

THE ROMANIAN COMMUNITY IN FLORENCE

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Abstract: *This study aims to create an accurate description of the Romanian Community in Florence, Italy. To do this scientific approach, mixed methods have been used, respectively the questionnaire and interview survey. This paper investigates varied perspectives of how the Romanians in Florence, Italy, are living, spending their free time, working and celebrating religious (or not) holidays. It is of great interest in the research field to gather as much information as possible about these behaviours and daily life aspects. Especially in this era, where technology has eliminated the limitation of space and time, thus enhancing choices, communicational acts and other various aspects in favour of people, both in the personal aspect of life, as well as professional aspects.*

Key words: *Romanian migration, migration to Italy, life satisfaction*

1. Introduction

The technology era has eliminated the limitation of space and time, giving humans endless opportunities to evolve, both personally and professionally. Consequently, more and more people are choosing to migrate and settle in places where they consider they can take advantage of these opportunities for development. When it comes to Romanian migrants, there is a preference to settle in countries such as Italy and Spain. There, immigrants usually form communities to fit in.

In the process of integrating into the society, they try to align their activities with the culture of the respective country. In other words, following the local customs by the newly formed community helps create a positive image of the community.

Following this path, the subject of this paper is the description of the Romanian community in Florence, Italy.

The aspects mentioned before represent the motivation for choosing this subject. The objective of this paper is to describe the community, both the internal perspective of Romanians and the external perspective of Italians.

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It is important to analyse their workplace, lifestyle, material resources, communication and socialization. First, we looked at the beliefs of Romanians who settled in Florence, followed by the perception of Florentine citizens about them. To complete the research, we also considered the opinions of Romanian students regarding their reasons for wanting or not wanting to settle in Italy, as well as the view of those who choose to move to Italy for construction work.

Also, we chose to approach the issue of Romanians in Florence and the local community that they have formed in a holistic manner because we consider that such an approach can provide us more valuable information about their problems and desires.

2. Literature review

Considering that in this paper we aim to describe the Romanian community in Florence, Italy, as well as to identify the image that this community has, we thought it might be relevant to present similar papers in this field.

Regarding the Romanian migration in Italy and the communities that they have formed in various parts of the country, one of the most comprehensive studies can be found in the work „Români în Italia: Monografia unei comunități de imigranți” *Romanians in Italy: A Monography of an Immigrant Community*. In this work, Otovescu (2016) provides a complete description of the foreign population in Italy, the integration of Romanian communities into Italian society, and their way of life, reasons for migrating and settling in Italy, their relationships with citizens, and their working conditions.

Considering that Romania is a Christian country, women are usually more religious than men. To fit in, the Romanian community in Florence, Italy prefer to follow the native culture (Molteni, Dimitriadis, 2021).

Using data from the National Institute of Statistics of Italy for the year 2007, Otovescu (2016) highlights that the main reasons for Romanian migration to Italy include work (60.66%), family reunification (31.62%), and studies (2.14%) (Otovescu, 2016, p.195). Additionally, in the region of Tuscany, where Florence is the capital, foreigners constituted 6.4% (234,398 people) of the region's population in 2007 (Otovescu, 2016, p.174). In 2019, Italy was the second country after Germany with the highest number of residents without citizenship - 5.3 million (Eurostat, 2020, p.26). By 2020, Tuscany had recorded 422,088 foreigners, indicating an increase in migration to this region (Statista, 2020).

In the context of Romanian migration to Italy, it is important to note that Italy has "the largest community of Romanians (over 1.3 million) among all Romanian immigrant communities formed in other countries over the past two and a half decades" (Otovescu, 2017, p.131). In 2019, Romanians were the largest group of foreigners living in Italy, followed by Albanians and Moroccans (Agerpres, 2020).

Additionally, Cozma & Bocancia (2019) conducted a study analysing the migration flow of Romanians between 1990 and 2016, highlighting that Italy is the preferred destination for Romanians and that Italy, along with Spain, has the largest Romanian communities formed after 1990. In the Castellon region of Spain, Romanians who settled long ago occupy various positions in the region's legislative body (Cozma & Bocancia, 2019, p.255).

