

'Is there any continuum between policies and politics?

'The contribution of a pragmatic stance to the analysis of local conflicts.'

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PAPER to be presented at 'XXIII Congresso SISP'

Rome, 17-19 July 2009

Section: Democrazie e democratizzazione

Workshop: Contentious Dynamics in Local Contexts

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i. Introduction

The Italian literature on urban policies tends to elude conflictual dynamics (Vitale 2007). It is even more so as far as safety policies are involved. This equally applies to Italy, Europe and the US. Scholars in fact seem to assume the passivity of actors, in an implicit reading of the 'urban texture' as based on a structure of power domination. Their attention focuses on policies. Little or no space is reserved to actors, particularly those who are the targets of such policies.

While investigating the hypothesis of a revanchist New York, Smith (1996) reports on the clearing out of Tompkins square park. He mentions the community resisted against it, but homeless, he says, just moved to another location. A similar picture is given by Mitchell (1997) who, in his study of US anti-homeless interventions, highlights they are simply removed from negotiations. In his discussion of British 'vengeful polices' (2006: 1), which draws from Smith's work, Atkinson points out their target are likely to be the actual victims. De Giorgi claims it is them who pay for zero tolerance in New York, but not only: the 'damned of the metropolis' (2005). They are often criminalized by spatial control practices, while specific anti-social behaviours are left unexplored (ibidem). A few years earlier Dal Lago (1999) had brought this very issue to light, with reference to the Italian context.

Pavarini (2006) wrote an analysis of the first ten years of urban safety policies in the boot-shaped peninsula. He defined safety as a public good that should be produced and governed in the effort to widen the spaces of access to and exercise of rights. He argued Italian institutions have failed to do so. Yet, no voice is given to the very people whose rights have been ignored. In 2004, Della Porta (2004) provided with a thorough overview of neighbourhood committees in Italy. She dedicated specific attention to urban safety committees. She stated they hardly ever count any immigrant as their members, while they can well be the actual 'scapegoat' of their concerns. I

believe they might have appeared on the scene with a different disguise. Possibly, this was simply not the case. To be true, the focus of her work was on committees. However, in all the above contributions it is evident that, apart from passing references, no trace is found of the target of urban safety policies, most often identified with immigrants, not to mention their agency. This might be hardly surprising in what some authors call 'a progressive depoliticization of the public sphere'.

Swyngedouw (2006) forcefully argues that proper politics¹ has been evacuated from the urban. According to him, 'a neo-liberal governmentality has replaced debate, disagreement and dissensus with technologies of governing'. (2006: 2). In spite of it, he acknowledges, 'spaces of political engagements occur within the cracks, in-between the meshes and the strange inter-location that shape places that contest the police order' (3). Furedi (2007) is more pessimistic. In his opinion, the mood of disengagement has even succeeded in engulfing movements of protest which have become more and more a strikingly personal matter. What about those people who do speak up? What about immigrants who do speak up? They have been repeatedly obscured, as other vulnerable actors have. Indeed, a crisis of politics has been paralleled by a crisis of social sciences (Thévenot 2006: 213) which have failed to rethink social categories.

As a matter of fact, immigrants have been mostly treated as objects rather than subjects of policy (Castels and Miller 1993). This attitude has equally characterised policy makers and scholars who have uncritically embraced the perspective of the nation-state (see Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003 cit in Però 2008), in isolation from the lived experiences of migrants themselves ².

¹ He defines it with reference to a definition given by Rancière (1998: 15): It arises when the police order is dislocated, transgressed 'when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those that have no part'.

² For an overview of existing work on the subject see Castles and Miller 2003

A few exceptions can be found in the fields of anthropology and feminism (see Però 2008 for an overview). In Italy, their political engagement has been studied in relation to associational structures, workers' union and dedicated consultation bodies (Mantovani 2007). Furthermore, they are generally considered as political actors only when they are entitled to vote. This has arguably contributed to a narrow understanding of the topic (Però 2008).

This contribution proposes therefore to address the following questions: is an evacuation of immigrants' politics observable in urban safety conflicts in Italy? No claim is made that the case studies presented here can be used to generalize on the wider Italian scenario. Nevertheless, the author believes they can be fruitful to exemplify how scholars can study policies in a continuum with politics, through the adoption of a pragmatic stance. Ultimately, this will bring actors' back on the agenda and it will help extrapolate an answer to the question that has just been formulated.

1. The theoretical background of the paper

1.1 'Yes we can!': a plurality of actors in a plurality of engagements. The French pragmatic stance.

