually they are extremely afraid of Roma people. It was a collective hallucination."<sup>11</sup>

"They're nomads": according to the interviewees, this is a prejudice with notable consequences, which can lead to support and justification for the idea of the 'nomad camp' as an appropriate policy acceptable to the recipients themselves.

"They're dirty": in the interviews the prejudice is criticised because of the superficial way in which situations are judged, with people unjustly attributing to a culture what should rather be associated with the conditions of some nomad camps and shanty-towns. Roma and Sinti are quite obsessed with hygiene and even in the most devastated camps, the dwellings are kept in good order and cleaned with great care.

"They don't want to work": according to the Roma and Sinti, such a statement cannot be proven, because it is extremely difficult for them to have any opportunity to work. Besides, the fact that they don't prioritise work in the way that the majority society does, is in no way equal to the statement "they don't want to work". On the contrary, they can recount endless tales of great efforts and investment being made just to be able to work.

In relation to this second area, according to our interviewees the prejudice about the 'exploitation of children by criminal conspiracies' cannot be applied to the majority of the communities. It is rather the result of episodes linked to organised crime and cannot be considered the norm. To explain their statements, the majority of the interviewees trace a parallel with very common clichés, such as the notion that "all Italians are members of the mafia".

Finally, the third area relates to prejudices that have some grounds in reality.



A Roma settlement within a former industrial skeleton  
Milan, 21 November 2009

<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth discussion of this episode, see Mannoia, 2008.

“They don’t send their children to school”: our interviewees make a distinction in this regard between those who consider schools as *gagi* institutions, where Roma children are uncomfortable and experience feelings of inferiority, and the majority who understand and value the potential of education and suffer because of the barriers to access: the unsustainable costs, the distance between schools and the places where they live, the discriminatory behaviour of the institutions, the relocations which keep them constantly on the move: “what can we say of the Roma coming from the East, educated over forty years ago, who would want to send their children to school?”

“They steal”: according to our interviewees this prejudice is true but cannot be generalised to the whole population: “stealing, this is true, for pity’s sake! Everyone knows it’s like this and we cannot hide reality: but only some steal, not everybody, and only because they really are forced to do it”. According to the interviewees, this is the most controversial problem, one which can only be solved through specific long-term policies, not merely repressive ones, but also allowing different options, contributing to the possibility for these communities to escape from marginalisation and segregation.

## 2. On the Political Solutions to Coproject with Roma

Roma and Sinti identify different issues at stake, closely interlinked, and they can also suggest some ways out.

*Dwelling.* The so-called ‘nomad camps’ are considered the tangible expression of discrimination, degraded places where Roma and Sinti do not like to live: “Gagi cannot imagine the situation Roma people live in: I’d want a gage to live in a camp, even only for one week, so that he could understand that reality better; gagi go to reality shows like Celebrities Island for two months, whereas Roma live all their lives in the same conditions and never complain”. And again: “they are an administrative invention”, that is to say “they have not been planned together with Roma people, there has been no interaction, they tried to concentrate the phenomenon to obtain greater social control over the issue of nomads”. There is no doubt that everybody considers them as contexts which create and fuel marginalisation and exclusion: “Vicious circles of misery. What can a nomad camp bring?” “It’s not easy to find a job because you may even have a fair skin but your documents state that you live in a camp”. As the issue of dwelling is intimately linked to that of anti-Gypsyism and exclusion, many consider getting out of the camps as the priority problem to be solved through specific accommodation policies, bearing in mind the heterogeneities of the different Roma and Sinti: from micro-areas to council estates.

*Working.* In the short-medium term policies of vocational training may be promoted, besides policies aimed at reviving traditional skills, involving them in the projects and leaving behind dependence on welfare: “for example, the role of the

commercial agent would suit a Roma perfectly because even if he depends on a firm, and therefore works under a boss, the profession of the commercial agent involves relationships, the freedom to move around and dealing with others: a characteristic of the ‘Gypsy’ spirit.” With great clarity: “welfare dependency is not acceptable and you cannot consider Roma as subjects who can only perform craft-based activities, and are not capable of aspiring to a profession... let’s say, being a doctor. Abroad it is pretty well normal”. Many also ask for “reserved jobs in the civil service, whereas we are systematically pushed away from the civil service”.

*Studying.* For all the interviewees education is the key to the future emancipation of new Roma and Sinti generations. Today “only 30% of Roma and Sinti children in Italy are enrolled in primary school, and even they do not attend”. What prevents even the children coming from groups who have been educated for decades (for example the Roma coming from Eastern European Countries) from going to school are the costs of books and of transportation and the discriminatory behaviour of educational institutions: “in Rome there are schools that don’t accept Roma children and they are proud not to have them, and in some others they let them in through a different entrance to the one used by *gagi* children”. Employing cultural mediators would be extremely useful.

*Participating.* An element stressed with great emphasis by all the *opinion leaders* interviewed is that *gagi* cannot speak in the name of the Roma: Roma and Sinti themselves ought to do it: “Without our active participation in social, cultural and political life, there will never be cultural integration”. They develop an articulated reflection on the reasons of the historic weakness of Roma activism, with a tendency to delegate it to associations who have acted in their name, even with positive results, but which today should support and not substitute: “now the time has come to support the capacity for participation within all the different groups”.

