

# REPRESENTATIONS OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE LOCAL PRESS: BETWEEN CONFLICT AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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**Abstract:** *The paper presents a study carried out in a municipality in the Marche Region of Italy, aimed at investigating the representations of immigrants in the local press. An analysis of local newspaper articles concerning immigrants has been carried out, and in-depth interviews have also been undertaken with journalists from the newspapers selected. The results of the study have highlighted important elements that influence migrant representations and allow the identification of new communication paths between the subjects of the local community.*

**Key words:** *Local press, immigrants, representation, conflict, integration.*

## 1. Introduction

European societies are becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse as a result of immigration, but this change is not always accurately reflected in the media, neither in the portrayal and representation of immigrants in the media, nor in terms of the composition of media professionals (Niessen and Huddleston, 2010).

Immigration and integration have gone from being of interest to just a few specialists to one of the foremost issues in a number of different types of organisations. Decisions taken at European level have an increasing influence on national and local policies in many areas of integration processes. "The media impacts on the public perception of immigrants. It also, however, reflects the views and attitudes that are prevalent in society – some tolerant, some intolerant, others openly hostile and some indifferent. Media organisations can be encouraged to provide an accurate and fair portrayal of immigrants in the media" (Niessen and Huddleston, 2010, p. 14).

Organizations working in the media find themselves facing a situation of ever-increasing competition; and to survive in a competitive market, they must ensure that their products respond to the needs and wishes of consumers. In this sense, competition can represent both an opportunity and a challenge for integration (Meli, 2014).

As far as the press is concerned, the tone and argumentation discovered in studies carried out at national level (Sbalchiero, 2015) stress that the treatment by articles

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relating to immigration is above all included in crime news stories, thereby conjugating the immigration/security nexus. The outcome of these analyses is a tendency to restrict the phenomenon to well-defined spheres, with stereotypical protagonists and tones, and to express and reproduce the most common ideas, which the media contribute to generating.

Journalist associations, both international and national, have repeatedly called for more careful, better informed and more diversified treatment of immigration-related topics.

In Italy, the Rome Charter (*Osservatorio sulla Carta di Roma/Charter of Rome Observatory, 2010*), a document that draws attention to the need to sustain a responsible supply of information that eschews incorrect and superficial conduct and the spread of distorted or generalized, if not inaccurate, information, has been in effect since 2008. The Rome Charter also established an Observatory, which has carried out a number of interesting studies that emphasize the elements that have emerged from an analysis of information in the media in recent years. With regard to the printed press, the 2010 data show that in 52.8% of cases, migrants are discussed in articles associated with crime-or law-related news; in 34% of cases, this relates to a legal debate on the subject; 5.3% are about immigrants landing in Italy; and a further 7.9% are on issues associated with culture and other topics linked to immigration (*Osservatorio sulla Carta di Roma/Charter of Rome Observatory, 2010*).

Some studies show that immigration is discussed much more often than previously even when there is no dramatic news story (Bellu, 2016; Barretta and Milazzo, 2016).

With regard to the local sections of daily newspapers, a study (Binotto and Martino, 2004) found that the presence of migrants in crime-related news items is particularly significant in local sections: 96% of articles, compared with 63% of those in the national news. The distinctive nature of the structure of a daily newspaper influences the topic-related development of local news pages. In the local press, immigration is only associated with certain types of events, and its overlapping with the subject of security is highly significant.

It is therefore essential to attach greater importance to studying the relationship between the press and inter-ethnic relations in local communities (Binotto, Bruno, and Lai, 2016; Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009; Freilich and Guerette, 2006; Sbalchiero, 2015).

To this end, the research presented in this paper investigated the various representations that the local press transmits about migrants. It identified significant aspects to which attention should be paid in order to develop communication that fosters cohesion in neighbourhoods.

## **2. Objectives, Materials and Methods**

The study was carried out in the Municipality of Jesi, a town of about 40,000 inhabitants in the Province of Ancona in the Marche Region. In recent years, it has been possible to work with continuity on social integration processes in neighbourhoods of

this municipality as a result of the social housing mediation activities carried out by social workers.

The average incidence of migrants in the municipality at the time of our study (2015) was about 10%. Foreigners residing in the Marche Region at 1 January 2016 amounted to 140,341, with an incidence on the overall population of 9.1%; this value is higher than the national average (8.2%) (*Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali/Ministry of Labour and Social Policies*, 2016). With regard to the municipality of Jesi, in the years preceding this study, housing social mediation projects were carried out that showed a high level of conflict in some neighbourhoods (Bronzini and Moretti, 2015).