The term refers to the approach of the Groupe de sociologie politique et morale³. Simmel (1908) taught us that conflicts must be studied as a configuration in its dynamic character. He insisted they all have an institutional dimension that can be studied empirically. It is then crucial to take actors seriously (Boltanski 1990). Starting from the analysis of a 'problematic situation' (Dewey 1993 cit Cefai and Joseph 2002), a pragmatic stance reflects on the 'micro-politics of troubles' (Cefai and Joseph 2002). It helps understand actors, how they contribute to the alternative

³ The research program of the group was launched at the beginning of the 80s, through the work of various researchers, in particular Luc Boltanski, in the field of sociology, Alain Desrosières, in the field of statistics, Michel Pollack, in the field of anthropology and Laurent Thévenot, in the field of economy. In 1984 the group was officially founded and today it brings together scholars from disciplines as diverse as sociology, political science, economy, anthropology, history, cognitive sciences, that conduct research in various parts of the world.

categorisations of any given situation, how this can lead to the emergence of a public problem. It helps understand how they interact with each other, through various 'forms of engagements', (Thévenot and Boltanski 1991, Thévenot and Boltanski 2006, Thévenot 2006), including familiar ones, which transcend the idea of social action, as intended by Weber. This suggests the 'chose publique' (Cefai and Pasquier 2003) is by no means the monopoly of the State. Thus scholars should not resign to reading every phenomenon as a system of domination. They should rather articulate the dynamics of conflicts and put actors back on the agenda, by observing them in a whole variety of 'scènes publiques' (ibidem). Indeed engagements do not only become manifest on the barricades.

It is not a revival of micro-sociological analysis that is being invoked here, not a micro-sociological analysis per se. It is rather supported that scholars should reach out to every 'scène publique', particularly those which fall outside deliberative democracy tools. Ideally, the multiple contradictory lines of conflicts can be discerned as a result, thus demonstrating that trading off and negotiations are only the ultimate step in actors' dynamics. An epistemological turn is needed in this sense: we need to move 'from a focus on individuals acted upon to individuals acting'. In other words, we must recognise that every actor has the potential to exert a form of agency. Boltanski (1990) defines it as 'competence', to indicate their capacity to shift from one type of engagements to a 'plurality' of other (Thévenot 2006). This requires a form of 'coordination'⁴ in which actors refer to a 'common good'. It also requires actors to pass a 'test'⁵ (Boltanski and Thévenot 1983) if a dispute is to be called to a halt.

Some forms of engagements might be invisible to the public scène but actors pass through it when opening up to a 'public arena'⁶. Accordingly, attention needs to be paid to every engagement

⁴ The groupe de sociologies politique et morale draws here from Hirschman (1981).

⁵ The concept refers to situations in which actors are criticized or advance a criticism, as in situations in which they try to come to an agreement (Boltanski, 1990).

⁶ The concept is drawn from Cefai (2002: pg. 58) to indicate 'a scene where, in front of some spectators, the claimants

regime as well as to the sequence of arguments raised by actors, with reference to various 'orders of worth' (Boltanski 1990) ⁷.

1.2 Migrants' engagements beyond political and discursive opportunity structures.

The empirical material informing this paper builds on ethnographical and qualitative data collected for a phd project on urban conflicts and immigrants' collective action in Italy. In particular, it focuses on disputes relating to a hot debate: the regulation of phone centers, whose owners are mostly immigrants⁸. The cities chosen as case studies are Modena and Verona. It was here that the issue first emerged⁹. Most importantly, these cities have a different political subculture. This makes it interesting to compare them in light of their political opportunity structures (POS) (McAdam 1982, Tarrow 1994, Kriesi et al 1995, cit. Koopmans et al 2005). It is from this theoretical basis that the limited literature on migrants' mobilization mostly departs from.

Migrants are expected to mobilize as a result of favourable institutional opportunities in the receiving society. This statement is problematic though: it tends to provide with a mono-causal explanation based on a rigid and nation-state-centered notion of POS: it overlooks the role of other factors, such as migrants' political socialization and background, the exploitative and marginalizing conditions they experience, their networks (Però 2008, see also Mantovani 2007 for a discussion on the Italian literature) and, I would add, their various forms of engagements.

Koopmans et al. (2005) did recognise 3 main shortcomings in this model. First of all, no attention is paid to discursive opportunity structures (DOS)¹⁰, nor for the way they determine which collective identities and substantive demands have a likelihood to gain visibility in the mass media

to ownership of a public problem face each other' (*my translation* from French).

⁷ The term worth recalls the fact that actors need to refer to a normative order that can be defined as justifiable, that is to say an order whose legitimacy can be qualified by actors.

⁸ Phone centers are shops where telephone and internet services are provided. In some cases they also offer services such as money transfer, etc. In other EU countries they are known as cyber cafès, telecafès, locutorios.

⁹ Exception made for other cities of the Lombardy Region, such as Milan and Brescia.

¹⁰ See Koopmans and Statham 1999b, Koopmans 2004b, Koopmans and Olzak 2004 cit. Koopmans et al. 2005

and to achieve legitimacy in the public discourse. Second, POS tend to be specified at a level which is too general and which ignores the local dimension. This is clearly most essential, particularly for non-citizens, who don't have access to political membership. Third, there is an insufficient appreciation for contentious politics as a fundamentally interactive and dynamic process. To be true research has gone much further on all these issues (see Tilly and Tarrow 2008). Yet, the main constraint of contentious politics is still identified with the POS. The paper will try and demonstrate that there is more to migrants' engagement than POS and DOS allow.