*Being citizens.* Urgent issues have to be tackled at the national legislative and political level, starting from the tragic cases of statelessness: people who may have lived in Italy for years, who have children and grandchildren here, but who administratively do not exist (just as their children and grandchildren do not exist): “in the sense that they have not been recognised in their countries of origin, they speak only Italian and Romanès and they have no documents”. The civil code should also be amended where it deals with the attribution of residence: there are people born in the camps who have not been declared residents “because living in a camp, even if it’s official and owned by the town hall, did not give them the right to residence”. The official camps are not, in fact, dwellings, but transition areas, and they cannot be considered as the first residence of a person. Finally, “we are the only minority not recognised in Italy by the law on minorities”.

*Facing each other.* To reverse the trend towards discrimination, they believe greater interaction and reciprocal knowledge are needed: this would mean creating chances to meet, providing information and training in schools, carrying out

campaigns against discrimination on the model of the ‘Dosta!’ (Enough!) public awareness campaign promoted by the Council of Europe: “...so that Roma culture may emerge and thus become known, so as to demolish the prevailing cultural ‘vision’ (the misery, the marginality), mistaken because it is partial, and replace it with events of Gypsy art (music, painting, sculpture, performing arts) but also with social, cultural and gastronomic meetings”. They also ask for more affective application of the legal instruments that already exist, in particular in the field of ethnic and racist discrimination. Finally, they also call for a stronger deontology by the media, in order to deliver more accurate information where they are concerned.

### **Beyond Logical Blindness: the Researcher’s Responsibility**

One of the main problems characterising the public discourse on Roma and Sinti is the pervasiveness of certain rhetorical constructions with the resulting effects of making them inferior and reproducing stereotypes. One of the most pervasive and at the same time most powerful is usually called ‘logical blindness’, or ‘restriction’ (Guillaumin, 1995). Despite these being clearly relational dynamics, the media and political actors systematically name only one of the parties involved, only one of the poles of the reaction. Thus, for example, we hear about the ‘Gypsy problem’, or the ‘nomad emergency’ as if the Gypsies were nomads and in any case a single and homogeneous group, but most of all, in the sense we are discussing here, as if the issue concerned only the Gypsies (whether they cause the problem or suffer from it), and we hear nothing about the relationship between “Gypsy” groups and other social groups.

Besides, the presentation of research results, be they qualitative or quantitative, often runs the risk of worsening the logical blindness. When we talk about Roma or Sinti, we tend to render them more exotic, describing their strange habits and considering their culture as fixed. Otherwise we talk about the *gagi*’s opinions of them, showing that Roma constitute a problem. The relation between the groups hardly filters into the public sphere. Thus research, even projects which strive to better contextualise the dynamics of public opinion, systematically fall into an error of restriction. Research into the dynamics of public opinion sheds light on the results of hostility, which may be used in ways that are completely at odds with denunciatory or emancipatory intentions of the researchers themselves. Such research can easily be used to justify the reasons for exclusion and discrimination, and to provide more solid arguments supporting favour of markedly anti-Gypsy initiatives.<sup>12</sup>

Considering this potential misuse of the research, those presenting their results can either choose to remain indifferent or, on the contrary, reflect in critical terms

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12 In reflecting on issues of this kind, we were deeply influenced by Thévenot (Thévenot 2007) on the difference among regimes of action and on the ‘tyranny’ exercised by the most public regime on the more intimate one: different regimes have different grammars.

on the potential uses of their work (Boltanski, 2009). No solution is obvious or definitive. Certainly the historicisation of explanations may help to avoid the effects of objectification and naturalisation of the data. But historical comparative explanations are sometimes ignored in favour of numerical data, which thus end up appearing as independent truths in the public sphere, ready to be used without reference to the explanations that accompany them. The results of qualitative in-depth research can be accompanied by their quantitative contextualisation. The comparative presentation of data can be useful, in turn, to provide context, just as can a more refined analysis which breaks down people's feelings according to social and geographical categories. Overall, though, these ways of presenting the data run the risk of remaining locked into the vice of logical opacity which creates and nurtures so much racism (Alietti and Padovan, 2000).

The solution we have adopted in presenting the results of our research, from 2007 till the present day, has been to try to give value to a *relational configuration* in presenting the data. The Roma's voice is rarely assumed a priori, either in policies implemented at local level or in projects run by *gagi* activists of associations supporting Roma people. In the modalities that we identified, we have not found it worthwhile to compare by adding the opinion of Roma and Sinti to that of the *gagi*, as if they were two different people whose different opinions needed to be stressed. What we thought would be useful was to present to the Italian public (both at conferences organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs and in widely distributed magazines) not the qualitative and quantitative data on the representations of Roma and Sinti, *but what some Roma and Sinti think of these data*. Thus we have tried to give greater weight not to the opinions of a homogeneous group on certain issues, but to the opinions of some Roma and Sinti leaders on the data gathered and summarised by us. Thus it was they who decided by themselves how to comment on the most widespread opinions and how to contextualise them and put them in perspective.

We do not, of course, believe that this is an 'exportable' solution, or one with a generalisable value. It is a temporary and case-specific solution that we have adopted for the presentation of our research to the Italian public in the last few years. A weak solution, overall, given the small size of the sample selected and the cost of the operation. We know that the differences of opinion between *gagi* and Roma and Sinti that we have identified may be exaggerated by the difference in the means of research we have adopted. Moreover, even though we asked them to tell us not only their own point of view but more in general the diffused point of view of the community they belong to, we are not so naïve as to ignore the real *bias* that this represents.

However, what seems worthwhile is the idea of taking into consideration the voice of the Roma and Sinti about what concerns them, even on the hardest and most hostile opinions about them. A voice that is not only interesting in itself, but also a potential resource to reflect on the potential use of research and to keep a close watch on the

automatic mechanisms of logical blindness. Because in the end the value of research lies not only in what is being written but also in the use that is made of it. Which clearly does not leave us without worries.

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