Additionally, according to Otovescu (2016), in 2007, most Romanians went to Italy to settle there (38.4%) and chose Italy because their relatives were already there (pp.235-

247). The study further reveals that 77% of Romanians in Italy rented their homes, lived with family members, and most worked six days a week following a routine (59.7%) and physically demanding jobs (86.3%), but had good relationships with their colleagues and superiors (Otovescu, 2016, pp.294-307). Regarding the quality of life, the research found that Romanians had positive relationships with neighbours, frequently met other Romanians in Italy, and many considered Italians friendlier and more tolerant compared to Romanian immigrants (Otovescu, 2016, pp.314-315).

A study analysing the sense of community, neighbour relationships, and life satisfaction in three central Italian communities (Casalbruciato-Rome, Grottaferrata, and Spoleto) highlights that Spoleto has the highest sense of community, followed by Grottaferrata (Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001, p.44). People living in the historic centres of these cities developed a stronger sense of community compared to those in the suburbs or other areas. There is a connection between the sense of community and life satisfaction, as well as between the sense of community and loneliness, even in large cities.

A study analysing the economic and financial transnationalism between Romanians in Italy and their relatives/friends in Romania found that Romanian immigrants in Italy who are unemployed or face medical or legal issues receive financial help from relatives in Romania. Additionally, most Romanian immigrants send money to their relatives in Romania to help them develop, such as building or improving homes (Ban, 2012, pp.137-138).

Moreover, the study found that if offered the same job with the same salary in Romania, most Romanians in Italy would return, motivated by the possibility of being closer to family and friends (Alexandru, 2007, p.163). Medical specialists have a tendency of migrating towards Scandinavian countries (Botezat, Moraru, 2020).

A study regarding the impact of Covid-19 on migrant workers in Italy shows that those who were “ <<veteran>> experienced little or no change in their working lives” (Salaris, Iacob, Anghel, Contu, 2022) while those that were newer or working less important jobs were the most disadvantaged.

During time of great economical distress, young people that chose to emigrate are putting their home country in a difficult situation but create growth in another country thus leaving the country without material and intellectual resources (Plesa, 2020).

Romania has some of the best universities but does not offer profitable workplaces for its engineers or doctors. The majority of engineers seek higher paying workplaces in another countries (Gherheș, Dragomir & Cernicova-Buca, 2020).

A study on the migration and social integration of Romanians in the Milan and Turin areas shows that between 2004 and 2011, most migrants to Italy were female (59%), aged 25-34, and had migrated for economic and family reasons, intending to stay long-term or permanently (Isilda, 2012, p.89). Younger people preferred to remain in Italy, while older individuals preferred to return to Romania after some time (Isilda, 2012, p.90). In terms of social integration, Romanians in Italy stated that accessing or receiving social assistance did not influence their decision to migrate, and knowledge of the Italian language was essential for social integration (Isilda, 2012, p.94).

Similarly, a study that analysed the perception of Italians in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region towards foreigners (Batic, 2016, p.117) highlighted negative perceptions of citizens towards them. According to the study, citizens believe that foreigners have intrusive behaviour (64.6%), that they are too attached to their cultural elements, customs, and traditions, which could endanger the cultural identity of Italian society. Many citizens also claim that immigrants should be controlled to see if they respect the existing rules in the country and that they should be granted the same rights as Italians as long as their way of life fits and adapts to the Italian way of life (Batic, 2016, p.124).

However, despite the citizens' belief that the impact of immigrants is negative within society, it is observed that at a national level, the state tries to integrate and develop immigrant communities as effectively as possible. This is evident in the integration plan developed by the Italian state in 2010, which covers five dimensions: the education system - offering Italian language courses, employment, housing - the state must help immigrants find a place to live, social and medical services - immigrants must have access to these services, and the final dimension includes immigrant children, who must be guaranteed access to education and various services (Caneva, 2014, p.10).

Discrimination can be found even in schools. It has been discovered that children of immigrants are graded less as compared to locals (Triventi, 2020). Even though it is plausible, the child attitude towards school is more important.

Another important study in this domain is done by Sergiu Gherghina (2021). In his study, he discovers that 1 in 10 Romanians has experienced at least once discrimination. But, the way the Romanian community in Florence, Italy describes itself usually is not the way that it actually is. One of the factors that change their vision is knowing the language. Poor understanding of the host country language makes people feel vulnerable and left out.

Regarding the profile of Romanians in Italy in 2007, they had jobs and occupations considered inferior, receiving "those jobs and tasks that Italians were not willing to perform". Most of them worked in construction, social assistance, tourism, or agriculture, and there were certain tensions between Romanians and Italians due to two events involving criminal actions by Romanians on Italian territory (Gherghina & Braghiroli, 2010, pp.7-8). Nonetheless, stronger negative opinions about Romanians existed mostly among Italians who had little social contact with them and were less exposed to cultural and social diversity (Gherghina & Braghiroli, 2010, p.14).