2. Verona, Modena: an (apparent) embodiment of oppositional political subcultures.

Verona and Modena are situated in the north of Italy. They have a population of respectively 260,000 and 170,000 residents, with a similar incidence of immigrants (10%) (Istat 2008). Following the socio-economic transformations that affected the country, at the beginning of the 90s¹¹, their political system was put under stress. While Post-communist' parties in Modena have become more and more fragmented, Christian Democrats have increasingly failed to respond to constituencies' demands (Diamanti 2003). Both have lost considerable support accordingly.

In Verona, the latter governed for over 40 years, until a Forza Italia coalition appeared on the local scene. It won the election in 1999 (58% of votes)¹². A center-left Ulivo coalition took over in 2002. In the meantime, the extreme-right political party Lega Nord started gaining consensus. The then regional health councillor, was presented as its candidate for the 2007 elections. He won (60,69% of votes). The new right wing coalition built its electoral campaign, and the program¹³ which followed, on a securitarian stance. Among other things, it focuses on the monitoring of immigrants' shops, particularly phone centers and kebab's, and on the adoption of spatial control interventions,

¹¹ Such as the increase in the number of elderly people and in unemployment rates, the gradual flexibilisation of work and new waves of immigration from outside the EU.

¹² All data reported in the paper in relations to electoral results were taken from the website of the Ministry of Interior. Available at: <http://amministrative.interno.it/download.htm> (accessed on 5 June 2009).

¹³ 13 Comune di Verona, 2007. Linee programmatiche di governo per il quinquennio 2007-2012 *approvazione*. Session 24

Oct. 2007/ n 79. Available at: http://portale.comune.verona.it/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=9229 accessed on January 10th 2009 (accessed on 1 January 2008).

including the installation of unfriendly park benches¹⁴, the introduction of fines to eliminate the phenomenon of street vendors¹⁵, the involvement of (national) military forces to patrol the town center¹⁶, etc.

Urban safety, together with immigration, are considered as priority number one in the whole of the country, however, and they have been equally politicised by leading and oppositional parties. The same can be said for Modena. In 1995, in the attempt to respond to new emerging demands, Giuliano Barbolini, the then mayor of Modena, approved the project 'Città Sicure', with the aim of rethinking urban safety policies. It was the first time that an Italian local council created an urban safety partnership with the Prefecture¹⁷. Other initiatives included the opening of a council office responsible for the collection of their complaints, the introduction of community police officers to patrol the territory and of ordinances to contrast the phenomena of begging and prostitution. With the beginning of the new millennium, following the adoption of an approach based on a mix of spatial control and mediation, Barbolini started focusing more on the latter and on situational prevention (Interview, 8 April 2009). In 2004, Giorgio Pighi was elected (63,8% of votes), with the support of the same coalition and he continued operating along the lines of his predecessor, with an increasing pressure from oppositional parties, particularly as far as urban safety is concerned. This became all the more evident during the last electoral campaign, in 2009. Pighi was eventually re-elected in April 2009 (50.10%).

¹⁴ L' Arena di Verona, Panche 'antirelax' segati i braccioli. 23rd December, News, pg. 12.

¹⁵ L' Arena di Verona, Supermulta a chi compra il falso. 1st August, News, pg. 11.

¹⁶ L' Arena di Verona, Un patto Tosi-Maroni. 25th February 2009, pg. 1.

¹⁷ See the website of Modena città Sicura: <http://www.comune.modena.it/cittasicura/>

3. The empirical evidence

3.1 Via Rossa¹⁸: 'The Bronx has moved downstairs'.

'On the ground floor opposite my house a Tunisian young man opened a pizzeria. An Indian opened a phone center, just next to it. In practice, in a few months the Bronx moved downstairs! The pizzeria was in fact not a pizzeria: no one ever saw any pizza coming out of it nor a supplier carrying anything inside. The phone center was open till 10 pm, they sold alcoholic drinks at cheap prices (...). It is mostly Moldovians that caused problems. They chose the place as their headquarters. Every night they grouped up there, they pissed in people's garden, they left beer bottles there, they listened to loud music (...). Decay resulted out of it, more than a year ago. At a certain stage we confronted on a parking problem and it all exploded' (Interview, 4th December 2008).

According to the young representative of the neighbourhood committee¹⁹ of Via Rossa, a sympathizer of the Lega Nord, this is how it all started. Via Rossa is a residential street located in a neighbourhood which borders with the historical centre. It has the lowest percentage of immigrant residents of all town districts (8,59% compared to 20,7% of the central district, which has the highest percentage) (Comune di Modena 2007). The phone center itself is on the ground floor of a residential building block which is mostly occupied by immigrants. It was first opened 10 years ago as a mixed business, including phone services and foodstuff. It was then taken over twice and it is currently a food store only, following the introduction of the new local regulation 188/2007 which, among other things, does not allow owners to operate both activities²⁰. As the young representative further explained during the interview, perceived problems related and still relate to

¹⁸ Streets' names are all invented.

¹⁹ Neighbourhood committees are generally made up of a very small group of people. In this case it is only made up by the actual representative and a few friends of his.