The study, which is part of the *IN.MEDIA.RES – Integrazione Mediazione Responsabilità/Integration Mediation Responsibility* project funded by the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, was carried out by researchers from the Department of Economic and Social Sciences at the Polytechnic University of Marche.

Specifically, the study analysed the type of information produced by the local press on immigration and its role in constructing the public image of migrants. Attention was paid to the complex system of interactions created and developed in the various neighbourhoods and to the social and political actions that might influence the construction of integration processes. The study, which used a quantitative and qualitative methodology, employed the following analytical tools.

With regard to the representation of migrants in the local press, analysis was conducted of articles in three daily newspapers: *Corriere Adriatico* (CA), *Il Resto del Carlino* (RdC) and *Il Messaggero* (M). The first two have a national news section and another devoted to the Province of Ancona, while the third, in addition to its national section, has a section dedicated to the entire Region. An eight-month monitoring process was applied (September 2014 to April 2015) and a total of 128 articles were analysed.

Articles that included references to foreigners were identified. It was considered important to distinguish between accounts in which the social dimension was prevalent and those in which the political dimension was prevalent. A number of frames – the interpretative framework used to convey the news (Pogliano, 2012) – were identified within these two dimensions.

Regarding the social dimension, the two frames used were conflict and cooperation; news attributable to the social dimension is that presented by journalists without reference to the political context, and that in which events occurring in the neighbourhoods, such as thefts or disturbances or initiatives on the part of associations or citizens are discussed.

The frames of the political dimension are: security policies, restrictive or repressive policies, interventions to promote positive integration, and the absence of policies.

In-depth interviews were also carried out with four journalists working for the newspapers that we analysed. Attention centred on integration problems in Jesi's neighbourhoods and the role of the press, as well as the sources and reliability of news and the training of journalists.

When the study had been concluded, the results were conveyed to the various subjects in the Municipality (government officials, local police, social workers, associations, traders, Italian residents, and immigrants) by means of focus groups.

### 3. Results

The results will be presented with reference to the issues that emerged relatively to the various survey tools employed.

#### 3.1. The elements emerging from the analysis of local newspapers

As regards the articles reviewed, an initial element that we analysed concerned the distribution of the 128 articles in the three local newspapers in relation to the period of time considered.

*Monthly frequency of articles in the three newspapers referring to migrants* Table 1

Month Newspaper	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	Total	%
<b>Corriere Adriatico</b>	7	3	6	3	4	5	13	7	48	37.50
<b>Il Resto del Carlino</b>	11	11	5	2	4	5	13	6	57	44.53
<b>Il Messaggero</b>	0	3	6	0	3	2	4	5	23	17.97
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Regarding the number of articles appearing in the newspapers during the period between September 2014 and April 2015, it emerges from the data that there was more news about migrants in the early months (September, October, and November) and the last months (March and April). Our analysis shows that there were more new stories relating to the same event for more days during these months.

In particular, one item of news that was republished several times concerned the installation and activation of video surveillance cameras (spycams) in neighbourhoods considered to be at risk with a greater immigrant presence. We discovered that in the early months, the journalists announced the installation of the spycams, and subsequent articles made reference to the reasons for the delay, giving the possible dates on which they would begin to operate. It also emerged that when news about thefts and disturbances was published, frequent reference was made to security problems and to cameras as a possible solution. As regards the lower number of articles published in *Il Messaggero*, the different nature of local distribution of the newspaper, which is aimed at the entire Marche Region, and not only the Province of Ancona like the other two newspapers, may have had an influence.

With reference to our analysis of the two dimensions identified – social and political – a number of significant elements emerged.

The social dimension, considering overall the frames of conflict and cooperation, is more present (58%). The political dimension, which comprises the security policies, restrictive policies, integration policies and no policy frames, refers overall to 42% of the articles reviewed.

If we analyse the social dimension frames, it emerges that the topic of conflict is present in 45% of the articles, while the topic of cooperation is present in 13%. With regard to news relating to conflict, there are frequently articles about brawls involving foreigners. Extracts from some of these articles are reported here.

“Maxi-brawl among foreigners in the town centre with bottles and outside bar furnishings being thrown: gypsies threatening shop owners and drug addicts molesting passers-by” (December 8th, CA).