Moving aside the emigrants, their children usually remain in the home country alone, or with a family member. Being neglected, the majority of them find their comfort in drug and dropping out of school (Matei, Ghenţa, 2024).

In a study regarding the post-migration fertility (Carella, Poveda, Zanasi, 2022) of Romanian and Moroccan women in Italy it has been noticed that Romanian women are less likely to have children after returning to their home country unlike Moroccan women. Romania has a birth rate already low.

When returning to the home country after the work has finished is thought that the Italy Syndrome appears. But a study regarding this phenomenon discovers that it is not the case for Romanian migrants. It is now safe to say that Romanians appreciate the Italian lifestyle but do not present the existence of depressive episodes (Costanzo, Gavina, 2022).

To achieve this description and analysis, it is necessary to use several research methods, which we will present next.

3. Methodology

The goal typically represents the expected result, which, to be achieved, required the establishment of more specific steps, represented by objectives. The differences between goals and objectives are also illustrated by the time required to achieve them, with objectives being set for the shorter term compared to the goal, and, while the goal has a general nature, the objectives must be specific (Macleod, 2012, p.60).

Thus, in order to elaborate the objectives, the SMART model can be used. According to the SMART model, an objective must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic for the researched and analysed topic, and to be time-bound (Macleod, 2012, p.70).

The goal of this research is to describe the Romanian community in the region of Florence, Italy. So, we aim to create an accurate image that highlights the lifestyle of this community, both the Romanians and the Italians.

Main objective: Identifying how members of the Romanian community in Florence define themselves

General objective: Identifying how the Romanian community is perceived by Romanian citizens. Is Italy an aspirational destination?

General objective: Identifying how the crime rate is perceived in relation to the Romanian community in Florence.

To conduct the research and obtain the necessary information about the Romanian community in Florence, Italy, it is required to use both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

In this research, the primary method used was the case study, which represents “a qualitative method that reunites several data collection techniques” (Coman, 2018, p.81), and, for this purpose, we used questionnaires, interviews and content analysis.

The questionnaire applied to Romanians in Florence was created considering several dimensions, including elements of quality of life: life satisfaction, living environment, housing, employment, leisure time, as well as elements regarding their reasons for leaving Romania, the length of settling in Florence, and returning to the home country. To measure life satisfaction, we used the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS), which includes five general statements about how individuals view their own lives. Respondents have to express their agreement with these five statements on a Lickert scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means strong disagreement and 7 means strong agreement.

The questions contained in the questionnaire are divers, including ice-breakers or introductory and control. Respondents were asked to provide answers to closed, open and semi-open questions.

Additionally, to gain an overall perspective on the reasons why the young population with a higher education level choose to migrate to Italy, we also created a questionnaire targeting Romanian students.

To complete the information obtained through the questionnaire and gather data on how the Romanian community is perceived by the Italians, we also used the interview survey method. The interview is used when it is necessary to analyse behaviour that is

difficult to observe, when studying beliefs, and elements which are not written. (Scârneci, 2006, p.55).

4. Data analysis and findings

The research results were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Version 20. SPSS provides the opportunity to perform a variety of statistical procedures quickly and easily (Coman & Netedu, 2011, p. 132).

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents, these include: gender, residence area, age, marital status, and the field of activity in which they work in Florence. Additionally, respondents were asked to specify their residence area in Romania before they emigrated. The research sample consists of 124 respondents, members of the Romanian community in Florence.

Considering gender, most respondents (83.9%) are female, with a small percentage being male (16.1%). Considering the respondents residence area, most of them live in the urban area of the province of Florence (92 individuals, 74.2%), while 32 individuals (25.8%) live in rural areas. In terms of respondents age, it is observed that most (67.7%) are aged between 36 and 50 years. However, a significant percentage of respondents are aged between 51 and 65 years, and 6.5% are aged between 18 and 35 years.

Therefore, it can be stated that respondents predominantly fall into the middle-aged and older adult categories. Regarding the marital status of the respondents, most of them are married (61.3%), while 19.4% are single, and 19.4% are divorced. Regarding the field in which most Romanians in Florence work, the research results show that the majority are employed in the service sector (41.9%). A significant percentage work in healthcare (12.9%), 6.5% in sales, and a small percentage work in construction (3.2%).