²⁰ Comune di Modena Local regulation 188, 17 December 2007: *Regolamento Comunale sui centri di telefonia e Comunicazione*.

issues of decay and pacific cohabitation. The common good under attack here is clearly the neighbourhood, to be more precise 'quietness and emptiness in the neighbourhood'. His arguments drew from a civic order of worth: the shop is blamed for making life in the neighbourhood uncomfortable and a specific group of people, Moldovians, are pointed out as particularly problematic customers.

The police was called a few times, the pizzeria was eventually closed down. '*Something was done*', the young man admits, but people kept going to the phone center. Three similar shops are located in adjacent streets. They were also described as troublesome, but not as much as the one in Via Rossa. The latter is just off a turn and it is enough to park there to block traffic. Apparently, some attempts were made by the representative to confront the phone center's owner, in a very informal, familiar type of engagement. In turn, she says that:

'I have had some problems [with the shop] because it is an area where the police always come for inspections, there are a lot of foreigners, this building above is all inhabited by them, especially Africans (...). If the police leaves the car in front of the shop everyone thinks it has come to inspect it (...). A young Italian guy [the neighbourhood committee representative] who lives here wrote letters to the municipality [to complain]. I told him 3 or 4 times that I am not responsible for any disturbance but he believes it is my fault (...). He never even does any shopping here. He only comes to tell me that something is wrong or to ask me to close down! No one else has ever done it (...). The police never found anything wrong (...) I am just selling stuff, doing my job! If someone buys a beer and then drinks just outside I send them away because it bothers me too. I always remove the bottles they leave outside, even if they did not buy them here. What else should I do?' (Interview, 28th April 2009).

The owner clearly based her justification on a civic order of worth too, as she suffered from similar disturbances. She also used a market one: she underlined that selling beer, which seemed to be a (perceived) part of the problem, is in fact her job. She then further commented that if she was to stop, it would prove negative for her profits and yet positive for her competitors: supermarkets. The owner was well disposed to talk and come to terms with any problem put forward by her interlocutor. Arguably, their appeal to different orders of worth made it more difficult to success in any coordination. He has kept complaining since.

In the meantime, two parallel actions had been undertaken by the municipality: a participatory process and a mediation one. These are examples of actions implemented within institutional scènes. The first was set up in 2006, with the aim to draw up a regulation for phone centers, after various complaints had reached the municipality. It involved local and regional officers and members of the police. In the words of a local officer:

'It is sufficient for any activity to be under strong press coverage as problematic, for all activities of the same category to be described in a similarly negative fashion. Phone centers have had an evolution over time that has been felt by residents 'in their stomach' ²¹ because they compete with some shops and because of the anti-social behaviour of some customers. This has required the municipality to deal with them not only from the commercial point of view but also from that of urban safety, social policy and integration (Interview, 10th October 2008).

This describes very well the widespread perception on phone centers. Apparently, the local authority had a very good grasp of what the all issue was about. In a way the interviewee summarized the arguments of the committee's representative and the owner.

²¹ This refers to irrational and emotional feelings as opposed to rational ones.

As for the mediation process, it had been set up the previous year by a cooperative of mediators, to which the service had been contracted out. It followed the receipt of specific complaints about Via Rossa. Curiously enough it was managed independently from the participatory one. The young representative, other neighbours and the actual phone center's owner were invited to join and they all did. Neighbours did not feel quite satisfied with it. Their arguments were put forward but the test was not passed as participants kept insisting on different orders of worth. The committee, in particular, did not consider the market one advanced by the owner as legitimate, hence the mediation process slowly turned into a test of power thus breaking down any possibility for coordination. The young representative eventually moved out of it and set up the committee. The decision was taken to take an alternative action in order for things to be solved. The police was asked to patrol the territory much more frequently. Little could be done by the phone center's owner who kept claiming it was not her responsibility to look after people outside her shop. Tensions are on-going. Assophone center never entered into discussions, despite the fact it called for a meeting, which never took place, with the representatives of all neighbourhood committees in Modena.

Assophone center is an association that was formally founded in 2006. Its initial objective was to define a commercial code for owners as to avoid the drawbacks of competition. Following the introduction of the national anti-terrorism law²² and of the above mentioned local regulation, it started organizing collective actions to resist against their implementation, as they were seen as severely impacting on the business²³. The owner of Via Rossa has been one of its active members. She took part in the local authority participatory process and fed into it. Negotiations did not go very far and a number of important issues, such as the requirement of the new regulation to create a waiting area inside phone shops²⁴, were not taken into consideration.

²² Italian Government legislative decree 155, July 27th 2005: *Misure urgenti per il contrasto del terrorismo Internazionale*.

²³ It requires owners to register customers' personal details prior to their access to telephone and internet services. This has been very unpopular with customers, particularly undocumented immigrants who were suddenly short of a crucial service.

²⁴ It should be noticed that the greatest majority of phone centers are located in small shops that are often part of listed buildings. As such no structural work is generally allowed.