“About 20 youths of foreign origin were shouting, annoying passers-by and punching each other” (December 22nd, RdC).

As far as articles related to cooperation are concerned, there are reports of an interesting initiative of an 80-metre long mural painted by students from the Jesi Artistic High School to promote integration. The mural consists of 35 panels, and shows a group of individuals of various ethnic origins walking hand-in-hand with the image of the Marche in the background.

In relation to the political dimension, it is significant that there is a high percentage of articles on security-related policies (30%), while the other frames only record a low percentage: integration policies at 6%; absence of policies at 3%, and finally restrictive policies at 3%.

As far as news stories about security-related policies are concerned, the most frequent topic is the installation of video surveillance cameras in neighbourhoods.

A good deal of space is also dedicated to news stories about surveillance, including:

“Uniformed civic guards are arriving with the police on leave. A team of two volunteers on a six-hour daytime shift twice a week for four years will carry out detailed checks in the area” (January 23rd, CA, RdC, M).

Turning to integration policies, one significant initiative concerned the presence of social mediators in the neighbourhoods: “The mediators gather information about, and if possible seek to resolve, residential and cohabitation conflicts reported by citizens: neighbour issues, problems with co-living, reports of problems (January 27th, CA and RDC).

### **3.2. The Journalists' experience**

The purpose of our survey of journalists for the three newspapers (two for *Corriere Adriatico*, one for *Il Resto del Carlino*, and one for *Il Messaggero*) was to go into greater detail about certain factors that might influence the type of content of the articles and communication modes. The interviews carried out with each journalist therefore focused on the following topics:

- A. integration problems in Jesi's neighbourhoods;
- B. the role of the local press;
- C. sources and reliability of news;
- D. training for journalists working on immigration issues.

A. With regard to integration issues, it emerged that in the past 20 years, problems of cohabitation have increased in those neighbourhoods that had already had problems in the past: "The better neighbourhoods have substantially remained respectable, while the more working-class neighbourhoods continue to create problems that can be attributed to the fact that the local government has less and less money, and you see more tangible decay, a badly-kept place, and you see a worse quality of life" (Interviewee 1). Cohabitation problems are also attributed to immigrants' different habits compared with those of Italians. The incidents of intolerant behaviour, the journalists report, are also caused by a lack of jobs and hardship. The inhabitants also perceive a situation of emergency because criminal acts involving immigrants are strongly emphasised, partly "due to the importance the press gives to the news, and how the headlines are written" (Interviewee 1).

B. The journalists stressed the importance of the role of the local press as regards both the selection of topics and how they are handled. Often cited are cases with a powerful impact on people. In addition, one journalist stated "As regards crimes, the readers' attention is attracted more if the article refers to a gang of foreigners, whereas if it concerns gangs of Italians the episode is forgotten" (Interviewee 1). The local press is linked to everyday occurrences, so that if there are crime news items, priority is given to them, whereas if things are quiet, space is given to local events, politics, or other situations. The publishers have also reduced staff, and the amount of space for articles has also been reduced as a result. In this scenario, negative news items steal space from positive news, and newspapers pay more attention to news events, which make more noise than cultural events. The belief that the press should pay greater attention to news that encourages interactions and cohabitation is widespread. For this purpose, it is necessary to overcome the notion that migrants only make news by deviant conduct; they also do so through actions of solidarity.

C. In relation to the "truthfulness of the facts", different opinions emerge. One journalist declared that the role of the press is to "report the facts as they are". Others emphasised that while seeking the "truth" is an important objective, it is also a difficult path to follow. It emerged that "unfortunately, the news is always the result of a selection, just as I make a choice, so do the police when they pass the news on to me" (Interviewee 3). The journalists also pointed out that in order to do their work as objectively as possible, they need to provide proof, compare their various sources, and look for other witnesses. It also emerged from the interviews that the press should give voice to immigrants, but they are rarely heeded. Another aspect considered crucial concerns the use of words. A journalist stressed: "for me, words are incredibly important. I don't like using the word 'clandestine': I prefer 'migrant', even to 'immigrant', because the word is enough to create prejudice. It's a key point, and I hope others will also pay attention; if integration doesn't start with us I don't know where it's supposed to start" (Interviewee 3). He also stressed the risk that a "standard schema" will be used to describe migrants which will then influence residents' demands for greater security. The risk is the prevalence of clichés often difficult to overcome even for people working in the field, who may become prejudiced and their accounts

stereotyped. Here, the interviewees revealed the importance of more in-depth awareness of aspects related to foreign communities and immigration.

