

Submitted Abstract

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First Author First Name Last Name	Karen Urso
Submitting Author First Name Last Name	Karen Urso
Correspondence	karen.urso@unical.it
Co-Authors >> E-Mails will be not listed	
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Abstract

The present study intends to analyze the territorial revitalization and social innovation paths that are triggered in rural areas by virtue of the foreign presence. Rural areas, starting in the second half of the twentieth century, have experienced a process of disintegration, that has led them to a condition of marginalization and isolation. In recent decades, as an effect of the capitalist restructuring processes of the agri-food system and of the introduction of spatial dispersal policies, an increasing number of economic migrants and forced migrants (refugees and asylum seekers) settled in rural areas. The arrival of "unexpected groups to unexpected places" (Camarero and Oliva 2016: 93) in the so-called New Immigrant Destinations (McAreevey, 2017) has changed the composition of rural areas; if on the one hand it is possible to find elements of dynamism in the terms of rural regeneration, on the other hand the settlement of new population appears problematic, due to the resistance processes posed by local communities and the lack of social infrastructures (Corrado and D'Agostino, 2018).

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the arrival of new population has triggered territorial revitalization processes, analyzing the experience of the reception project for refugees and asylum seekers - coordinated by the Italian Ministry of Interior (Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati - SPRAR) - operating in Camini (Reggio Calabria), a disadvantaged area in Southern Italy. The joint mobilisation of public initiative and local action has contributed to the transformation of rural areas, the reversal of demographic trends, the reactivation of the local economy, the construction of new networks and, more generally, to an important phase of social and political change. The positive outcomes in terms of social, demographic and economic transformation, enable us to read this experience as a process of rural social innovation (SI). The SI is understood as a tripolar process oriented towards the satisfaction of needs, the reconfiguration of social relations and collective participation (Moulaert et al. 2013). Migrants and natives therefore identify themselves as agents of innovation in a system of co-production and co-governance within rural spaces which, on the one hand represent spaces of depopulation, degradation and isolation, on the other are spaces of autonomy, rural regeneration and social innovation.

The research methodology adopted refers to the review of existing literature - academic and gray -, and to the conduct of semi-structured interviews with privileged stakeholders.