All in all, owners felt it was a democratic hypocrisy and they developed an ill-disposed attitude towards the local authority. In 2006, following a run of inspections by the health authority, they had already undertaken some structural works, in compliance with new requirements. The local regulation was now introducing more. This is why in a third meeting, when they found out they were there just to attend its presentation, and that further discussions were not possible, they stood up and left. Yet another test failed to be passed. Arguably, it was not even staged, but it still managed to fuel hostility towards power-holders and, with it, their motivation to mobilize (Interview 6th November 2008).

Action went well beyond formal institutional channels. Meetings were called for with the police to voice their doubts on the legitimacy of inspections, again in what resembles more to a familiar type of engagement and some agreements were reached on the registration of customers. Furthermore, the president of the association, an Italian man, sent articles to local newspapers to make their protests more visible and to try and counter the negative image of phone centers. However, during a meeting which took place last December, he lamented that editorial offices were being less responsive than usual, possibly due to elections coming up. This went to the detriment of their last protest to date, in December 2008²⁵. It was in fact not echoed.

Importantly, despite the visibility the association has gained since its formal constitution, local officers, residents and committees still fail to give it any recognition. They generally claim it is just a bunch of owners, even though the vast majority of them have subscribed to it and are still somehow active. They believe it is only about their president 'goobling them up' to rise up and protest instead of trying to compromise (Interview 10th October and 3rd December 2008).

²⁵ Two took place in crucial phases of the conflict²⁵. The second, the one mentioned here, was anticipated by a lockout which involved other immigrant shop-owners and members of a workers' union in Modena; the third (the second in chronological order) was organized by various associations in Modena, to put forward the rights of immigrants in general, and Assophone center decided to join.

3.2 Via Bianca: 'It is a question of rights and duties'.

Via Bianca is located in a residential area in a neighbourhood south of Verona town center, with the second highest percentage of immigrant residents²⁶. It is well-known for its history of drug dealing, dating back to the 90s. Problems with phone centers started in 2005, as reported in the following extract of the main local newspaper:

'Everything started, as they [some residents] explain, with the opening of two phone centers (...) that, besides offering an international phone service, sell foodstuffs. Since some time they have become habitual meeting points for a considerable number of people of different nationalities that meet up and hang around till very late at night. The result, according to residents, are a series of inconveniences such as hampered traffic, disturbance, abandoned litter, let alone the frequent moments of tensions, both between regular [immigrant] customers and between them and residents²⁷.

I introduced this case study with a press article because, according to many interviewees, media coverage had a crucial impact on the all issue of Via Bianca. The above was the second article that appeared in the press. Others followed, particularly in the same month and two years later, with the beginning of the electoral campaign 2007 and soon after the election of the current mayor. As this article came out, residents were presenting a petition to protest, for a second time, against the bad quality of life in their neighbourhood. In their opinion, problems were caused by the phone centers²⁸.

²⁶ Statistiche Comune di Verona: Cittadini stranieri residenti Verona per sesso, Circoscrizione. Anno 2007.

²⁷ L'Arena, Nella strada di XXX (name of neighbourhood) raccolte 230 firme per chiedere al Comune di intervenire. 'Traffico, rifiuti e violenza'. La gente insorge. 4th August 2005, News, pg. 13.

²⁸ Actually, only one of the shop was a phone center. The other was a foodstore, but it came to be defined as such because of its bad reputation (Interview 29th April 2009).

A few days later, another article appeared ²⁹. This time the parish priest was interviewed. He invited residents to reflect on the 'real' causes of decay, blaming it more on domestic animals. Implicitly, he criticized racist attitudes and stressed on the need of a welcoming attitude towards immigrants. As he stressed: *'Anti-social behaviours are observable in natives too, but the petition was explicitly targeted at non-European immigrants'*. The phone center owner was the second interviewee. He explained:

'Whenever any tension arises around [the shop], I immediately close it down. When there is too much mess in the [public] garden I call the police. They often suggest I should talk to those who disturb and ask them to lower their voice but they reply it is none of my business. The green area is public and access to it is free! I cannot prevent people – many of whom are Italians – to buy a drink from my shop and hang around there. It is not easy for me either'.

As the priest did, the owner stressed it is not only immigrants who disturb. He also admitted to be rather uncomfortable with the situation himself:

'They [residents] think it is the shop that causes the problem. But I have seen them [the problematic customers]. They do not come here to buy something. They 'do business' [drug dealing] outside, in the public garden. I denounced this fact to the police. (...) It is not my fault if they get drunk, if they disturb! I only do my job by selling food and drinks. I even help them because I provide them with a toilet! Otherwise they just piss outside. Till last year there was not even a bench to sit on, in the garden' (Interview 18th May 2008).

²⁹ L'Arena, Il parroco don XXX (name) invita a essere tolleranti con le diverse culture e a impegnarsi a integrarle. Imputa il degrado della zona agli animali. Il titolare del centro: 'La vita non è facile neanche per me'. 6th August 2005, News, pg. 12.