D. With regard to training, it emerged that the level has fallen because the immigration issue has been undervalued, and editors do not require specific knowledge; each journalist trains himself or herself. The respondents also said that this topic is not dealt with in the training courses organised by the journalist's association, which are currently compulsory. The hope is that there will be initiatives in which migrants and representatives of associations of foreigners can talk so that knowledge can be obtained and comparisons made among the various cultures. The journalists therefore asked for greater contact with foreign communities, and believed that training which fosters mutual awareness and dialogue in local areas is required. It is therefore important to enhance multicultural initiatives and take them to the most difficult neighbourhoods, and to involve Italians and migrants so as to encourage cohabitation among the resident population.

### **3.3. Return of the results to the subjects of the territory**

The findings of the research were conveyed to the local actors concerned by a focus group. Participation by social workers, volunteers from local and migrants' associations, tradespeople, the Municipal Police, and politicians enabled us to start discussion on the results of the study and to identify the aspects to which special attention should be paid.

The intention is to promote and support forms of "horizontal subsidiarity" (Bichi, 2010, p. 121), and to nurture local resources that can act not only in the area of social welfare but also in the cultural domain, because they work through informal social relations.

There are various people in the town's neighbourhoods who are willing to make their skills and energy available to foster co-living among the resident population. The words of a migrant are significant in this regard: "There are many foreigners who would like to collaborate. We want to be useful, but there's not much information around, word-of-mouth. There is a lack of linguistic mediators. Help us work with you". Although, on the one hand, the area offers many opportunities, on the other, participants report a lack of publicity for these initiatives in the newspapers. Moreover, information in the newspapers uses language that reduces complexity, and provides simplistic, static images. The focus on events and individual "front page news" or the use of statistical data relating to criminality are fundamental to the construction of a consensus in favour of exceptional emergency measures (Altheide, 2002).

Great attention was also paid to the functions of service operators, specifically social workers. What emerged was the need for them to have a greater presence in the neighbourhoods so that they can do community work (Mannarini, 2004; Martini, 2003). Here, the positive experience of social housing mediation projects (Bronzini and Moretti, 2015; Luison, 2006; Moretti, 2017) also carried out in the Municipality of Jesi was apparent. This experience was implemented as a result of the funding of specific projects that have not given continuity to mediation activities. Local authorities should therefore plan systematic interventions for social mediation in neighbourhoods.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The elements emerging from the research show that the communication of local newspapers influences public opinion regarding migrants, favouring hostile behaviours, not readily available for inclusion paths. The local press should contribute to overcoming cultural stereotypes and prejudices that only associate migrants with negative aspects, and dedicate the appropriate amount of space to positive news and economic and social successes. "Initiatives to create and maintain a media that better serves and reflects the cultural diversity of European societies will not only promote equality, but also help to facilitate integration and support community cohesion" (Niessen and Huddleston, 2010). The migration phenomenon is now structural, and can no longer be classified as an emergency.

Although, on the one hand information on the success of integration processes and commitment and personal success is increasingly present in the media (Benson, 2009; Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007) on the other, the criminalisation of immigrants continues to manifest itself in terms of "an underlying invariance" (Cerase, 2016) that may be interpreted as indicative of a climate of widespread anxiety that accompanies migratory processes in many countries.

To this end, significant are the words of journalists regarding the need to ensure greater and more objective coverage of integration topics on the newspapers, so as to limit misleading prejudices and consolidate awareness on the part of public opinion of the economic, social, and cultural impact of migration and the positive contribution made by migrants. Daily newspapers can, therefore, perform a service with regard to opportunities offered by the local territory so as to promote positive social integration processes for immigrants with a concrete impact on improving the quality of local information.

The research provides an opportunity not only to look more deeply at the representation of migrants in the local press, but also to identify new communication paths (Calvanese, 2011; Corte, 2016; Morcellini, 2010) which will be possible if constant dialogue is implemented with actors in the local area, who witness events on an everyday basis. This dialogue has first of all seen collaboration between social workers and journalists, with the development of training initiatives. In this context, a proposal has been made for a memorandum of understanding to be concluded between the journalists' order and the social workers' order in the Marche Region to identify and agree on means of communication that more effectively respond to the complexities of migration, thereby making a real contribution to neighbourhood integration and cohesion.

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