Considering the reasons why Romanians chose Florence as a migration destination, it is evident that these reasons vary depending on the sector in which they were employed while living in Romania. In other words, compared to those working in the private sector, individuals who worked in the public sector in Romania found the working conditions in Florence more attractive.

Moreover, most Romanians who migrated to Florence because their friends already lived in the area were either private sector employees or unemployed individuals. Thus, it can be deduced that the influence of friends was greater on these individuals than on those who had public sector jobs.

When grouping the counties according to regions of Romania by summing the percentage of Romanians who migrated from each county, it is observed that most Romanians lived in the North-East region, which includes Bacău, Botoşani, Iaşi, Suceava and Vaslui (54.8%). This is followed by the South-East region, which includes Constanţa, Galaţi, and Vrancea, and the West region (Arad, Caraş-Severin) with 6.4%.

Regarding the means of transport chosen by Romanians to travel to Florence, the research results show that most of them opted to travel by bus (61.3%), with the second most used means of transport being the aeroplane (22.6%).

Additionally, 12.9% of respondents reported travelling by their own car. Considering the companions with whom Romanians migrated to Florence, the research results reveal that most of them left the country alone (77.4%). Many travelled with their spouse (19.4%),

and 3.2% travelled with friends. It is evident that the majority of Romanians chose to leave the country alone, while the number of those who left with companions is relatively small.

According to the research results, most Romanians settled in Florence return to Romania to spend their holidays (54.8%). Many of them return to visit relatives (25.8%) and to spend Easter or Christmas holidays (12.9%). It can be stated that Romanians in Florence return to Romania for relatively short periods.

Another factor that would determine Romanians to migrate to Italy is the quality of the education system. The research results show that the majority of respondents somewhat agree with this statement (27.9%), agree (22.9%), and strongly agree (10.1%). However, some of them provided neutral responses, stating that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement: The quality of the education system in Italy would determine me to move to Italy.

Regarding the opinion of Romanian employees on the influence of the presence of Roma people in Italy on perceptions of Romanians, the research results reveal that most respondents believe to a very large extent that the Roma people in Italy influence how Romanians are perceived (43.8%).

Additionally, considering the regions mentioned by respondents, we were interested in their opinion on how safe they would feel in Italy. In this regard, the research results reveal that most respondents believe they would feel very safe (36.3%). However, some provided neutral responses (26.3%), and 16.2% believe they would feel only slightly safe in public spaces.

The quality of food and inedible products is another factor that contributes to Romanians' decision to move to Italy. The research results show that most respondents somewhat agree with the statement: The quality of food and inedible products would determine me to move to Italy (27.4%). Additionally, 22.3% agree with this statement, and 10.1% strongly agree.

5. Conclusions and discussions

Given the before mentioned aspects, this paper focuses on describing the Romanian community in Florence, Italy, aiming to provide a clearer overview of the community's image and social integration. The research aims to describe the Romanian community in Florence from both an internal perspective, from the community members viewpoint, and from an external perspective, from Italian citizens viewpoint.

To achieve this goal, several specific and measurable objectives were formulated, concerning the identification of reasons why Romanians chose to settle in Italy, their life satisfaction, their life style, the difficulties encountered, the perception of the community, and perceptions about the level of crime within the Romanian community in Florence.

This research contributes to expanding theoretical information about the social integration of immigrants and their lifestyle. It can also serve as a reference framework or starting point for other studies focused on this contemporary subject.

As a practical implication, this research can contribute to improving the living conditions of Romanians in Florence. By providing a clear and realistic picture of the Romanian community and their criminal behaviour in Italy, and the difficulties they face, this

research intends to present its findings to Romanian state representatives in Italy. This aims to improve local integration policies for Romanian immigrant communities.

Additionally, presenting the results to Romanian students can help them understand the challenges they might face if they choose to migrate to Italy, the opportunities available there, and the steps needed for successful integration into Italian society.

This could pose as a useful and attractive guide for anyone, especially younger generations that are think about their future and about a path to take in life for themselves and for what they personally think is useful, helpful and good for them and their future.

Many young people go to Italy to study, for example, and then choose to remain there for a few more months that grow into years and finally, seeking to settle in Italy for an undisclosed period, even for the remainder of their lives, especially if they find a partner.

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