Neither the parish priest's nor the owner's opinion were ever voiced again, at least not in the press. However, further space was given to the claims of residents and to the 'replies' of officials, including particularly the local safety officer, the head of the local police force and the regional health councillor – who was then elected mayor of Verona in 2007. They kept confirming the situation was serious but under control ³⁰. In the same year, a group of residents appeared on the scene (from now onwards mediators). There is no trace of it in the press. It had not emerged from the first interviews either. One of them recalled the problems in Via Bianca:

'There is a group of people that have dedicated time to social issues (...). In 2004 we started a new adventure and organised a festival for the neighbourhood (...). We gave it a theme, integration, since a problem with a phone center was emerging (...). It would have been ridiculous not to involve the African residents (...). This was how we started to learn. We approached them in an informal way. They were enthusiastic! Then something happened we could not cope with. The shop owner started feeling attacked on the activity that provided him with a living. That worry was overwhelming and he started telling us about it during our meetings: drug addicts got used to hide in his toilet, the police blamed him for it. He stopped selling beer for a while, as we suggested, but they'd buy it elsewhere. Of course he complained for the evident loss of profit. We also tried to mediate with drug addicts, we even talked to the questura! ³¹(Interview 29th April 2009).

Various actors occupy the scenes of Via Bianca. While their opinions converge on some of the issues, that is to say disturbance and abandoned litter, they attach a different weight to each one of them. Moreover, they do not agree on who is to be held responsible for any such matter. The owner and the mediators stress mostly on drug addicts, while residents do not even mention them.

³⁰ See for example L'Arena on 7th July 2007, News, pg 11; 26th Oct 2005, News, pg 14; 6th Aug 2005, News, pg 12; 7th July 2007, News, pg 11; 3rd Jan 2007, News, pg 13.

Yet, as every interviewees confirmed, it is an old well-known problem of the neighbourhood.

As in the previous case study, a civic order of worth emerges in arguments, which is self-explanatory. This is used by all actors. An industrial and a market one were also advanced, by the owner: the first on the basis he offers a service the local authority has failed to provide with, the second on the basis 'he only does his job'. Mediators further stressed on the latter, by pointing to the possible of competition. These arguments mostly crossed in the newspaper only. As for the priest, it seems that he sneaked off any possible test by avoiding to address the relevant orders of worth and by focusing on a general call for integration.

The research confirmed that there was no direct confrontation between the residents and the owner. The former limited themselves to screaming out their complaints a number of times and to calling the police whenever it was needed. It was the mediators who, in a familiar regime of engagement, first approached the owners, for the organisation of the festival. Later on, they unintentionally gave them the chance to give vent to their worries. One of them reported they, particularly the priest, had tried to facilitate the communication between the signatories and the phone center's owner, but this attempt was unsuccessful (Interview 29th May 2009). Apparently, Italian shopkeepers had a contention with the priest. It developed as works were carried out to transform the parking space in front of the parish church into a pedestrian zone. In their opinion, it was going to prove detrimental for their business. Arguably, this contention is still very much 'alive' in the memory of shopkeepers and it made the one that is being discussed here even stronger as the parish priest chose to support phone centers' owners.

In 2005, as it results from a systematic press review³², Via Bianca became the object of a public alarm. Inspections followed, at a very fast and regular pace, particularly in the summer of the same year, when the problem first emerged, and in summer 2007, soon after the elections. Interviewees

³¹ A body of the Italian National police force.

³² A press review of the l'Arena was carried out for the period November 2003 – August 2009.

argued that the strong media exposition was, at least in part, orchestrated by politicians, including first and foremost the then regional health councillor who was to become the mayor of Verona in 2007 (Interview 29th April, 29th May). He accompanied police officers in their inspections, together with journalists who had been invited to join and report on them, as testified by articles and related pictures³³. As some literature suggest it is typical of right wing parties to give visibility to mayors in the resolution of safety issues (Braccesi 2004), as it can be very instrumental when the pressure from residents comes to a climax. Arguably it was the case in Via Bianca, where the Lega Nord even opened a branch - just opposite the phone center - 'to patrol the territory because nothing had been done to solve the problem' (Interview 16th April 2009). The mayor himself explained: 'It is not a question of discrimination, but of rights and duties. Up to now there has been a relaxed attitude on the issue on the side of the municipality.'³⁴

As inspections became an everyday experience, the phone center's owner contacted the Coordinamento Migranti³⁵. In 2006, other owners started having similar difficulties and they decided it was overdue time to do something about it. They organised meetings at the Coordinamento's office, even though they had already been meeting to try and define a common commercial code to among them, to try and avoid the drawbacks of competition. Informal meetings with the police and local officers were organized too to clarify articles of the normative framework on the basis of which they had been repeatedly and unjustly - according to them - fined. Some negotiations worked out, despite the fact no formal agreement was every signed, but no 'communication bridge' was ever established with the local authority itself which still seems to proceed with a rather untransparent conduct³⁶.

³³ L'Arena, Controlli a tappeto. Nel mirino di vigili e ispettori Ulss una ventina di negozi di immigrati. Sigilli al locale di XXX (name of neighbourhood) between via XXX and via XXX spesso teatro di risse. Scatta il blitz, chiusi 3 phone center. 7th July 2007, News, pg. 11.

³⁴ L'Arena, Phone center in XXX (name of neighbourhood). Chiesti controlli severi. 20th November 2005, News, pg. 11.

³⁵ It is an immigrants association which offers assistance to immigrants. It has also been particularly active in the organisation of protests to put forward their rights.

³⁶ For example, owners repeatedly asked for a confirmation on what activities they can carry out to be in compliance with the regional law and the ordinance that derived from it (Comune di Verona ordinance 18/2009, 17 March 2009: *Disciplina degli orari di apertura e chiusura dei phone centers*).

In late December 2007, owners joined a protest organised by the Coordinamento, to reclaim the rights of immigrants as a collectivity in general. Yet, after a number of heated discussions, they decided not to build on persistent claims over their rights. In the words of a phone center's owner: 'It is pragmatic practical actions that we need to think about now. We are happy to get involved into politics, we do want to put forward our rights but this can only be done once we have sorted ourselves out' (Interview 13th May 2008). This recalls the fact that while experiencing marginalization, be it in work terms or in other aspects of everyday life, it is hard for immigrants - or anyone else - to dedicate any time for politics (Però 2008, see also Mantovani 2007).

4. Discussions

4.1 The complex nexus between policy and politics.

In the introduction of this paper it was proposed to adopt a pragmatic stance for the analysis of two local conflicts, on the believe it can help 'follow actors'. The empirical evidence shows well how this approach opens the path to the sequence of arguments they advance and to the various regimes they engage into. As it will be further explicated next, such a reading does allow to analyse politics in a continuum with policies. I will show it by further elaborating, in a comparative light, on the case studies presented. In particular, I will do so by recalling actor's engagements, particularly those which generally escape academic analysis, by pointing out the situations in which their arguments were put to test.

As anticipated, migrants have been mostly considered as political actors as far as they have access to political membership and in relation to the work of associations, workers' union and immigrants' consultation bodies, hence on (generally) formalized structures. Despite their contribution to the field of analysis, these perspectives have been argued as providing with a limited understanding of their political involvement. In fact, the configuration of public problems does also take place through actors' engagement in their more familiar worlds, in scènes exceeding institutional ones,

but still potentially leading to the opening up of a public arena. The rich empirical evidence shows this well. Beyond institutional arrangements, there lies a complex world of engagements. As it was reported, phone centers' owners called for informal meetings with police officers, in both cities. No mediation was provided for by the respective municipalities, not even in Modena where a specific participative process had been set up which involved, among other actors, police officers and phone centers' owners themselves. Confrontations also took place between the representative of the neighbourhood committee of Via Rossa and the phone center's owner, within and without the mediation process set up by the local cooperative. An attempt to facilitate dialogue was also made in Verona by the mediators who tried to help residents and the owner come to terms with their dispute. In either of cases, something went wrong. In other words, they did not pass the test, or they did not even reach out to it.

The (to be) representative of the neighbourhood committee of Via Rossa entered the mediation process, together with other residents and the phone center's owner. As it was mentioned, at a certain stage, the former broke out of it. Arguably, it was the result of actors using different orders of worth to put forward their justifications. This made communication harder in the first place. Most importantly, one of the orders used by the phone center's owner was misinterpreted. She introduced a market one point out the risk of competition, but the latter was not accepted as a legitimate one: it was intended as an individual interest rather than that of the wider community, thus it could not be linked to a common good.

There is another scène in which the test was not passed in Modena: the third meeting organised at the municipality, as part of the participatory process. No space was opened here for any argument to come across. It was perceived as a mere test of power and it resulted in the breakdown of any possible opportunity for actors to bring forward their justifications to try and achieve a form of coordination.

In Verona, mediators tried to put to test their justifications to residents, in the name of phone centers' owners. Two types of constraints prevented it from being passed. First of all, the priest 'sneaked it off ' (Vitale 2009), by calling attention to the more general topic integration, thus failing to confront on the basis of a legitimate order of worth specific to the common good under attack. Second, it is reasonable to expect that the test was hampered by the memory shop keepers still have of a previous contention on the public square. In that occasion they felt their dissent was merely silenced in favour of the parish priest's requests, to the detriment of any opportunity of coordination. As a result, their attitude was less open to confrontations and resembles more to a test of power. But how did immigrants' politics come about in the first place?

4.2 Do political and discursive opportunity tell all the story?

Predictability and safety have become non-negotiable principles of social life and crime now surpasses healthcare and the economy as public anxiety number one (Atkinson 2006, Braccesi 2004, Palidda 2009). The result is that residents' fears have been increasingly legitimised, with policies giving ample space to all sorts of prohibitionism, protectionism and authoritarianism (Palidda 2009) in what can be described as a shift from demands for the right to the city into a claim for the right to urban safety (Petrillo 2000). This is particularly evident in Italy and it transcends the 'colour' of political parties: Braccesi (2004) argues that (similar) urban safety policies tend to be put forward irrespectively of any political affiliation, with a difference. While right wings tend to focus on a more visible involvement of mayors and on the delegation of urban safety to the national government, left wings mostly activate social interventions and mediation types of activities. The case studies demonstrate it vividly. They represent well a general national trend. It is enough to recall the spectacularization of inspections in Verona, as well as the securitarian stance which has characterised the program of the current mayor. In Modena, on the contrary, after the adoption of an approach based on a mix of spatial control and mediation, more attention has been dedicated to the latter and situational prevention. This scenario suggests a considerable diversity in the POS of Modena and Verona.

If we now zoom out of urban safety and zoom back into urban policies, we can shift our attention to the local level. It becomes immediately clear that there is more to immigrants' political engagement than the model of POS allows for. The Modenese local authority has been very attentive to the emergence of the issue around phone centers. It even set up a participatory process. In principle, such an instrument should facilitate actors' access to a public arena. In this case, it rather showed the 'Janus face' of some forms of governance (Swyngedouw 2005), that are (yet) short of codified rules defining participation. At least this was the perception of phone centers' owners. None of these opportunities was available in Verona. Interestingly, owners acted in very similar ways to their colleagues in Modena though, with some differences. They both privileged informal confrontations with police officers and residents. They both organised protests.

Let's now interrogate DOS in Verona and Modena. Tilly and Tarrow (2008) stress that mass media are among the most common tools used by actors, during disputes, to put forward their claims. Unfortunately, scholars have thrown light on this dimension with some delay (see Mosca, 2009). From this research it has emerged that the press has been well understood by all actors as a crucial channel to make their voice heard. Access to the media space is not automatic, however, nor necessarily positive. As the press review³⁷ showed, phone centers have been repeatedly portrayed as 'evil shops'. Many of the residents that were interviewed during the research referred to newspaper articles to support their arguments. Hence, it is reasonable to expect that (negative) media visibility has proved detrimental for owners and their claims. Having said this, Assophone center, in Modena, managed to gain some visibility, even though the beginning of the electoral campaign proved it harder to reach out for editorial offices. Yet, the president still fails to be recognised as representative of the association at all. This ultimately constrained opportunities for owners themselves. As far as Verona is involved, it is evident that while *l'Arena* has provided accounts of Veronese residents' opinions, it has hardly done the same for phone centers-owners, with a very few exceptions. In other words, it is hard to support that owners really benefited from

³⁷ For Verona see note 30. For Modena a review of *l'Informazione* and *La Gazzetta di Modena* was carried out for the same period.

DOS, nor that their collective actions found any fertile ground in this sense. In Modena they opened but they were severely constrained by the factors indicated above. In Verona they were hardly present at all.

5. Some concluding remarks

A superficial reading of the preceding chapters might well suggest that residents (voters) have prevailed over phone centers' owners and that ultimately the municipality has dominated the scene. However, this paper has demonstrated that the conflicts explored have not unravelled against a background of mere domination. Actors have opened up to a 'public arena'. As McAdam (1982) argues, models of mobilisation tend to be linked to power, but the literature would very much benefit if we looked at collective action through the lens of capabilities instead.

The French pragmatic stance can well serve this objective. Indeed, it has been shown that if we shift our attention from individuals acted upon to individuals acting, it is possible to study politics and policies in a continuum. This can be done by investigating actors, their engagements and the sequences of arguments that are put to test, in what is more than a linguistic exercise. Through such a lens it has emerged that an evacuation of politics is hardly observable in either of the cases analysed, despite the fact that predictability and safety have become non-negotiable principles of social life. Immigrants, in particular, have clearly enacted various forms of political engagement, at times even through 'invisible forms' (Sani, 1996: 503 cit. Biorcio 2008) and with a low-profile attitude (Eliasoph, 2005), despite existing and evolving POS and DOS.

The fact that policies and politics can be studied in a continuum does not mean there is always a continuum between them. Actors' actions are multiple and fragmented. They should not be intended as an inexorable response to structures of power (McAdam 1982: 9), nor can conflicts be analysed in a straightforward stimulus-response perspective. Neither of them does necessarily represent a reaction to problems and tensions. Additionally, people are not impotent: they can act

and indeed they do so even when they are short of resources, without awaiting for facilitative support. As Hirschmann (1985) stresses, the academic analysis should open up to possibilism, that is to say to the discovery of paths and outcomes that any simple probabilistic reasoning seems to exclude (90). In other words, attention should be paid to improvised, unexpected actions.

In both Modena and Verona the disputes are still on-going. In Modena, the newly achieved 'order'³⁸ is already being destabilized with the introduction of the new 'pacchetto sicurezza'³⁹. In Verona, there is an apparent 'caos calmo'. However, the (apparent) exhaustion of the conflict does not necessarily reflect (Goffman 1971) negligence. The latter can be intended as a regime of engagement in itself.

³⁸ After the local regulation became effective at the end of December 2008.

³⁹ Italian Government law 94, 15th July 2009: *Disposizioni in materia di sicurezza pubblica*.

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